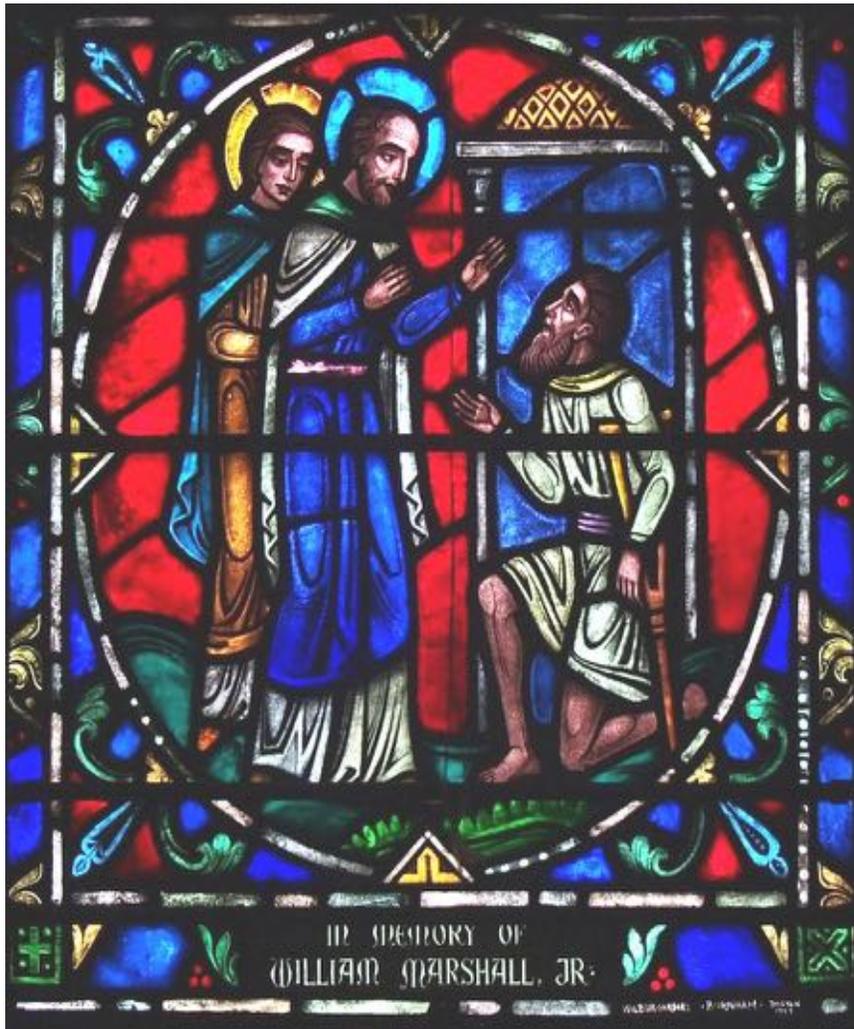


St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Lenten Devotionals
2021



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

all are welcome at our table ~

Introduction

This Lenten practice was started by Amy Salvatore in 2004, when Mike Salvatore was our music director. Lis Gordon took over the editing from Amy in 2005 after Mike and Amy moved to Wakefield, and Godfrey Perrott became the Editor in 2012 after Lis died. Then he handed the Editor's pen off to me when he and Ann Perrott moved to Connecticut.

Every year this changes a little. This year, like everything else in our world, it changed a lot. Thank you to all the writers, who took their random assignments, read the lectionary for their days, and offered up incredible insight and beauty – and yes, even joy – for the Editor, and for you, dear readers.

If you have time, you will get the most out of this, I believe, if you read the day's verses before and after reading the authors' reflections.

Before any of that—or instead of that—you might want to center yourself, finding a quiet space just to sit and breathe, listening to the silence, and meditating for just a moment each day using this year's Foreword as your guide, if you like.

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.

Read, think, meditate on, and enjoy these passages.

I wish you a peaceful and Holy Lenten Season.

--Ann Weeks

Foreword – a Meditation

In the silence, I hear God.

In the time and space between movement and conscience thought, I sense God.

In the stillness of mind and my own rhythmic breath, I feel God.

--Loretta Cusick

Wednesday, February 17, 2021 (Ash Wednesday)

Psalms 95 & 32

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

Rejoice and sing to the Lord. Sing a new song, sing a song of gladness, sing and live!
How much more these words mean to me this year—and I am guessing, to all of you—than they did last year. How I miss singing with all of you!

Last year when we wrote these devotional reflections, how many of us had even an inkling of what the year to come would bring us, both collectively and personally? How many of us knew that we would be unable to sing together, to break bread and share wine together, to have a coffee hour together, to have a Fair Lunch together, to make a Mitten Tree?

And in the outside world, how many of us could have imagined a political landscape like the one we are in? When I sent out this year's assignments, I wondered how different the responses to Scripture would be from the past years, how all of you have all weathered the storms of 2020 and been transformed by them, and how that would show up in this volume of the Devotionals, for a new Lent, in a new year.

I was amazed really to see how our parish is looking forward into Lent, not back into darkness; and doing so with hope and courage, giving each new day its due.

As it should be. We never know the future—all we ever have before us is *this* day, and what we can do with it, with God's help. "Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life," as an old Sanskrit poem reminds us, "look well to this day."

Get up every morning, eat your breakfast, brush your teeth, put your mask on, and sing a new song. I hope these reflections provide some support for that!

--Ann Weeks

Thursday, February 18, 2021

Psalms 37:1-18 or 37:19-42

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

With just three chapters, each 20 verses or less, the book of the prophet Habakkuk might be the shortest book in our Bible! His life is not known, his father is not named. His feast day is January 15th, and his name means “embrace.”

Chapter 3 is presented as “A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk” and there are instructions for music, a choirmaster, “shigionoth,” and the last words in the last verse: “To the leader: with stringed instruments.” And “selah” – that word of “uncertain meaning.” I think of these verses as a strident anthem to God as a mighty warrior, wreaking vengeance on the enemies of righteousness. Even the earth, the sea, and the rivers will rise up at God’s anger and command. Habakkuk’s people need only to remain righteous and faithful to God in the face of real and violent oppression. Prophets have told us this for thousands of years. If only we can listen and hear them.

In the Gospel, Jesus’s hour has come when he must be arrested, be denied by Peter, stand before Pilate, and die on the cross. Try to imagine knowing that all these things are going to happen and then, still obediently following scripture and obeying the Father! These 8 verses are the beginning of Jesus’s prayer to God on behalf of the disciples and for and to all of us – He prays that we would “know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”

Again, I need to hear this. Again, I need to read this. Again, I need to believe this. Again.

