

St John's Episcopal Church

Ross, CA



Daily Meditations for Lent

2018

Using this book

The season of Lent, the forty days before Easter, commemorates the 40 days Jesus spent praying in the desert before his public ministry. At Lent, we also remember the 40 years that the people of Israel spent wandering in the desert.

Lent traditionally been the season in which Christians focus on the call to ongoing repentance and change. Lent is also a call to humility as we remember our mortality and our need for God.

Lent is not intended to make us feel terrible about ourselves. During Lent we focus on prayer, self-examination, and repentance not in order to feel guilty, but in order to clear space for God to work in our lives.

Some find that giving something up – a favorite food, a bad habit – helps to open that space for God and serves as a constant reminder of God's presence. Others find it more helpful to take on something new – ten minutes of prayer, a daily walk, or some other spiritual practice.

We offer this booklet to be a part of your spiritual practice this Lent. In this booklet, 40 members of St. John's have written a meditation or reflection on one of the Gospel passages assigned for the weekdays of Lent.

We are thankful to all who have contributed and we pray that this resource helps you to create space for God to work in your heart this Lent.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus said, “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Susan Aley

It surprises me to read this message on Ash Wednesday. Most days of the year people do not know if I have attended church. But on Ash Wednesday there is a dark, visible mark of a cross that others most certainly see if I attend a service. Jesus' message seems irrelevant today. Rereading this passage though, I see it as an invitation to Lent and to mark the season as it is appropriate for me. Lent is a season for examining our relationship with God and making changes so that our relationship with God grows and deepens. Here Jesus is calling us to focus on our personal relationship with God and to do those things which are relevant for our individual relationship with God, regardless of what others do, think or say. It is quite energizing not to have specific rules to follow but to go where God guides me. I'm looking forward to these 40 days.

February 15 Thurs. after Ash Wednesday

Luke 9:18-25

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?”

Peter English

OK. A short vignette in a very complex and meaningful life. Quite likely its relevance should not be measured in the message alone, but in the context of Jesus' profound ministry leading up to this conversation, and most certainly in the tumultuous days following. Luke's recording seems to be a timely bridge. Keep in mind that many of his disciples were teenagers, Peter being either 13 or 14.

Keep also in mind that a vastly enduring ministry such as Jesus' needs a core contemporary group of messengers who will single-mindedly spread the message to an ever-enlarging circle of acolytes, this to not die like a fire, but to grow every year and in every century, as has Christianity (remarkably).

When Jesus asked his disciples what the crowds were saying, and what his disciples themselves thought, he might have already known the answers. He was seemingly using this opportunity to stiffen a dozen spines, to shore up and center those most closely following his lead.

Given the disciples relative youth, Jesus over and over used questions and answers, and provocative language (impending death and resurrection), to grab their attention and devotion, knowing that if many wavered, the message might not carry forever.

With that backdrop, this "bridge" obviously served its purpose. To set the stage for Jesus' most defining statements: his crucifixion, then his redemption.

February 16 Friday after Ash Wednesday

Matthew 9:10-17

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

Forrest Craig

There is a saying, attributed to Buddha Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni and the Theosophists, that goes: “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

Mathew invited Jesus to eat at his table and Jesus sat among the sinners and scofflaws (tax collectors and publicans) not because He wanted to be like them but because He was the spiritual physician - a teacher, to help those who lost their way and were thirsting for mercy. To teach the sick and sinners to repent, to ask forgiveness and to seek God’s way and will. Jesus is a healer. A physician for wayward sheep and that is where I will find Him.....giving attention and attending to the sick.

I am human and therefore I am a sinner. Let me not be prejudiced against a person because of the color of their skin, by what they are wearing, or where they live, or what they do or don’t do for a living, or by their own opinions of what is right and just, or by their wealth or material possessions or lack thereof. If God does not judge me, why should I judge others? Let me help those in need and those less fortunate than me not by rule of law or government mandate, or by righteous pride, but by His conscience calling to be His reflection in this world as Jesus did. I pray God help me to treat and help others as I would like them to treat and help me.

Prejudice, like hate is not an inherent nature in human beings. They are learned traits deformed by information that may be false, biased, stereotyped or inaccurately processed. Who am I to judge others when I too am sick? I pray for healing and mercy daily. I seek Jesus daily through prayer to learn from Him what I can do and how I can help others...to be of service to others unconditionally...to be a teacher. But of course I can’t give to others that which I haven’t got.

Be not afraid. Help me be patient and kind and accepting. Help me I pray to be Christ-like in the sense of a true Christian to use what God has given me and share it with those who seek Him. Amen.

February 17

Sat. after Ash Wednesday

Luke 5:27-32

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Robin Brennan

Who are the sinners? It is easy to spot the Pharisees in the world around us but our inner “Pharisee” is just as harmful and often given a comfortable home within our minds.

We are living in a time when many of us believe we are never good enough. We are constantly in search of a better body, a better brain, and a more enlightened being. Often, we seem to wallow in our unworthiness, keeping ourselves from being satisfied with who we are and making ourselves miserable. Jesus certainly had no problem dining with the “worst of the worst” yet we constantly find ways to make ourselves feel unwelcome at Christ’s table. Condemning ourselves is just as damaging as condemning others.

The core message in this passage is that none of us is in any position to be condemning of anyone, including ourselves, as sinners. If we are going to live our faith, live the “love thy neighbor as ourselves” command, we are called to actually love who we are, not because we are good looking, wealthy, talented, spiritually advanced, or brilliant, but because Jesus loves us just as we are and Jesus expects us to go into the world and carry that message.

As we forgive and accept ourselves we can experience God’s love. All of us have things we want to change about ourselves, but if we sincerely try to “do no harm” we hopefully can relax and stop the voice of self-condemnation. If we are lucky we experience God’s love in prayer and meditation. Transforming that love into kindness toward ourselves and others will help us carry the message of Christ into the world.

