



## **His Property is Always to Have Mercy**

A Series of Meditations and Reflections for Lent

by

Members of St. James' Episcopal Church  
West Bend, Wisconsin

## Morning Offering

### PRAYER

I offer all the prayers, works, joys and problems of this day to the Father, through the Son, my Lord and Brother, in Union with the Holy Spirit. I unite myself in spirit and prayer with all the Eucharists that will be celebrated today throughout the world. May the People of God witness the Good News of Christ in all places, at all times, today and forever. Amen.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, \*  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

### PSALM(S) APPOINTED FOR THE DAY

### BIBLE READING(S)

### MEDITATION

### PRAYER

To the beginning of this day you have brought me, O Lord Father Almighty. Preserve me now by Your power so that throughout this whole day I may not fall into any sin; rather that all my words, thoughts, and acts become part of your Holy, providential plan. This I ask of You through my Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

## **His Property is Always to Have Mercy**

### **Introduction**

“We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.” (Prayer of Humble Access, *BCP* 337)

Some priests do not use the Prayer of Humble Access because it strikes down a posture that has already been rendered erect earlier in the celebration of the Eucharist. We have already confessed and received absolution. Once I omitted this prayer—for reasons of expedience more than anything else. A parishioner reminded me that they loved this prayer and preferred it be said when Rite One is used.

A woman I knew in Texas told me a story involving this prayer in some country of a repressive regime. Seems the people had just prayed the Prayer of Humble Access when a marauding band of soldiers stormed into the church and scattered the consecrated wafers across the floor. After they had left, the people fell to the floor and picked up the bread, now crumbs, and ate it. “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table.”

Whatever state we may be in, even like those soldiers, our Lord is merciful; it is his property to be that way. That is a good thing because when it comes down to whether we want justice or mercy, the decision is always clear as to what we want. The decision as to what the Lord will grant is something that we can bank on and of which we may be assured.

This is our fourth year publishing this Lenten devotional booklet of meditations for the “Weekdays of Lent.” Once again I have informed those who contributed that if they sought notoriety, then this would not be the vehicle. As always, we do not publish the names of those that write here. That gives them the opportunity to be as bold and as free in their writings as they choose.

When the priest invites you to a holy Lent, in part, by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word, we are hopeful that this booklet will assist you in that regard.

We will see you on the other side of these forty days, exhausted but ready to die with Christ and be raised with him on that glorious Resurrection Day on which we will join others in the annual group sermon proclaiming Christ Jesus’ resurrection.

Richard+  
a servant of God  
Lent 2015



Ash Wednesday - February 18, 2015

Joel 2:13 "Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain-offering and a drink-offering."

It seems that Jesus has taken up residence in so many prisons, but he appears to hide from the people. To no avail, however, for so many prisoners find Jesus while imprisoned. I googled this subject and found a disturbing comment by a person:

I think its disgusting how these animals suddenly find Jesus in prison, because all you have to do is believe in Jesus and all your crimes will be forgiven WHAT BS. There is no Jesus but there is a natural law to things and if you are an animal in prison you deserve to suffer for all eternity no matter what you believe. and btw the reason I am so p----- off is the a----- who murdered a member of my family claimed to have found Jesus and thinks he should be set free! (YAHOO! Answers)

The reality is that it is sad that people kill others and do great harm to other people. We, however, are not able to determine how and where a person will reside throughout eternity. Yes, Virginia, there is a Jesus—this writer above did not comprehend that. And, simply believing in Jesus is sufficient for a person to gain entrance into heaven.

The so-called good thief understood that. He did nothing that we can see to atone for his deeds, at least the ones that brought him to capital punishment on a cross. he asked Jesus to remember him when he (Jesus) "comes into his kingdom."

Evidence and a faithful people over the many decades and centuries have affirmed the opposite of what the writer above stated. Starting from Moses, we have much evidence that God most probably will turn from destroying the people he has made.

The fact that Simon Franklin could forgive the man that actually killed his own wife and the state that wrongfully executed his son is clear evidence that we emulate Jesus.

Seems Joel was on to something.

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 103 or 103:8-14; Joel 2:1-2,12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10; Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

Thursday after Ash Wednesday - February 19, 2015

Luke 9:27 “I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the kingdom of God.”

The expression regarding strange bed fellows has always been fascinating to me. I understand that love creates a lot of strange bed fellows because love can minimize, tolerate, and obliterate sins, shortcomings, and negative postures. The one relationship that I do not understand is the friends that are so unlike each other. One may be kind and the other one is mean. One is gentle and the other is abrasive. One claims to be Christian and appears to be Christ-like. One claims to be Christian and borders on evil. How are these two people friendly? How are they friends? What is their common thread?

What attracts the two unlikely friends? Someone said to me that God may send Christ-centered people into the lives of those not so centered to be a holy presence of transformation. Perhaps, there is a loyalty relationship at work because of some greater good that was shared. According to C.S. Lewis in the *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape (Satan) teaches, his nephew, Wormwood to attract the Enemy's (God's) people with delusions. Do not allow them to see the truth. Do not allow them to hear what is actually being said and the true meaning of the words they hear. Never interfere with their quest to know the Enemy (God). Their quest for God is so strong that the attraction to the inappropriate behaviors is lessened.

Some people have the gift of discernment and are able to know what is not good. They see what we, often, cannot see. I know a lady who has a very strong personality. She can be opinionated and feels free to say whatever she wants. No one is off-limits to her curt responses. Everyone loves this individual. They don't know that when they are not around they may be the subject of her tirade. “I assure you that there are some who will not die until they have seen the kingdom of God. Isn't that our saving grace? God will not leave us in our state of ugliness. He offers us many opportunities to be readied for the kingdom.

Screwtape makes sure that we are attracted to people and things that will pull us away from God. As adults, we feel that we are on the right path but we are blinded by charisma, popularity, and charm or are we being gracious and tolerant like our Lord? Why are some attracted and some repelled? Who is at work in my life?

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 1; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:18-25

Friday after Ash Wednesday - February 20, 2015

Matthew 9:14-15 “Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.’”

All three of the scripture selections for today talk about fasting. I must admit that as I read them there was that uncomfortable niggling of guilt. I thought “How am I supposed to write about fasting when I have never fasted myself.” Sure I have given up things and added things to my life during lent, but when it comes to food I have never done it. I started researching fasting and discovered that there are very specific guidelines for the process. There are only two specific days during lent that the Episcopal Church recommends fasting. They are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. I nicely used the word “recommends” but in everything I read it was very clear that these are required days of fasting. Add extra guilt here.

I actually felt a little dumb that I did not know this or that I had never closely read the scripture reading in Matthew. I had no idea that the disciples of Jesus did not fast while he was physically in their presence. It made perfect sense when I read it. Immanuel (God with us) was in their lives. He was eating, walking, talking and living with them. Why would they fast to be closer to God when they were as close as they could get on this earth? God is no longer physically with us. A new calling sparked to life in me and I realized it is time for me to fast. I really do want to be closer with my Lord.

As my research continued, I realized that the intention of fasting is to remove the things in our lives that keep us from searching out God. (Guilt lessened a bit now.) That by denying ourselves of the worldly things that distract us we can find the open space for God to enter. Food is a very big distractor in my life and the suffering would definitely open up an opportunity for me to rely more on my Lord. It would open up space for God to enter. As I contemplated this I realized that there is a much larger distractor that dominates my life. The never ending joy of electronics. I spend so much time in front of the TV, the computer, my Kindle and cell phone that I don’t even know how God ever has time to enter into my thinking.

I have decided that for Lent this year I will be going electronic free for several hours every day. I also decided that on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday there will be no electronics at all. I am genuinely hoping that this denial of my fleshly desires will help me to fulfill my desire to be closer to the Lord. My intention is to pray and read the Bible more. I also suspect I might get a lot done around the house too.

My question for you today is: What is your biggest distractor from God?

Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so we may fulfill it with inner sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 51:1-10; Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:10-17

Saturday after Ash Wednesday - February 21, 2015

Luke 5:30-32 “The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus said to them in reply, ‘Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.’”