--John Newman

Friday, February 19, 2021

Psalms 95 & 31 or 35

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-36; Philippians 4:1-9; John 17:9-19

In today's reading from John, Jesus prays in solitude to God. He asks God to guard and protect his disciples. Jesus has protected them up to this point, but he knows he is not long for this world, and therefore cannot be there to protect them from the evil one. Jesus explains that since he has given them God's word, the disciples do not belong to this world any longer, just as Jesus does not belong to this world. They will encounter those that will hate them.

Jesus is looking ahead to when soon he will not be in the physical world. He will no longer be able to be the good shepherd guarding his flock on Earth. Jesus prays to God on behalf of them. Jesus looks past his own needs and feels responsibility for his followers. This is just another great example of Jesus behaving as a Good Shepherd.

--Bruce Walker

Saturday, February 20, 2021

Psalms 30 & 32

Deuteronomy 7:12-16; Titus 3:1-15; John 1:43-51

This verse from Psalm 30 speaks to me during this dark and difficult time of the pandemic: “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” No matter what, we have hope in God as did the psalmist who suffered many travails. Jesus is our light in the darkness. Psalm 32 speaks of forgiveness of sin as a source of great happiness. “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Deuteronomy follows on this theme and emphasizes that we will receive unending blessings for obedience to God. “You shall be the most blessed of peoples....”

The epistle from Titus lays out clearly what we must do to live righteously and in peace with God and others. Be “ready for every good work.... Speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, show courtesy to everyone.” (I smile at the admonition to avoid quarreling. If only that advice were followed on social media, particularly in partisan posts!). The epistle reminds us that “we were once foolish, disobedient, led astray.” But our Savior Jesus has saved us according to his mercy. We did not do anything to earn salvation, yet, we should live righteously and carry Christ’s light and love into the world.

In John, Jesus is calling more disciples to follow him. Jesus startles Nathaniel as he recognizes him, proclaiming, “Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Nathaniel wonders how Jesus knows him, and Jesus replies that he saw him under the fig tree before he was called. Nathaniel then believes that Jesus is the one foretold by Moses and the prophets. Jesus assures him that he will see much greater things than this, and indeed John’s gospel records many signs and wonders in the following chapters, leading to the glory of Jesus, his death and resurrection.

--Deborah Gardner Walker

Monday, February 22, 2021

Psalms 41 & 52 or 44

Deuteronomy 8:11-20; Hebrews 2:11-18; John 2:1-12

The readings for today remind us to be thankful to God, not ourselves, when we are successful. Moses reminds the Israelites, in the Deuteronomy reading, that God is the One who rescued them when they were escaping from Egypt. But he also warns them not to be seduced by idols. Desire for those idols, he says, can only lead to destruction.

In the Psalms, we get the bitter and the sweet. We are reminded that we feel both joy and pain in life, and sometimes we feel abandoned by God.

The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that God completed God's original plan, by providing us with a savior in Jesus, but also that Jesus calls us "family" and "brothers and sisters." The reading from Hebrews reminds us that we are a *family*, and my recent experience with surgery has helped me with that.

The Gospel reading is one of my favorites, and Roger and I used this reading at our wedding. I love this reading, maybe because Jesus does his first miracle at a party! As Sam Portaro put it, "Jesus was familiar at table and social to the point of scandal." During Lent, maybe we need to be reminded of the fact that Jesus attended parties. Maybe, in these days of Covid-19, we need to find a new way to accomplish the same ends.

As you read this, today is one day past the six-month recovery mark for my surgery. I have lost the hearing in my right ear, a hard thing to think about when one is a musician. I am trying to find the joy in this moment, and these readings remind me that I am grateful to everyone who helped me on this journey. They may not believe in God, but God obviously believes in *them*. If not for all the beautiful men and women who helped me, both in and out of the hospital, I would not be here right now.

--Kirsten Helgeland

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Psalms 45 or 47 & 48

Deuteronomy 9:4-12; Hebrews 3:1-11; John 2:13-22

These readings all recall instances in which God or Jesus got angry. The root cause seems to be humankind's forgetfulness of God's mercy. In Deuteronomy – the people are reminded that they aren't getting into the promised land because they deserve it. It's really because the other people were worse, and God promised their ancestors the land. God reminds them of their stubbornness and rebellion. (Hard to read this and not picture Charlton Heston coming down the mountain and flying into a rage when he sees the people partying with the golden calf).

In the Gospel, we find Jesus at the Temple as Passover is approaching. He is angry because shrewd traders have set up shop to change money and sell various animals needed for making a proper sacrifice. This was necessary since people came from many places to observe the Passover at the Temple. This passage is often used by those who argue that money doesn't belong in the church. I'm no scholar, but thanks to the Friday Morning Bible study, I have read and discussed these passages for many years, and my takeaway is that what Jesus is objecting to in this passage is the idea of the need for individual sacrifice. I believe he is saying that his death and resurrection will basically replace the Temple and the need for individual sacrifices.

The tone shifts a little in Paul's letter to the Hebrews. He begins by saying "brothers and sisters, *holy partners in a heavenly calling*," and then he quotes the Holy Spirit, reminding us not to "harden our hearts." We are partners with God now. We are joined in his heavenly calling. I'm certain we are still as rebellious and hard-hearted as the Jews wandering in the desert, but now we can claim one-ness with God through Jesus. He has showed us the way to live in harmony with our fellows to bring about the Kingdom.

--Your sister in Christ, Carrie Kimball

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

Psalms 119:49-72 or 49 & 53

Deuteronomy 9:13-21; Hebrews 3:12-19; John 2:23-3:15

After perusing all the readings for this day, how can I not choose to write about Deuteronomy. Look at the setting and the cast of characters – the top of the mountain! God! Moses! Smashing tablets! Fatted calf! It's all so clear and so vivid...oh wait, that was Charlton Heston in "The Ten Commandments."

With the scenes from that old movie playing in my head, the phrase that jumps out at me from this reading is in verse 13 – where God tells Moses that we are "stubborn people." Some translations refer to it as "people with stiff necks." And, indeed, we still are.

We are stubborn and often unwilling to let go of things that do not really matter – we place high values on position in life and cherish "stuff" that we collect – we haven't actually progressed too far from the days of the fatted calf.

Even now we are people with stiff necks, often unable to turn to see the other side. We still have tantrums and smash things, perhaps not as dramatically as Moses and the tablets, but we let anger and stubbornness drive our decisions.

God initially wanted to wipe out all these people and start with a fresh crew, but...he listened instead to Moses, and they were spared. And there, my friends, is good challenge for Lent and for our lives going forward. Take a look at why you are being so stubborn, turn that stiff neck to see the other side and continue to communicate with God, as did Moses, to look for direction, because God does indeed listen.

--Nancy Lian

Thursday, February 25, 2021

Psalms 50 or 19 & 46

Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5; Hebrews 4:1-10; John 3:16-21

The readings today remind me of how a centering practice, a spiritual core, whether in reading, writing, breathing, praying, walking, or in any other form, is vitally important in a healthy life.