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

John Gulick

It was a cold and rainy night in February. The smokers in front of the Silver Peso stood close to the wall to stay as dry as possible. A man unsteadily jay-walked and stumbled across the street and pushed his way into the bar. He was wet and disheveled. He was unsteady on his feet. His hands were dirty and there were mud stains on his clothes. There was an abrasion on the left side of his face. He was a mess and looked like a common drunk. Once inside the door, he stumbled toward the bar and in doing so bumped in to a man seated on a stool at the bar. The stool sitter yelled at the man and stood and faced him telling him that he would be beaten up if he didn't get out of the bar immediately. The man didn't say anything in response and stumbled away from the bar over to where the pool tables are and fell into a chair that was unoccupied. The irate stool sitter followed the man over to where he was sitting and stood over him and angrily repeated his threat. Several men who appeared to be friends with the stool sitter left the bar and stood facing the seated man, presenting a common and unified front. The man didn't respond or even look at the stool sitter or his friends.

The bar had become quiet as everyone listened to the exchange such as it was between the stool sitter and the drunk sitting in the chair. They expected a fight or something interesting, such as watching the drunken man be thrown out of the bar physically by the pool sitter. Instead a young man in his late twenties came up to them said something to the stool sitter and squatted down next to the drunk in the chair. The stool sitter stepped back. And the young man spoke quietly to the "drunk" and seemed to be performing some sort of cursory examination of the man's face. After a couple of minutes, the young man made a call on his cell phone. Soon the sound of sirens could be heard as an ambulance pulled up in front of the Silver Peso. Several EMTs came into the bar and spoke to the young man who had called on the cell phone and then turned to the man in the chair. After a very brief examination, they brought a gurney into the bar and put the man onto the gurney, secured him with straps and rolled the gurney out so they could load it into the ambulance. They then drove in the direction of Marin General.

The stool sitter and his friends went back to the bar and their drinks. The young man who had made the phone call rejoined his friend at a pool table and resumed his game. The friend asked him "what was that all about." The young man replied, "that guy was having a stroke but I think they'll be able to stabilize him at the hospital."

Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus said, “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

The prayer in this passage is so familiar; its words are like comfort food. Since a child these words have been those I go to when no other words can be found or when too many overwhelm; when worried, or thankful; for a quick prayer or to pray at length; whether alone, or in community. These words are always the perfect fit.

As I repeatedly read this passage, it is the words that precede and follow the 'Lord's Prayer' that strike me. Jesus does not just give us the words to pray, he teaches us how and why. He makes it clear that prayer is not meant to be a performance to impress, nor is it complicated.

He tells us that the One we are praying to already, "*knows what you need before you ask*", thus implying that the words themselves are somewhat meaningless. Why then does Jesus give us these words? Is it perhaps because He wants us to know that God is seeking our attention? God does not need to hear us, but we need to hear Him! God wants us to pause and to listen, to give Him the time and space He needs to help us see the answers and actions He has already put before us, but that we are too blind, busy or arrogant to see. By giving us the 'Lords Prayer' Jesus gives a mantra to meditate on, a refrain to remind us of the simplicity our needs and gives us **a single** instruction. In case we miss it, Jesus repeats it at the close of the prayer, "*forgive others their trespasses*".

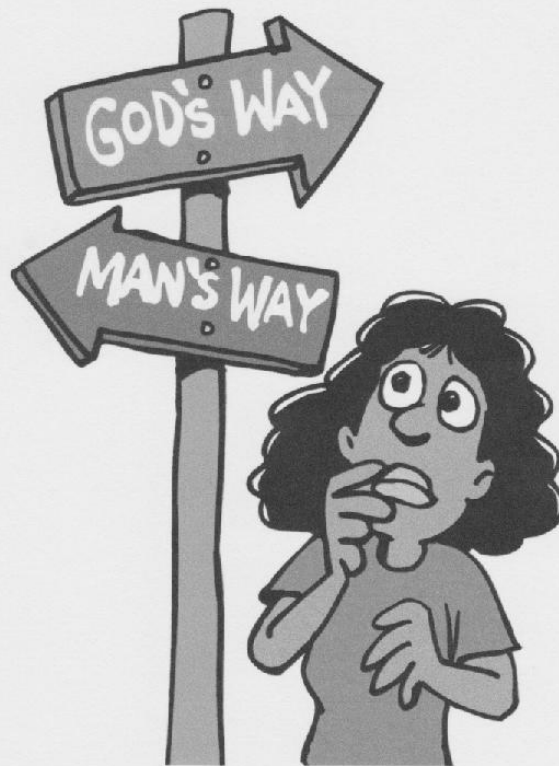
With this scripture Jesus teaches us to pause, brush all but the essential aside, and communicate with God; to connect with acts of forgiveness – it is this action that he wants us to speak.

February 21

Wednesday 1st Lent

Luke 11:29-32

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!”



Why do we still look for a sign when the evidence is right in front of us???

February 22

Thursday 1st Lent

Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”

Marcia Summers

Welcome, I've been waiting for you
I have all that you need

You are the key
the door is always open

Blessings as you walk
through the threshold

Into my loving acceptance



Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Tap on the Shoulder

I love the Lord. I believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I read the Bible, and.....

I am jealous of those who lived with Jesus. Having Jesus to tap you on the shoulder and say "come this way" or "do this" would make things so clear! So I search here and now for my tap on the shoulder.

What does it take to enter the kingdom of heaven? What is my path?

What helps you answer these questions? How can your righteousness (being in a right relationship with God) grow to be greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees?

The direction to these answers can come from the personal relationship between you and God.

For me the following helps:

Gods word- the Bible is my manual. God, help me to refer to it more often.

Jesus' example- perfection personified. I fall short. I am thankful that my desire to follow is the first step and believe that this desire pleases God

Holy Spirit- I come to Church and participate in Dinner Church to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, to get in the spiritual zone. God, help me to grow in my awareness.

Other believers- I am thankful for those in my life who teach me the importance of Faith paired with deeds. These people shine light on the meaning of what it means to be righteous (in a right relationship with God)
Thank you JG!

Grace- The core of my hope. Each second, minute, and day I am closer.

From where does your "Tap on the Shoulder" come?

February 24

Saturday 1st Lent

Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect

Eleanor Prugh

If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come.