Picture it, High School, USA— Insert Year here. The jocks and cheerleaders run the school, while the nerds sit on the sidelines pushing up their glasses. Nobody notices these kids, but everyone is impressed with the football players and pretty girls. Well for me, I was neither kid. I was the kid who floated through groups, but there was one particular group I considered my main group of friends. I called us the United Nations group. We were made of all types of kids, black, white, gay, straight, nerds, and jocks. Man, can you imagine if the Pharisees and their scribes had seen my crew? Oy vey!

However, even my main crew had their divisions which didn’t make me happy to witness. There was one particular girl that many people in my group did not care for, but tolerated her. She was far from popular in school, let alone in our circle of friends. My friends complained that she was annoying, fat, smelled, and didn’t have clean clothes. Unfortunately, many of what they said was true, but the one thing that stood out about her that made me really appreciate our friendship was that she would share her lunch with me. I always had money for lunch, so it wasn’t because I could not buy lunch, but because I was her friend and she thought I would appreciate this kind gesture.

Soon my other friends noticed that our friend was sharing her homemade lunches with me and when she wasn’t around, would ask me why I would eat her food knowing she was “dirty.” I was taken aback by their questions and statements because I thought of them being better than that. I basically told them that they needed to lay off and that she came from a home where she didn’t have a lot of money. My friends represented the Pharisees and the scribes. They came asking why I would associate with my friend. My friend represents the sinners and the tax collectors, not that she had sinned, but that she was the one viewed by my friends as the outcast and the one with whom I shouldn’t associate. In this lesson, I learned that sometimes the outcast can be more Christ-like than those who claim to live by God’s word. My friend had a pure heart and generosity that far exceeded the cool kids.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 86:1-11; Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32

Monday in the First Week of Lent - February 23, 2015

Psalm 19:12-13 “But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression.”

When reading the passage for today, I came across the word insolent. I did not know the precise definition for this word, so I looked it up in the dictionary. (Insolent-insultingly contemptuous in speech or conduct.) I have never thought of myself as insolent. I realize now that sometimes I am.

I am insolent when I answer calls from telemarketers. When the phone rings and the person on the line is trying to sell something to me, or guilt me into giving to their cause, I have become insolent. Why are you calling me? Sometimes I have complained that they have invaded my privacy or I am on the no-call list.

About eight years ago, my sister had lost her job. She was six years away from retirement so she needed a job. She started to work for a company that solicited funds for The Performing Arts Center in Milwaukee. Recently she told me how hard that job was. She said the hardest job to handle were the ones who would yell at her and then tell her to get a real job. I may have never said those same words to a telemarketer, but I know I have thought them. Insolent, yes I am.

After Christmas I needed to exchange a gift. At the Customer Service department I was directed to go to one of several check-out lines. As I looked at check-out lines there was no one working at some of them. When I found one with a person working I started to unload my frustration on how they were handling the returns. I soon realized that she was only following the store management's instructions and did not need any direction from me. I apologized for my rude behavior, but I never should have let my frustration show. I just added stress to her long hard day. Insolent? Yes I am.

Insolence is a fault I need to correct. I need to be gracious and kinder. When a telemarketer calls, I need to be polite. If I am inconvenienced in some way, I need to remember that I am not the only one who has been inconvenienced. Everyone has God in them. I would not want to treat God in such a manner. God please help me not to be so insolent.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 19:7-14; Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent - February 24, 2015

Psalm 34:15 “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.”

In this world there are so many things that pull us apart or distract us from God and each other. Although I know that the Lord is always with me, in times of trouble I need to reassure myself. I do this with prayer. This dialogue makes his presence more real for me; it calms me and takes the weight off my shoulders.

When I ask others to pray with me or others ask me to pray for them in trying times, for ourselves or for friends or loved ones, we ask God for the strength and the grace to help us through; it brings us closer in our common need. We celebrate together the joy of healing or we mourn our loss, but we are always brought closer as human beings. These life events bring us to love each other as God loves us. We are there for each other, the way God meant it to be, and the way he is towards us; ever present with ears open to hear.

My mother always said, “Everything is better when you share.” She said this when we were children, fighting over toys or candy or some possession. Over the years, I've found this applies to other things as well. To share joy or sorrow with each other and praying together brings us closer together and closer to God. Our shared grief over a loved one's pain brings us closer, but our shared joys have the same effect. We share with our friends and families, all the events of our lives, and all the while, God watches over us.

We truly become the 'body of Christ' when we remember the words of Jesus in the gospel of John, chapter 13, verse 35; “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Grant to your people, Lord, grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only true God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 34:15-22; Isaiah 55:6-11; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent - February 25, 2015

Psalm 51:11 “Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

As I read this passage from Psalm 51, it sounded to me like the psalmist is pleading to God not to cast him away from God’s Holy Presence. It also sounds like he is accusing God of taking away whatever amount of spirit he thought he had.

I put myself in the psalmist’s shoes, because sad to say, those shoes seem to fit my feet only too well. Is it possible, just possible, that I may have the roles of God and me reversed? Perhaps I am the one pushing (casting) God away from me. Have I also abandoned my spirit that God has given me due to my frustrations and fears that life on earth (not God) has thrown at me? I hate that I feel separated from God with no wind for my “sails of perseverance.”

This “separation” thing is hard for me to meditate on and also to explain to readers of this meditation. Yes, I say that I have felt separated from God, yet I do know that He has been with me but I didn’t see Him. He has spoken to me but I didn’t hear. He held my hand, yet I didn’t feel it.

This Lent, and beyond, I will try, with God’s help (which I should know is always available) to realize that it is I who creates this separation from God. I will still read this scripture passage as it is written but realize and try in my humble way to assure God in my pleas for help that I know He is not the one causing our separation from each other.

Bless us, O God, in this holy season, in which our hearts seek your help and healing; and so purify us by your discipline that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 51:11-18; Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday in the First Week of Lent - February 26, 2015

Psalms 138:3 “You answered me when I called to you: with your strength you strengthened me.”

The psalmist praises God for His promise to strengthen us. How reassuring this is!

How often have you and I found ourselves in a situation that required a decision that would not be perfect, but one that would have positive aspects and negative aspects? Upon what criteria do we then base our decision? We base it on what is in accordance with God’s love!

Many years ago, my mother had terminal cancer and needed continuous care. She and my father lived forty miles away. As her illness increased, it seemed necessary to place her in a nursing home, but my father and brother believed it would be a mistake and I had mixed feelings about it. I stayed at their house three or four days each week for several weeks and my sister-in-law stayed in my absence, but not at night. However, this plan didn’t work well. My father had had stomach cancer surgery nine months before my mother’s illness was diagnosed. He could help her in some ways but couldn’t lift her when necessary. As her condition worsened, I realized I had to move in with them or care for her at my house. Also, it got to the point where I needed help lifting her; my house and husband was the answer. Together we were able to care for her for a few months before she needed to be hospitalized.

Did I make the right decision? I think I did, and God gave me the strength to care for my mother, and because my father often stayed with us for a few days each week, I was able to see to some of his needs. Upon reflection, I believe caring for my mother at my house was in accordance with God’s love.

Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 138; Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14; Matthew 7:7-12

Friday in the First Week of Lent - February 27, 2015

Matthew 5:20 “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There is a theme of righteousness, forgiveness and redemption that runs through the three readings for today that are key ingredients for a Christ-filled life. The definition of righteous is: meeting the standards of what is right and just: morally right. Matthew says that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. I think the key to living this life of righteousness is to take time in our lives to slow down and spend quiet time in reflection and prayer.

Have you ever been overwhelmed by circumstances and demands that others put on you and you put on yourself? What is your solution to get beyond this point? When I find that I've filled my life with too much busyness and too many tasks to keep and maintain, the one thing I neglect is the time for the essential task of being still and in the presence of the Lord. I am at that point as I sit and write this reflection. The only way to succeed in all that I am committed to at this time is to lay it at the feet of Jesus. Only through his guidance and quiet listening can I sort out and prioritize the tasks that are before me.

I remember a time when our youth group was planning an event at St. James that included youth from around our diocese. We would gather together on a Saturday evening with activities planned for the evening, breakfast in the morning and a folk mass at 10 a.m. on Sunday morning. We sent out invitations and finalized our plans. All through this process there were numerous signs that it was not the time or place for this event, but we didn't listen. The event did happen, but it was not a great success and the kids were disappointed. I made a decision at that time that I would pay more attention to where God was leading us. What a difference that decision made!