This past year for me, like for most people, has brought many shakings, unexpected turns, and steps back that occur just as I begin to take steps forward. In this past year, more than any other in my life, I have realized that I should make the most of what I have and live each day to its fullest, trusting in God and in the people in my life see me through.

Psalm 19:13 reminds me that I should avoid becoming involved with the misdeeds of other people that may be tempting in uncertain times, while Psalm 50:12-15 reminds me that I am an integral part of God's wonderful creation, even when I feel that I have not done enough to live my best life.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." Psalm 19:14.

--Will Talbot

Friday, February 26, 2021

Psalms 95 or 51

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Hebrews 4:11-16; John 3:22-36

I've always been fascinated by John the Baptist. If nothing else, I suppose you could call him rather odd. Living on the margins of civilization in the harsh landscape of the Judean desert, dressing in animal skins, and eating wild locusts and honey was *not* a conventional lifestyle in first century Palestine. But what really distinguished him from the mainstream was his willingness to speak truth to power—to the point of being arrested and executed. He was certainly countercultural, not unlike the hippies and activists of my own generation. Perhaps that's one of the reasons I like him so much.

But as strange as John was, God charged him with a crucial mission—to be a bridge between the old guard and a new community of converts who were flocking to Jesus. John acknowledges his transitional role when he says of Jesus: “He must become greater; I must become less.”

What does John's “in-betweenness” say to us today? Well, we all experience liminal times in our lives when we stand at a crossroads. Although living in the tension of “betweenness” may be frustrating, it can also be spiritually enriching. Lent is such a place, a wilderness where we can intentionally listen for God's voice, a place where “the Spirit is without limit.” It is not an easy space to inhabit. There are often no answers to our questions, only stillness and waiting.

Nonetheless, it is a necessary waystation in our Christian growth—a bridge between our old way of life and our new life in Christ.

--Pegge Bochynski

Saturday, February 27, 2021

Psalms 55 or 139:1-23

Deuteronomy 11:18-28; Hebrews 5:1-10; John 4:1-26

Deuteronomy 11:18 & 20 reads: “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads....Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.”

The words referred to are part of the Jewish prayer Shema, which is the Hebrew word for hear. The Shema is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” It is the answer Jesus gives when asked which is the greatest commandment. The BCP Rite One service has us recite a portion of the Shema when we quote Jesus (BCP p. 124).

The devices in which these words are contained to be worn, in Judaism, are called phylacteries. A phylactery is often made of a black calf skin case with thongs on it for binding on the forehead or around the left arm. The devices holding the Shema on door frames are called mezuzoth (singular, mezuzah)—small metal containers with the words inside, to be touched when going out or coming in. The term phylactery is found only once in the entire Bible, and that is in Matthew when Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for their misuse of phylacteries.

In the Hebrew reading, Jesus is pictured as a priest like Melchizedek from the time of Abraham.

The John reading is the account of Jesus meeting the woman at the well. Last week I watched a PBS show of Peter, Paul and Mary in one of their earliest shows; they told this very story in a folk song which emphasized Jesus telling the woman “everything I’ve ever done.” I had forgotten how much of their early performances were spirituals based on the Bible.

--Bill Graham

Monday, March 1, 2021

Psalms 56 & 57 or 64 & 65

Jeremiah 1:11-19; Romans 1:1-15; John 4:27-42

While reading Psalms 64 and 65, I once again experienced the emotions I felt in 2020. The description of the “scheming evildoers” using words as arrows and planning cunning plots brought on the familiar punch to the gut. Again, frustration and anger when reading words that I now really comprehend: “shooting from ambush at the blameless;” “[w]ho can search out our crimes?”

It is so hard to stay positive and to not hate. The Psalmist asks God for protection from the “dread enemy”, not for their destruction or for revenge. Anger can motivate us to action as our faith keeps us steady. In the Psalm, God will shoot his arrow at the enemy and “Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin.” *Nihil novi sub sole [There is nothing new under the sun].*

Psalm 65 is a song of thanksgiving to God for all he has created, his miracles and a fruitful year. It’s a song of joy – “The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks.” Last year there wasn’t much joy. Many people suffered and still suffer, and we want to help. We pray. We give time and money. We do what we can. We have been given the gifts to support ourselves and others as we adapt to new circumstances. I am thankful. When times became simpler, I learned to experience life at a slower pace. I am joyful.

--Cheryl Robinson

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

Psalms 61 & 62 or 68:1-36

Jeremiah 2:1-13; Romans 1:16-25; John 4:43-54

Psalm 68:4, 32-33 “Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—his name is the Lord, be exultant before him.” “Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord, O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.”

Jeremiah 2:13 “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.”

Romans 1:20-23 “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse, for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.”

John 4:48 “Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”

When reading these passages, I was struck by two things: the need for gratitude and the need for wonder.

In these very stressful times, I often am overwhelmed by sadness and frustration. I forget the goodness of God that is all around me. I forget to go to God in prayer for renewal rather than stewing in depression and distracting myself with mindless activities. The beauty of the world is constantly reminding me of the power of God’s creative and healing forces. When I cease to be in awe of, and grateful for, this bountiful earth, its amazing plants and animals, and the loving human beings that make it home, I lose faith. How can I give in to hopelessness when there is an eternal spring of Love surrounding me and calling out to me? So, I remind myself (and you all, my friends) to stop, look and listen to the signs and wonders this Lenten season.

--Robin Talbot

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Psalms 72 or 119:73–96

Jeremiah 3:6-18; Romans 1:28-2:11; John 5:1-18

Tikkun olam—the repair of the world—is a concept in Judaism that by its very definition implicitly acknowledges the imperfections inherent in our society and our human nature. Verses 12-14 of Psalm 72 speak of the need of all who could benefit from tikkun olam—the poor, the afflicted, the weak, the oppressed, and the victims of violence. The Psalmist also offers assurances that God will heal and restore them.

Yet God can't repair the world alone. And where is God anyway, when disaster strikes, injustice prevails, and suffering abounds? When Fred Rogers, of PBS fame, wondered the same thing when he was a child, his mom advised, "Look for the helpers. You'll always find people who are helping." And, I might add, when you do find the helpers, God will be in the midst of them—comforting, restoring, strengthening.

So, who are the helpers? That would be us. We are God's fingers knitting together the slashes in the fabric of society—whether they be gaping holes or tiny tears.

--Pegge Bochynski

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Psalms 71 or 74

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

The authors of these readings marvel at the power of the Lord to make and unmake. In Psalm 74, the Psalmist is overwhelmed by the destruction of the sanctuary and hoping for deliverance from human enemies. In Jeremiah, the author cries out in anguish in the middle of a ruined encampment, explaining that this disaster is retribution for the evildoing of his people. In these Old Testament passages, the authors explain God's power to make and unmake in settings that are often political—God's favor, or lack thereof, may allow your enemies to defeat you in battle and smash your sacred buildings.

