

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



2020

Lenten Devotional 2020

Lent is a season of preparation, reflection, introspection and change. It can be a season when we examine our lives, our need to do something different and our chance to grasp the opportunities of new life found in following the path of Jesus Christ.

During this next 40 days, we invite you to use this daily devotional as a starting point for your Lenten journey. These brief reflections, written by members of our community, link to a scripture our denomination recommends for the days of Lent.

We invite you to read, reflect, and pray each day of Lent. That you might draw nearer to God, find a spiritual sense this Lent and prepare your heart for Easter.

See you at church.

In Christ,

David

Wednesday February 26, 2020

Psalm 51: 1-19

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.
- 5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- 6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

19 then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Today is Ash Wednesday. Today we recognize our mortality. That we are dust and to dust we shall return. Today we recognize that Lent has begun, and we are called to walk with Jesus towards the cross. The somberness and sobriety of Ash Wednesday remind us of the severity of sin and the seriousness of death. We begin with Psalm 51 today. In it we find the themes of sin, mortality and the need for grace that are common during Lent, and particularly on Ash Wednesday. King David lifts us these themes in Psalm 51, as he was confronted by the prophet Nathan as a result of his own sin. Let us read Psalm 51 and realize we must face our need for God in Christ in order to be made whole.

David Gray

Thursday February 27, 2020

Matthew 6:16-21

¹⁶“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. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so 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^l

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Lent is a season in which we often seek to give something up. We give up chocolate, or alcohol or social media. We do so to seek to create space in our lives for the Holy Spirit and to reflect on what might draw us closer to Christ. In Matthew’s Gospel, Christ calls us to fast, not for recognition, but so that it truly draws us closer to God. Moreover, Christ calls us to generosity. We are to let some things go in order to make room in our lives for positive things. For charity and justice and love and compassion. To act on our best instincts and to put into place the principles that Christ teaches us. For Lent is about our slowing down, looking inward and recognizing that in the end, and in the grand scheme of things, much of what we fret about is not essential. What matters most are the relationships, with God and others, the investments of time we make to help, and the love we share.

David Gray

Friday February 28, 2020

Romans 1: 8-17

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.

9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers,

10 asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you.

11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—

12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish

15 —hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Throughout the season of Lent, it seems like we are meant to be in the mood of lament. Yet, we can be thankful to God for what we have in our lives and we can share our spiritual gifts with God and with others during this season. As Paul says in verse 17, if we live by our faith then we will know the righteousness of God. During Lent, God is calling us to think about our relationship with God and we should take a cue from Paul and thank God for our relationship with God.

Sara Sadler

Saturday February 29, 2020

Matthew 18: 1-7

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 He called a child, whom he put among them,

3 and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

6 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!

Over the years, I've watched young children at play, always amazed at the seeming simplicity of their world. They seem to know what's fair, what's right, what's good, almost intuitively. Is it us adults that teach them all those shades of grey that spoil their innocent outlook? Yes, I know life is not simple. I know that we put away childish things. But, can we still try to remember that innocence? Remember what it means to love unconditionally? What it means to believe with total faith? Jesus says that we must if we wish to see the Father face to face. Can we do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God? Like a child?

Frank Randall

Sunday March 1, 2020

Matthew 4:1-11

- 1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
- 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.
- 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."
- 4 But he answered, "It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "
- 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,
- 6 saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you,' and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "
- 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "
- 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;
- 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."
- 10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "
- 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

I tried fasting two days and was hangry! I can't imagine 40 days and 40 nights. But Jesus is divine but in human form. One could say he was at his very weakest human vulnerable point. Throughout the New Testament, the human vulnerability of Jesus tells us that God understands our human condition. So, this is a demonstration that while we couldn't survive that length of fasting, we are human and vulnerable to temptation. Christ is showing us that we have the strength through Him, to deal with temptation even while suffering. Most importantly, it's our human condition that creates that vulnerability - while we were made in the image of God, there's a lot of temporal and earthly constraints that create conditions that are nearly unbearable. But focusing toward God and not the temporal will help us get through these temptations.

Paul Mays

Monday March 2, 2020

Psalm 32

- 1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
- 2 Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. (Selah)
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Selah)
- 6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. (Selah)

8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.

11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

It is in Lent where we really come face to face with our powerlessness, ultimately with our helpfulness, with our humbleness, with limitations and with our woundedness. Lent is a season to recognize our imperfection. Even to celebrate it.

For we may find happiness with the Psalmist. Happiness that in Christ our transgression is forgiven. Happiness that in Christ our sin is covered.