-- *Old Chinese saying*"

These days I desire not much more than being outside, either perusing the garden plants or sitting in the sun, enjoying the chattering of squirrels, the twittering of birds, or the antics of our cats and dogs. Sometimes I long to be absorbed into the Creation and can almost imagine being so. The spontaneous exuberance of my four-year-old granddaughter breaks such reverie and reminds me that God created humans for **good**. She is joy incarnate. God created such beings and has chosen them to be family.

Jesus says, "I am the real vine, my Father is the vine-dresser." I infer that Jesus' followers are meant to be fruit and that in growing and nurturing each other within Christ the Vine, it is possible they will yield good produce. (When my mind is in turmoil about how I've lived -- calling myself to account, as it were -- I berate myself for having done or not done according to my perceptions of what was "required.")

I read this scripture further and realize Jesus **chose** me. *Whoa*. He calls me **friend**. Double *whoa*. Yet, as Adam and Eve did in the garden, I often hide myself when he speaks my name. From morning chapel in Ocean Grove when a child, to baptism on a Holy Thursday evening at age 16, through Westminster Fellowship groups, to coming forward in the Billy Graham Crusade in Madison Square Garden, and Confirmation in the Episcopal Church, into all the living that has followed ... marriage, east to west coast transplantation, motherhood, gainful employment, creative expression of voice and words, and active participation in many church activities ... often I have failed to remember I was chosen. Jesus' words are direct and personal, and they are not meant for me alone. They are aimed at the heart of every human being. What do they plant there?

LOVE. JOY. COMPASSION. (Lasting fruit.) AMEN.

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said, “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

It's very interesting to note that
Christ called us to turn
the other cheek when we
ourselves, individually,
are slapped.

He never said to turn the
other cheek when our
brothers and sisters in faith
are attacked.

To turn the other cheek at
your own persecution
is courageous.

To turn the other cheek at
the persecution of others
is cowardice.

~Matt Walsh

Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Martin Coyne

We are living through the chaos of our present day rulers who sit on “*Moses seat*” in Washington DC shouting, interrupting, preening and disrupting everyone around them, but are “*not willing to lift a finger*” to reach a fair solution. “*Everything they do is done for People to see*” whether via Twitter, sound bites or messaged news conferences.

In today’s reading we hear Jesus’ warning about those who claim to be leaders, and fail to be servants. He points out how the religious leaders of the time “*fail to practice what they preach*”. How often have we experienced people of influence who ignore that same duty of trust to those they serve?

The choice before us in selecting leaders in our Church, Community or Nation is to choose whether we want them to be servants who lead, or be leaders who refuse to serve. Today more than ever, we are surrounded by elected representatives who refuse to act as Statesmen to serve, but behave in similar ways that Jesus observed when he criticized the Pharisees in Jerusalem 2000 years ago.

How do we cope with all the self-promotion and self-indulgence our leaders use to strong arm their agenda versus serving the needy? I think we see it every day by those following Jesus’ footsteps.

Jesus demonstrates by his actions that he loves the lowly, he seeks out sinners, and he shows a path to repentance and reconciliation. It’s not by seeking recognition, or pursuing one’s own agenda or allowing self-interest to play a dominate role; its by all those small acts of service we rely upon in communities like St. John’s, e.g. the altar guild, flower angels, acolytes, the REST crews, the Gilead House team, Sunday school teachers, communion bread bakers, ushers, and much more. Thankfully we have leaders who are willing to lift a finger to serve our needs while asking nothing in return.

Being a good servant doesn’t have to cost anything, and as Jesus said in Matthew 19:30 “*many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first*”.

Matthew 20:17-28

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.”

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Keith Granger

In the first part of this reading, I have always been amazed of course, that Jesus persisted in his journey knowing what would happen to him in Jerusalem, and that he would not try to change the outcome, but instead let it happen so the prophecy could be fulfilled, and we could learn from it.

In the remaining verses I am struck how it parallels our modern day jostling for power and status at work or in society. It makes one ponder the subject of “Earthly Authority” and the chain of command that we have often found necessary to evolve as a civilization.

Many of us have been annoyed when an aggressive coworker or colleague runs to the boss ahead of us with their ideas, or to seek a position that compromises our own role in some way -- especially when they have others helping and advocating on their behalf, as the mother of the sons of Zebedee (John and James) was in the writings of Mathew.

Many of us at some point have also encountered a response like Jesus’s “are you ready to drink from my cup” from their earthly superiors, asking if you think you are ready for a certain position or a responsibility. Sometimes we find out like James and John did, that what we think is important to first or to be great is not always what we think it is!

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said, “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Kelli Fleitas

God doesn't say you will be given everything immediately: Sometimes we have to wait for the door to be opened after we knock. And while children get food when hungry, sometimes they have to wait for dinner to be ready- and they don't like the food they get, even though it's what they need!!!

Sometimes seeking takes a while, and the wrong path, before we find the right one.

But I love the Hope this text gives, that if we ask, if we try, our efforts to do the right thing will be guided, that seeking God, or love, or friendship, or forgiveness, or what you will, you *will* find it.

I believe in an all-loving God. Far from perfect, it's a relief to see even the "evil" are heard, and "given good things" when they ask. May we all strive to be so loving!

Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus said, “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’”

So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.”

Knowing this is a parable, I wanted to be able to say it was an easy lesson that gave me a clear and immediate understanding of a fundamental moral truth. Parable: “a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson...”

But I get caught up in the last interchange between Jesus and the priests. He asks them what the metaphorical landowner (God) will do to the tenants (humanity) who have killed his servants (holy leaders) and even his son (Jesus). Up until that point, the parable seems to be a foreshadowing of what’s to come for Jesus in the days ahead. But the priests’ answer surprises me – it seems like more of an old testament answer with its tone of vengeance. And I think it surprises Jesus too. Is that why he responds with something that almost sounds like he’s chastising them for an answer that misses the mark? “Have you never read in the scriptures...?”

And then Jesus’ story changes course, leaving the question of death for the tenants behind and instead shifting focus to the rejected stone. Is he introducing a new metaphor for the murdered son, because he hopes this imagery will better illustrate the point that the priests may be missing in their too hasty embrace of revenge? Is the story surrounding the parable showing us that the eye-for-an-eye time is past?