I wish to be righteous with God and to listen to his direction for my life. I make a commitment now to spend time in prayer and reflection during this Lenten period and throughout the year. I challenge you to make the same commitment.

Lord Christ, our eternal Redeemer, grant us such fellowship in your sufferings, that, filled with your Holy Spirit, we may subdue the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to you, and at the last attain to the glory of your resurrection; who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday in the First Week of Lent - February 28, 2015

O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The word reconciliation really stood out to me when I read the collect above. I decided to look up the word Reconcile and see its definitions.

Definition #1: To establish friendship between.

Definition #2: To settle or resolve.

Definition #3: To bring oneself to accept

Definition #4: To make compatible or consistent.

Then I read Matthew 5:43-48 and the word reconcile and its meanings are strongly represented.

“Love your enemies” Surely one of the hardest things to do. But when led by the word reconcile and its meanings, if we learn to settle or resolve the feelings we have towards our enemies then we can bring ourselves to accept and pray for our enemies. “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that they may be sons of your Father in Heaven.”

Ultimately, are we not all equal in the eyes of our Lord? Do we not have all struggles and moments when maybe our attitude creates animosity and we can be considered an enemy? I intend to look to myself and realize that my “enemies” are really a chance to establish a friendship or at least to see what’s really happening with that person. Who am I to judge?

So my Lord and Heavenly Father, I thank you for your words. Help me walk in your ways and delight in your will and carry out the work of reconciliation.

“O God, the Father of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth, deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”

O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 119:1-8; Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48

Monday in the Second Week of Lent - March 2, 2015

Luke 6:27-28 “to you who are ready to hear the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst.” (*The Message Bible*)

How do you love people when they speak badly of Christians? How do you love a person who says the Bible is nonsense? How do you love people when they think believing in God is ridiculous? I have had to work through these questions with a gentleman I have gotten to know quite well. Years ago, I know I would not have associated with him. I know I would have run in the other direction, I would have avoided him at all cost, and I would have thought of him as my enemy, but not now. I believe God has given me this opportunity to work through the questions and figure out how to love a person through our differences and our thoughts about “God.”

Giving him time and listening to his stories, he shared with me his experiences of being an only child, being bullied as a child, and how unloving his parents were. He had only married once, long ago, for only a short period of time, and had no children. He had no knowledge of religion, had no belief system and was a proclaimed atheist. It sounded to me that he had not experienced much love in his life. I understood more about him. One day he said to me, “I know I am a condemned man according to your God,” and I replied back, “not my God.” He looked surprised. I wondered what it was like to feel condemned. No wonder he had ill feelings towards Christians. After that exchange of words, our relationship changed. We kept the conversations going. The tension between us faded. He knew that I did not condemn him for not believing. I’ve read somewhere that all people have three emotional needs, they are: to be accepted, respected, and loved. I had grown compassion for this man and accepted him for who he was. There was a feeling of mutual respect.

He left for a warmer climate this winter. As I was thinking of him the other day, I actually said to myself, “I miss him” and then said a little prayer for him. I realized at that moment I didn’t save him, he saved me. Through him, God saved me. He saved me from a hardened heart. He saved me from becoming bitter towards people who don’t believe in God. He saved me from my ego which said I am better than him because I have faith and he does not. Through him, God saved me and taught me to love him and not consider him my enemy anymore. I know he felt loved and not condemned when we were together. I look forward to his return in spring. I believe this is how we show our love for God; to love others and let them bring out the best in us and not the worst.

Let your Spirit, O Lord, come into the midst of us to wash us with the pure water of repentance, and prepare us to be always a living sacrifice to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 79:1-9; Daniel 9:3-10; Luke 6:27-38

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent - March 3, 2015

Isaiah 1:2 "Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."

A Facebook friend posted a quote attributed to the Reverend Billy Graham: "A child who is allowed to be disrespectful to his parents will not have respect for anyone." Attempting to be insightful, I offered this quote: "Raise up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Of course that's from Proverbs. A couple of folks liked my comment.

I recall reading a passage, which for all the world, appeared to have been written about contemporary children and their bad behavior. Then it was revealed that this description applied to the children of Socrates' time. I guess all we can say is that human nature continues unabated in its flawed ways.

A high school teacher told me about some quirky beliefs held by some of our teens. They are having children, obviously out of wedlock, and they have no work ethics in the main.

I read disturbing stories about bad behavior of some of the young people in our community. I read, however, a periodic e-newsletter from our school district. In that newsletter, I learned about all the marvelous things some of our children are accomplishing, (i.e., winning contests, presenting at science fairs, helping in the effort to feed the hungry in our community, and the like.)

Dean wrote this statement in his letter: "You don't have to worry about me. I always look both ways." And, Larry wrote: "Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother." (*Children's Letters to God*)

A boy named Angel was brought to our city to escape the threat of death. This teacher took this boy under his wings. The boy played football in high school, graduated, attended a community college. This boy now has a permanent job with one of the industrial giants in our town.

Is there hope?

O God, you willed to redeem us from all iniquity by your Son: Deliver us when we are tempted to regard sin without abhorrence, and let the virtue of his passion come between us and our mortal enemy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 50:7-15, 22-24; Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent - March 4, 2015

Psalms 31:14-15 “But my trust is in you, O Lord; You are my God. I am always in your care. . .”

We were expecting my father-in-law to come to visit us. My husband's parents were coming to spend Christmas with us. We were so excited. He was the last of our family to come to our new home. Just before Thanksgiving we got a call, my mother-in-law reported that my father-in-law had just been diagnosed with cancer of the lungs. No one discussed the prognosis. My father-in-law was advised by his doctor not to opt for chemotherapy. The procedure would minimize the quality of his life. My husband thought that his father would visit us in December. I knew better. We went home for Thanksgiving so that my father-in-law could see his new granddaughter. It was a wonderful visit.

In January, the call that we dreaded came in — my father-in-law had died. We got the first flight out. The plane was a huge air bus. We had never flown a plane of that size. There were hundreds of people on the flight. We noticed a number of adolescents in school uniforms going north to their prep schools. Our family was split-up on the plane. Half way through the flight, the pilot came over the intercom to announce that he had just received a bomb threat. We were told that we would go into the old airport that was no longer used. The passengers became very quiet, not a sound was made. No crying, no talking, no movement, it was surreal. It was what I imagined heaven sounded like. I am sure we were all praying. We all realized all we could do was to trust in God that we were in His care.

We landed far out on the tarmac. Vehicles waited for the plane to stop taxiing so that the drivers could take us to the old terminal. It was damp and moldy with puddles of water soaking the old carpet. It smelled old and wet. It was cold and damp. After two hours, they brought in peanuts and sodas from the plane. Everyone was questioned. I explained that we had come home to bury my husband's father. I asked if our families had been notified; they had not. My husband was getting anxious. He was concerned that his mother was upset by our delay. There was no way to contact our family. My brother-in-law was in the airport waiting for us. Our family was going to begin to fret. We prayed while the children slept; they were 9, 4 and 18 months. God took care of us; there was no bomb on the plane.

O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven: Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 31:9-16; Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20; Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent - March 5, 2015

Jeremiah 17:5 “Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.”

I think I have a friend who has been cursed with negativity and unhappiness because she puts her trust in mere mortals and her strength comes from mere flesh. Her heart turns away from the Lord instead of running towards him. I know that I have done the same thing many different times and I am sure all of us know someone who has this same issue.

My friend spends all of her energy both physically and mentally on going out to the bars, hanging out with dramatic friends and thinking she will be happy if she works out more, eats less, has more money and has more friends. I cannot tell you how many conversations I have had that are all about who is doing something the wrong way, who is cheating or stealing or just annoying, how little money she has, how she hates her job and how her life sucks. Many times she puts her trust in the behavior of other people, only to be disappointed and hurting.

My friend has a good heart, but is so spiritually unhealthy. I pray about her spiritual health as much as I would for a friend who is physically ill. I have spent the better part of 11 years wondering when she will grow weary of the negativity that has infested her life. Sadly, I fear that it will take much more than my trying to say positive things to her to get her to see what her life has become.

Sin has a funny way of creeping into our lives and we don't even realize we are allowing it. When I don't make God or my spiritual health a priority everything in my life ends up out of whack. At those times I will find myself sucked into the negativity, I start sharing in the trash talk and how bad things are.