Happiness that the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in the Spirit there is no deceit.

While our body wastes away, we acknowledge our sin and confess our transgressions to the LORD, God will forgive our guilt. Therefore, let us offer a faithful prayer to God.

David Gray

Tuesday March 3, 2020

Kings 19: 1-8

1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."

3 Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat."

6 He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

The story of Elijah fleeing to Horeb in Kings 19:1-8, sheds insight to how we should view our service to God. Elijah was resigned to die, but God gave him the strength to carry on. Like Elijah, in times of hardship, we too feel that we have not the ability to go on, let alone an idea of what direction we should go. But if we pause and allow God to help us recover in the moment, we will find that we not only have the means to overcome, but that our course is clear and true.

Derek Drake

Wednesday March 4, 2020

Exodus 34: 1-9

1 The Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke.

2 Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain.

3 No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain."

4 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

5 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord."

6 The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

7 keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

9 He said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

Matthew 18: 10-14

10 "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.

11

12 What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

14 So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

When Moses took the two tablets up Mount Sinai, the Lord spoke to him about forgiving sin, but not clearing the guilty, rather visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children for generations. What a devastating prospect!

We do affect our children's futures by our actions in opposition to God's will. It takes generations for our children to relearn the truth of God's grace and regain the desire to love and serve Him. Yet, in Matthew's gospel story of the lost sheep, Jesus tells us that it is not God's will that any little one should be lost.

Does this mean that the ill we do comes from our actions, our own will? How much better to listen, pray and learn God's will for us, so the little ones will not be lost!

Frank Randall

Thursday March 5, 2020

Psalm 121

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
- 8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Psalm 121 was the verse assigned to me to memorize for my 8th grade confirmation. It was late fall, and my sisters and I had just learned that my father was being transferred to North Carolina – we had to move right after Christmas. I was devastated. I did not want to leave my school, my friends and my church. The minister agreed to confirm me and my two closest friends, who I had met at Rye Presbyterian Church nursery school at the age of 3, in a private service. He had to hold special confirmation classes for us to make that happen. I will always remember his kindness and grace at a difficult time. The words of Psalm 121 continue to bring me comfort when I face life's challenges.

Naomi Kettler

Friday March 6, 2020

Romans 3:21-31

- 21 But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets,
- 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,
- 23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
- 24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
- 25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;
- 26 it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.
- 27 Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.
- 28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.
- 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

30 since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. In a passage about righteousness in faith –or right relationship in life we are reminded to be humble. Paul’s letter to the Romans speaks to me to remind that our righteousness is grounded in a faith that rests in God and God’s actions through Jesus Christ for us. We are forgiven and freed, not from our own doing, but through life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are to live and celebrate this gift of faith, in gratitude, energy, imagination and love.

Chris Foster

Saturday March 7, 2020

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

“Keep your head up!” Have you ever been told that? Or told someone else that? Usually this expression comes out as a means of support and encouragement to someone really struggling. A call to not give up, but to keep moving knowing better times are ahead. We have all had those days, weeks, or even years when it feels like nothing is going right. When it seems like we are barely able to keep our heads above water. And, we are losing hope. In Psalm 121 we are reminded where we can always turn for help. Where all Hope is derived. “I lift my eyes to the hills...My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” The Lord can always be counted on, He will always provide and protect. You cannot be lost with Him as your guide. Look up...there you will find the Lord now and forever.

Sean Owens

Admittedly, I am in an unsettled mood about the state of our country’s leadership and the havoc they can wreak on the whole world. Thus, my prayers this Lent will be 40 days of petitions for God to bless all mankind with his saving grace. Each of these three passages speaks to my need for God’s reassurance.

Psalm 121 reminds me to trust in the Lord, He who will guard our going out and our coming in, for this time forth and forever. Through prayer, I hope to achieve that unfaltering trust not to worry, that God’s “got this.”

Kate Wise

Isaiah 51:4-8

4 Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples.

5 I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

7 Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people who have my teaching in your hearts; do not fear the reproach of others, and do not be dismayed when they revile you.

8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be forever, and my salvation to all generations.

Isaiah 51:4-8 comforts me to know that God's righteousness will be forever, and His salvation has gone out to all generations. Though we may not get the world order I long for in the near term, faith tells me it will surely come in God's time.

Kate Wise

Luke 7:1-10

1 After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death.

3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.

4 When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him,

5 for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us."

6 And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof;

7 therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go," and he goes, and to another, "Come," and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this," and the slave does it."

