



St. Peter's Episcopal Church

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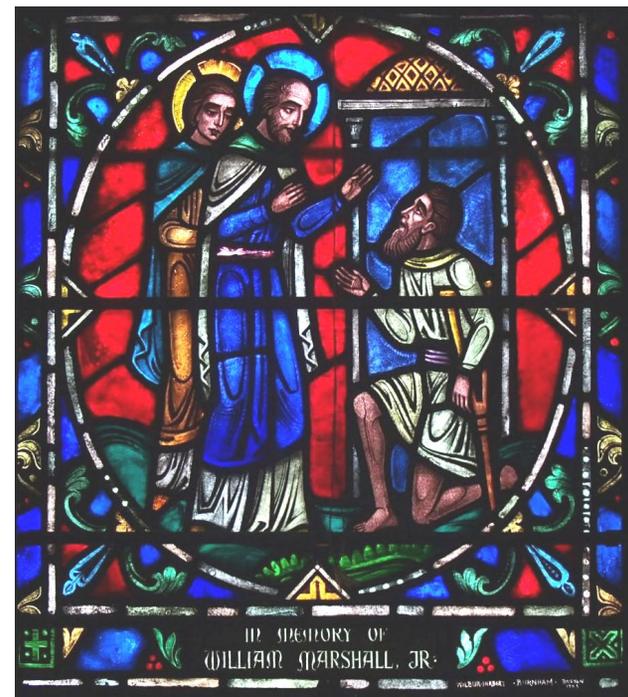
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The Reverend Manuel P. Faria III – *Rector*



St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Lenten Devotionals 2020



~ St. Peter's feeds God's people...

all are welcome at our table ~

Introduction

The St. Peter's Lenten Devotionals were started by Amy Salvatore in 2004, when Mike Salvatore was our music director. Lis Gordon took over from Amy in 2005 after Mike and Amy moved to Wakefield, and Godfrey Perrott took over from Lis in 2012 following her death. Then he handed these off to me when he and Ann Perrott moved to Connecticut.

Again, this year, I will quote John Prine in my apologia: "Father, forgive us for what we must do, you forgive us, and we forgive you. We'll forgive each other 'til we both turn blue, then we'll whistle and go fishin' in heaven." To those of you whose work I have edited for space, I hope I have done you right (I do love me some Oxford commas, and I did make some edits for space, grammar, and tense choice), and if not, that you will forgive me.

May I also suggest that you will get more out of this practice if you can each day read the lectionary underlying that day's Devotional. Of course, you will be forgiven if you can't. If you can, though, read the lections first. And then, it is helpful to consider their contexts. Ask who wrote it, to whom, where, and when? What are the important issues? If you have time, read the verses before and after the given passage. Study Bibles and commentaries also are valuable resources.

But never let the perfect stand as the enemy of the good – each author has offered up a personal vision for you here, and I encourage you to read whatever you can of these precious writings.

Finally, thanks to all who contributed this year, particularly for getting your Devotionals in on time, and writing such interesting material. You make my job easy.

I encourage you, dear readers, not to miss a day.

Ann Weeks

Dedication

This booklet has been produced in joyous thanksgiving for the generous, uplifting, insightful, and just plain funny life of Lis Gordon (1944 – 2011). Lis was a very special member of St Peter's parish, and those of us who knew her were enriched by that relationship.

Lis was fond of summarizing the Gospels as: "Love your God. Love your neighbor. Feed my sheep."

Her favorite passage from Isaiah is a fitting close to these Devotionals:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live."

--Isaiah 55:1-3.

Ann Weeks/Godfrey Perrott

Saturday, April 11, 2020 (Holy Saturday)
Ps. 88; Lamentations 3:37-58, Hebrews 4:1-16

In Hebrews, the author discusses how two groups were both gifted with hearing the good news, but only the group which truly believed and faithfully followed the path laid before them were rewarded. Perhaps the other group, despite not having the depth of faith of their counterparts, behaved in a similar manner. They prayed the same prayers, made the same oblations, and observed the same rituals as the believers. By all outward appearances, they were equally devout. Some may have even believed they were.

Once there was a girl who desired membership in a prestigious organization. Her mother and father were tantalized by the prospect of joining the ranks of parents whose children were members of that elite group; and the cachet it carried. This organization is known for its notoriously high standards for enrollment. She was a nice girl, albeit rather spoiled and self-involved. Her accomplishments up to that stage of her life were mediocre. Her most notable attribute - a pretty face. Lest life become too difficult for their treasure, her parents had always smoothed the way for her. So, when she expressed her wish to Mom and Dad, their formula for their daughter's success was to buy it.

This story has been playing out in the courts and the media over the past year, sparking outrage over the blatant use of money as leverage in the matriculation of affluent children into eminent colleges and universities. Some argue that regardless of how the child got into the school, it is up to them to do the work necessary to stay. I say that point is irrelevant. Even if their deception is never revealed and they graduate with honors, the degree bestowed upon them is tainted, an invisible asterisk next to their name in the alumni catalog.

But wait – we all crave approval, we all are gullible. Without strong core convictions and an unwavering faith in Christ, we are vulnerable. We must look within ourselves. Is there substance enough inside us to support our external façade, or are we living a life doomed to the invisible asterisk? God cannot be fooled.

Barb DiMambro
40

Wednesday, February 26, 2020
Ps. 32, 143; Amos 5:6-15, Hebrews 12:1-14, Luke 18:9-14

Here it is again, we have come 'round in the Circle Game once more to the season of Lent. The days are getting lighter, and longer, and we look forward with hope to the warmer times. But first we must go through THIS together.

How shall we do it this Lent? Today's readings suggest that we ought to remember the days of old, meditating on the works of God's hands, who created the Pleiades and Orion, and who turns the long night into day. That we should lift our drooping head and hands, strengthen our weak knees, and make straight paths for our feet. That we should run with perseverance the race that is put before us – whatever that is – considering that Jesus himself ran it and runs it with us.

This Lent I am going to admit that I am not enough like the tax collector – most times, in my daily life and work, I don't measure up to the ideal in the readings. I need to think about different, straighter paths for my own feet, in gratitude for all I have, no matter that it might be hard sometimes, asking for God's help in quiet reflection, not in a prideful way.

Take this little book – I hope it helps you in your own reflections – and read it “standing far off,” but in gratitude for all it contains, and not pride that our community has created it.

That is so hard to do. Our work *is* beautiful, we *can* take pride in it.

I wish you the time to “do” Lent. Time to hear, read, and learn. And time for gratitude, and joy, and even some peace, as you reflect and move forward one day at a time, one foot in front of the other, towards Easter, and Spring.