The curse of putting my trust into mere mortals and making mere flesh my strength seems to be a life of negativity and hurt. Sometimes it seems to me that it is all issues I have brought upon myself by not choosing faith, hope, and love. Fortunately, before long, I realize that I am being dragged down into the trenches of sin and sadness. I grab my prayer book, my Bible, or my faith filled friends and search out my Lord. I will continue to pray for my friend that God's love cures her negativity, and that He will continue to lead me out of the dredges of sin I find myself in far too often.

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hands pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 1; Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

Friday in the Second Week of Lent - March 6, 2015

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness

Jesus' prayer to God seeking grace for those who have wronged him is a constant reminder to us what we should do as Christians. We live in a society that becomes easily revengeful and unforgiving when wronged. We seek to hurt those who have hurt us or our loved ones. I am no stranger to this. When I was 24 years old I fell in love with this guy that I thought was a good person. He said all the right things to me and made me feel wonderful. It was a whirlwind relationship and our love moved fast, and looking back now, I should have known something wasn't right.

As fast as our love was proclaimed, it quickly deteriorated. He used to talk about how wonderful it was that I had a family that supported my dreams and ability to go to school. He used to talk about how wonderful it was to be dating a woman bettering herself. But over time, things began to change. Whether it was jealousy or just the way he was, he began to put me down for the things he used to like about me. My ex would often say, "Well some of us don't have family to help pay to go to college," failing to realize that Uncle Sam was paying my way. He talked about how he couldn't handle me because I was "too emotional" and even told someone I was crazy. And besides breaking my spirit, he tried to keep tabs on me; even stalking me while I was having lunch with my friend. Through all this I loved him and let him be a part of my life, until he finally cheated on me. At this point my spirit was broken.

I questioned myself in every relationship since then. Am I too emotional? What if he can't handle my mental health issues and thinks I'm crazy? I spent many years of my life being angry at this man. Then one day he called me after all these years to apologize. Somewhere in his heart he knew what he had done to me was wrong and he felt the need to reach out to me to let me know. I let him know how horrible of a person he was to me and how it affected me. He was deeply sorry and at the time I accepted, but the reality was, I hadn't forgiven him. I was still very hurt. I had done nothing to him to have been treated this way.

This mediation hit home to me because it is time for me to forgive him. He has moved on. He has made right with God and his conscience and I'm still in pain. I can't allow the past to affect my future. The result is not being in line with what Jesus wants me to do as a Christian. He was able to do it for those who put him on the cross to die. Why could I not do it for my ex? I have to learn that pain shapes me to be stronger and not the victim. This is my final journal writing to say, I forgive you, Eric. No pain, no anger. Just letting it go, so I can be free again.

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 105:16-22; Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28; Matthew 21:33-43

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent - March 7, 2015

Psalm 103:8 “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

It was a beautiful wedding. Our relatives and friends were there, the rain ended just before we went to church. We had the meal, reception, dance and I wore a white dress. A beautiful wedding and we had not told our parents that we were expecting to be parents in four months. I wasn't showing at the wedding, but you can't hold in a baby forever.

About three weeks after the wedding, we decided to tell our parents. We told my husband's first. They were not surprised as we thought they would be. The same thing had happened with his sister, but she didn't have the big wedding. It was not the end of the world.

Next we went to my parents' house. It was a sunny day and some of my brothers and sisters had stopped by also. We all sat under the big tree and were having a nice time. After most of my siblings had left we told my parents about the baby. This was the end of the world. Both of them took a deep breath, got up, went in the house and closed the door. We sat there for a few minutes and then we left too. We had hurt them. How will they face the relatives? Back then, if you were pregnant, you would get married quietly, not the wedding we had.

For the first time, I felt cut off from my parents. I wasn't sure of our relationship would ever be the same again. I was alone. The next couple of weeks went by and I realized I needed to see them. I called home and my sister answered. I asked how mom and dad were handling the news. She told me they were very quiet and did not talk for a week. Then mom started to smile again and now she has just started to make a quilt for the baby. We went to visit them soon after, and were greeted with love and understanding. We were forgiven and best of all they were very excited about having a grandchild.

This is our relationship with God. We sin and he forgives us. God does not desert us. What a great gift of God's this is. We can turn to him and he loves us. We will be forgiven.

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 103:1-4(5-8)9-12; Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Luke 15:11-32

Monday in the Third Week of Lent - March 9, 2015

Luke 4:23 “And he said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here also in your own country.’”

In this gospel lesson from Luke, Jesus went on to tell how in a time of famine in Israel, Elijah, the prophet, left Israel to aid widows in towns unfriendly to Israel and healed lepers in other towns, but not in Israel. This angered the Jews of Nazareth.

God sent His Son to save the whole world, but not from their human oppressors; he was sent to save sinners, all of mankind from evil. He promised a future home with him in heaven, to those who listened to his word and believed in him; Jew and Gentile.

Jesus had a loyal, but rather small group of followers. After his death, he appeared to the apostles, spent time with them, and left them with the Holy Spirit working in them. This small group was the base for the Christianity we enjoy today. They spread the word, one person, one small town at a time. Those people told their friends and they told others, until it became a huge movement. Eventually, the Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire. From there it spread beyond the Mediterranean world, throughout the whole world. What a glorious story!

For this story to continue, we must bring that story of salvation and love for one another to everyone we meet in our lives. Of course, not everyone has it in them to preach on a street corner or to go knocking on doors looking to convert, but we can help by living a good Christian life. Feeding the poor, visiting the sick, helping our neighbors, basically treating people the way we want to be treated.

Father Richard signs all his writings and correspondence with: Richard, ‘a servant of God.’ This is a good way for everyone to feel. Another saying we hear often is “What would Jesus do?” He loves everyone; not easy to do sometimes, but something to strive to. Loving each other, in spite of our differences is not easy, but it is what will save us in the end.

It's easier to love our friends and family, but it takes real effort out there in the wider world. Maybe we as a people will never get it right, but if we serve our God by being a good example to those we meet, I think God will appreciate the effort. Jesus walked the earth just as we do, so he has human experience in knowing how hard it can sometimes be to please everyone. I think if we can please God, the rest will follow.

Look upon the heart-felt desires of your humble servants, Almighty God, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 42:1-7 2; Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:23-30

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent - March 10, 2015

Psalm 5:6-8 “Be mindful of thy mercy, O Lord, and of thy steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions; according to thy steadfast love remember me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord!”

It seems like I am always asking God for His mercy and love. When I read this passage, it made me realize how much I am really asking of God. I mean, to ask him to forget the sins of my youth, or my transgressions — who do I think I am? I feel that the “sins of my youth” should include anything prior to and up to the hour of my asking God for His forgiveness. I said, “who do I think I am?” What I should worry about is who does God think I am? For the answer to that question, all I can do is keep listening to how God is speaking to me. Sometimes I hear Him in prayer; in circumstance; or in my conscience. Deep down I know He loves me and forgives me, and is constantly giving me more chances to “do right.” I just need to better understand how anyone can be so loving and forgiving when the everyday world is not exactly like that! I do thank God for who He is, and for His seemingly endless supply of grace.

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom you have given a fervent desire to pray, may, by your mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 25:3-10; Song of the Three Young Men 2-4, 11-20a\*; Matthew 18:21-35

\* In some Bibles, Daniel 3:25-27,34-43

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent - March 11, 2015

Deuteronomy 4:2 “Do not add anything to what I command you, and do not take anything away. Obey the commands of the Lord your God that I have given you.”

Clearly in Deuteronomy 4:1-2 and in 5-9, Moses emphatically tells the Israelites that they must obey the commandments he is giving them. We know these as The Ten Commandments.

It seems to me we Christians are less likely to add to these than to take away. Although like many other Christians, I am guilty of breaking most or all the commandments in various degrees at various times, I am going to focus on the commandment of keeping the Sabbath holy. Usually I attend Sunday church service but the remainder of the day is much like the other days of the week. I might do a little shopping, some housework, an odd job or two, perhaps work on a project, but these are not what Moses meant when he said to keep the Sabbath holy. How might I keep this commandment? Several ways come to mind. Some are more traditional than others, but I think all are fitting, at least in my way of thinking. A few traditional ways are reading scripture, or a book on Christian history, or one of inspiration, or listening to Gospel music or other types of Christian music, or a video depicting Christian living. Less traditional might be appreciating God's gift of nature by walking in a park or along a beach, visiting with family or friends, or calling to mind God's blessings. Maybe even writing them down or turning them into a poem. Whether traditional, less traditional, or a combination, I am going to try to keep a holier Sabbath.

Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 78:1-6; Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent - March 12, 2015

Luke 11:23 "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

Wow! It seems that we have quite a task ahead of us if we are "with" Jesus.

I grew up a few blocks away from my church in Madison. My older sister and I joined the choir when I was in 5th grade and she was in 7th grade. We sang at two services every Sunday until we graduated from high school. We participated in youth group and occasionally took care of the nursery. We fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent. We both continued to be active in our churches as adults. My sister has been head of the altar guild and she plays the organ and piano and sings in the choir.

Our younger sister contracted polio when she was in about third grade. She didn't have the usual symptoms of polio. It affected her spine and the development on the right side of her upper body. Luckily she was a tall third grader, because she stopped growing at that point. Her spine became like the letter "S." She had two operations to straighten her spine. She was tutored at home for her 5th and 7th grade years, as she was in a plaster body cast and confined to her hospital bed twenty-four seven for 9 to 10 months for each operation, and then she graduated to a walking cast for at least two more months. She was a real trooper under those circumstances. I don't think I could have handled it the way she did.

She did well when she returned to school for 8th grade, though she was always quiet and shy. She played flute in the band and first chair violin in the orchestra. She went to college where she met her husband. She has three healthy children and four healthy and active grandchildren.

However, when their children were young, there was a situation in their church that disturbed my sister and brother-in-law and they stopped going to church. They have never returned. I'm godmother to their oldest daughter, and my daughter is godmother to their youngest daughter, and it grieves us that they don't have Jesus in their lives.

I love them dearly and they're good people, but my greatest prayer is that they be gathered to Christ and not scattered. If I am not the one to bring them into that relationship, my hope is that he will send someone else to lead them

Keep watch over your Church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 95:6-11; Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

Friday in the Third Week of Lent - March 13, 2015

I have often heard of the saying “open your heart to let Christ Jesus into your life” and to be honest it causes me some trepidation. Actually it is a fear of what will happen to me when I actually take this step. This fear started when I was 12 years old. I was in that awkward stage in life where I wasn’t popular and didn’t feel like I fit in anywhere. I was not in the circle of friends I was once in. I was out of the loop. Then I met my first best friend Heather and we started a friendship. We would spend sleepovers at each other’s houses and on one occasion I went to church with Heather and her family. Her church was huge compared to mine! It had an indoor bowling alley and a pool! Heather’s father was the preacher of this Baptist church. That Sunday Heather’s father delivered the sermon. During his sermon I began to feel very uncomfortable. I felt like I was going to be struck down by a bolt of lightning for being such a terrible sinner and person. The experience was like nothing I had ever felt at our little church. That was the last time I went to Heather’s church.

What if I open my heart to the Lord and I become a “bible thumper.” What if I open up and make mistakes and then feel like that bolt of lightning comes crashing down? Will I lose my identity? Can I still have my friends? What if I am selfish and like earthly goods? I know this might sound a little over reactive, but it is a truth for me.

And then it occurs to me that that is why we ask for strength to open our hearts and let the “true love of your holy Name” enter in.

I just remembered while I write this that when I was 13, I had the most incredible dream. I enter into an adobe hut and in the center of it is Jesus surrounded by the brightest glow of warmth and sunlight. He has his arms outstretched and I walk into them and he embraces me. His embrace is full of compassion and love and the feeling I felt during that dream has never left me. How can one fear such joy? He must have been sending me a message about all my fears.

I will pray about this and for continued strength to not be afraid of this commitment to my Lord and Savior.

Grant us, O Lord our Strength, a true love of your holy Name; so that, trusting in your grace, we may fear no earthly evil, nor fix our hearts on earthly goods, but may rejoice in your full salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 81:8-14; Hosea 14:1-9; Mark 12:28-34

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent - March 14, 2015

Psalm 51:16 “Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.”

Everyone familiar with Morning and Evening Prayer knows this verse from the Ash Wednesday psalm. I say Morning Prayer even when I am the only person present. This verse is formatted in the Daily Office as a versicle and response where the leader speaks the first phrase and the people, if present, speak the concluding phrase, (and my mouth shall proclaim your praise).

I spoke with a fellow parishioner, and he mentioned to me that he wishes that we would offer more prayers of thanksgiving and adoration. Seems to this person that we most often say prayers of petition and intercession, (i.e., prayers where we are asking for something like good or restored health, safe travel, healing, comfort for those that mourn, and the like).

Of course, there is nothing wrong with such prayers. Wasn't it the psalmist that wrote “I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?” (Psalm 121:1) And, Jesus himself taught that we should ask, seek, and knock at the closed doors.

How good it is, however, when we can sit in our prayer chairs or wherever we talk and listen to/for God and simply offer prayers in which we proclaim praise. Some of my more fundamental brothers and sisters in our Christian religion have so many little phrases they utter all the time. Perhaps you have heard them say, “Give God the glory.” Isn't that a form of doing what the psalmist is talking about when he asks that his lips might be opened?

Another expression I hear my brothers and sisters proclaim is also a versicle and response: “God is good; all the time.”

There are so many reasons why I want to proclaim God's praise. The first reason is that he has created me in his image, giving me and others like me, charge over all that he has made. Foremost, I offer God praise for he speaks to me; he gives me all that I need.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
praise him all creatures here below;  
praise him above the heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 51:15-20; Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 16, 2015

Psalm 30:5 “For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

There has been a good deal of news coverage recently about National Football players, in particular, and their abusive behaviors. One notable player was guilty of beating his then fiancée—they are now husband and wife. The other player, closer to us as he is a member of the Minnesota Vikings, was convicted of punishing his child harshly. This man is out for the season. He lost his appeal.

My parents and many parents resorted to the proverbial switch, which was a small branch from a tree. [My electronic dictionary defines it as “a slender flexible shoot cut from a tree.”] It was the implement of choice when it came to spanking a child.

We got a spanking in response to our bad behavior. Some children were required to gather in their own switch. There was a danger that if a child got one that was “too small,” the parent preparing to administer corporal punishment would get a bigger one. A kid soon learned to get an ample-sized switch.

Happily this writer was a fairly good kid growing up and was not on the end of the switch very often, and his parents were not that all out of control when spanking one of the children. I do recall hearing, however, the now proverbial threat that went something like this: “Stop crying or I will give you something to cry about.”

In the main, our parents were good, loving people that labored under the prevailing notion at the time, (i.e., “Spare the rod and spoil the child.”). I don’t recall any great amount of anger on their part when we were spanked. And, any residual anger receded soon after the punishment had been administered.

Soon thereafter, these adults demonstrated their love for their children. They praised them for things done well. They gave us the ability to take advantage of any and all experience that we could avail ourselves of. They loved us, as always, in the morning.

O Lord our God, in your holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell for ever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 30:1-6, 11-13; Isaiah 65:17-25; John 4:43-54

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 17, 2015

John 5:6 “Do you want to get well.”

John 5:17 “My Father is always working and I, too, must work.”

I have known my niece since she was a tiny child. She is, physically, model beautiful. Her creativity is a gift from God, which she expresses in graphic art, music, jewelry-making and baking. She has so many avenues available to her to be successful. Yet, she chooses not to work or go to school, but to live with her parents with her two young school-aged children. Her only income is the child support provided by the fathers of her children. There is no spousal support--there was never a marriage. When things get tight, financially-challenging, she will make jewelry to sell or bakes cupcakes and pies for holiday dinners and parties. She manages to stop short of getting ahead to be able fully to provide for her children and herself — to be independent.

Around Christmas time her younger sister got married. Her sister is a teacher. The sister is very independent. She, also, has a small business where she teaches art painting to clients. She has illustrated a children's book which was published in January. What my young mother has taken from her situation and her sister's life, is that she needs to have a man in her life. I would love to ask her the question of Jesus — “Do you want to get well?.” Do you want to take care of yourself and your children? This young lady has grown up during the period of advancement of women; yet, she did not heed the lessons of women. The simple lesson that says, “My father is always working and I, too, must work,” goes unheeded.