9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Luke 7: 1-10 shows an example of a good leader, one who shows compassion for his slave and a love for his nation, one for whom Jesus marveled at his faith.

Kate Wise

Sunday March 8, 2020

John 3:1-17

1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."

3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above.'

8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.

12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

In John, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, a Jewish rabi, saying "A person is born physically of the human parents, but he is born spiritually of the Spirit. Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again." Jesus goes on later to say "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior."

When I reflect on this passage I see both the commitment that we need to make to God - we need to be born again spiritually through baptism and faith – and I also see the commitment that God made to us – giving His Son so that we may have eternal life. Although God seems to have the much harder commitment, truly believing can be very difficult. When I find myself having doubts and questions, it is the idea that Jesus gave his life to teaching powerful lessons of love, patience, tolerance, and acceptance which has made my faith stronger. Jesus and God are not judging our level of commitment or our consistent faith, but instead love us for who we are and love us through even our own self-judgement.

Anonymous

Monday March 9, 2020

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1 Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

2 He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness;

3 and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.

4 And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

In Hebrews 4:15 - 5:10, we learn that a great high priest is not born, but is tempered. This is joyous news, as it gives us all comfort in knowing that we are all works in progress. Despite what faults and shortcomings we find in ourselves, it is the effort we take to atone and improve our character that will bring us closer to God. May we reflect on our lives so that humility, reverence, and joy resonates in all that we say and do.

Derek Drake

Tuesday March 10, 2020

Romans 4:6-13

1 What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3 For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

4 Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.

5 But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

6 So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;

8 blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin."

9 Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness."

10 How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them,

12 and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

These verses refer to God's grace for those who believe in Christ as our savior. For it is by grace alone that we are saved from our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. What about those who obey the Jewish laws by keeping kosher and observing the sabbath? God promises that all people will be united under the House of Abraham by trusting God to keep his promise and having faith in Jesus. Indeed, God blessed Abraham before he became a Jew, anointing Abraham as the spiritual leader of both the Jews and the Gentiles. God envisioned a multi-ethnic family of people from all nations united by love and faith in Christ, not to be divided by those who adhere to the laws of the Torah and those who don't...

So let's not get bogged down in the details of adhering to laws only - we are bound to break the laws eventually. What God asks for is faith in the one He sent to live among us and die for our sins.

Anonymous

Wednesday March 11, 2020

Ezekiel 36:22-32

22 Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

23 I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes.

24 I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land.

25 I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

26 A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

27 I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

28 Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

29 I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

30 I will make the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant, so that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

31 Then you shall remember your evil ways, and your dealings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds.

32 It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, O house of Israel.

Although no one probably reads this verse this way, I think this is the foreshadowing of God's grace and a new covenant. God says through Ezekiel that He's going to save the tribes of Israel not because they deserve it, but to demonstrate the power of God to save even the most profane. In the divine existence of God, I see the Israelites as the representation of man capable of worshipping one God.

Paul Mays

Thursday March 12, 2020

Colossians 1:15-23

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—

23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

Paul writes a word of and for reconciliation. As we look around our world, we see how divided our nation, our world, our own lives can be. So we pray this day for healing. For reconciliation. For God holds all things together in Christ. May we continue with hope this Lenten journey. That through Christ, whatever it is we have done, or worry about or are thinking separates us from God, can be reconciled through Jesus Christ. Let us follow Him this season. Let us take a moment of silence. Then let us open our hearts to God in prayer...

David Gray

Friday March 13, 2020

Ephesians 2:11-22

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—

12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,

16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near;

18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,

20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;

22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

What joy! All our lives we have been taught that those “others” are so different that we could never exist side by side in true peace. Then along comes this man, this Jesus, who expels the dark gloom of difference with the shining light of His spirit. He creates in and through Himself one new humanity in place of division. Now everyone has access to the Father. No one is a stranger. Everyone is a member of the household of God, whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ: a structure joined together into a holy temple in the Lord. And we, each of us, become a dwelling place for God. What joy!

Frank Randall

Saturday March 14, 2020

Psalm 95

1 O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

3 For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

6 O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

9 when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways."

11 Therefore in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest."

The first part of Psalm 95 reminds us to joyfully worship and praise God in good times and in harsh time because He has provided everything from the mountains to the sea and He understands our needs and has provided for us as sheep under His care.

The second section contains a stern warning against hardening our hearts and forgetting all He has done and provided. I'd summarize this section as reminder to "keep the faith".