It seems like the tenants won’t be put “to a miserable death,” even if the priests jumped to that conclusion, but the tenants *will* lose the vineyard. It’s a loss for those who killed the landowners’ son, but I think part of the point, at least, is that it’s a more forgiving consequence.

Am I misreading the parable and the ensuing discussion Jesus has with his priests? I’m not sure. But I do see that the lesson ends not with the death of these “wretches” but instead on a note of thriving bounty—the “fruits of the kingdom”—for those who appreciate the value of the rejected stone, who know how to nurture the vineyard and who are willing to spend time cultivating the promise of the kingdom of God. It doesn’t seem like a “simple” message to me, but maybe that hopeful vision--more enduring and powerful than vengeance and miserable death--is the passage’s ultimate moral lesson.

Luke 15:11-32

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Cynthia Newton Captain

Luke wrote, “Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

“He was lost but has been found.” These words are echoed by the famous hymn “Amazing Grace,” which was written by John Newton, the evangelical Anglican priest, in 1779. There is a family myth that my maternal grandfather’s forebears were somehow related to John Newton (who had no natural children of his own, but many adopted ones), and there are no less than 20 John Newtons in my family tree. My grandfather referred to “Amazing Grace” as “our” hymn, and I remember sitting on his knee and learning three verses by heart before I was four. We would sing it together - Grandpa with his beautiful baritone, and me with my squeaky baby soprano, and it was wonderful, and wistful, and beautiful.

But what did it mean? Who was lost? Who was found? How does all this relate to the Prodigal son (or daughter)? For John Newton, this hymn was a way of explaining how he could go from slave trader to evangelical priest fighting for the abolition of slavery. He was truly lost, but through the Grace of God he was finally found. But this hymn, and the story, can still speak to us, too. We are lost in our schedules, lost in our cell phones, lost to our true, genuine selves, but we are never lost to God. That is what the Prodigal represents to me and, by extension, “Amazing Grace.” Even when we are most alone, by the very grace of God, we are never lost.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That save a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I’m found,

March 5

Monday 3rd Lent

Luke 4:23-30

Jesus said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Virginia Kosydar



Collage, Mixed Media. V. Kosydar

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Glynis Doyle

Jesus offered Peter the parable of a king settling accounts to describe how often and how fully one should forgive. I have seen what this forgiveness looks like in action. The mother of my close friend in college showed the patience and pity of this king, requiring none of the payback shown by the slave. Just forgiveness.

Over a five-year post-college period my friend's drinking spiraled out of control. As an alcoholic he struggled and slipped through: hospitalizations, oxygen tanks, near heart failure, and home insecurity. One year his father took an opportunity to work overseas. Rather than explore Europe with her husband, his mother chose to stay home and close to her son as he moved in and out of sober living facilities. Her patience stayed strong even as her savings dwindled, since his healthcare did not cover treatment.

She continued to stay close to him and he was able to come out the other side. He is married now and his son is nearly my son's age. His mother gets to be a grandmother. Friends now get to see happy family photos on Facebook and posts that show his positive attitude and eagerness to help others and offer forgiveness to those who need it.

Many families that deal with addiction are asked to practice acts of forgiveness that number in the seventy times seven range.

March 7

Wednesday 3rd Lent

Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Katie Hoertkorn

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife, or property.

Matthew 5:17-19 precedes the profound and radical Sermon on the Mount. So before beginning that instruction, Jesus tells us that our foundation must be the Torah law, to us perhaps most represented by the Ten Commandments.

Most of us probably learned the 10 Commandments when we were children. Taken literally, they seemed self-evident and of course something we could all do. In fact, I would guess that most, if not all, of us could not have imagined breaking these laws when we were eight or ten years old. But then as we get older, complications and grey areas arise. Exactly what does it mean to have no other gods before me? What does it mean to honor? To murder? To steal? To lie? The interpretations can get more muddled as soon as they are not literal. For example, we are not going to physically murder anyone, but what about psychologically or emotionally? What does “honor our mother and father” really mean, especially if it is inconvenient to spend time with aged or sick parents or grandparents? What does it mean when we want material goods or that special vacation? How hard do we work to have materially more than our neighbors? Do we gossip? How do we love our neighbors more than ourselves - especially if we do not even like them? What does it mean to keep the Sabbath holy when we have so little time? Just how do we truly follow the Commandments in law and spirit?

So for me these laws, and instructions from prophets, are most difficult to follow. I think Jesus is telling us that we must be humble. In order to truly obey these Commandments, we must possess humility and bow before them. They are both figurative and literal. Our obedience to these laws will bring us glory in the God's kingdom.

I pray for strength and wisdom to follow these Commandments in my life.

Luke 11:14-23

Now Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.” Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

David DeRuff

"Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house."

Oof! That was a punch in the gut. There are so many ways that I do this!

I realize that Jesus is talking to me, to us, as people of faith, of all faiths. He is reminding us that we are all God's people and occupy just one kingdom which is God's. Dividing ourselves into small groups whether social, racial, local, national, or political will bring the kingdom down.

Social media and fiddling with my phone in public are two ways that I divide myself from others. I do it all the time! It has become the norm. I "friend" people with similar beliefs and am prone to scoff at those who think differently. Social media and politicized media have made this worse. Have you noticed how strong people's language often is? How one-sided? How rude? I don't think people would say what they write if they were facing one another in conversation.

For Lent this year, I'm going to look up from my phone and smile at strangers. Ya, watch out! I might even say hello and I can do this every day. I also want to make time to invite someone with different beliefs to join me for coffee or a beer and try genuinely to understand their point of view. In thinking about this, I remember a commercial that Heineken made a while back titled "Worlds Apart." Look it up on YouTube. It's awesome and I think Jesus would approve.

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

The line that stands out for me is "*...You shall love your neighbor as yourself...*"

I don't want to but I confess this is a challenge at times - I don't always love my neighbor *and* I don't always love myself.

I am not proud to admit I frequently expect perfection, can be judgey and quick to criticize; especially with myself and sometimes others. Perhaps, the antidote to this is to fully "*...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" If I love my God completely, I would love myself and my neighbor and if I love myself and my neighbor completely I would be loving and honoring my God. For me, there is a circular nature to this commandment.