I was reared by a grandmother whose husband died when her 3 children ranged in ages from 8 to 3 years old. She was able to return to teaching in order to take care of my father and his siblings. The lesson that she taught my aunt and me was that women needed to be educated so that they would be able to care for themselves and their children alone, if necessary.

Perhaps, my young relative may be afraid that she cannot manage being totally responsible for her existence or she has been supported by family to the level of being incapacitated or she doesn't want to get “well.” When told that she didn't need a man to take care of her, she balked and became very defensive. Her siblings and her mother came to her rescue. In psychology we would call her the “IP” — “the identified patient.” The IP carries the dysfunction of the family. The IP usually does not grow to his/her highest level of independence or maturity. I can hear Jesus say to her, “Pick up your mat and walk.” I know that she can walk, if only I could convince her to get well and walk. I can only do the work of the Father, which is to pray.

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 46:1-8; Ezekiel 47:1-9,12; John 5:1-18

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 18, 2015

Isaiah 49:10 “They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.”

The unrelenting wind and heat was like a blow dryer pointed directly into my face. That was my first thought as I stepped out onto the burning tarmac of a small airport in Saudi Arabia. I had just spent about 24 hours of traveling in air conditioned airplanes and airports. Now as I took my first steps onto a rickety set of stairs that led us from the dark lit plane into a world that was blazing with sun and heat, I felt blinded and it was hard to breathe. Each breath of air that I took felt heavy and hot. All I could think about was entering the air conditioned tent that seemed miles away. It felt as if my limbs were made of lead as I lumbered across black top that was radiating visible waves of heat. I could actually feel the heat from the black top through heavy soled combat boots. As I look back to a moment that occurred 24 years ago in my life, it seemed as if that walk took an hour. I am sure it was more like minutes that passed, but I had time to think “Toto we are not in Kansas anymore.” Well more like Wisconsin, but you get the idea.

When I finally stepped into that tent I was slammed with cool air, and it was as if I had gotten my first breath of air after being suffocated. My lungs relaxed, I felt more alert and my limbs once again felt normal. Bottles of water and snacks were placed into my hands and I rejoiced when I felt the cool liquid quench my parched mouth. The soldiers that handed out the water took pity upon the weary travelers and led us into a new world. Stepping into that tent was like stepping into a cool spring of water.

My time in the desert holds some of the worst memories of my life. PTSD and anxiety plagued my life for 21 years before I found another “air conditioned tent” at the VA hospital. I found a woman (my therapist) who took pity on this weary traveler of life and who led me next to a spring of water into a world of healing and peace.

There is an irony at this moment. I am cuddled on my couch, laptop in hand. I can see out my window a completely different world from that of the desert world I experienced. The wind is blowing cold snow, drifting its pure whiteness around my little home. My house and heart are quiet with peace. I am safe. I do not thirst. I am not hungry. My cup runneth over. The scorching wind or sun did not strike me down. It is true that our Lord will take pity on us in the deserts of our lives, He will lead us and guide us to refreshing springs of water. The springs may be air conditioned tents or a cuddly couch on a winter day, but He will always lead us out of the desert.

O Lord our God, you sustained your ancient people in the wilderness with bread from heaven: Feed now your pilgrim flock with the food that endures to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 145:8-19; Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:19-29

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 19, 2015

John 5:30 "I cannot do anything on my own."

Brought into this world by your love  
Molded and shaped to do your will  
But I strayed and tried to do things my way

You lifted me up like a rag doll  
And pointed me in a new direction  
But I strayed and tried to do things my way

You said come here child  
I'll show you the way  
But I strayed and tried to do things my way

And even though you love me  
You let me falter  
Because I strayed and tried to do things my way

But one day I stopped straying and doing things my way  
Because I realized that I needed you  
I truly needed you

Why you ask?  
Because I cannot do anything on my own  
You are my rock

Almighty and most merciful God, drive from us all weakness of body, mind, and spirit; that, being restored to wholeness, we may with free hearts become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 106:6-7, 19-23; Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:30-47

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 20, 2015

Wisdom 2:12a “Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions.”

Whenever you do what is unexpected, you cause friction. You are different and that makes the people uncomfortable. There is a reaction. Even when you aren't looking to be noticed, you are.

When I was a teenager, it was my responsibility to get myself to church. I would sleep in and usually went to the last Mass at 11:00 a.m. Our church was too small for our congregation and many times I would have to stand in the back of the church. We stood throughout the Mass, even at the Consecration.

When I was growing up, we were taught that the Consecration was the most important part of the Mass. Out of respect for God and Jesus we were always to kneel.

One New Year I made a promise to God that if I had to stand at the back of church, I would kneel on the floor during the Consecration. I did. The other people standing in the back of church must have thought I was strange. I kept my promise. Every couple of weeks I was standing at Mass. Every Sunday that I had to stand, I would kneel at the Consecration. As the year progressed I noticed some of my fellow standers were giving me some nasty looks. I must have come across as self-righteous. This was not my intent. I had promised God and I meant to keep it. It was very hard to keep this promise.

When October came around I noticed that some of the other people were beginning to kneel at this point too. I made it until the end of the year. The following year our church began to have a Saturday night Mass.

It is difficult to be different. The other people did not lie in wait for me, but I was an inconvenience to them. In this age we live in showing your faith is difficult, but we need to persevere because others learn by example.

O God, you have given us the Good News of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 34:15-22; Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 21, 2015

John 7:38 “‘He who believes in me,’ as scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow living water.’”

“Rivers of living water;” this phrase, to me, means the new life and grace that God gives to those who believe. In the creed, we as Christians, announce everything we believe. I feel these 'living waters' every time I attend a service at church; morning prayer, evening prayer, compline, and Sunday mass — to name a few. This 'living water,' to me, is the Holy Spirit coming into us, renewing us in our prayer.

I feel these 'rivers of living water,' especially at Sunday services; the communal prayer, the Holy Eucharist, the lesson readings, and the homily; all shared with fellow parishioners and friends. It's hard to describe the feeling, the rush of emotion that I feel at Sunday mass. To me it's new strength to get through whatever comes my way in the week ahead. It's a reminder that God is always with me.

For many years, I didn't give God much thought; and to be honest, I usually felt pretty much alone. Sunday mass wasn't even thought about. It was just a day to sleep in. Once I started to ask myself where my life was going, I realized that I had lost my direction. I remembered my childhood and the loss of innocence that I once had. I prayed for forgiveness and God sent it to me through the Holy Spirit. I felt this spirit come into my heart. I truly believe this!

I came back to church and back to God. I wonder how I ever left and know that I could never leave again. This is my strength and my foundation; my 'River of Living Water.' I no longer feel alone.

Mercifully hear our prayers, O Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that those whose consciences are accused by sin may by your merciful pardon be absolved; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 7:6-11; Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:37-52

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 23, 2015

John 8:10-11 “‘Jesus looked up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.’”

How easy for all us sinners to cast stones at one another not thinking that we, too, are sinners. It was ok with Jesus to let others do that as long as they can honestly state that they themselves were without sin. Since they all walked away after Jesus challenged them, the woman was able to tell Jesus that no one had condemned her. Then the best part — when Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again.”

I cast stones at others on many occasions, especially when caught up in my emotions of the moment. When I do read this scripture passage, it always reminds me that due to my own sins, I have no right to condemn others.

My “casting stones” is by not forgiving others for what they have done to me. By not forgiving my enemies for past hurts, I feel I am at least getting my revenge; and so I feel this justifies my vendetta against them. A number of years ago I lost my job after about 25 years of loyal and impeccable service to employer and clients. My livelihood was taken away before I was ready to retire. Naturally the financial loss was enormous and continues to affect how I will survive in my retirement. Beyond the monetary loss, came continuing bouts of depression and anxiety accompanied by counseling and numerous medications. I know my vendetta philosophy is wrong. I know that, but I can’t help it. I need help — I need prayers — even though I do know that God has taken care of me and not abandoned me. This makes me feel guilty. I have no problem reaching out to help and support others, yet I hesitate to call on others to help me because, let’s face it — almost all others have their own troubles also. God please have mercy on me.

This Lent I must try, and it won’t be easy, to spend more time reading passages of scripture so that I don’t overstep the boundaries of my small place in the whole scheme of things.

Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 23; Susanna\* 1-9, 15-29, 34-62 or verses 41-62; John 8:1-11 or John 8:12-20

\* In some Bibles, Daniel 13

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 24, 2015

John 8:24 “That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you will die in your sins if you do not believe that ‘I Am Who I Am.’ “

Jesus makes clear that those who do not believe in him will die because of their sins. To be forgiven of our sins, we must acknowledge Jesus as God’s son, the one who forgives sins.

It seems to me, if I am to be forgiven of my sins, I must admit my sins and not cloak them over as something other than sins. I think the trend of today’s society is to rename sins as anything but sins. I think society frowns on the word sin. “Certainly that person who...didn’t sin! It must have been his upset state of mind or his unhappy life led him to make a bad decision.” Unhappy situations can, and often do, lead to bad decisions, but if the bad decisions result in sin as found in the Bible, then sin must be admitted in order for the person to be forgiven.

Reflecting on past years, I realize I often rationalized why I did something wrong, or why I didn’t do something right, but in spite of the circumstances, advice from friends, relatives and current, secular opinions, I know the real answer is: I sinned! Admitting it to myself and asking God’s forgiveness is healthy. Pretending it was something other than sin, is unhealthy. I believe God wants everyone to live healthy, useful lives, so he set before us guidelines to help us recognize sin, ask forgiveness when we do, and to try to be more alert to situations that could lead to sin.

Almighty God, through the incarnate Word you have caused us to be born anew of an imperishable and eternal seed: Look with compassion upon those who are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant that they may be built as living stones into a spiritual temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 102:15-22; Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 25, 2015

John 8:31-32 “Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’”

I'm assuming that anyone reading this is a believer in Jesus Christ and wishes to continue in his word and learn the truth. The truth is we are all at different places in our physical and spiritual lives. I don't believe any two people are at the same place at the same time. That's okay! We have to be respectful and open to where other people are in their walk with Christ, regardless of where they are at this moment in time. Our job is to love and pray for the needs of others as they walk with and are awakened to his presence.

I have been fortunate to have participated and worked on many Christian renew groups through the years. I've worked on New Beginnings with middle school youth, Happening with high school youth and Cursillo and Spirit and Fire Prayer and Praise with adults. What I've discovered is that God can come to you in many different formats. When we open our hearts and minds to his presence our lives can be transformed. I've experienced it and I've seen it happen to others.

Growing in the presence and knowledge of Jesus is a lifelong journey, not just one event. We're baptized into the community, usually as infants, and confirmed when we feel that we want to take on the responsibilities of our own life in Christ. He's present in the wine and bread we eat at his table. He's present in the prayers we recite. He's always present to us in all things and at all times. We need to take the time to be quiet and listen to his directions as we grow in his love and service.

As you continue in his word, you are his disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free!

Almighty God our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm Canticle 2 or 13; Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28; John 8:31-42

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 26, 2015

After reading the passage from John I can picture the scene in front of me. An angry crowd of people on the verge of violence. Can you imagine the fear that Jesus must have felt? And yet he gathered his strength and faith to speak his words. Such shocking words, that the angry crowd picked up stones to throw at him. He believed in his Father in Heaven. He spoke with conviction! "I tell you the truth!"

What it must have been like to hear a man speak like that?!

A man that made such incredible claims during that time in history. What courage Jesus must have had to stand up to this crowd.

Is that what being a Christian is? Do we face angry crowds? Do we have fear or conviction?

Are we able to arm ourselves "with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service?"

I once meditated to a passage on trusting Christ with all my burdens. As I lay in bed, closed my eyes and moved into stillness, I pictured Christ walking up to my bed. I could almost hear his robes rustling as he moved. I pictured him putting out his arms and hands for me to pass over all the burdens I was holding onto. I remember feeling so guilty, thinking he has already suffered so much! Why should I add more? But in my meditative state, Christ assured me that is why he is here. I had a great sense of such peace and pure awe. I felt very blessed to have had that experience.

If Christ trusts me, then I trust Christ!

"Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen"

Mantra: Lord I believe; help my unbelief

O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 105:4-11; Genesis 17:1-8; John 8:51-59

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 27, 2015

Psalm 18:6 “In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.”

In this booklet, there are a couple of meditations that speak in varying degrees about people and finding Jesus in prison. I can imagine those would be places, dreadful as they are, where one might seek out that deity. On one of the many police TV shows, there was a scene where a man had been uncooperative with the police seeking information. The police told the man that he had violated the terms of his probation, and he would now be sent back to prison. The man begged them not to send him back to prison, that he would do anything to stay out of that place.

The Third Sunday of Epiphany, the lesson appointed was from Jonah. In particular, the passage selected dealt, in part, with Jonah’s having been swallowed by a great fish. Certainly, that qualifies as a place of distress. Certainly, that would be a place where one might call on the Lord.

One of the two men that was executed with Jesus on Calvary Hill, had the gall to petition Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into his kingdom. It was a last-ditch effort, and the man stood to lose nothing. Perhaps, he undoubtedly thought, it might do him some good. We know in this case, the man was granted immediate entry into paradise.

We needed some money desperately and the only source of that money would be our Federal income tax return. I filed my return as I did most years, some would say at the last minute. Actually, I mailed my return on April 15, driving it to the Post Office where they had employees on the street to take these last minute filers’ returns. Now refunds are subject to some delay, particularly when the return is mailed in the last days before or on the deadline.

What hope was there that we might receive our refund soon. We did not let that stop us from praying that God would somehow intervene and cause our refund to reach us as soon as possible. Possible—All things are possible with God? In just two weeks, the postman delivered to us our income tax return, just when we needed it most.

Seems God, from his temple, heard our voices. It was more than coincidence. God had once again shown himself to me immanent and that we should not hesitate to call on him when we are in distress.

O Lord, you relieve our necessity out of the abundance of your great riches: Grant that we may accept with joy the salvation you bestow, and manifest it to all the world by the quality of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 18:1-7; Jeremiah 20:7-13; John 10:31-42

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 28, 2015

Psalm 85:5-7 “Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.”

This is the psalmist at his best. He cries out to God as he understands that the people have strayed from God’s ways. He recognizes that God has to be angry with them, but ponders if that anger might endure to all generations or whether it might be diminished over time.

Another lesson appointed for this day gives us a clue.

“I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms.” (Ezekiel 37:22)

There was a time in the early church when Christians believed that once baptized, a person would no longer sin. I guess they had not looked at humankind over the past. Given this was not the case, some sought to be baptized on their death beds so that they would not fall into any further sin. You can see the fallacy in that, especially when a person died before being baptized. Reconciliation of a penitent is one way to receive absolution; the general confession is another.

Sacraments of the Gospel were given by Christ Jesus to help us in our earthly pilgrimages. In both Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism, we are accorded forgiveness of sins. The psalmist’s cries have been addressed in these vehicles for us.

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble. (*The Book of Common Prayer*, 289)

Answers to the psalmists questions have been provided in the sacrament of baptism, which presents other benefits that accrue to all that receive this sacrament. Historically instruction for baptism has been given in the 40 days of Lent, a time for reflection, repentance, and recreation. God gives us a biggie in this sacrament, his favor granted freely without cost and without our having to earn it.

O Lord, in your goodness you bestow abundant graces on your elect: Look with favor, we entreat you, upon those who in these Lenten days are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 85:1-7; Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-53

Monday in Holy Week - March 30, 2015

Mark 11:25 “Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your sins.”

The first time anyone offered me a shot of whiskey I was twelve years old and it was my mother. It was 7:00 a.m. on a school day and I had just gotten my first period. She said, “Drink it you’ll feel better.” My mother was loving and kind, but many times in my life I have wanted to strangle her because of her drunkenness.

When I was in my early twenties and newly married, my father joined the Life Science Church. It was a scam so ministers could put their property in the church and avoid taxes. My father paid the money and became a minister. He also believed the government was not legitimate so there was no need to obey the laws. A friend of his wore a Nazi uniform. Blacks were from outer space, Jesus wasn’t a Jew and he slept with a pyramid under his bed. He had a crazy girlfriend with very hairy legs. I was told I wasn’t his daughter if I didn’t join his church. My mother was left penniless and went on welfare at age sixty-one. My little brother was sixteen. He found Jesus in jail.

Fast forward twenty-five years. I discovered my alcoholic husband had run up tens of thousands of dollars in credit card debt. One day a woman from Texas called me and said in her southern drawl, “This isn’t going to be a very pleasant conversation, but I’m engaged to your husband and are you really in a coma?”

Thank you God for that phone call. Catholic or not I knew my path ahead of me. I threw his clothes in the boat along with that big frozen fish meant for the taxidermist, Frozen fish can be thrown many feet, easily. Soon after I found out he had another fiancée in Kewaskum that he had been seeing for years. I had accused him of seeing her when my son was a toddler, but was assured I was crazy. I survived the panic attacks with anti-depressants and prayer for many years. I did not want my son to grow up without a father.

The divorce led me to St. James. Here I learned forgiveness. Perhaps my father was mentally ill. Alcoholism is a disease. I never went to dad’s funeral. I had buried him many years earlier. Mom and I talked every day and were close till her death. I feel sorrow for my first husband, not anger. I was so blessed to find this church, to find peace and to learn to forgive. All things are possible with time, prayer, God’s grace and friends.

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 51:1-18(19-20) or 69:1-23; Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Mark 11:12-25

Tuesday in Holy Week - March 31, 2015

Psalm 94:18 “When I thought, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.”

My wedding day was the most wonderful day of my life. Everything went very smoothly. There was only one little mishap. As I was standing on a step in front of the altar, my beautiful gown sparkling, love gleaming from the eyes of my husband, the priest speaking of our commitment, my foot slipped. I took a step forward not realizing that my very full gown was hiding the step in front of me. I barely even had a chance to lose my footing before both my husband and the priest grabbed my arms. It was so quick that hardly anyone in the congregation even noticed that I almost fell. I swear that the men standing on either side of me just held me up until I got my foot on stable ground once again. I barely had time to register what was happening.

If my husband’s steadfast love could hold me up on our wedding day, how much greater and stronger must be God’s steadfast love?

If there is one thing I have learned it is that God’s love is truly steadfast. The Israelites are a wonderful example of His never ending love, understanding and dare I say, patience. When they wanted to be free, He sent Moses. When they were wandering, He gave them the Ten Commandments. When they were hungry, He sent manna from heaven. When they wanted a King, He allowed it. Whenever they grumbled, He listened. He forgave them when they worshipped a golden calf. He never left their side. When the Israelites became so caught up into the letter of the law, He sent Jesus Christ to show them that it is the spirit of the law that really mattered.

Is there any greater love than that which He showed us with the life and death of His son? I am awed at how His love was so unwavering as to send His only son to die for His people, to conquer death to give eternal life. He has shown us time and again through history that his love is so great that it will always hold us up.

I would be remiss if I did not add that at the end of my wedding day both of my arms had some bruising. I know without a doubt God’s love holds us up, we may end up a little bruised along the way, but He will never let us fall.

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 6, 12 or 94; Lamentations 1:17-22; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22; Mark 11:27-33

Wednesday in Holy Week - April 1, 2015

Psalm 55:6 “And I say ‘O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest: truly, I would flee far away.’”

There isn't a room in my house that doesn't have at least one image of a bird. All my life I have loved their beauty and what those wings represent. I watch the chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers and their feathered friends at the bird feeder while I do my morning meditation. They are blessed with the freedom to escape the tumultuous earth and soar above it all. They fly closer to the heavens.

The day I got my driver's license was truly one of the most joyous of my life. I vividly remember the blue floral dress I wore. It was a perfect June morning. I had total assurance that as long as I had wheels, a license, and a couple of bucks for gas I would never be depressed or crabby again. I would pick up my girlfriends in my white Catalina with the black “flower power” decals and go to Randy's fast food place on the south end of Main for a burger and fries. (They were under a dollar.) Then we would “bomb the gut.” That was cruising Main St. looking for cute guys. Such freedom we had. The worries about school or home evaporated.

We all have difficulties that make us want to escape periodically. That's life. Even birds must return to earth though.

I am so very grateful that God gave us imaginations, the desire, no the need, to dream. As I've aged I still cherish the freedom from having my own wheels. I can put the radio on the classic hymns station, scoot over to Lake Michigan, walk the beach, watch the seagulls and talk to God.

Thank you God for the beauty of this day and for the beauty of your Creation, especially your winged creatures. Angels definitely are included, both the ones with wings and those without. Help me if troubles come my way this day to face them with courage, to remember that there will be a day soon when I can go watch the seagulls and sing your praises.

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 55 or 74; Lamentations 2:1-9; 2 Corinthians 1:23—2:11; Mark 12:1-11

Maundy Thursday - April 2, 2015

1 Corinthians 11:27 “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and the blood of the Lord.”

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy and gracious Father, in your infinite love you made us ... *I wonder where Cindy is. This is the second week she hasn't been here. Maybe I better call her.* ...sent Jesus Christ your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, ... *It has been a long week, I haven't called Mom to see how she is getting along with this weather.*

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, ... *Get your mind back on the Eucharist!* ...our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, and said ...*I wonder what it was like in that room at the Last Supper. Did the disciples realize what was unfolding before them? Did they realize how their lives were about to change?*

After supper he took the cup of wine, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and said, “This is my blood — do this in remembrance of me.

*Why did I let my mind wander? I wonder if I will be taking Communion in an unworthy manner.*

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. ...*Why is it so hard to keep the rest of the world out when we are celebrating the Eucharist?*

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy and peace; ...*God, thank you for your Son. Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to save me.*

As our Savior Christ has taught us, we now pray. Our Father in heaven ...

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 102 Or 142, 143; Lamentations 2:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:27-32; Mark 14:12-25

Good Friday - April 3, 2015

Psalm 22:1 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”

Jesus repeated these words as he hung on the cross. At one time or another, everyone may have felt what the first line of this psalm says. When innocent people die in wars or terrorist attacks; when children die from illness or are born with handicaps; when children die in senseless drive-by shootings; not to mention natural disasters or any number of tragedies that befall our human condition, people often ask. “Where is God in all of this?”

I believe through it all God is with us, giving us the strength to endure. He was there for his Son and we are his children, too. He must hurt when we suffer, after all he loves us.

I have many favorite movies, but one that made an impression on my younger self was “Zorba, the Greek.” The main character, Zorba, after discussing the woes of life with a young man says, “Life is trouble, only death is not.” As humans, we have very little control in some things that happen and no control in others. If we believe in God and the salvation brought by his Son, then we believe in life with God in heaven. While we are still on earth, we face many trials, losses and tragedies, but we are not alone. God is always with us, giving us the strength to endure. I believe that God has a plan for each of us and that we have to trust that there is reason for everything in God's plan. It is God alone who understands.

God created us and he loves us. He sent his only Son to die for our salvation, to pave our way to heaven, to life everlasting with him in heaven, whatever you believe heaven to be. On Good Friday, God gave his Son to save his people. Praise be to God!

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 95\* and 22 or 40:1-14(15-19), 54; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; 1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38\*\* or John 19:38-42\*\*\*

\* For the Invitatory \*\* Intended for use in the morning \*\*\* Intended for use in the evening

Holy Saturday - April 4, 2015

Lamentations 3:55-58 “I called on thy name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; thou didst hear my plea, ‘Do not close thine ear to my cry for help!’” Thou didst come near when I called on thee; thou didst say, ‘Do not fear!’”

How many times have I called on His name? Does God keep count? It seems every time I am in some kind of “pit,” I call on the Lord; sometimes in quiet thoughtful prayer; sometimes screaming out loud in frantic desperation. Yes, deep down I know He hears me but then why do I, like the soul in Lamentations, ask Him not to close His ear to my pleas? Looking back – after surviving many “pits” in life I can see that, indeed, He did come near when I called. He said, “Do not fear!”

Today is Holy Saturday. It has been a long hard haul. Maybe it is now time for me to actually remember what Jesus went through for me. It is time to look towards not just tomorrow, Easter Sunday, but to all of the tomorrows our Lord Jesus Christ may give to me. I need to remember to be brave and to trust that I will never be alone in any future “pits.”

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 95\* and 88 or 27; Lamentations 3:37-58; Hebrews 4:1-16\*\*; Romans 8:1-11\*\*\*

\* For the Invitatory \*\* Intended for use in the morning \*\*\* Intended for use in the evening