Lisa & Sam Wilson

Saturday March 15, 2020

John 4: 5-42

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';

18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

- 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."
- 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."
- 27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"
- 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,
- 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"
- 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.
- 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."
- 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."
- 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"
- 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.
- 35 Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.
- 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.
- 37 For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps."
- 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."
- 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."
- 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.
- 41 And many more believed because of his word.
- 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

For a weary traveler on a hot and dusty day, the well offered a chance to rest for a moment in a space filled with peace and quiet. Then the woman came to draw water, but she didn't realize that the water she was offered would change her life forever.

When the disciples returned and found Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman, they were only concerned that he eat to keep his strength up, to prepare for an uncertain future. But Jesus reminded them that the harvest is now, that the fields are ripe now, that now is the time to tell of the living water that will save humankind.

We can plan and prepare to tell the good news, but we mustn't forget that every day is an opportunity to witness to the living water – the light of world – our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Frank Randall

Monday March 16, 2020

John 1: 1-13:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being
4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.
8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.
9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.
11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.
12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,
13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

As the daily news cycle strokes fear, confusion, and feels overwhelming, it was nice to read “the light shines in darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.” Our brains are wired to focus on the negativity whether that be a comment at work or a fearful story heard on the evening news. We need to look for the light, the positive, for it is there (even pre-coffee). Today, look for the light in the darkness and share it with at least on other person.

Melissa Kallas

Tuesday March 17, 2020

Psalm 81

1 Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
2 Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.
3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day.
4 For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
5 He made it a decree in Joseph, when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a voice I had not known:
6 "I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket.
7 In distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. (Selah)
8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you; O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
9 There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god.
10 I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
11 "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me.
12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.
13 O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!
14 Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes.
15 Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him, and their doom would last forever.
16 I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

The scripture reading today reminds us that we are God's children; imperfect as we are. One of my favorite hymns, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," mentions our hearts being prone to wander from the God we love. Psalm 81 offers us reassurance that though we are prone to wander, if we recognize this imperfection, listen to God, and follow in the ways of the Lord we will receive abundant blessings.

Just as Jacob's uncle welcomed him with a kiss and an embrace when he arrived in Paddan Adam, so too the Lord welcomes us when we turn from our own ambitions and follow the Holy Spirit. Though we may feel at times that we are lost, wandering without direction or purpose, we need only to remember that we are following the footsteps of our Christian ancestors before us. We all have a spiritual rock accompanying us on this journey and that rock is Christ. Seek strength in him to carry you on the journey.

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Brian Adams

Wednesday March 18, 2020

John 7: 14-31

14 About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.

15 The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?"

16 Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me.

17 Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.

18 Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.

19 "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?"

20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?"

21 Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished.

22 Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath.

23 If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath?

24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

25 Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill?"

26 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?

27 Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

28 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.

29 I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me."

30 Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

31 Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

37 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,

38 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.' "

39 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.

I remember feeling the deep dread of being myself, sitting on my bed in high school and crying because I thought I was the worst thing a boy could be. I remember covering myself up with the gauze of antiquated standards for masculinity, desperate to be something I wasn't. My own body felt like it was made out of nothing, like it wasn't really there. And all the while, Christ was calling, "Come to me, you who are thirsty . . ." rushing all around like a wave of relief.

Quenching my thirst for substance, Christ causes me to discover and *be* the self I always was. I do not have to become some other self. I do not have to live someone else's life or inhabit someone else's body. I remove the gauze. Rivers that never run dry spring forth from the depths of my own being.

Matt Nabinger

Thursday March 19, 2020

Ephesians 4:25-32

25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.

26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

27 and do not make room for the devil.

28 Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,

32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

I often feel just too inadequate to the standards of Christian discipleship. Harbor no anger? Forgive injuries? Share my wealth? Love my enemies? It seems like a sure setup for failure. In teacher terms, I'm headed for a 50% (at best) on the cumulative final exam. To mix my metaphors, what helps me is to think of lifting lighter weights, to take them one at a time, as I'm able: To diffuse a temper outburst by a deep breath and a brief look through the other person's lens. To edit my snarky text attack on social media to more diplomatic wording without exclamation marks. To lighten the stress of a harried cashier with a few words of appreciation and humor. So easy, really. Then I find I'm capable of a little heavier lifting: To recognize my self-serving attitude in a disagreement at home or at work. To write a bigger check than usual to a cause I care about. To take an even longer look from that other person's

perspective - not to agree, but to understand. Again and again, I discover that I'm able to lift more than I thought I could by removing the burdens of ego and fear. It's a matter of practice. Discipleship one step at a time.