This reminds me of a personally resonant line in the last paragraph of one of my favorite books I Know This Much is True, by Wally Lamb. "The evidence of God exists in the roundness of things".

Blessings to all this Easter season. And blessings to me too!

March 10

Saturday 3rd Lent

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Emily McFarland, Director of Stewardship

Although “humble” can mean to shame, demean or degrade, those experiences rarely result in the inspiration to change direction. They can have the opposite effect because they are such overwhelmingly negative experiences that there is no room for reflection, insight and evolution. I like to think that here humble means the act of accepting (being merciful) that all humans must strive toward “the better angels of our nature”. Jesus might be saying that to be human is to be imperfect. Truly accepting this lesson allows the space to compassionately face my own unique imperfections (of course I yelled, I was hungry and tired) and do it differently the next time (I need to sleep well before I talk to her about the email she sent).

John 4:43-54

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Jennifer Bull

For me, this passage is about God's call to us to have faith at all times – in good times and in bad times. Interpretations of this passage suggest that, at various moments in our lives, we all cry out to God when we are the “soldier in the foxhole,” fearing imminent death or destruction. When we are desperate and in crisis, we reach to God in hopes of miracles, just as the royal official begs Jesus to heal his dying son. Yet, Jesus subtly chides the official, saying that mankind seemingly cannot have faith without tangible signs and wonders from God. Instead of accompanying the official back to his sick son's bedside in Capernaum, Jesus instructs him to go home where he will find his son healed. By taking leave of Jesus and travelling home – not knowing the fate of his son and no longer physically in the presence of Jesus -- the official demonstrates a deeper faith and trust in God, which he then shares with his entire household.

In this passage, God is calling on me to actively live in faith all the time, not just when I have a personal crisis. God wants me to believe, even when I don't see miraculous signs and wonders. Instead, I must know that even if I cannot sense the presence of Jesus and God, they are always with me and will guide me through the mundane, the magnificent, and the tragic events of life. I just need to believe. Always.

John 5:1-18

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

Thank you Lord

Give me faith and wisdom
A heart that is sincere
Songs of praise and gladness
Messages to hear
Eyes to see thy beauty
Feet to walk thy way
Thank you Lord for listening
Every time I pray

-Ellen Barbee Wilson, mother of Stuart Barbee

John 5:19-29

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Ginger Strickland, Associate Priest

This text from the Gospel of John gives us a window into one of the great mysteries of our faith: the interior life of the Trinity. As Christians, we believe that God is both three and one; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. How do these three persons relate to one another? What characterizes the interactions between the three persons of the Trinity?

Here, John's language becomes awkward and halting. Here, we are at the very limit of language, aware that any effort to describe the interior life of God is going to fall short.

The Son imitates the Father – and the Father makes himself totally open and available to the Son. The Father gives his power to the Son – the power to raise the dead, then goes a step further: the Father refrains from judging so that the Son may take on this role. The Father not only shares honor and praise with the Son; he also refuses to accept any honor that cannot be shared.

What John describes is a relationship characterized by self-sacrificing love. By a willingness to give up power to the other. A relationship of mutual deference, respect. The Father desires to see the Son excel, be honored, be lifted up. The Son desires the same for the Father. Each part of the Trinity is willing to sacrifice for the good of the other.

And so, we find, at the very heart of God, a model for our own intimate relationships. We are invited to imitate God by having the same kind of love for those who are closest to us: to desire their good above our own. To desire that they be honored, recognized, appreciated. To step back so that they can step forward.

How can your relationships become more like the model God offers?

John 5:30-47

Jesus said, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

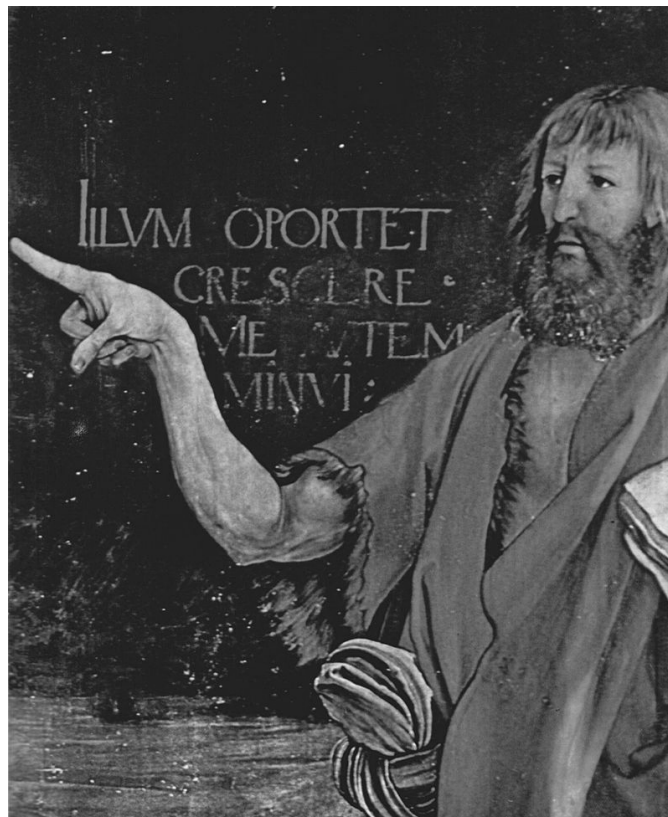
In today's reading, Jesus says that John the Baptist is "a burning and shining lamp" testifying to the truth of who Jesus is. He also speaks of his own role – to testify to the glory and love of God, just as God does the same for him.

Below is a detail of the Isenheim Altarpiece, a spectacular work by Matthias Grünewald in the early 16th century.

In it, John the Baptist points to the crucified Christ. Next to him are the Latin words for John the Baptist's famous statement about Jesus: "He must increase and I must decrease."

I keep it on the wall of my office as a reminder of what it means to be a Christian.

We are not called to be perfect – or even to call attention to ourselves at all. We are just to point to the place where perfect love can be found – to point to Jesus.



March 16

Friday 4th Lent

John 7:1-2, 25-30

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

A favorite St. John's meditation on Lent:



John 7:37-52

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.” Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

Today's text suggests that even those who were open to Jesus' message struggled to believe that he could really be the Messiah. Recent research into how Jesus might have dressed offers some insight into why it was so easy to dismiss him.

Some food for thought for us as we think about how we dress and present ourselves – who are we seeking to identify with and why? And how do we judge others who dress differently.

There is no neat physical description of Jesus in the Gospels or in ancient Christian literature. But there are incidental details. From the Bible (for example, Mark 6:56) you can discover that he wore a mantle – a large shawl (“himation” in Greek) – which had tassels, described as “edges”; a distinctively Jewish tallith in a form it was in antiquity. Usually made of wool, a mantle could be large or small, thick or fine, coloured or natural, but for men there was a preference for undyed types.

He walked in sandals, as implied in multiple Biblical passages (see Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7, 6:9; John 1:27), and we now know what ancient Judaeian sandals were like as they have been preserved in dry caves by the Dead Sea.

He wore a tunic (chitōn), which for men normally finished slightly below the knees, not at the ankles. Among men, only the very rich wore long tunics. Indeed, Jesus specifically identifies men who dress in long tunics (“stolai”, Mark 12:38) as wrongly receiving honour from people who are impressed by their fine attire, when in fact they unjustly devour widows' houses.

Jesus's tunic was also made of one piece of cloth only (John 19:23-24). That's strange, because mostly tunics were made of two pieces sewn at the shoulders and sides. One-piece tunics in first-century Judaea were normally thin undergarments or children's wear. We shouldn't think of contemporary underwear, but wearing a one-piece on its own was probably not good form. It was extremely basic.

Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Jesus was remembered as looking shabby by a scholar named Celsus, writing in the mid second century, in a treatise against the Christians. Celsus did his homework. He interviewed people, and he – like us – was quite interested in what Jesus looked like. From Jews and others he questioned, he heard that Jesus “wandered about most shamefully in the sight of all”. He “obtained his means of livelihood in a disgraceful and importunate way” – by begging or receiving donations.

From the perspective of respectable people, we can surmise then that Jesus looked relatively rough. When the Christian writer Origen argued against Celsus, he rejected many of his assertions, but he did not dispute this.

And so while Jesus wore similar clothes to other Jewish men in many respects, his “look” was scruffy. I doubt his hair was particularly long as depicted in most artwork, given male norms of the time, but it was surely not well-tended. Wearing a basic tunic that other people wore as an undergarment would fit with Jesus' detachment regarding material things (Matthew 6:19-21, 28–29; Luke 6:34-35, 12:22-28) and concern for the poor (Luke 6:20-23).

This, to me, is the beginning of a different way of seeing Jesus, and one very relevant for our times of massive inequality between rich and poor, as in the Roman Empire. Jesus aligned himself with the poor and this would have been obvious from how he looked.

The appearance of Jesus matters because it cuts to the heart of his message. However he is depicted in film and art today, he needs to be shown as one of the have-nots; his teaching can only be truly understood from this perspective.

-From “What Did Jesus Wear?” Joan Taylor, *The Conversation* (Magazine of King's College, London)

March 19

Monday 5th Lent

John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Bob and Kathryn Goldsmith

The subject of this passage from Luke, that of the child Jesus interacting with the elders of the Temple of Jerusalem has been painted and depicted for centuries. Some of the famous painters who illustrated this passage include Rembrandt, Albrecht Durer, Tissot, and Ingres. It seems to us that these illustrations, some featuring parents Mary and Joseph hovering in the background, watching him pontificate, intend to be instructive in two ways.

The first is to demonstrate that, even as a fairly young boy, not yet a teenager, Jesus was fully capable of engaging with, and instructing respected, older religious elders in the very seat of their power. Even the elders must have found this unusual in the extreme. Jesus has now defined himself to them as someone very, very, very special.

The second revelation is about the nature of the child Jesus, not only during his separation from his parents on their journey home, but demonstrated in a startling but kindly rebuke to Mary and Joseph when they come back to find him.

“How is it that you sought me?” he asks them. So, why are you guys looking for me? Of course they would have been looking for him, as worried parents would naturally do, concerned about the welfare of their child. But Jesus challenges that. Like the circumstances of his birth, here is the foreshadowing of what he is to be, and what he is now.

He goes on to say “Did you not know that I would be in my Father’s house?” Jesus is straightforward to the people who love him most on this earth. As human parents, they did not understand his statement, or, we can probably imagine, his tone. He was only twelve years old!

And, after that rebuke, he obediently follows his parents home to Nazareth; they were probably much comforted and relieved. However, the passage ends prophetically and somewhat cryptically. It is Mary, again, who truly *knows* and internalizes what she was told at Jesus’ conception, and at his birth. Something is definitely UP with this boy! He is beyond a regular son; he is a youngster who fully engages the learned elders of the Temple; he is a boy who, without rancor, chides his parents for worrying about him. He knows how to be obedient, but he is also confident about his ultimate role. He is God’s son. Somewhere on that dusty passage home to Nazareth, Mary absorbs the implications of this, again, as she “kept all these things in her heart.” The passage shows Mary as a very human mother, but one with an unusual and singular pipeline to God, the Father, and with an extraordinary son. Luke finally catapults this event at the Temple to let us know that “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.”

We think this passage is intended to set us up, as readers of the New Testament, to anticipate the fulfillment of Jesus’ ministry in the passages to come: we see what he can do as a twelve year old...we are not surprised, then, at his future miracles and healings.

John 8:21-30

Again Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.” They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” As he was saying these things, many believed in him.



When you focus
on the
why or the
what if....
You lose sight
of the
WHO

In this moment when Jesus is trying to tell the non-believers WHO he is, I am reminded that here in these last moments with those who do not yet believe, Jesus simply tells them they cannot go where he is going and they will not understand until they raise him up. Of course when I read this in my much younger years I assumed the “raise” was the physical placement of the Jesus on the cross and all that encompasses Easter. As a more seasoned adult, with a few more shaken and stirred faith moments under my belt, I see these words “raise me,” as Jesus telling us to exalt and hold HIM higher than anyone else on our journey. Raising Jesus up allows us to be authentically humble and takes a bit of the pressure off quite frankly. We were designed to stumble, but the Lord is with us all the way, just as he was with Jesus. I am beyond grateful that because I raise him up, I can follow. I can go there. In the end if we cannot follow, we are in fact our worst enemy. I am reminded to raise my faith higher and higher as the doubts and the fears get bigger and bigger.

John 8:31-42

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word.

I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.” They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “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 heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.”

Humans by nature are prone to sin.

If we follow the word of God, our sins will be forgiven and we will live fulfilling (truthful) lives as the children of Christ.

Look for the presence of God in all things, as they may appear when you least expect.

John 8:51-59

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

The Gospel of John gets hard to read sometimes: the repetition “you do not know him...I know him...I would say that I do not know him”; the references to demons and eternal death; the long speeches. It’s easy to let our eyes glaze over.

And if that happens while we read today’s text, we might miss what is possibly the most shocking sentence in the Bible; certainly it is the most shocking thing that Jesus himself ever says.

In this text, Jesus is having one of his typical arguments with the religious leaders of his day. They are protesting his claim that whoever follows him will have eternal life. Jesus replies that even the great patriarch Abraham acknowledges him.

The leaders are shocked – how in the world has Jesus seen Abraham?

And Jesus replies with a statement so shocking that the leaders almost stone him: “I tell you truly, before Abraham was, I am.”

“I AM” - the ancient Jewish name of God that no faithful Jew would dare to say aloud. Jesus not only dares to say it. He dares to claim it for himself.

No wonder they almost killed him.

The belief that Jesus was God is the most distinctive and shocking Christian doctrine. And it is one that we should spend time wrestling with, taking in, meditating on.

What does it mean to you?

John 10:31-42

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ —and the scripture cannot be annulled— can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” And many believed in him there.

Tom Fregoso, Youth Minister

Language Barrier

I couldn't understand the language she spoke,
at least not all of it,
but the emotion pouring past her lips,
the tears in her eyes, her clenched and
shaking fists
enunciated more clearly,
than any piece of English Poetry I had ever read,
and grabbed me, held me still.

...In that moment, her soul was in
my arms.

In that finite, tender breath of our lives,
she was my mother, my best friend...
but I could not console her.
I didn't have the words;
and my heart sank into the
concrete between us,
wet with the pain of God's rain
and her tears.

...Were my tears
So, I simply opened my palms
toward her crouched form and
spoke the only words I could
fathom, that would be accepted
by a stranger on a dangerous street.

"I am sorry, It will be okay. God will bless you."

I knew she did not understand...

"Lo siento"

“que va a estar bien”

“Dios te bendecira’ “

the words were as messy as the overturned
duffle bag at her feet...and fumbled, slowly
from my lips, as my knees hit the street.

Two strangers, cried in the rain,
knowing nothing of each other's suffering,
and yet we shared the weight,
together, for those few moments;
the barrier of language was broken.
Love spoke for us.

-James Kelley 2014, All rights reserved.

John 11:45-53

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

Sandra Pathik, Director of Children's Ministry

MIXED RESPONSES TO JESUS

The context of this passage is an aftermath of the display of Jesus' divine power. Lazarus was raised from the dead. And there were many witnesses to this extraordinary miracle.

The response of these witnesses is recorded in this passage and the succeeding chapter. John 11:45 tells us that many of those who had "*seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*" Many of them took a step further by telling others about Jesus and their eye-witness account of the miracle. John 12:18 records that "*that was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign.*"

But there were others who had seen and yet did not believe. Instead they reported to those who opposed Jesus what he has done. These opposing group took a step further to plot to kill him (verse 53).

People's response to Jesus during his ministry on earth has not changed over the centuries. Today, we see people who have heard the Gospel and experienced miracles draw closer to him. And many have put action to their faith by telling others about their life-changing experience. However, there are those who have given up their convictions. And sadly some have become proponents against faith in him.

This Lent, may we reflect on our faith in Jesus and pray that he will find us faithful to the end.

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Shelley Wilson

“In all His acts God orders all things, whether good or evil, for the good of those who know Him and seek Him and who strive to bring their own freedom under obedience to His divine purpose. All that is done by the will of God in secret is done for His glory and for the good of those whom He has chosen to share in His glory.”

– **Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island***

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him.

Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Charles Schaefer

This passage reminds me of a quote I heard about 'loving with a whole heart'. In looking for it, I came across this one that resonated with me.

“We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.”

– **Thornton Wilder**

I'm not sure of Wilder's original intent, but it seems to describe happiness that comes from recognition of and gratitude for one's 'treasure', i.e. not taking blessings for granted. Here's my take on the passage...

Mary's greatest treasure is Jesus, and she acts accordingly. When Judas criticizes Mary, Jesus supports Mary's effusive praise and suggests that Judas' heart is not always in the right place, not always 'conscious of his treasure'. So my prayer for the day is...

Dear God, Please help me keep my heart conscious of my greatest treasure.

March 27

Tuesday of Holy Week

John 12:20-36

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Chris Rankin-Williams, Rector

For when He said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me,” He wished it to be understood just as if He had said, If any man doth not follow me, he serveth me not. And those, therefore, are the servants of Jesus Christ, who seek not their own things, but the things that are Jesus Christ’s. For “let him follow me” is just this: Let him walk in my ways, and not in his own; as it is written elsewhere, “He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.” For he ought, if supplying food to the hungry, to do it in the way of mercy and not of boasting, seeking therein nothing else but the doing of good, and not letting his left hand know what his right hand doeth; in other words, that all thought of self-seeking should be utterly estranged from a work of charity. He that serveth in this way serveth Christ, and will have it rightly said to him, “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of those who are mine, ye did it unto me.” And thus doing not only those acts of mercy that pertain to the body, but every good work, for the sake of Christ (for then will all be good, because “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth”), he is Christ’s servant even to that work of special love, which is to lay down his life for the brethren, for that were to lay it down also for Christ. For this also will He say hereafter in behalf of His members: Inasmuch as ye did it for these, ye have done it for me. And certainly it was in reference to such a work that He was also pleased to make and to style Himself a servant, when He says, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto [served], but to minister [serve], and to lay down His life for many.” Every one, therefore, is the servant of Christ in the same way as Christ also is a servant. And he that serveth Christ in this way will be honored by His Father with the signal honor of being with His Son, and having nothing wanting to his happiness for ever.