In John, Jesus explains his power over life and death in a way that is at least as miraculous: he will raise the living and the dead and judge them each according to whether they have done what is good or what is evil. This judgment is meted out not to an entire nation, but to each human being, regardless of their heritage and according only to whether the requirements of God's law are written on their hearts, as Paul explains in Romans.

As we struggle through a moment when our personal decisions have an outsize impact on the lives and deaths of those around us, it is worth remembering that by narrowing the scope of making and unmaking from the political to the personal, Jesus holds each individual accountable for their own actions.

--Peter Lugthart and Eleanor Lustig

Friday, March 5, 2021

Psalms 69:1-38 or 73

Jeremiah 5:1-9; Romans 2:25-3:18; John 5:30-47

This selection of readings contains a lot of instruction and theology. Who's in and who's out; who God cares for and who might be tossed aside; how God's people should conduct themselves and how they shouldn't. All interesting and debatable thoughts. But not what my soul can take in right now.

And then there is Psalm 69. This, I can relate to. The Psalmist is drowning, unfairly attacked by everyone, near the end of his rope. I don't feel that desperate, and I am blessed that I am not being unfairly attacked by anyone. But I AM LIVING THROUGH A PANDEMIC! Just like you. People aren't attacking me, instead, an invisible entity is nipping at my heels everywhere and every day, threatening my safety, threatening my health and my well-being. So where do I turn? Where does the Psalmist turn? Directly to God. This isn't about theology or how to think and be in the world. This is raw. This is one on one with the all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful Spirit we call God. It's a plea for help and an affirmation that a Being greater than we can imagine will surely respond and save the one who prays.

“For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah, and people will live there on their own land, the descendants of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there.”

Whew!

--Lou Ann Faria

Saturday, March 6, 2021

Psalms 75 & 76 or 23 & 27

Jeremiah 5:20-31; Romans 3:19-3; John 7:1-13

“When the earth totters and all its inhabitants...”

Doesn't it feel just like that these days? Like the wheels are coming off and we could spin out into the universe with no mooring? Lies have become reality, and reality lies. The patriotic lead an insurrection. The strongholds of our nation are fracturing before our very eyes. Nature itself threatens our bodies and we cannot marshal even the ant-like forces to defend ourselves or right the ship. Isolated, lonely, frustrated, harried, and mourning, we push away our emotions, believing that our neighbor must have it worse. Each of us can add our own details to the list.

“...It is I who keep steady its pillars.”

The Psalmist knew where to look for reassurance. God sees. God sees both the truth and the lies, the pure hearted, the self-focused, and the evil minded. God sees the powers and principles through which we slog. God sees each of us, too, cloistered behind our doors and masks. And there God lingers to share the Holy Presence, to wash our feet, and to nourish our spirit.

Let us not look to the east, or to the west, but let us look to God's Spirit within and among us. We are assured that in God's time, all will be judged with equity. May we be found among the just and pure in heart, living in faith, looking after the needs of others, and giving thanks to God because we truly know that “his name is near.”

--Leasa Lutes

Monday, March 8, 2021

Psalms 80 or 77

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

The image of the Vine in Psalm 80 really captured my attention. The Vine is brought “out of Egypt” and planted by God in a place God has chosen and prepared for it. It thrives and spreads beyond imagination—much like the Leaven and Mustard Seed grow in the parables of Jesus (Matthew 13:31-33)—until it has “filled the land” and “covered the mountains” with its shade and reached with its branches up into the “mighty cedars,” sending “branches to the sea” and “its shoots to the River.”

From the reference to Egypt and God’s role in planting the Vine, it is clear that the Psalmist is referring to the people of Israel, brought out of Egypt by God in Exodus. The Psalmist seems to delight in the language of the growth of that people and the role that God had in “planting” them and tending them. But now, says the Psalmist, the “walls” (other translations say “hedges”) have been broken by God and the worst kind of destruction is being done to that Vine. The fruit is unprotected and then there are the wild boars ravaging it. The people of Israel have been abandoned by God.

The Psalmist calls out to God to “turn again” toward the Vine to repair it and restore the people of Israel. There is a wonderful conversation here, the Psalmist asking God to “turn” and in response promising that “we will never turn back from you.” It makes me think of a dance: The People turn away, God turns away, the People turn back to God, God turns to the People. Repentance is our big Lenten dance with God.

--Kate Cabot

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Psalm 78: 1-39

Jeremiah 7:21-34; Romans 4:13-25; John 7:37-52

“Give ear, O my people to my Law, incline your ears to the words of my mouth, I will open my mouth, I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and know our Fathers have told us. ... For he remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.”

God marvels in the Exodus of rebellious people.

We keep not the Covenant of God. Some refuse to do good, but we should remember we are only flesh. Obey the commandments, observe Religion, avoid false teaching thus says the Lord of Hosts, I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of bride: for the Land shall he desolate.

We must obey God, walk in his ways, and do what he commands us to do. Say a word of comfort to others. For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not made to Abraham or the seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of no effect.

We must have faith. We must not be transgressors, we must remember no one is above the law. Jesus stood and cried, saying, “If any man thirsts, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” He spoke from the Holy Spirit, that all who believe in him should receive that understanding, for the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to all of us, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

We should believe in Jesus, also in our own laws. When we are sad or lonely, then we can call on you, Jesus, or we can call our friends and neighbors to care for them and see if they are ok.

--Delva Bent

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Psalm 119:97-120

Jeremiah 8:18-9:6; Romans 5:1-11; John 8:12-20

Psalm 119 is filled with the beautiful imagery of poetry: “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” And my favorite verse, one that we explored often with the children in the atrium: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (We even sang a song that repeated this verse over and over). The opening verses of Genesis tell us that God created light on the first day – *before* the sun and moon were created. What was this light? John opens his Gospel by telling us that Jesus is the Word that was with God and is God. Jesus is for us the source of light and life. God’s word lights our path.

Jeremiah the prophet mourns for the people of Israel. “My people do not know the ordinance of the Lord.” Even the birds know more than the people, he says. What an analogy! The birds are wise. Then, in one of the most famous of verses, Jeremiah asks: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?” We should remember that healing comes from obeying God, and from following God’s word.

Paul’s letter to the Romans reminds us that we are justified by faith and have peace with God through Jesus, even during the most difficult times, such as the one we are going through now. “Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us...” God’s love and the vaccines give us hope and an ability to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The Gospel of John circles back to the imagery of light found in the Psalm. “I am the light of the world,” Jesus says. “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The light of life. Meditate on that for a while.