Mike Frenkel

Friday March 20, 2020

Ephesians 2:11-22

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—

12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,

16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near;

18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,

20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;

22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Love this verse! It is the founding principle of Christianity and describes directly the new promise. The new promise is extended to all mankind, not just the Jews and the Old Testament covenant. The new promise is not contingent in following the Talmud, but rather belief in Christ - direct access to God. Verse 17 has a very divine aspect to it - those who were far away and those who were near reminds us of the divine omnipresence of God - those who are far are stuck in their time and location before and after Christ - doesn't matter - all are included.

Paul Mays

Saturday, March 21, 2020

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

In the valley of the shadow,
Lord, I long for wings to fly
O'er the darkness that surrounds me,
Safe within your arms to lie.
Here the cup and here the table,
Here the staff to comfort me,
Here the light that knows no darkness
Shall make all my shadows flee.

Susan Bowis

Sunday March 22, 2020

John 9:1-41

1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.
2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.
4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.
5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes,
7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.
8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"
9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."
10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"
11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."
12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."
13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.
14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.
15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."
16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight

19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;

21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."

25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.

32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

This verse has some really interesting concepts. First, that bad things happening in our lives are not necessarily the result of doing bad things. God wants us to view him above the day-to-day existence. Secondly, using the earth as mud to cure the man's eyes takes us back to the biblical creation story, where God created man from earth - connecting the divinity of Christ with God. Thirdly, it uses the Jews misunderstanding of how to serve God (by following laws) as a backdrop to instead, believe in Christ. Observe God above all else, understand that Jesus is God, and believe in Christ, not works.

Paul Mays

Monday March 23, 2020

Psalm 146:

1 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

2 I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,

6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free;

8 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

9 The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

10 The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

This beautiful hymn reminds us to always put our trust in the Lord. The Lord watches over us always and we should praise the Lord always for all the Lord has done for us. God is our creator and of all creation. Throughout Lent, let us be reminded to praise the Lord and use that praise to deepen our relationship with God and transform ourselves.

Isaiah 59:9-19:

9 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us; we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.

10 We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among the vigorous as though we were dead.

11 We all growl like bears; like doves we moan mournfully. We wait for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.

12 For our transgressions before you are many, and our sins testify against us. Our transgressions indeed are with us, and we know our iniquities:

13 transgressing, and denying the Lord, and turning away from following our God, talking oppression and revolt, conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart.

14 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter.

15 Truth is lacking, and whoever turns from evil is despoiled. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.

16 He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him.

17 He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle.

18 According to their deeds, so will he repay; wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital.

19 So those in the west shall fear the name of the Lord, and those in the east, his glory; for he will come like a pent-up stream that the wind of the Lord drives on.

The prophet Isaiah uses this oracle as a way to remind us to always be patient for justice. There are so many times in our lives when we are impatient – especially when we want and need justice. During the time of Isaiah, the Israelites wanted righteousness and justice to be served immediately since these people have been knocked down constantly. During Lent, let us be reminded that God’s timing is always right and justice will come when it is time and God knows you are ready. Transformation will occur if you just keep patient with God.

Acts 9:1-20:

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”⁵ He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.”¹¹ The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision^[a] a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem;¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.”¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul^[b] and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus,²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

For Paul, his faith and his transformation came from seeing Jesus in a vision. He went from being Saul, a persecutor to being Paul, the evangelizer and believer. Paul’s transformation can teach us a lot about how God and Jesus work in us and through us, transforming us and those around us. Think about a time when you saw God and Jesus in a way like Paul did and remind yourself about the transformation that occurred. Lent is a season of transformation – let Paul’s story be a guide for you.

Romans 1:8-17

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.⁹ For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel^[a] of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers,¹⁰ asking that by God’s

will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I want you to know, brothers and sisters,^[b] that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish ¹⁵—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."^[c]

Throughout the season of Lent, it seems like we are meant to be in the mood of lament. Yet, we can be thankful to God for what we have in our lives and we can share our spiritual gifts with God and with others during this season. As Paul says in verse 17, if we live by our faith then we will know the righteousness of God. During Lent, God is calling us to think about our relationship with God and we should take a cue from Paul and thank God for our relationship with God.