Ann Weeks

Thursday, Feb 27, 2020

Ps. 37:1-18; Hab. 3:1-18, Phil. 3:12-21, John 17:1-8

The readings for the day all contain instructions in one form or another. St. Paul's letter to the Philippians contains encouragement in striving towards a goal. Habakkuk rejoices and states that he will wait quietly for the day of calamity to come upon those who attack us. The gospel reading in John relates how Jesus set an example by praying for his disciples in the hope that they would be strengthened to carry on his work.

But I must admit, Psalm 37 has risen to the top of my personal list! I'm always looking for how these ancient readings translate into the crazy twenty-first century life we all lead. How could any of this help me as we are beset by the disappointments and challenges of our everyday lives, as well as the absolute weaknesses and oft times bizarre and wicked behavior of our elected leaders? This Psalm could easily have been written today.

Lent has always presented a challenge to me. The church colors change to purple, the music becomes more penitential – but how do I make changes to my own behavior and become more prayerful as I attempt to shut out the daily distractions which abound? I may have found a personal answer in this ancient Psalm with its theme of patience and trust. The Psalms are, after all, petitions and prayers. My plan is to read it every day as a prayer during Lent and probably until the November elections. Take a look, and see if it offers a path that also appeals to you.

Peace.

Nancy Lian

Friday, April 10, 2020 (Good Friday)

Ps. 22; Lam. 3:1-9, 19-33, 1 Peter 1:10-20, John 13:36-38

Jesus loves his disciple Peter, yet He knows something Peter does not. Peter loves Jesus but he does not understand his own weakness. He wants to follow Jesus to the point of laying down his life for Him (which he will ending up doing, but that comes much later), but Jesus says no, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." Then Jesus tells him the sad truth, "Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."

I can imagine how this may have made Peter feel—saddened to hear that Jesus did not believe him, perhaps angry that Jesus would say such a thing when he himself felt with such confidence that he would follow Jesus and lay down his life for Him. Maybe Peter felt that Jesus was judging him improperly. He did not want to believe that he could be so weak when his intentions were so good. But Jesus knew his weakness. Jesus loved Peter, but Peter had not really reached a point when he was strong enough to truly follow Jesus.

I think about this scripture a lot during Lent. About how I fall short of what is asked of me as a follower of Jesus. When I listen to the Passion, I wish I could change the way the story ends. But there is no avoiding it. Jesus will be taken from the garden and brought to trial and Peter will try to hide the fact that he was a disciple. Jesus will be mocked in His pain while hung on the cross and Peter will warm himself by the fire and say he did not know the man arrested at Gethsemane. Jesus's body will be broken, and He will cry out and Peter will say, with his Galilean accent, "I do not know Him."

Of course, that is not the end of the story. "Where I am going," says Jesus, "you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." Even knowing what Peter will do, Jesus still gives him the keys. The forgiving love of Christ is still granted to Peter and he strengthens in faith to become "the rock" upon which the Church is built. That's enough to give any flawed follower some hope on this dark day.

Kate Cabot

Thursday, April 9, 2020 (Maundy Thursday)

Ps. 102; Ex. 12:1-4, 11-14; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday, the name means Mandate Thursday, Commitment Thursday. And right there in the Gospel text Jesus asks for the disciples' commitment that they and we should do to others, what Jesus did for them, wash tired feet, care for people, make life bearable for those in need. This is God's invitation to us latter-day disciples, what we are to commit ourselves to today.

And further, we are to make this commitment in spite of what life puts in our path. Around the disciples' table there was betrayal, fear, anger, misunderstanding, competition. But even in this very human, broken gathering Jesus asks the disciples and us to be instruments of care just as he was to others. This is not just a commitment to Communion on Sunday morning, it is a commitment to real life.

As this motley group of disciples has gathered, I'm struck by the elements of their last meal, bread, wine, water to purify. A faithful Jew would know that these are the three sacred elements, water to purify, bread and wine, that one would sacrificially share only in the Temple at the Festival, to show one's commitment to God. But for Jesus the Temple, and its rituals and priests, was often the last place where God was found. For Jesus, God is rather found in the simplest things, people gathering at a meal, bread shared, wine to bring joy and comfort, water to clean dusty feet. God is present in the commonplace, "everywhere present" for those who have eyes to see. So, the other deeper commitment we are to make on Maundy Thursday is to find God in the stuff of all life, the simplest to the most complex, and not just in the church or Temple as others would like us to believe.

Blessings, Roger Cramer

Friday Feb. 28, 2020

Ps. 31, 35; Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32, Phil. 4:1-9, John 17:9-19

The older I get, the more I relish reading the words of the Hebrew Prophets. I do so with fear and trembling, though. These Truth Sayers use their words, powered by an electric connection to God, to cut right through to the bone to strip us bare of our excuses for, and our blindness to, the world of sin in and around us.

God's message here is simple. Our Creator cherishes all lives and wants each of us to live with a new heart and a new spirit of righteousness. But if we live lives of iniquity or turn away from righteousness, we WILL die even while appearing to live. I believe that means that we will poison our connection to God and spiritually wither. Our souls, our innate goodness, will shrivel up like sour grapes. The Lord of Compassion is not unfair; The Lord of Life takes no pleasure even in the death of the wicked. We all know what is "lawful and right." Forget about past and current failings! Grasp onto God's great gift of Love! The hand of the Good Shepherd reaches out to us so that we may "Turn, then, and live."

Cameron Wicker

Saturday, February 29, 2020

Ps. 30, 32; Ezek. 39:21-29, Phil.4:10-20, John 17:20-26

The Psalms both focus on the joy found in receiving forgiveness. They explain how the LORD is with us, responds to our prayers, and that forgiveness that is received by asking for it. They are comforting in the way they portray the writers' relationship with the LORD. The interpretation from reading these is that the same forgiveness, protection, and joy are available for us all.

The Ezekiel reading again focuses on the LORD's power of forgiveness and protection over his people of Israel. It explains why they were exiled, and why they were allowed to return. The LORD promises to restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on them all.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians he also addresses how GOD takes care of people and provides for them. The settings of these readings are all very different, but the outcomes are the same. Trust in the LORD, repent your sins, follow the word of the LORD, and we shall all be embraced and forgiven.

The reading from John is on a similar topic, but comes at it from a different direction. Here Jesus is the intermediary, praying for GOD to protect the disciples as they go forth and spread the teaching Jesus has brought to them. He extends this prayer to cover all who listen to these teaching and believe. Basically Jesus is praying to GOD to protect us.

Forgiveness abounds in these readings. Everyone is looking for it from GOD and celebrating the joy experienced when it is received. These discussions do not extend to our forgiving each other, but I cannot imagine celebrating receiving forgiveness if we don't give thought to extending it in our own lives to those around us.

Marguerite Parkman

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Wednesday April 8, 2020

Ps. 55; Lam. 2:1-9, 2 Cor. 1:23-2:11, Mark 12:1-11

"Mama said there'll be days like this, there'll be days like this, Mama said." Those of us of a certain age will remember this old Shirelles song. While the lyrics speak to romantic issues, they could just as easily apply to any of life's challenges.

Beset by trouble, the Psalmist is certainly having "one of those days" his Mama may have warned him about. Enemies physically attack him; a close friend betrays him; and scoundrels take over his city.

Biblical scholar Robert Alter notes in his commentary on Psalm 55 that the first two verses clearly classify the poem as a psalm of supplication. The writer begs God to *do something!* The psalmist becomes more and more agitated as the poem continues, complaining and moaning as he calls down curses upon his tormenters.

In the face of desperation, pain, frustration, and need, the Psalmist's *cri de coeur* is entirely relatable. Can you identify with the jumble of emotions he's feeling? I know I can. Dealing with hurt, bullying, abuse, and fear are just as common today as in the fifth century B.C.E. when these 150 songs were first collected. I guess that's why the Psalms are so often the "go-to" book for people who need divine assurance.

Yet this Psalm isn't only about supplication, it's also an entreaty to trust God—even if you're at the end of your rope. The Psalmist says, "cast your burden on the Lord, he shall sustain you." Being sustained by the Lord—it's a comforting concept, but not always an easy one to live out. The Psalmist must make a conscious choice to trust God in the midst of overwhelming difficulty.

We'll never escape bad things happening in life, but we are called to trust, no matter how things seem to be turning out. I'm still learning this lesson. How about you?

Pegge Bochynski

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Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Ps. 6, 12; Lam. 1:17-22, 2 Cor. 1:8-22, Mark 11:27-33

I can identify with almost every statement and emotion expressed by the Psalmist in today's Psalms. I am certain that most of us can. Even in the midst of our great blessings, though we are the lucky ones on this planet, our lives are still riddled with fear, sickness, grief, and despair. Where IS God in all this? How can I praise God for all my blessings if I am a miserable wreck? And since I'm only human and living under great stress, I sometimes find myself hoping that my enemies feel just as awful as I do. But still I know in my heart that the Lord "has heard the sound of my weeping... [and] my supplication."

I don't know how or when my rescue will come but I will hold on to the certainty that it will surely come. "The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure." Blessings may come from the Lord in ways I don't expect, but I can be sure that the creative force behind them is Love.

Cameron Wicker

Monday, March 2, 2020

Ps. 41, 52; Gen. 37:1-11, 1 Cor. 1:1-19, Mark 1:1-13

John the Baptizer had arrived as foretold by Isaiah. As word spread and anticipation of the Messiah's arrival grew, the atmosphere must have become electric. Multitudes of people from most of the Judean countryside and all of Jerusalem went to John to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins in preparation for the new way of life.

Jesus too followed the crowd and was baptized, as one of us. What sins could the son of God repent?

The result of his baptism was astounding. The heavens were torn apart to release the Spirit, and it came to Jesus as a dove. The Messiah would be different from what the masses expected. An eagle or raptor would be a more likely symbol of a conquering king. But the Good News was of a different type of kingdom. Not only would the heavens be torn apart because of the Spirit, but the social order on earth would be shaken and cracked. God's voice from heaven confirmed Jesus's mission.

The journey begins.

Cheryl Robinson

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Ps. 45; Gen. 37:12-24, 1 Cor. 1:20-31, Mark 1:14-28

We start off in the Old Testament, with important people getting married. Genesis brings in Joseph, as the youngest and weakest brother, is sold into slavery. He works his way up to become Pharaoh's advisor. Then, in Corinthians, we learn how the power and wisdom of God transforms the weak into members of a new body called Christians who value a new wisdom which makes perceived weaknesses into strengths. Jesus embraces the weak and powerless followers with knowledge, authority and teachings.

Our Psalm is a royal wedding song: an important man and a princess marry to become King and Queen. God has blessed him. He is a mighty warrior who defeats many enemies. God has anointed him on the throne above all persons forever through his many descendants. He will be a just and righteous king. His sons and daughters will be highly exulted.

In Genesis, the weakest and youngest brother is deceived and sold into slavery. But, through good fortune and a pure heart, he becomes Pharaoh's advisor.

In Corinthians we learn about Christ the power and wisdom of God. Christ ushers in a new philosophy of wisdom and new values. The foolish, weak, the insignificant and despised of the world are uplifted in the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is wisdom from God to us.

And in our Gospel reading, Jesus drives the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue, exemplifying his authority through teaching and command. Jesus taught with power, authority and religious conviction. Jesus' ability to teach with authority and to control evil spirits is a testament to his God-infused wisdom.

Mike Bent

Monday, April 6, 2020

Ps. 51:1-20; Lam. 1:1-2, 6-12, 2 Cor. 1:1-7, Mark 11:12-25

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

These words echo down the years, not just from the Psalmist, but, for me, from the very first minister I can remember, the aptly named John Priestly Mitton, the man who invented the Mitten Tree, and who said this before every sermon he preached.

It didn't matter what Mr. Mitton said AFTER that, although I am told it was usually pretty thoughtful. For the middle- and high-schooler I was back then, those words were all I really heard.

I didn't understand where they were from. Truth is, I would have told you I thought Mr. Mitton made them up.

Imagine then, the memories and the wondering that come to me from reading this Psalm, set to be read on a day I randomly threw my name on for this project. As we tell our Atrium kids, every time you hear a Bible verse, or parable, you can hear something new, if you listen.

Now, I ask myself why Mr. Mitton chose this Psalm, these verses, for his every-sermon-prologue. Was he thinking about "teaching God's ways to the wicked?" He certainly could have been thinking that in my fancy old parish with the ladies in the fur coats and the historical silver on the altar, and the Revolutionary bullet holes in the steeple. Was he begging forgiveness for himself (maybe for accepting such a cushy position—hah!) before he spoke to us? All of those ideas are in this Psalm. And juxtaposed in today's readings as it is, with the wizened fig tree, and the temple money changers – well, images of my fancy old home parish come flooding back to me.

Mr. Mitton, he of the Mitten Tree, was a humble man, I believe, saying to us all in that fancy parish, that the Gospel message can best be heard by those with clean hearts who put on a 'right' spirit. Certainly, that's a good place to start from, when entering Holy Week.

Ann Weeks

Saturday, April 4, 2020

Ps. 137:1-9; Exod. 10:21-11:8, 2 Cor. 4:13-18, Mark 10:46-52

Psalms 137, a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, has some of the most beautiful imagery, so beautiful it was set to music in the play *Godspell* (I am singing this plaintive song as I write). And what a picture the Psalm paints. They hung up their harps by the rivers of Babylon, so sorrowful that they were unable to sing in a foreign land. Their captors tormented them, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” All they did was to weep, and claim their fidelity to their God and home. “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!” Then, surely, they will never be able to play their harps again.

The Gospel and Old Testament share themes of faith, what can be seen and what cannot. Old Bartimaeus has long been a blind beggar, but his faith restores his physical sight. Paul in the letter to the Corinthians echoes the lesson of Bartimaeus about the difference between physical sight and believing in what we cannot see. “We have faith in what we cannot see, for what is seen is temporary. What cannot be seen is eternal.”

Pharaoh has no faith in the Hebrew God and refuses Moses’ request to let the Jewish people go to worship the LORD, bringing now the ninth plague upon his country. This is a terrifying plague, darkness; such a deep, dark, inky blackness that people are rendered “blind” – nothing can be seen. Exodus describes it as a darkness that could be felt, a darkness that lasted for three days (a foreshadowing of Christ’s time in the tomb). For three days, the Egyptian people could not see one another and they could not move from where they were. But God’s people, the Israelites had light and they could see like Bartimaeus after his faith made him whole. The Egyptians were like blind Bartimaeus the beggar, who sat each day unmoving, begging for coins until his encounter with Jesus the Messiah.

Deborah Gardner Walker

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Ps. 119:49-72; Gen. 37:25-36, Cor. 2:1-13, Mark 1:29-45

Lately, it has been my habit most days to read a portion of the Bible. But it has not always been that way. Throughout my life, I’ve had periods of serious study followed by longer periods of ignoring Scripture, frustrated by its inscrutability. Like cosmologists and particle physicists, I wanted a unified theory to explain the Bible’s dichotomies and inconsistencies, the vagaries of translation, and the improbable narratives of creation, talking donkeys, battlefield casualties, and psychotic breaks communicating with fantastical beasts. But mostly, I wanted corroboration for my own beliefs. About ten years ago I abandoned my need for scriptural cohesion and rationality, tossed aside my hope for an airtight theology and embraced the overarching concord that seemingly disparate passages of Scripture reveal. Now, I try to keep it simple and acknowledge that God’s way is not my way; but God’s way is the best way to live.

These four passages show how to live God’s way: meditate on God’s precepts, trust that God is present regardless of nefarious deeds and tragedies, embrace the mystery of Divine wisdom despite the limits to our understanding, have faith that the Incarnation was a factual event.

This Jesus, who asserted his authority through signs and miracles, distilled all the law and prophets into three precepts: love God, love others, love yourself. That’s it in a nutshell. It’s so frustrating that our fabulously rich language is so lacking in words for all those kinds of love. These directives are all we need to live a fulfilling life. But it is impossible for me to live out, by myself. Thankfully, all I must do is ask God’s Spirit to intervene: to transform my nature, renew my mind, and empower me to live in accord with these three truths. When I remember to ask, God answers my prayer. May we all be encouraged by the wisdom of Scripture, the example of Jesus and each other, and the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to live in love. Then God’s will is done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Keith Zellman

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Ps. 50:59 & 60 OR 19, 46;

Gen. 39:1-23, 1 Cor. 2:14--3:15, Mark 2:1-12

“But we have the mind of Christ.”

What a wonderful thing Paul pronounces to those gathered!

Paul is telling us that just believing in God is not enough. With spirituality comes responsibility to exemplify God’s teachings in all ways...in words chosen and actions taken. If we truly are people of faith, to honor God we must live as an example to others of what we believe.

In today’s world that challenge is being put to the test! But we persist!

Manny, in a sermon a few weeks ago, encouraged us to focus *each day* on honoring God’s call to us. By waking up every morning and asking ourselves, “how am I going to serve Christ today?” In doing this we can ignore Paul’s admonishment to the Corinthians to not be “people of the flesh, as infants in Christ” because we are living in faith to God.

Dena Lisle

Friday, April 3, 2020

Ps. 22; Exod. 9:13-35, 2 Cor. 4:1-12, Mark 10:32-45

It seems like I’ve been on a never-ending, windy path in my search to understand the Gospel. As a child I loved church and everything about it – the teachers, music, the fair, fellowship. It was a safe place full of love and acceptance. Luckily, there I learned and accepted Jesus’s commandment to love God and love your neighbor. Then came the 1960’s. To me and many others, church as an institution had failed – too many rules and exclusions. For many years I trusted Jesus, but avoided church.

I find the Mark and 2 Corinthians passages fascinating because they describe what early Christians faced. Jesus tells the disciples in detail what is to happen to him. They don’t understand. Following Jesus isn’t a path to glory. They faced, as did the other early Christians, danger, hardship and death. Paul’s letter describes how they were terrorized but not demoralized because God was with them. Jesus was alive in them. I, however, have never been fearful or felt in danger as a follower of Christ. Never had to make a big sacrifice.

Our neighbors close and faraway need help. People of all beliefs are acting to bring comfort and aid to them, and to make change. I need to follow my heart, face fears, make a plan and get moving – follow a straight path to understanding the Gospel and the Kingdom.

Cheryl Robinson

Thursday, April 2, 2020

Ps. 131, 132; Exod. 7:25--8:19, 2 Cor. 3:7-18, Mark 10:17-31

The reading from Corinthians tells us of the promise God can bring us, but the Gospel reading tells of the challenges God has placed for us. I have always struggled with the passage about leaving family and things behind, as a person who is not obsessed with possessions, but who values them as ways to connect with other people, and a person who is very close to my family members.

I think what Jesus is getting at, is that God, who is embodied by all people and all of nature, and all the wonders of Creation, is always there for us and should be a main focus.

Will Talbot

Friday, March 6, 2020

Ps. 40, 54:51; Gen. 40:1-23, 1 Cor. 3:16-23, Mark 2:13-22

Genesis chapter 40 is a mini-story within the larger story of Joseph and his brothers, which in turn is within the larger story of Esau and brother Jacob (also called “Israel,” father of 12 brothers who became the nation Israel).

What strikes me in the mini-story is Joseph’s love for his fellow-prisoners, the former cupbearer and baker of the king (Joseph has been unfairly thrown in prison). Bothered by dreams, the two former servants of the king wake up troubled. Joseph notices. He loves them insofar as he pays attention to them, he picks up on body language: “When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh’s officers, who were with him in custody in his master’s house, ‘Why are your faces downcast today?’”

Joseph himself had every reason to be down in the dumps. His brothers have betrayed him, throwing him into a wilderness pit and leaving him to die. Some foreigners rescued Joseph only to take him “down” into the barbaric land of Egypt, where he is again betrayed, this time by an Egyptian ruler’s wife whose demands for sex are rebuffed; once again he is taken “down,” this time into a prison by the lying and bitter seductress. Yet even here he is paying attention to others in order to help, to serve. “He saw that they were troubled,” and asks why.

Read the story for further details, but for me this is enough to teach me about love. Listening is the heart of love, I think, and love well may be what constitutes true humility—the willingness to always, regardless of circumstance, serve an other. This I believe about goodness, about love: *listening is the heart of love; love is the essence of humility.*

Paul Borgman

Saturday, March 7, 2020

Ps. 55; Gen. 41:1-13, 1 Cor. 4:1-7, Mark 2:23-3:6

In the passage from Mark, Jesus is making his way on the sabbath through the grain fields with his disciples. Along the way, the disciples began to pick grain. The Pharisees became upset, saying that it was not lawful to do any kind of work, let alone picking grain on the sabbath. Jesus reminded the Pharisees of David doing something similar when his companions were hungry. Jesus explained that the sabbath was made for mankind and not the other way around.

I feel this is very relevant today. Many times, I see comments on social media where the comment authors are caught up in one passage of the bible verbatim and missing the bigger meaning behind Jesus's messages and teachings. One of the two most important commandments is to love thy neighbor as thyself.

Bruce Walker

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Ps. 119:145-176; Exod. 7:8-24, 2 Cor. 2:14-3:6, Mark 10:1-16

Pharaoh's heart remained hardened and he would not listen to them...

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant...

Our competence is from God...

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

The above excerpts from each of today's readings spoke to my heart. My belief is that when our hearts are hardened by our experiences in this world, we cannot listen to the loving relationship that God calls us into- with ourselves, with others and with the whole world. We will continue to be lost sheep and "led astray." Children come to God with an open heart. They are imperfect beings...growing in their love...but not afraid. Jesus calls us to leave behind our "outside" selves and be the beautiful children we are inside. Anything that gives us real competence in this life comes from God. What hardens your heart? Take whatever it is to God. Be like a child. Open your heart and listen. You belong to the Kingdom of God. The Good Shepherd calls you by name.

Robin Talbot

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Ps. 121, 122, 123;

Exod. 5:1-6:1, 1 Cor. 14:20-33a, 39-40, Mark 9:42-50

When Moses first goes to Pharaoh, and says that God wants the Israelites to celebrate a festival to him in the desert, it sounds like he is asking for a week off: A three-days' journey into the desert and a feast to the Lord. Pharaoh responds that they have too much time on their hands, listening to Moses instead of working. So, he orders them to make the usual quota of bricks, but instead of having straw provided for them, they will have to go out and collect it themselves to make the bricks. Moses' first effort at freeing his people is an unqualified bust.

But God has a plan, and Moses as his servant only learns of it piecemeal, as it unfolds. So, things are not always what they seem. It looks like Moses has made things worse for the Israelites, but the demand will grow from just being allowed to worship in the desert, to being liberated, to bringing Egyptian booty with them.

Instant results are seldom what we get when God is involved. There is always the long view, and we are not generally privy to the long view. The events that unfold in Egypt will become central to the identity of Jews and Christians for thousands of years. Yet as lived by the Israelites who were enslaved, it must have seemed interminable.

Manny Faria

Monday, March 9, 2020

Ps. 56, 57; Gen. 41:46-57, 1 Cor. 4:8-20(21), Mark 3:7-19a

These readings all give us directions on faith. In the Psalms David is celebrating his trust and love of GOD during times of great personal danger. We do not hear him crying to the GOD to complain about his situation but rather we hear him praising GOD and testifying his faith at a time when he is personally in peril. The Genesis reading shares part of the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his own brothers. In this reading we hear how Joseph oversaw the saving and storage of the crops during the seven years of abundance so when the prophesized years of famine came, the people were able to survive without fear of hunger. Joseph showed his great faith in GOD when as a slave he faced the most powerful in the land and without fear, relayed the word GOD sent through a dream to the Pharaoh.

In 1 Cor. Paul encourages the faithless to follow the example of the disciples. He relates the message that how even in severe adversity they continue to preach and follow the WORD of the LORD. The Mark reading tells the story of Jesus empowering the disciples and sending them to heal the sick and spread the word of GOD.

At all times, but especially during Lent, when we are looking for direction and guidance in how to live a life of faith these readings give us direction and hope. They all relate examples of how those called before us were able to find comfort and demonstrate their faith in challenging times in their lives. Many of us are struggling with the challenges facing our country and the world today. Examples, like those provided in these readings, that GOD is always with us, and we thus always need to be with GOD is the uplifting message we are looking for each day.

Marguerite Parkman

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Ps. 61, 62; Gen. 42:1-17, 1 Cor. 5:1-8, Mark 3:19b-35

In this powerful narrative about broken family relationships in Genesis, it appears that the dreamy Joseph – who was brutally stripped, abandoned, then sold by his jealous brothers – is finally going to get his revenge. How interesting that the brothers thought they had taken the moral high road that day when they decided to sell their brother and line their pockets with money rather than kill him. Little did they know they would see him many years hence! For Joseph is not dead as the brothers assume, he is very much alive and in a position of great power – a position to decide if they will have food to eat or slowly starve to death. There's dramatic irony in this famous story, because we the readers are in the know, and so is Joseph, but his brothers are clueless – they are literally in the dark.

There's a terrible famine and Joseph's beloved father Jacob, who has never stopped mourning for the one of the 12 who was lost, tells 10 of his sons, "Go down to Egypt and buy grain *so that we may live and not die.*" Little does Jacob or his sons suspect that in Egypt they will find fullness of life, healing and reconciliation with Joseph. But God works in mysterious ways.

We find the theme of family again in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus asks, "Who are my mother and brothers," and answers his own question: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother." That includes us, too.

The Psalmist speaks of God being "my rock and my salvation, my fortress." Surely Joseph relied on his faith in God when his brothers abandoned him. The Psalmist also emphasizes by repeating twice the importance of silence in our spiritual lives: "For God alone my soul waits in silence." Be sure to take time for silence this Lent.

Deborah Gardner Walker

Monday, March 30, 2020

Ps. 31; Exod. 4:10-20, 27-31, 1 Cor. 14:1-19, Mark 9:30-41

When I think of Moses, the image of Charlton Heston, in all of his Cecil B. DeMille Technicolor glory, immediately springs to mind. After his life-changing encounter with God at the Burning Bush (do you buy the humble delivery of the line "who am I, Lord?"), Heston-as-Moses descends, chest puffed, purposeful, and immediately begins planning his audience with the Pharaoh, infused with heavenly light. He's obviously the center of the scene. Everyone is going to follow him, no questions asked.

Too bad (or good) then, that the actual scene in the Bible is so different. When God gives Moses instructions for confronting the Pharaoh, the first words out of Moses' mouth aren't "absolutely, I'm off to Egypt, wish me luck." Instead he says, "I am slow of speech and tongue." And when God says, "I'll tell you what to say," Moses still demurs, hesitant and unsure, and tells God to send someone else. Instead of wasting any more time trying to convince our erstwhile hero, God does something brilliant. He tells Moses that if he is so reluctant and doesn't feel up to it, He'll just talk to Moses's brother, Aaron (the 'eloquent' one), and Aaron will go too and do the talking. Moses can be the man of action with the staff.

Watching my two boys grow up, playing off of one another, arguing, conspiring together, I wonder what it was really like for Aaron and Moses, two brothers who grew up in such different circumstances. They obviously had a fraternal bond that brought them together for this momentous task, and they supported and complemented each other. I watch my kids designing railroads across the living room, building Lego towers that soar to the sky, planning together, hashing out the details, the pros and cons of each development. They discuss and collaborate on the narratives of their pretend play with action figures. When one gets in trouble, the other steps in as the 'Aaron,' to help. And while there are always the times where one brother gets frustrated and may knock over the Lego tower, they always come back together as a team.

God never intended for Moses' hero journey to be a solitary one, with so much on the line. No one gets anywhere alone. Not to the top of the Lego tower, and not to the Promised Land. ***Jill Donovan*** 29

Saturday, March 28, 2020

Ps. 107:33-43, 108:1-6;

Exod. 2:23-3:15, 1 Cor. 13:1-13, Mark 9:14-29

Each year when I *randomly* sign up to write a selection or two for the Lenten Devotionals, I hope that at least one of the readings for the day will be something that makes sense to me, so that I will be able to write something coherent about it. It's often hard to interpret ancient writings that seem vague and full of ancient biblical babble. Imagine my surprise when all of these readings were somewhat familiar stories I have heard over the years – this should be easy!

The Exodus reading is the famous “burning bush” with God speaking to Moses from the fire, as God tells Moses that he is to lead his enslaved people out of Egypt. St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians is the very familiar passage we often hear at weddings – “love is patient, love is kind....” Mark's Gospel story tells of the child beset by seizures thought to be caused by evil spirits. The child's father declares his faith, Jesus exorcises the demon and the child is healed.

In each of these familiar tales, it is challenging to take a deeper look – we already know the stories, we can recite some of the familiar phrases by heart - but is there something in these familiar readings we haven't heard before – a phrase? A word? A message?

Messages from God don't usually come with the drama of a burning bush. Expulsion of evil usually doesn't come as dramatically as a public exorcism. We hear the word of God in different ways and small pieces – often in quiet moments. St. Paul writes “Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

I pray that our Lenten journeys discover those new parts.

Nancy Lian

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Ps. 72; Gen. 42:18-28, 1 Cor. 5:9-6:8, Mark 4:1-20

Joseph spends several chapters of Genesis alternately showering his estranged brothers with kindness and terrifying them. He sells them food — yet secretly returns their payment. He enquires about their family — and holds one of them hostage until they produce their beloved youngest brother. It's easy to think of this cat-and-mouse game as payback for their earlier betrayal of him into slavery, but the deeper reason is unknowingly voiced by the brothers upon discovering the money in a grain bag: “What is this that God has done to us?”

When Joseph later unmask himself to his brothers (Genesis 45:8, see March 17th), he upends this plaintive query (one he doubtless uttered himself when sold into slavery) with reassurance: “You didn't send me here; God did.” His generosity of spirit springs from both faith and practicality: if they had not betrayed him, he would not have prophesied famine to Pharaoh, and both Egypt and Joseph's whole family would thereby have perished.

John Cabot

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Ps. 71 OR 74; Gen. 42:29-38, 1 Cor. 6:12-20, Mark 4:21-34

The parables of Jesus are some of my favorite readings because they seem so simple, yet they contain so much. A parable is a little like a carry-on bag, that can fit under the seat in front of you, but when you unpack it, supplies enough garments for a month-long vacation. These parables are short but full of meaning. I love to unpack them.

What is the Lamp doing under that bushel basket? It is out of place! Surely it is not doing what a lamp should do. We all know that a lamp is meant to shed light. If you cover it, what good is it? “For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” Jesus says: “Pay attention: this is about the Kingdom.” We have to know its value. The “measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given to you.” That also might be a good way to read a parable. Pay attention and look for the Light.

There is a Growing Seed: “The Kingdom of God,” says Jesus, “is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground” and in sleeping and rising, the sower does not know how the seed grows, but it grows anyway. According to God’s design “first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head,” and only then will it be time to harvest. Jesus says to me that this is long work we do. The Kingdom of God comes to harvest in GOD’S TIME, not in ours. We may take part in the sowing, but it is not ours to control. We work and then we wait in hope.

And the Mustard Seed is very tiny. It is not a European mustard seed, no, the seed Jesus refers to here is so tiny it is like a speck of dust. (I invite you to see some in our atrium! It really adds something to the parable to see how small these seeds are in real life). This tiny seed is just enough – it “grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Jesus tells me that small things become great things with God. That tiny seed defied all expectation. The Kingdom of God is one in which the humblest becomes the greatest.

Kate Cabot

14

Friday, March 27, 2020

Ps. 102; Exod. 2:1-22, 1 Cor. 12:27-13:3, Mark 9:2-13

Children of adoption often find themselves torn between the elements of their creation and their upbringing. Moses is described successively as Hebrew, Egyptian, Midianite, Hebrew again (a leader this time), and eventually a refugee in Sinai. In each case, he is set apart from those around him.

Being the “other” to one’s peers can be both both painful and instructive; it stimulates the observer's eye needed by effective authors and leaders. We all experience being a “stranger in a strange land” in our lives. It can be lonely or even frightening, but equally it can be exciting or joyful. To some extent, it’s up to us to lean into it or shy away. Being followers of Christ in a self-absorbed world presents us with that challenge every day.

John Cabot

27

Thursday, March 26, 2020

Ps. 69:1-23, 31-38; Exod. 1:6-22, 1 Cor. 12:12-26, Mark 8:27-9:1

The Psalm is titled a “Prayer for Deliverance from Persecution.” New Testament writers saw Jesus in this Psalm, a cry of suffering from a righteous man who is alienated even from his family because of his zeal for God. Certainly, we see Jesus in that description and in verses 20 and 21, which foreshadow the crucifixion: “I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

The opening of Exodus echoes an age-old situation that we see played out today, even in our own country, where fear of immigrants and people different from us leads to violence and cruel government actions. Pharaoh decides a particularly cruel method of reducing the population of the Israelites in his land – he tells the midwives to kill every male baby. But the midwives fear God and disobey; they have pity on the babies and let them live, telling Pharaoh that the Israelite women are vigorous and give birth before they get there. God rewards them with a multitude of their own children.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is one of my favorites with the powerful anatomy metaphor, which Paul used many times, of the church being one body with many members. This picture of unity in diversity is the exact opposite of the Old Testament reading where diversity is feared. We cannot function as a church without one another, we must care for, honor and rejoice with one another.

Mark has another of my favorite verses, one sometimes used in jest in casual conversation: “Get behind me Satan!” But Jesus is not kidding when he rebukes Peter for “setting his mind not on divine things, but on human things.” To be a follower of Jesus is to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and rise above earthly things. We must set our minds on divine things, not so easy in our consumer, online-driven culture.

Deborah Gardner Walker

Friday, March 13, 2020

Ps. 69:1-23, 31-18; Gen. 43:1-15, 1 Cor. 7:1-9, Mark 4:35-41

The Psalm arises from a difficult time in David’s life. Weary and tired, he sounds mentally exhausted and seems to have a broken spirit while praying and waiting for God’s help to rise above this feeling. There are enemies out there, but we must stay the path to find comfort in God. In this scripture, David goes on about how low he is feeling, how heavy his heart is, and continues to ask for God’s help and strength.

In Genesis, the story is of severe famine in the land and Jacob must have his sons return to Egypt and buy more food from Joseph, as they had eaten up all the grain they had brought back from their first trip there. On this trip they were to bring Benjamin, the youngest brother, with them. Judah said he would take Benjamin with him and protect him. When they arrived, they met up with Joseph and since Joseph saw they honored his request to bring Benjamin, he was overwhelmed and then went on to serve them food and dine with them.

Then Corinthians -- These verses discuss the principles of marriage and the relationship of men and woman and the faithfulness between a husband and wife. It describes how they should treat each other in God’s eyes.

And in Mark we hear about the Sea of Galilee, a lake only 8 miles wide that does not appear difficult to cross over but does lie below sea level and is surrounded by mountains that rise all around it. Jesus was asleep on the boat and a giant windstorm appeared. He woke and gave the commands for there to be calm and peace on the surface. This ability showed them not only did God have this power but so did Jesus, Son of God.

Marie Ciancarelli

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Ps. 75, 76; Gen. 43:16-34, 1 Cor. 7:10-24, Mark 5:1-20

You will never be in control of your life circumstances, but you can relax and trust in His control.

Instead of striving for a predictable, safe lifestyle, seek to know Him in greater depth. Only then can you rejoice in your love-relationship with God, and walk in His light, delighting in His Blessings, seen and unseen.

Be not afraid, I go before you – the farther you roam along the paths of unbelief, the harder it is to remember that He is with you always.

Anxious thoughts branch off in all directions, taking you further from awareness of His presence.

Voice your trust in Him frequently. This simple act of faith will keep you walking in a straight line. Trust in Him with all your heart, and your paths will be made straight. He will provide for your needs even in a strange land.

Eric Wilkins

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Ps. 101, 109:1-4, 5-30; Gen. 50:15-26, 1 Cor. 12:1-11, Mark 8:11-26

I opened the Psalm for this day and said I need go no further. This is the message for this time. It is so tempting to join the spite game, to say that it's ok to be vicious if it tears down the bad guy, but NO. You can't let the times goad you into letting go of your real mission of being godly all the time. Don't let it distract you. Don't let your thoughts dwell on the sins of others. "Have no part in what the faithless do." Be careful to continue to live a blameless life even when external conditions provoke you.

This is not saying that you should not support justice, or that you should not promote moral values out loud and publicly. To "cut off the evildoer from the city of the Lord" means you don't give way to evil. But at the same time, it reminds you that it's not your job to avenge evil by becoming spiteful yourself. Fight evil by being good, by keeping your own house clean.

Beth Hufford

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Ps. 97, 99; Gen. 49:29-50:14, 1 Cor. 11:17-34, Mark 8:1-10

Miracles, miracles. Jesus performs his healing miracles in today's passage from Mark – for the outcast leper and the disdained Centurion, who shows concern for a servant, and faith in his power.

And yet even Jesus is “amazed” at the Centurion's faith. This passage says a lot to me about Jesus's humanity. He wasn't so divine that he wasn't amazed at other humans' response to him, and his works. I love that basic humanness of Jesus – it crops up in lots of places in the Gospels – he gets mad, and sorrowful, he is amazed by things around him. He experiences all that we do in this confusing, painful, wonderful, amazing life here on this planet.

As Wendell Berry's poem *2005, Stanza XIX* says so perfectly, and succinctly:

Born by our birth
Here on the earth
Our flesh to wear
Our death to bear

Now, That is Amazing.

Ann Weeks

Monday, March 16, 2020

Ps. 80; Gen. 44:18-34, 1 Cor. 7:25-31, Mark 5:21-43

In Mark's story, Jesus heals a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, and restores life to a 12-year-old girl whose family weeps over her death. Whenever I read about Jesus performing miracles, I am moved by how quiet he is about his power (he often cautions his followers not to talk about it) and how it seems that he finds it almost commonplace. But when I looked closely at the passage, I began to understand how closely Jesus' power to heal is connected to people's power to believe. This is no one-way street.

The woman, who clearly is putting all her faith in this prophet, Jesus, must summon all her courage to push close enough to him to touch his robe. She puts her entire being into making a connection with the man she believes is her best hope for a cure. I'm sure in first century society, touching even the robe of a man in public was a serious breach of custom, if not an outright insult or crime. But it's not the touch that matters to Jesus; it's the belief. The woman's faith in him is so profound that they connect with each other through a piece of cloth. I think of it as an electrical current of love. “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” I often wish I had this kind of faith.

The story of the little girl shows another side of Jesus' healing power. This time it is he who reaches out to help. When he hears from the distraught father, whose friends urge him not to bother Jesus, Jesus says, “Do not fear, only believe.” Again, all he is asking is faith. The miracle is described so simply. Jesus says, “Little girl, get up!” And when she does, he tells them to give her something to eat. All better!

These magnificent triumphs over illness and death are so direct: Have faith, and Jesus will perform miracles. As if it's all very simple. But oh, what faith is required!

Lou Ann Faria

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Ps. 78:1-39; Gen. 45:1-15, 1 Cor. 7:32-40, Mark 6:1-13

Psalm 78 recalls the familiar story of the Israelites' 40 years in the desert. It specifically details the many ways that they fell short with their complaining and lack of gratitude for all that God had given them: "Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert. * They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved. * They spoke against God, saying, 'Can God spread a table in the wilderness?' * Even though he struck the rock so that water gushed out and torrents overflowed, can he also give bread, or provide meat for his people?"

I am reminded of one of the several times I brought our youth group to Common Cathedral, where we made and served lunch before a church service held for the homeless of Boston. We handed out sandwiches, bananas, water and cake. On our walk back to the car, one of the young people said in that way only a teenager can, "I'm starving to death!!" When asked why s/he didn't eat one of the sandwiches, s/he replied, "I don't like sandwiches."

While this is a fairly blunt and teenager-ish example of a lack of perspective, I am uncomfortable thinking about how often I do the very same thing. "Thanks, God for everything ... blah, blah, blah ... but my house is too small ... my car is old ... my co-workers are annoying" You get the idea. I remember the late Lis Gordon had a practice of keeping a gratitude journal, where she recorded each day 5 things for which she was grateful. Maybe one of these days I'll follow her example.

The Genesis story gives us the exact opposite response. Joseph is expressing to his brother, *who sold him into slavery*, that it was God who sent him to Egypt in order to protect them during the famine. Talk about finding the silver lining. I know that my cup overflows. I know that those blessings come from God and that I have done nothing to "deserve" them. I also know that I fall short – every day. I stand at the banquet and wonder why my favorite dish isn't among the many offerings. Fortunately, God knows this about me too and he loves me anyway.

"Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath. * He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again."

Your sister in Christ, Carrie Kimball

18

Monday, March 23, 2020

Ps. 89:1-18; Gen. 49:1-28, 1 Cor. 10:14-11:1, Mark 7:24-37

Jesus here is in full healing mode. Yet he hesitates to fulfill the request of the Syro-Phoenician woman to heal her daughter, who is possessed by a demon. When she asks, he replies that it is not right to take the children's food and give it to the dogs.

Many of us might at that point hang our heads and go away, but she dares to answer him – the dogs eat the scraps under the children's table. Anyone who has had children knows how much food that can be. Jesus, brought up short, realizes she is right and does for her what she asks.

Sometimes we just cannot take no for an answer and our persistence will pay off. Like any good mother, this woman argues on behalf of her child and her argument wins the day. Jesus does for her what she wants, and the demon departs her daughter.

A little later Jesus heals a deaf-mute. He takes the man aside and does it quietly, not in front of the crowd. He warns the man to keep silent about the source of his cure, but he shouts it from the rooftops. "Their admiration was unbounded," says the New Jerusalem Bible, "Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak."

This is indeed who Jesus is and what Jesus does. And the impact, while he is among them is great.

The challenge for them and for us is remembering who he is and what he does when he is not in front of us.

Manny Faria

23

Saturday, March 21, 2020

Ps. 87, 90; Gen. 47:27-48:7, 1 Cor. 10:1-13, Mark 7:1-23

In the passage from Mark, the Pharisees and some scribes gather around Jesus. The Pharisees watched as some followers of Jesus did not wash their hands prior to eating as was the tradition of the elders. The Pharisees asked Jesus why his followers did not live according to the tradition of the elders, as they ate with defiled (unwashed) hands. Jesus referred to Isaiah prophesying about hypocrites providing lip service to God in their worship, but not following God with their hearts. Later Jesus explains that it is not unwashed hands that defile one, but the human heart with bad intentions that does. Sins like adultery, theft, murder, avarice, pride, slander, pride and folly defile a person.

Some people are tied to following the traditions rather than following the Lord. As a result, they miss the big picture.

Bruce Walker

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Ps. 119:97-120; Gen. 45:16-28, 1 Cor. 8:1-13, Mark 6:13-29

As always, I suggest you read the passages for yourself. I sit in the Demack Room and write this and thank God for each of you.

Psalm 119:105: Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Genesis 45:24: Do not quarrel along the way.

1 Corinthians 8:3: The women and men who know God are loved by God.

Mark 6:13: The disciples drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

All of this says to me: We have been given the Way; we have been told what to do and have been assured that God Loves us!

How Blessed are we!

Claire Thompson

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Ps. 42, 43; Gen. 46:1-7, 28-34, 1 Cor. 9:1-15, Mark 6:30-46

In the New Testament readings, we have powerful descriptions of the relationship of food to our bodies, to each other, and to our Lord. The fundamental premise is that we live in a world of abundance NOT scarcity. In Mark's loaves and fishes story there are more leftovers than when the meal began! Our primal and cultural need to survive too often overrides our desire to be generous and share. I need to think, pray, and act about this every day or it doesn't happen.

This isn't just about food or fuel or money or things. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth he begins by writing about food and physical hunger but quickly moves on to the bread and wine of the new covenant, of our Lord's body and blood. Paul says don't come to church hungry, come together to be in communion as a group, come together as individuals in communion with ourselves, come together in communion with our God. I would add, come together in communion with the earth, "our island home."

Simple? Mysterious? Difficult? Think, pray, and act.

Psalm 98 (ok not on today's list, but) ...

Sing to the LORD a new song!

John Newman

Friday, March 20, 2020

Ps. 88; Gen. 47:1-26, 1 Cor. 9:16-27, Mark 6:47-56

It must have been a terrible night for the disciples trying to row their boat against the wind in the blackness. Exhausted and fearful in the dark, no wonder they panicked when they saw Jesus walking by on the water. A person can't do that, so it had to be a ghost. A person also can't feed 5000 people with 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. But the disciples had just helped do exactly that. For days they'd witnessed Jesus heal, cast out devils and raise the dead. They'd listened to him teach and describe the kingdom of God. But they still didn't know him. Once the boat arrived, the regular people on shore recognized Jesus, and brought the sick for him to heal. In contrast to the disciples, they had faith and sought his help.

At one time or another most of us have felt overwhelmed, unable to solve a problem and stop worrying. For me, early morning hours are the worst. I know if I stop the ideas swirling through my mind and listen, help will come through the calm. Instead, I'm like the disciples in the boat in the dark. When the sun finally rises, the fear fades. I think of lines from a Wallace Stevens poem (*The Sun this March*):

The exceeding brightness of this early sun
Makes me conceive how dark I have become.

Cheryl Robinson