--Deborah Gardner Walker

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Psalms 42 & 43 or 85 & 86

Jeremiah 10:11-24; Romans 5:12-21; John 8:21-32

Surprisingly, Psalm 42 is my favorite Psalm, along with Psalm 23. Bear with me as I relate that Psalm 42 is one of the Prayer Book selections for Burial. It was read at my son, Edward's funeral 5 years ago by his older brother, William. Despite its personal sadness for me, it also contains wonderful images that speak to all of us and sweetly remind me of my lost son. "As a deer longs for flowing streams," it begins, "so my soul longs for you, O God."

Do we not all feel this overwhelming thirst for God, for right living in a broken world? I know I do. "My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, 'Where is your God?'" What a hard, harsh world it is, even for those of us who are so privileged! We are challenged on every side by hate, greed, and rapacious secularism. Tears, indeed! No wonder our souls are "cast down" and "disquieted."

But the Psalmist still remembers with joy, "how I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival."

So, also, our faith calls us to always hold onto hope, welcome it into our lives, and be thankful even though we have our moments of asking, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" The Psalm finishes with "[h]ope in God...my help and my God" and that is the path I choose and I "hope" you do too!

--Cameron Wicker

Friday, March 12, 2021

Psalms 88 or 91 & 92

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

If anything remains true of human nature since Jesus' time, and likely long before, it is that the unvarnished truth is hard to take. Over and over in scripture we are presented with simple truths: You have a choice between good and evil. You have a choice between sin and virtue. You have a choice between Satan and God.

Simply do the right thing.

But here we are in John with Jesus laying it out clearly, and his followers questioning him over and over. He is straightforward and clear:

“If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I hear from God. This is not what Abraham did.” In this passage, his followers are looking for some wiggle room. Jesus doesn’t give them any.

We all look for wiggle room! Doing the right thing all the time is hard, and we’re not always up to it. The good news is God has enormous patience. We need to keep trying until we get it right.

--Lou Ann Faria

Saturday, March 13, 2021

Psalm 136

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

I recommend reading Psalm 136 first. It sets the foundation for the other readings by reviewing all the wonders the Lord has provided for us. Once we acknowledge the vastness of the Lord's gifts to us, there is no way we cannot agree that our response to these gifts should be obedience to our Lord.

The parable in Jeremiah clarifies what happens if we do not "listen" to the Lord. This starts the theme of obedience that continues in Romans and John. In the passage from John, Jesus's message is, do not twist God's words to suit your own wants or interpretation. In the temple he is challenged, and has to hide so he is not stoned, because they do not want to hear the truth in his message.

Twisting the Lord's teachings and message to fit our own beliefs and needs is unfortunately something we see very frequently in many venues. It is used to control and dominate others who are different from us in their beliefs, sexual orientation, race, and for a myriad of other reasons. These readings help us remember to recognize and appreciate the Lord's gifts to us, and to respond by obeying the Lord's word, not twisting it to gratify ourselves.

It sounds very logical on paper, but it is difficult to carry out. Lent gives us an opportunity to really look at how we act and behave.

--Marguerite Parkman

Monday, March 15, 2021

Psalms 89:1-18 or 89:19-52

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

In today's text from Jeremiah, God, the Lord, rails against the people of Israel who with their forefathers have stubbornly and repeatedly gone after other gods. But now with what seems like unbridled anger God says, "I will *hurl you out of this land* into another land which neither you nor your father have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor." It's a brutal judgment, to be slaves to other gods.

And what about our other gods who we serve night and day? It's a good time during Lent to reflect and make our own list. What gods do we chase after night and day—comfort, wealth, the attention of others, easy peace, and so many more?

Of course, in the end, still speaking for God, Jeremiah says that God will bring us back from our unsatisfying places to a safe land, not because we have stopped chasing after other gods, though we try, but because this is God's free, loving gift to us yet again.

In the Gospel, Jesus feeds hungry people on the hillside with five barley loaves and two fish, and there were baskets full left over. This miracle of abundance is a picture of how God is for those with eyes to see. Nothing is lost in God's plan; God's world teems with food for all of us, especially when we join in preparing and sharing the feast ourselves.

--Roger Cramer

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

Psalms 97 & 99 or 94

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

In the Gospel reading today, John tells us the familiar story of Jesus walking on the water. I have often wondered why this particular miracle should be such a focus of the Gospels— it is in Mark and Matthew as well in John. Is it just a way that Jesus showed his otherworldly powers over the physical world? It certainly does that. I can only imagine that his disciples were especially aware of the power the sea had over their lives, as it does to this day for fishermen everywhere. And back then, few people knew how to swim, so the risk of drowning was very high. Looking to Jesus as someone who could rise above that fear and subdue nature beneath his feet must have been an especially appealing image for Early Christians.

And then I reflect on other times in the Bible when water is used to show the power and control of God—starting with the Spirit moving over the waters in the Creation story in Genesis and then in the story of Noah and his Ark which survives the flood (the water that God sends to end the Earth and begin it again). In Exodus, the water of the Red Sea is controlled by God to help the Israelites escape from Egypt before it rises up and drowns the army of the Pharaoh. I reflect on how water is used in baptism, to renew us to a new life and how we are reminded by Paul that in our baptism we are dying with Christ so that we may be raised with him. The image of Jesus walking on the water is, I think, another sign of the Resurrection, a sign that in Jesus there is a power over death itself.

--Kate Cabot

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

**Psalms 101 & 109:1-30 or 119:121-144
Jeremiah 18:1-11; Romans 8:1-11; John 6:27-40**

The work of a potter has changed little in the 2500 years since Jeremiah was sent to the potter's house to observe his work. The medium is still clay. The wheel still plays a significant role in shaping the pot. The kiln is still used to fire the pot. Nowadays, electricity may power the wheel and gas the kiln, but the work is essentially the same. So, this for me has always been a lesson easily absorbed. God tells Jeremiah he fashions humans as a potter does clay and when one proves unsuitable, he can take the raw material and remake that human.

The message needn't predict destruction. The clay we are remains the same. What God does with it, what God does with us, is what changes us. I often find myself looking no farther than my own journey to see God at work remolding me. My introversion has been stretched and pulled to accommodate the task I've been called to. My idea of what I can and can't do has been broadened, despite my own reservations. The person I was in my 20s bears no resemblance to the person I am in my 60s. This has not been me at work so much as it has been God at work in me.

God's ability to remold the clay can also mean starting from scratch – that is the threat implicit in the message to Jeremiah. But for those willing to be remolded and stretched, God's possibilities are endless.

--Manny Faria

Thursday, March 18, 2021

Psalms 69:1–38 or 73

Jeremiah 22:13-23; Romans 8:12-27; John 6:41-51

Let me start by saying when Ann sent me my assigned reading list for this project, when I opened the Bible to get started, it opened right to Psalm 69. A sign? In the first few verses I hear the worry and fear of someone who feels alone; that people hate the writer, but for the wrong reasons, that only God truly knows the wicked things he has done. Leaving aside whatever else the full Psalm is about (and I thought the writer seemed to be all over the place), there is a lovely prayer in verses 13-14:

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.
At an acceptable time, O God,
In the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.
With your faithful help rescue me
From sinking in the mire.
Let me be delivered from my enemies,
And from the deep waters.