Sara Sadler

Tuesday March 24, 2020

John 1: 1-9

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being

4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Perhaps because I have always loved reading and have spent much of my life as an English teacher, I have always loved the cadence of the beginning of John's gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Word, through my parents, my teachers, my reading of the Bible and my singing of hymns and other sacred music, has always been a primary way for me to understand God and Jesus. That "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" was God's great gift, as Jesus gave us still more words to remind us how much God loves us, how to live, and that we are not alone in the dark times in our lives. John's gospel echoes the reassurances of Psalm 23 that I am invited to "dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Cathie Lutter

Wednesday March 25, 2020

Psalm 146

- 1 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
- 2 I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.
- 4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.
- 5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,
- 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
- 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free;
- 8 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.
- 9 The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
- 10 The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 146 is a wonderful reminder of what God promised and Jesus later embodied in His own life. We are reminded not to put our trust in people, but rather in God. It is God who executes justice for the oppressed, feeds the hungry, frees prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, lifts the downtrodden, watches over strangers, upholds orphans and widows, but brings the wicked to ruin. Jesus modeled these principles and we are called to follow His example in our own lives. God's plan was carried out through Jesus and we can have hope and live accordingly.

Carol Frenkel

Thursday March 26, 2020

Psalm 130

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
- 2 Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
- 3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
- 4 But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.
- 5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
- 6 my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.
- 7 O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.
- 8 It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Out of our depths and pain we cry to God. Our souls wait for God. We wait for hope. For God's word we hope. We hope in the Lord. We hope in the love of the Lord.

We walk the Lenten journey towards hope. We turn to our Christian faith because it gives us hope in the face of the realities of life and death. Lent is about our considering our condition, the human condition, including sin and its consequences for individuals and society. Lent is also a time for considering God's condition and the new possibilities offered to us in Jesus Christ. It's not just

about our nature, but about God's nature. God's nature is to love; it's to forgive sinners, show grace and recreate people.

For in Christ God turns towards us, committing to relationship, investing time in humanity and giving life on a cross to help as an act of love.

We are in it together. We know that we do not always reflect God's image. We do not always love as God loves. We face the rocks.

And yet Jesus is our ultimate rock. We seek our peace in His will. We celebrate that our reflection on our condition can be a starting point for spiritual growth. In it we experience the reality of a loving God from whom we came and to whom we will return.

For God's love is a love that has birthed us, a love that stands with us through all days, even the rockiest of them; a love that abides with us through all eternity. This love calls us to reflect, to reconcile with God and others and to ready ourselves for the Easter celebration.

David Gray

Friday March 27, 2020

Ezekiel 33: 10-16

10 Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?"

11 Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

12 And you, mortal, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not save them when they transgress; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, it shall not make them stumble when they turn from their wickedness; and the righteous shall not be able to live by their righteousness when they sin.

13 Though I say to the righteous that they shall surely live, yet if they trust in their righteousness and commit iniquity, none of their righteous deeds shall be remembered; but in the iniquity that they have committed they shall die.

14 Again, though I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," yet if they turn from their sin and do what is lawful and right—

15 if the wicked restore the pledge, give back what they have taken by robbery, and walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity—they shall surely live, they shall not die.

16 None of the sins that they have committed shall be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right, they shall surely live.

The passage brought to mind the line, "What have you done for me lately?" This may be an effective contemporary customer retention philosophy, but is it really what God has in mind for us as God's people? Are we really supposed to just forget the past? I think not. Everything we have done in the past, righteous and sinful, contributes to who we are today. But how we use that history today is a choice we make today, and God wants us to make that choice wisely.

Andrew Foster

Saturday March 28, 2020

Psalm 130

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

2 Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

This Psalm, sometimes referred to as “De Profundis,” the Latin for its opening line “Out of the depths” is a beautiful cry of distress and hope. The author’s pain is palpable: “my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning.” But no matter how dark or painful the wait, the author’s hope stays strong. The Bible teaches us that suffering can be an invitation: in the dark places, we can see God more clearly than we do during carefree days. And so the author rejoices: “with the Lord, there is steadfast love.”

Andrew Martel

Sunday March 29, 2020

John 11:1-45

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.

3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,

6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"

9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world.

10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."

11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him."

12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right."

13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.

15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away,

19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,

26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

35 Jesus began to weep.

36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.

42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Lazarus is the deceased brother of Mary and Martha, who lament that Jesus did not heal him in time. Indeed, even after hearing of Lazarus's illness, Jesus chose to linger two extra days before traveling to Bethany.

Bringing the four-days-dead Lazarus back to life further inflames the crowd to harm Jesus, bringing his own death closer. Why doesn't Jesus stay away? His act of love for Lazarus in the face of danger calls us to follow his example. We all can be Lazarus and come to eternal life from death if we believe when Jesus says: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Anonymous

Monday March 30, 2020

Isaiah 51:4-8

4 Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples.