-St. Augustine: *Homilies on the Gospel of John*: Tractate 51

March 28

Wednesday of Holy Week

John 13:21-32

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.”

“Why shouldn’t we entertain the idea of an archetypal betrayer? In (English Professor Susan) Gubar’s view, the original, Biblical Judas may have had a bad influence on our politics, but he does represent something true about our lives. He testifies, she says, to the “distressing nature of the human condition,” our “capacity for faltering and sinning” and then for despair and self-hatred—which, somehow, don’t prevent us from faltering and sinning again. Many of us, on many occasions, are not going to love one another. If this widely acknowledged fact is personified by one figure in the New Testament, why shouldn’t it be?”

-from “Betrayal: Should We Hate Judas Iscariot” Joan Acocella in *The New Yorker*, August 3, 2009.



Caravaggio “*The Taking of Christ*” (1602-03)

March 29

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Heather Erickson, Assisting Priest

What would we do without Peter? I imagine the disciples were somewhat used to Jesus turning things upside down – he never really answers a question straight on, he heals when he “shouldn’t,” he includes those who were on the “outs,” and here he is doing it again. With a towel wrapped around his waist, he kneels before his disciples and washes their feet. I think it’s sometimes hard for us to enter the cultural mindset. Lots has changed in 2,000 years, and yet some things remain the same. It was normal for their feet to be washed at the table (the ground was nothing if not dusty or muddy) - but to be washed by their friend, their teacher, Jesus is once again turning things upside down.

It’s when he arrives at the feet of Peter that the questions begin. Me too? Peter asks. Jesus cryptically responds with how it doesn’t make sense now but will later. To which Peter emphatically responds, “You will never wash my feet,” clarifying his understanding that he is the student, Jesus the master, and it is not for the master to kneel at the student’s feet.

Thank God for Peter’s doubts, for his questions, for his willingness to be the one who doesn’t understand. Peter helps us break open the story to reveal the beauty inside. There’s nothing we can do or not do, say or not say, the Kingdom of Heaven is open to us through God’s grace, through the love of Jesus, kneeling before his disciples, and loving them into another way of being – “Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another.”

Where are we holding back? Where are we trying to do the work on our own? Where are we holding fast to the limited ways we understand things? Jesus invites us into holiness. Jesus invites us to share in the work he is already doing. Jesus invites us to step into grace, together. The Kingdom of Heaven is here. “Love one another.”

March 30

Good Friday

John 18:1-19:42

The Passion narrative of John is too long to reproduce in this booklet form. Please refer to your Bible for the complete passage, cited above.

Chris Rankin-Williams, Rector

Today's passage is the passion narrative from the Gospel of John. The word passion refers to the suffering and death of Christ. The passion narrative from John is always used as the gospel reading on Good Friday, whereas the passion narratives from Matthew, Mark and Luke are used in the three-year lectionary cycle on Palm Sunday.

At St. John's Good Friday service everyone who attends is given a white flower and a large nail to place at the foot of a large wooden cross setup in the church. The flower represents our mourning the death of Christ and our love for him. The flower is also a reminder that Jesus' death on the cross is the victory over death for all of us, which is why it is called "Good" Friday. Through Jesus' death we have true life.

The nail is to remind us of the ways each of us crucify Christ in our own day. There is a long and shameful history in the church of blaming the Jews for killing Jesus, but theologically we all participate in his death. Christ has no body now but ours. Anytime we act in a way which denies Christ in our neighbor we are, in a sense, crucifying Christ. This goes not only for our own actions but for our complicity in systems that oppress or dehumanize groups of people. This is why we confess "the evil we have done and the evil done on our behalf."

Today we are both Jesus' mother and the crowd shouting "crucify him!" We are Joseph of Arimathea and Pilate. We mourn and we confess. We give thanks for the victory over death and lay down our nail at the foot of the cross that we might walk away as Christ's body in the world.

Matthew 27:57-66

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Jennifer Davenport



Holy Saturday

We mourn, we wait, are patient and reflect...We mourn the death of Jesus and death itself. We have faith in our silence. We wait by the impenetrable cold grey tomb...We have faith in our fortitude. We are patient and pray. Joy will replace grief. Lightness will replace the heaviness of our hearts. We have faith and grow steadfast. We reflect as we look back on the Lent and hope that it had been a time of growth and a time of self-examination and renewal. We have faith. It is still and quiet but have faith that with death comes light and patiently await his coming.

Other Ways to Connect to God this Lent

- **Daily Meditation and Prayer.** Interested in starting a daily practice of prayer or meditation? Or looking to infuse your daily prayer with some new energy? Join us as we explore how to pray in a way that is sustainable and joyful. **Sunday, February 18, 11:30am-12:30pm** in the Fireside Room.
- **Yoga at St. John's.** We offer weekly yoga for all levels with live music and candlelight and a daily reflection/meditation. For the next 40 days, we will focus on exploring Lent. Every Monday, 6:15-7:30pm in the Parish Hall. Suggested donation of \$10-20.
- **Lent Mini-Retreat.** Bring the whole family and take a couple of hours for rest and reflection. Join us for breakfast, then kids go to their art/story program while adults get to chose two discussion groups to attend. Topics this Lent are:
 - “Understanding Anxiety and its Impact on Our Kids” with Dr. Tracey Foose, Director of the Anxiety Disorders Progam at UCSF, mom, and St. John’s Parishioner.
 - Christian Meditation: Why and How
 - An Introduction to Godly Play for Families: Learn more about how to talk about God with your children
 - Godly Play training for Sunday School TeachersSaturday, March 17 from 10am-12 noon (breakfast from 9:30am)
- **Serving in the Community.** Consider a serving alongside someone in need this Lent. St. John’s needs you, and the community does too! Check out <http://www.stjohnsross.org/community/serving/> to learn more.