With Jeremiah I was immediately struck by how modern it sounded. I saw that scholars believe the writer may have been born around 627 BCE. Something written 2,000 years ago in response to events of that time, still speaks clearly to us now. The concerns are so similar – leaders who don't honor the Word of God, who put themselves first, who say, "I will not listen." Reading the words, "this has been your way from your youth, for you have not obeyed my voice," I immediately thought, swap out vermilion for gold and I can think of a few people who fit this bill! Then wondered if that should be speaking to me. That I can point fingers at others and say, "oh that person nailed it, that is JUST how he/she is," but would be shocked to think, "what, me??" Yikes!

Lastly, I thought Paul's letter here bookended Jeremiah with his line, "for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body." A few hundred years after Jeremiah Paul was still working on getting that point across.

Then, I came across a quote recently that the writer Anne Lamott posted that I really liked and realized fits in with the messages of today's writers. She offers, "[w]e cannot force someone to hear a message they are not ready to receive, but we must never underestimate the power of planting a seed."

You never know which seed from Jeremiah, Paul, Jesus, on down to modern times will take root with someone and make all the difference.

--Susanne Conlon

Friday, March 19, 2021

Psalms 102 or 107:1-32

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

The Jeremiah reading gets my blood boiling! I am a committed “Jesus as The Good Shepherd Believer” and when I read “[w]oe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture,” I want to crack heads together! Or, as the Lord says, “I will attend to you for your evil doings.” And the Lord is going to do that by gathering the flock together and keeping them safe with Good Shepherds to watch over them.

I think the Good Shepherds are each and every one of us who have hope, love and compassion in our hearts. I think we are the ones called to watch over one another and dispel fear and hopelessness and make sure no one goes missing.

I think the Lord wants to raise up for all of us “a righteous Branch” so that we may “execute justice and righteousness in the land” along with growing the loving kindness of the Good Shepherd for his beloved flock deep within our hearts.

--Cameron Wicker

Saturday, March 20, 2021

**Psalms 107:33-43 & 108:1-6 or 33
Jeremiah 23:9-15; Romans 9:1-18; John 6:60-71**

Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart. Jesus speaks, and many murmur against him. He's not only the pastoral guy from the pictures we often imagine him to be. Almost brazenly he confesses to being "the bread of life" come down from heaven. What does he mean? How can this be? People in the crowd dispute him. How can we "drink his blood, eat his flesh?" The disciples also murmur at his hard sayings. Many followers draw back and don't want to be found with him. Doubt is everywhere, as it often is with us. How can any of his sayings and actions be the path that we want to walk?"

Jesus himself also feels forsaken. To his disciples and to us he asks, "will you also pull away when my demands seem too great, too impossible to believe?" And will we also say with Peter, "Lord, to whom should we go? Honestly, you are all we finally have, our life, our companion, our eternal life, come from you, God with us. Didn't you choose us?"

I like this Gospel text from John because it demands that we see Jesus as a real person, himself uncertain at times, forsaken by those he has loved, living with loss, questioning whether it is all worth it. And the disciples, too, those who follow him "now and then" and even us, we have our doubts and uncertainty about him, too. And they are good to be remembered! Each doubt we acknowledge is one fragile step towards firmer, fiercer faith.

--Roger Cramer

Monday, March 22, 2021

Psalms 31 or 35

Jeremiah 24:1-10; Romans 9:19-33; John 9:1-17

I am very grateful for the Bible. I read it most days, and it's often a chore to find something edifying. But I always do. Energized by the power of story, this sacred collection of myth, Fertile Crescent Early Civilization history and personal tales, moral and ethical precepts, prayers, wisdom, and later, a glimpse of First Century Roman Empire life infused by Jewish and Greek thought, is a marvel.

I am a relatively unscathed, Twenty-First Century American. As such, I am inculcated in the notion that self-expression is paramount; I relegate to aspiration my responsibility to humanity and the ecosystem. Combine that, in me, with the supremacy of rational thought and the empirical Scientific Method defining how things work, and the result is that I wrestle with a prevailing biblical theme that "God blesses the righteous and destroys the wicked." This zeitgeist appears antiquated; wishful thinking from an ancient time when most human experience was like the six million Jews of the Holocaust, the victims of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and Rwanda, or Syrian citizens' trauma and death from years of civil war.

Were I subjected to such horror, I would understand the Psalmist imploring God to vindicate me and thwart the schemes of my enemies, the prophet proclaiming God's wrath upon an evil ruler, or an apostle's pretzel logic to appease a holy God. Instead, I glibly walk down the cafeteria line of Scripture, choosing what appears palatable and eschewing the unfamiliar or unrelatable. These first four passages are among the unpalatable, spiced with this biblical theme. Despite its other tasty ingredients, I decline these meals and move on.

From today's selections, I choose the healing of the blind man in John. It's one of two places in the Gospels when Jesus' disciples are espousing the aforementioned zeitgeist; falling victim to confirmation bias by looking for evidence to reinforce their belief system. "Who caused this bad thing to happen? The sins of the parents or his own?" In both instances, Jesus replies (using today's vernacular), "shit happens." I agree and cleave to God's omnipresence and the omnipotence of love, "that the works of God might be displayed" in me.

--Keith Zellman

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

**Psalms 121 & 122 & 123 or 124 & 125 & 126
Jeremiah 25:8-17; Romans 10:1-13; John 9:18-41**

As I look at the readings for my assignment, I think, “I guess I *ought* to read them ALL.”

I grew up an Episcopalian in Memphis. It was the Baptists that were the big Bible readers, or at least memorizers – Baptist Sunday school kids did drills on chapter and verse. And how often do aggressive Christians cite single verses, out of context, applying them to what they will—using the Bible for one-liners. But the Bible is not meant to provide zingers to attack an opposer. It’s ALL important. It’s ALL relevant.

Case in point, I could have stopped at Psalm 121, the famous one, My Help comes from the Lord. Plenty to reflect on there. But the next, Psalm 122, contains this very timely and relevant gem.

May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.

I could have stopped there, but continuing on to the remaining readings, I can see an even bigger theme; that salvation is individual, and punishment is not the role of any of God’s people.

Jeremiah tells how the Lord will use the Babylonians to punish the sinners before him. But that action gives no grace to the Babylonians, for they will be punished in their turn. And the lesson in Romans, is that salvation is not based on what the community thinks is right, but what the Lord tells you is right. Psalm 125 even warns us that the self-righteous are vulnerable, for:

[t]he scepter of the wicked will not remain
over the land allotted to the righteous,
for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.

I write this only 3 weeks after the insurgence in D.C. You will read it in the middle of the new President's first 100 days. It tells me that salvation and security does not come from the self-righteous enforcer. Vanquishing one evil does not protect us from the same sin, nor give us salvation by the deed. Salvation comes from the Lord by your understanding of his will, not anyone else’s.

I never would have put it all together, if I hadn't read it ALL.

--Beth Hufford

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

Psalms 119:145-176 or 128 & 129 & 130

Jeremiah 25:30-38; Romans 10:14-21; John 10:1-18

John 10:14-21

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep and I am known by mine.” During these terrible times of turmoil and pandemic we all need someone to look up to and follow as a leader—One who will show us the true way. He speaks to all, but all do not hear. Jesus had the power to lay his life down and then pick it back up again.

This was and is the greatest thing that could ever happen to this world. Trusting in God, and believing in his word, brings comfort to those who mourn for a lost one. Learn to trust in him when things go wrong. Disruptions to your routine bring dependence on him. Trusting acceptance of trials brings blessings that far outweigh them.

Walk hand in hand with the Good Shepherd through the day. He has lovingly planned every inch of the way.

--Eric Wilkins

Thursday, March 25, 2021

Psalms 131 & 132

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

You don't know me yet, but I'm a glass half full person, one whose personal theology definitely leans more towards the empty tomb than the cross, which is one reason why every year I struggle with Lent. Introspection and repentance are not generally my fallback positions. I may also have a teensy problem with control. Fortunately, God knows this and loves me anyway, speaking to me in the places I can find God—one of which recently included a gift catalog, where I found this gem: "God only gives three answers to prayer: 'Yes,' 'Not yet,' and 'I have something else in mind'."

"No" is not an answer. The readings for today seem to make that assurance feel kind of improbable and distant, filled as they are with dark prophecies and threat. Punishment seems to be sneaking towards us from around every corner unless we amend our ways and repent. But I take comfort from the Psalm, where we hear God say to us at least seven times "I will." God will, so I don't have to. God will, when I can't. God will, no matter what my prayer may be. God will, in God's time. Paul then reminds me that I, all of us, are worthy of God's grace.

The first two words that I noticed in the Psalms were "Hope" and "Remember." During this Lent, I am trying to do both, to remember the gift of God's grace and love, freely given to all of us and to focus on the hope of hearing the "yes" that answers all our prayers, even when God is saying, "I have something else in mind."

Amen.

--Pat Rubenstein

Friday, March 26, 2021

Psalms 22 or 141 & 143:1-11

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13; Romans 11:13-24; John 11:1-27 or 12:1-10

We are living in unprecedented times, which is a statement that has become more frustrating than factual this past year of the pandemic. It's not what I imagined my mid-twenties to look like. However, in the last year I have found comfort in mending my relationship with God. While it was never abandoned, it was often neglected as I prioritized travel, friends, and finals—three things that have dominated my life the past four years. Without travel or finals, and having to completely reconceptualize friendships, I am left with time to reconnect with God, but also far too much time to take in the awful things going on in the world around me. The constant stream of bad news I was used to, became an uncontrollable flood.

I don't think I am alone with these feelings. But I have also felt the first verse of Psalm 22 to be all too real, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It might be fair to say that most people have felt this at some point and maybe multiple times this past year alone. I think it's easy to get caught up in the beginning on this Psalm and forget to read on. But doing that is like finishing the story of Lazarus after he dies, or never hearing what God says after he trims the branches of the olive tree. Each of these stories has its moment of despair. The feeling of abandonment and helplessness, of not understanding the reason or the greater picture.

But there is a reason why we don't stop reading there—why the lesson continues. Because at the end of each of these passages, we find that God has not forsaken us. That Jesus resurrects Lazarus and that he has broken branches so that others may be grafted in. God has not abandoned us during the darkest of times but instead encourages us to listen, to continue reading so we may see the hope shining through.

The pandemic is not over, but we are now able to see the light. We have a vaccine. We have a better understanding of the way our world affects us unequally. We know that so many of the problems that seemed like they were solved, haven't been. We know more now. The lessons continue, and now it's up to us to keep reading and learning from them.

--Susie Faria

Saturday, March 27, 2021

Psalms 137:1-9 & 144 or 42 & 43

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

In the passage from John, it is explained that even after all the miracles that Jesus performed before the crowds, many still did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah. However, there were many others, even those in authority, who did believe in Jesus. Since they feared that the Pharisees would send them out of the synagogue, they would never confess this. They valued human glory, more than God's glory.

Next Jesus explains that whoever believes in him, believes in the Lord. He did not come to the world to judge those that did not believe in him. He came to save the world by providing the way to eternal life. The Lord will be the judge.

I have to believe that if I were alive during this time in history, and witnessed a miracle or two, I would have believed right on the spot. I think this first section tells me that the authorities and Pharisees had a lot to lose by entertaining the idea of Jesus's news that God had a different plan in mind. To protect their status and existing world, they had to condemn Jesus. (Very short sighted in my opinion, I must add!).

The second passage from John reminds us that Jesus is not God in the flesh, and is not the judge of each soul, but rather the messenger of God's Word and ultimately the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his flock.

--Bruce Walker

Monday, March 29, 2021 (Monday in Holy Week)

Psalms 51:1-20 or 69:1-23

Jeremiah 12:1-16; Philippians 3:1-14; John 12:9-19

Me, me, me.

Throngs gathered to see Jesus and Lazarus. Jesus had to be the Messiah – he proved he had power over death by bringing Lazarus back to life. The people were counting on Jesus to be the powerful king able to defeat the Romans and create a great nation. Things were looking up. However, the chief priests feared losing their positions as Jesus gained more followers.

Why did so few listen to Jesus's words? Everyone seemed to be out for themselves hearing Jesus's message only as to how it might affect their individual status. Most relied on the law, or looked for signs, rather than having faith. The grand entrance into Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy of the king's arrival on a donkey's colt. But he was not the king they expected.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians says that we gain righteousness from God not from law but from faith in Christ. These and the words in the letter about knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection will be foremost in my mind this week.

--Cheryl Robinson

Tuesday, March 30, 2021 (Tuesday in Holy Week)

Psalms 6 & 12 or 94

Jeremiah 15:10-21; Philippians 3:15-21; John 12:20-26

I have looked for words to reflect something from this pandemic world in which we all have been living. They are not hard to find, but Psalm 6 dropped into my lap.

O Lord, heal me, for my bones
Are shaking with terror.
My soul also is struck with terror,
While you, O Lord – how long?

The Psalmist is pretty dramatic, but these feelings are all too familiar this year. Better to not ask, I might not like the answer.

I remember the response, “My ways are not your ways, my time is not your time.” Patience is virtue that I never have enough of. The Psalmist blames his illness on a curse put upon him by his enemies. Were things that simple in ancient Israel? Are they that simple today? Have we brought this upon ourselves?

What really matters is that “there is no health in me” without God.

--John Newman

Wednesday, March 31, 2021 (Wednesday in Holy Week)

Psalm 55

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

The Psalmist suffers great despair and offers this wish, “[o]h that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.” It is telling that he chooses a dove, the bird that symbolizes peace and the Holy Spirit. But he cannot fly, so he offers this advice to others in despair: “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.” This reminds me of Jesus telling us to exchange our burdens for his yoke, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

All of this requires faith and trust. Jeremiah tells us “Blessed are those who trust in the LORD... they shall be like a tree planted by the water.” A tree by the water will survive intense heat and drought, and will continue to bear fruit. We go through dry times in our faith, but if we continue to trust, we will survive and bear the fruits of our faith.

The reading from the letter to the Philippians offers some of the most inspiring verses. Paul, who like the Psalmist is struggling, writes, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” There is the message about strength in today’s readings again. Paul outlines a roadmap we should follow: Rejoice in the Lord always. Do not worry about anything, but rather give thanks. (Gratitude is a powerful practice.) Think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise.

In chapter 12, John’s Gospel shifts from Jesus performing signs, to speaking about his coming death. The crowd is confused, trying to reconcile what they know of the law with what Jesus is telling them. He says that, while he is still among them, “[w]alk while you have light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. ... Believe in the light, so that you may be children of light.”

--Deborah Gardner Walker

Thursday, April 1, 2021 (Maundy Thursday)

Psalms 102 or 142 & 143

Jeremiah 20:7-11; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 & 11:27-32; John 17:1-11(12-26)

The Maundy Thursday service is one of my most favorite liturgies. I love the rhythm of the Passover story in Exodus with its specific and urgent instruction to remember God's mercy. I love the quiet stripping of the altar and the transformation from our recollection of the Last Supper to the doom of Good Friday. Jesus is gathered with his friends for the last time. He offers them a new way to remember God's mercy. He transforms an ancient ritual into another in which we are called together to eat from one bread and drink from one cup. And we leave in silence. The silence continues until Easter, and then, there is joy!

With winter upon us and a year into the pandemic, it feels like the same kind of silence. It's lonely. The future remains uncertain. It is, at times, frightening. Will life ever feel the same? Will it ever *be* the same?

It is when I am feeling this way that I find our liturgy most comforting. The ritual brings to a place of understanding and remembrance. How did the disciples feel on that Passover night? Surely their future was very uncertain. Truly their lives never would be the same.

Again, this year, we will not gather. We will not read these familiar stories together. Manny will not wash anyone's feet. The Altar Guild will not strip the altar and drape it in black linen. And yet, what those rituals help us to recall is still true. Christ came here to serve. As we read in the passage from John, he came to bring us to God and to give us eternal life. "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

And, while we cannot gather to receive Communion, it is still true, as Paul says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

You are all dear to me. I miss you terribly, but I am comforted knowing our connection to one another is through God, and therefore, eternal. And when we can gather again, there will be great joy.

--Your sister in Christ, Carrie Kimball

Friday, April 2, 2021 (Good Friday)

Psalms 22 or 40:1-19 & 54

Wisdom 1:16-2:1, 12-22; 1 Peter:10-20; John 13:36-38 or Genesis 22:1-14; John 19:38-42

Good Friday provides the opportunity for a variety of readings from many books of the Bible. I cannot resist Psalm 22. Each “normal” year, I would be in church on Maundy Thursday, prior to Good Friday. At the end of that service, the preparation for Good Friday begins. The Altar Guild slowly and methodically strips away all the trappings that normally surround the altar. Hangings are removed, kneelers and candles are taken away, everything is made stark and bare, and the cross is covered in black. While the Altar Guild undertakes this ancient tradition, the congregation, in the background, recites Psalm 22. Even though we are not together this year, I can still hear the words echoing in the dimmed light.

Psalm 22, verse 14 says, *“I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint.”* Everything is drained. Nothing seems to fit. After so many months of separation, that verse resonates deep within me.

The Psalmist describes the pain and misery he or she is feeling – “I am a worm.” What I find so interesting about this Psalm, recited in the midst of pain and bleakness, is the small words, like “but,” and “yet.” Whenever there is a painful verse, soon after there is another verse that contains hope, and often includes “but” or “yet.” *“Yet you are he who took me out of the womb, and kept me safe upon my mother’s breast.”* And following those phrases of hope, are verses which include words of positive affirmation, for example: *“shall be,” “shall live,” “will serve,” “will declare,” “will remember,” “will come.”*

We are drained, and all our bones are out of joint...but with God’s help, we **will** ____ (you fill in the blank).

--Nancy Lian

Saturday, April 4, 2021 (Holy Saturday)

Psalms 88 or 27

Job 19:21-27a; Hebrews 4:1-16; Romans 8:1-11

“To set the mind on the flesh,” says St. Paul, “is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

- “Flesh,” for St. Paul, means *ego-centric desire*.
- “Spirit,” for St. Paul, is the reality of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22).

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So, then, “to set the mind on *ego-centric desire* is death, but to set the mind on *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* is life and peace.”

Toward the end of his tale, we find Job in a frenzied state of *ego-centric desire*—which, says St. Paul, leads to death. A great irony of Job is that, while impeccably good throughout his great suffering, he ends up a pathetic human being whining about losing the esteem of others, and his honor. This ego-desire of Job’s is captured in his cry, “I know that my Vindicator lives,” someone above the fray to prove my worth, my honor (Job 19:25). His petulance regarding lost status comes to a climax in chapters 28-31.

NOT “My *Redeemer* liveth” as Christians understand Christ to be. What Job envisions is the opposite, a God who will prove Job worthy of respect: a vindicator (Hebrew, *ga’al*—one who “*avenges, takes revenge*”). “I know,” he shouts, “that one day my Vindicator will restore me to a position of honor before all who ridicule me.” Job didn’t start out this way. He looks awfully good for the first two-thirds of this moral tale, but he ends up squarely in the camp of those dominated by *ego-centric desire*. And death. When God finally does show up, he silences Job up with poetic displays of divinely playful power. Irony piled on irony, Job *is* vindicated, though in a roundabout way, and quietly—with nobody around: God asks him to pray for his three pious comforters, cerebral and smug in their religion, and false to the bone.

The moral of Job’s cumulative dilemma is signaled by St. Paul: “to set the mind on *ego-centric desire* (including vindication) is death; but to set the mind on *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* is life and peace.”

Let us on this Holy Day of Silence breathe deeply, setting our minds. Breathe out our self-positioning. Breathe in kindness—toward ourselves and others.

--Paul Borgman

Dedication

These Lenten Devotionals are 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 were privileged to know her were enriched by that relationship.

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

Her favorite passage (Isaiah 55:1-3) is a fitting endpiece:

"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."

--Godfrey Perrott



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