5 I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

7 Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people who have my teaching in your hearts; do not fear the reproach of others, and do not be dismayed when they revile you.

8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be forever, and my salvation to all generations.

Look to the Lord, for only He can provide your salvation. We need not worry about what others say of us or what difficulties we face for our beliefs. Don't be consumed by earthly comforts or avoiding persecution. God is the ultimate judge and juror. Everything and everyone on earth will one day perish, but the Lord's righteousness is steadfast and never fails. His salvation is everlasting. Regardless of your level of wealth, comfort, fame, or famine, God's salvation and righteousness await you. Listen to his teachings, follow his example, be humble and find comfort in knowing he watches over you now and always.

Sean Owens

Tuesday March 31, 2020

Psalms 143

1 Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness.

2 Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

3 For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead.

- 4 Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.
 5 I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands.
 6 I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. (Selah)
 7 Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.
 8 Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.
 9 Save me, O Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge.
 10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.
 11 For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.
 12 In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant.

This passage is a powerful reminder of our Lord's comforting and loving presence in my life when times are most challenging. God is my steadfast refuge who shelters and protects me when my spirit is flagging. God lifts me up and points the way forward, leading me out of distress on a true and level path.

Charles E. Brodine, Jr.

Wednesday April 1, 2020

Matthew 21:1-11

- 1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.
 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately. "
 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;
 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.
 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"
 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Palm Sunday story but some interesting twists. The Jews were looking for a warrior king not a man on a donkey. But if you read the Old Testament you'll note that in every sense God reveals His divinity in the face of impossible odds. Jesus constantly foreshadowed His rise to Glory in parables of impossible proportions (widow's mite, mustard seed, etc.). The humble ride into Jerusalem

remains consistent with the demonstration of the divinity of God - not how man defines it (warrior king) but the glory in the kingdom of heaven and resurrection.

Paul Mays

Thursday April 2, 2020

Philippians 1: 1-11

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you,

4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,

5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight

10 to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,

11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to know what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,”

If there is ever a time in which the path is not clear, Paul's prayer for the Philippians is a reminder that God's grace is with us.

Curt West

Friday April 3, 2020

Philippians 1: 21-30

21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer.

23 I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better;

24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith,

26 so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,
28 and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.
29 For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—
30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Even though Paul is addressing a relatively new community of believers in Philippi in the first century, these words echo true and strong even in 2020. He reminds us to make sure we live our lives worthy of Christ – to be Christ-like in all that we do. By believing in Christ, we gain eternal life and salvation. Lent is a season where we can reflect on how well we are living our lives in reference to the Gospel and seek out ways for us to transform our lives into what God is calling us to do.

Sara Sadler

Saturday April 4, 2020

Mark 10:32-34

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him,
33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles;
34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

Jesus reminds his 12 disciples what is to come as they travel toward Jerusalem. I referenced the Jerusalem Bible, translated from ancient texts in the 1950s and '60s. In that version, the followers are apprehensive. Jesus will be handed over (rather than betrayed) to the Jewish leaders and then turned over to the pagans for execution. On the third day he will rise.

The travelers were apprehensive about what is to come. Jesus knew his followers would turn him over to the Jewish authorities, though he does not call out anyone specifically in this passage. Some of his followers were Gentiles, so it is important to recognize that the executioners were not simply non-Jewish, they were non-believers. He knew what was to come and continued toward Jerusalem anyway, and his disciples do not attempt to dissuade him.

James Scroggs

Psalm 31 :9-16

9 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.
10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

- 11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.
- 12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.
- 13 For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.
- 14 But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."
- 15 My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
- 16 Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

I like to read the Psalms and don't always understand them, so I use a book by Timothy Keller called The Songs of Jesus to help me. I really like the interpretation this book provides about today's reading:

David lives with "terror on every side" (verse 13). Life seems precarious and even capricious. Terrible things happen that make no sense to us. But, David knows, world history and our personal histories are not, ultimately, operating on chance. "My times are in your hands", he reminds himself and us (verse 15). The Bible's teaching on this is balanced. Many events are evil and grievous, yet God overrules them and works them all together, in the long run, for good (Romans 8:28). So, in the end our lives cannot be derailed permanently. Learn how to say to God: "My times are in your hands."

I'm comforted by this message, and hope you are, too.

Susan Vanderver

Sunday April 5, 2020

Matthew 21: 1-11

- 1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
- 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.
- 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately. "
- 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
- 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
- 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;
- 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.
- 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
- 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
- 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"
- 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 21: 1-11 tells of the majestically arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, as well as the start of His final ministry before his death. By Christ's time, Jewish nationalism had led to the expectation of a military Messiah to deliver them from Roman control and to establish David's kingdom. However, in a suburb of Jerusalem, Jesus tells his disciples to enter the village to get a donkey for Him. Why a donkey? Zechariah calls them "a beast of burden". This "beast of burden" points to what kind of king Jesus is—His purpose is to serve humanity. In humility, Jesus shows that He has not come to establish an earthly kingdom. He does not ride on a horse nor in a chariot, but on a donkey—a sign of humility and peace. This entrance into the Holy City declares the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew also tells us that a colt as well as a donkey is requested by Jesus. The two animals represent the faithful Jews and the Gentiles who are brought together in the Kingdom. After retrieving the colt and donkey, the disciples put their garments on the donkey where Jesus would sit. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, "the multitude spread their garments on the road". The people who spread their clothes before Jesus did so as paying reverence to a King. The garments and palm branches served as an improvised red carpet, and a spiritually interpreted as our need to lay down our flesh, and indeed our very lives, for Christ.

Bettyjean Schmiedegen

Monday April 6, 2020

Psalm 31: 9-16

9 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.

10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.

12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

13 For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

14 But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."

15 My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

16 Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

David pours out his heart in these Psalms and avows his purest trust in God alone. The Psalms reflect all the varied incidents that can happen in life. He shouts "Be merciful to me, Lord for I am in distress."

It was just two years earlier that my daughter in law had battled colon cancer. I observed that any stressor triggered a reaction with her. The following weather event illustrates this.

It was June 29, 2012. We had triple digit temperatures that day fueling a line of severe thunderstorms resulting in a "derecho" (Spanish for straight). Winds topped at 60 mph knocking out power. We had no power, our son, Davy and family had no power but our friend's street were

on a different grid and had power! Our son and family and two dogs were able to stay at the Bethesda home of these friends, the Grobowski's, who were away in China at the time.

With community, trust in God, restoration of body and spirit, we weathered the storm and light returned!

Pam Hammers

Tuesday April 7, 2020

Matthew 26: 14-27:10

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. 17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. 20 When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; [a] 21 and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22 And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 25 Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so." 26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the [b] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' 32 But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 33 Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." 34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." 35 Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples. 36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38 Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." 39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." 40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; [c] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." 43 Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into

the hands of sinners. 46 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.” 47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49 At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. 50 Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51 Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” 55 At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. 58 But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’” 62 The high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” 63 But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah,[d] the Son of God.” 64 Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your verdict?” They answered, “He deserves death.” 67 Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, 68 saying, “Prophecy to us, you Messiah![e] Who is it that struck you?” 69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But he denied it before all of them, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” 71 When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”[f] 72 Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” 74 Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!” At that moment the cock crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. 27 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. 2 They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. 3 When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus[g] was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 He said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent[h] blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” 5 Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. 6 But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.” 7 After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners. 8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah,[i] “And they took[j] the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had

been set,[k] on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, 10 and they gave[l] them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.”

Body and Blood

 snatching life out of death
bread and the wine
 snatching grace out of torture

 the subversive Christ
 the shocking Christ
 with a body that bleeds
 the depths of his own being mingling with mine,
 mingling with all the deserters
 even the ones no one else
 wants to come close to

Matt Nabinger

Wednesday April 8, 2020

Matthew 27: 11-54

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so."

12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.

13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"

14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

15 Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.

16 At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas.

17 So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

18 For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him."

20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"

23 Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

25 Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

26 So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.

28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

29 and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.

31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),

34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;

36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him.

37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads

40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying,

42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.

43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son.' "

44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah."

48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.

49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

I read the crucifixion story and am dismayed as God's plan for Jesus plays out. Everyone in the protect his status and power, to Pilate, who would not defy the crowd, washing his hands to deny his participation. The soldiers who flogged Jesus felt compelled to follow orders. The people felt a need to be part of the crowd. The Centurion had to exclaim as the veil was torn, "Surely he was the son of God!"

story feels a sense of duty, from Caiaphas, the high priest, pulling strings in the background to

Even Jesus felt his duty to be obedient to the Father, no matter the cost.

I, too, feel a sense of duty. I must tell the story to others. I must demonstrate the love that was given to me. I must live so others can see God's grace as I fall down, get back up, and try again. I must be an example of the truth: Crucifixion is not the end – it is a new beginning.

Frank Randall

Join us for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter.