



Meditations 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.

Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly with Your God

Meditations for Lent 2013

Introduction

I was thrilled to learn that there was interest in our producing another devotional booklet for Lent. I was thrilled also to learn that most of those that wrote with us last year have signed on to have another go at it.

I have decided upon the theme, *Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly with Your God*¹. Of course, that is the famous admonition we find in answer to the question, “What does the Lord require of us?” The Prophet Micah provided that answer, and you’ll find that at Micah 6:8.

I have encouraged the writers to be as creative, as open, as they choose; using all the tools available to them to produce meditations that speak to you, the reader. We imposed few limitations on the writers other than length of meditations so that you will have reflections that you will be willing to read on these forty days. They and I seek no notoriety or fame in composing these meditations. To that end, we have not published a roster of those participating, nor have we given authorship credits to the individual, daily works. We offer all in these pages to you for your use and edification in Lent and to the honor and glory of our Lord.

As a minimum, we suggest that you read the meditations daily. That simple exercise should be valuable to you. For a broader experience, we suggest that you read all of the lessons and the collect for each day in addition to reading the meditation. We provide those scripture references. You only will need to look them up. If you are a regular user of the Daily Office—Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer—you could certainly fold these meditations into your routine. Never said Morning or Evening Prayer? Now is as good a time as any to begin. Another option is to use the Morning Offering format we included on the inside cover of this booklet, substituting the lessons for the day and the meditation we provide for each weekday.

Our God has chosen to walk with us in the form of his only son who came to us and walked as one of us and among us. He even walked, in obedience to the will of the Father, all the way to the cross, even death on the cross—and all for us and for our salvation. Can we do less than to walk with our God?

Richard +
a servant of God
Lent 2013

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Ash Wednesday – February 13, 2013

Psalm 103:11-14 - “For as the skies are high above the earth so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers. As far as the eastern horizon is from the west so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actions from us. As the father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers. For he knows what we are made of: he realizes we are made of clay.”

In the last several years here at St. James I have learned to love the imagery and poetry of the Book of Psalms. These hearty, stiff-necked people sang their praises to God, not while sitting in their Lazy Boy recliners in seventy degree dens, but in a dry harsh land. The psalms have a harsh reality to them, an earthiness.

As I write this meditation for “Ash Wednesday” I realize it was perfectly named. “Day One of Lent” does bring us to think of ashes and our immortality. This brings us back to Genesis and our creation and takes us to the end of our lives, becoming ash, dust.

In February 1999, my mother died a peaceful death, which she had prayed for frequently. She had great faith in the power of prayer. The following Christmas season my family was invited to a party at my aunt and uncle’s. While I was running an errand that morning my aunt left a message that said, “bring mom.” I still had mom’s ashes in the den and thought it a strange request, but nice. I liked having mom with me. That afternoon as I walked into the party with mom’s urn under my arm people looked very surprised. Evidently my aunt had meant I should bring my mother-in-law, who is alive.

My mom had a great sense of humor. She would have been happy to be included and remembered. In a novel by Mitch Albom he writes of a Jewish rabbi that states that the second death is in being forgotten. We will all be forgotten someday, given enough time.

So while I have this time on earth I have increasingly a sense of mortality, of waiting for Jesus to “open the door.” During this time of Lent it is a time to be reconciled to God, to be his Light, to grow closer. I try to keep him at my core, a stillness that centers me as I rush through doing the mundane, earning a living, surviving and enjoying life. I do fail and will fail to keep God as my center. I will be impatient, self-centered, say something sarcastic, the list is unending. At the end of the day and hopefully at the end of my life I will recognize some of my failings, but I have the faith that I am forgiven because my Creator knows I am made of clay.

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.

Psalm 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 14, 2013

Luke 9:18, 20 - "One day when Jesus was praying alone, the disciple came to him . . . 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are God's Messiah.'"

I was reared by my grandmother whom I called Mama. Mama was a small rather frail woman. She had severe rheumatoid arthritis and was not always able to walk without extreme pain. Sometimes I would have to do the grocery shopping in the neighborhood store. By the time I was 10 years old, I could take the city bus downtown to pay the electricity bill. I remember praying as I went to catch the bus that no one would bother me or take the bill money from me. Who did I say Jesus was? He was my Protector.

My grandmother developed Alzheimer. My aunt would take care of my grandmother during the day while I was in school. I stayed with my grandmother at night. She, often, woke up at night and would slip out of the house if she could. I learned to be a very light sleeper and could wake up and hit the floor before my grandmother could leave the bedroom. Those nights were long and I was afraid. Who did I say Jesus was? He was my Guardian Angel and my strength.

Many years later, as an adult, I decided to go back to graduate school. My advisor told me I was prepared to complete my proposal for my dissertation. I sent in my proposal only to be told it was not ready. I sat on my proposal doing nothing from September until December. My due dates were March for the proposal and the end of April for the dissertation. I prayed and others prayed for me. I made it! Who did I say Jesus was? He was my Grace.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer. I was told on the last day of school for the Christmas holidays. I told no one. I did not want to spoil Christmas for my family. The day after Christmas I told my husband. We went to the oncologist. The diagnosis was confirmed. We gathered the children, our eldest by telephone and told them of the cancer and the impending surgery. We wept. We prayed. I lived through the surgery, the chemotherapy and the radiation therapy. The family, the friends and the parishioners gathered to be supportive. I learned to rest and to be quiet. I learned to find comfort from my husband's constant care. I learned what was important in life. I learned that some will find that you are expendable. I learned to appreciate life and to value every day that we are given. Each day is a gift from God. Who did I say Jesus was? He was my Healer, my Comforter, my Center of Peace, my great Exhorter . . . Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" I answered, "You are my EVERYTHING!"

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.

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

Friday after Ash Wednesday - February 15, 2013

Psalm 51:10 - "Create in me a clean heart, O God; And renew a right spirit within me."

What a wonderful gift it is to "Let go, and let God." A "permanent" sibling disagreement, a fellow Christian's unChristian act, or a passerby's unfair judgment can cause anguish and anger. Either emotion can be debilitating if allowed to influence or control our lives.

God gives us the wonderful gift of letting go of hurts. We are told to pray for those who inflict a wrong on us, who may believe they are justified in their actions, but who or what gives them the right to pass judgment on us??

What is our responsibility in negative "relationships?" What does God want of us? If God can forgive us, why don't we forgive each other? Why can't we? Do our egos get in the way? Do we want attention? Do we want others' sympathy?

What should the Christian response or action be? What will give me "a clean heart and renew a right spirit" within me? What will give you "a clean heart and renew a right spirit" within you? Is it something we truly desire?

A favorite poem, "A Poison Tree" by William Blake, a British poet influenced by the Bible all his life, was written in 1794. Its lesson should help direct our actions.

A Poison Tree (from *Songs of Experience*)

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine
And he knew that it was mine,

And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And into my garden stole
When night had veiled the pole;
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

While God can and will help us deal with those who hurt us, knowingly and unknowingly, it is incumbent upon us to deal with hurts in a constructive way so we end up with "a clean heart and a right spirit" rather than as the person in "A Poison Tree." No discussion and no face-to-face forgiveness between them has occurred. God will help those who choose to "let go and let God" take the pain away as God forgives us each and every day. We all make mistakes.

Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so may we 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 16, 2013

Psalm 86: 6-7 - “Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication. In the day of my trouble I call on you, and you will answer me.”

My daily prayer, after my husband died, had the same content as this line from David’s psalm. I needed God’s help to get my life back on track. I was feeling disjointed and alone. There was this empty place in my heart and my life.

First and foremost, we were friends. We laughed at the same jokes, we shared a joy of the outdoors, we loved animals, and we made each other laugh. He gave me a shoulder to lean on and his total support. For over twenty years, we were a team. Nearly inseparable, but we respected each other as individuals.

His sudden death was a shattering experience for me. Friends said that maybe a support group would help. I joined several. One was a very large group of people who had lost sons, daughters, parents and the list goes on. After the first month, or so, some people stopped coming to the meetings. Maybe they made it on their own at that point, or they just weren’t ready to talk. Everyone grieves differently. You never ‘get over’ the loss, but you learn to accept and slowly move on. I know that God does things on his own schedule, so I don’t question why he takes us home or when. Belief in God and in resurrection, helps to ease the pain of loss.

I often wonder how atheists deal with the trials and tribulations of life. I think that I wouldn’t be able to handle a lot of what life throws my way, if not for my belief in God, and the promise of a life to come in the presence of my Savior. I heard an atheist once say, that “ People that believe in a God are weak and use God as a crutch.” I disagree.

To believe in a God that you’ve never seen, takes great strength and faith in a higher power. Praying to God is not weakness; it’s love. You don’t need to see him; sometimes you can feel his love. It’s not something that you can reach out and touch, but his love touches your heart, if you let it.

God can bring healing and comfort, you only have to ask and on his time you will receive all that you need to go on. With God’s help, I made it through my grief and came out the other side a better person, with a stronger faith than before. Thank You, God.

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

Monday in the First Week of Lent – February 18, 2013

Psalm 19: 7 - “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple . . .”

From 1997 through 1999, I lived in the former Soviet Union as a Peace Corps Volunteer. It had only been eight years since the Iron Curtain had come down, so the way of life and memories of over fifty years of occupation had not faded yet. When the Soviets occupied a country, there were many laws the people were required to obey.

During Soviet times, every person in every country was required to speak only Russian. You were not allowed to speak English or to foreigners on the street. No one could own a typewriter in order to prevent seditious writings. Religion was forbidden. You needed identification papers to travel anywhere. You had little choice of occupations. If you or members of your family did not belong to the Communist Party, you were not allowed any job above menial labor. The stories you may have heard about the stampedes when food became available, are all true. No one could own land or own homes. The Soviets built shoddy apartment buildings and huge, ineffective heating plants in every single city, in every single country they occupied. This is how the Soviets contained the masses – the government owned everything and provided all the basic needs of the people.

“It was better in Soviet times.” I heard that again and again while living in and traveling around the former, Soviet countries from Latvia to Mongolia. And, I figured out why – it was better because the basic needs of the people were taken care of regardless of the harsh rules.

The three readings for today all deal with the subject of God’s laws. The Psalmist tells us the law of the Lord is perfect, sure, right, clean, true and righteous. Leviticus reiterates the Ten Commandments. And, Matthew speaks about the Second Coming of Christ and His judgment when He comes.

In all the readings, if man obeys these laws of God, his life is better. Keeping the Sabbath restores our soul. Our neighbors live safely if we do not murder or bear false witness against them. We live in peace with ourselves if we don’t have envy and covetousness in our hearts. The needs of the poor and the hungry are met when we feed them. NOT ONE of God’s laws does us harm. NOT ONE of God’s laws is beyond our ability to keep.

It is our basic needs that are so important. Take care of God. Take care of yourself. Take care of others.

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 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 19, 2013

Matthew 6:11 - "Give us this day our daily bread."

The Lord's prayer is the most beloved of all prayers in Christianity. In some churches it is known simply as the Our Father. In one Episcopal Church I visited a few years ago, the congregation did a special thing. All present knelt and held hands before they then began to recite the prayer. I understand that some members of one parish advised the long term supply priest that they preferred the traditional version of this prayer as opposed to the contemporary rendering.

I have visited people in nursing homes where many are old or ill or both. Instinctively when the Lord's Prayer is begun, the person lying in her bed joins in without benefit of any text. They know this prayer all too well. Why, we said this prayer as children in public school assemblies, even into high school years.

Jesus gave this pray to his disciples as a how-to guide. In other words he was saying these are the kind of things one ought to say when praying.

Give us this day our daily bread; in other words, give us what we need each day. As a youngster, I "needed" a book satchel. Even at that young age—must have been 6 years old—I knew, somehow, that God gives us whatever we asked for from him. So I prayed that God would get me a book satchel.

Many years later some friends were renewing their marriage vows. They asked me to sing the Lord's Prayer. Although I did not quite reach the performance of Perry Como, I sang it well and the couple was most appreciative.

As a member of a mixed chorus in high school, we participated in regional competitions with other schools from around the state. One year my group was set to sing two songs. On location, our choir director recognized that we were not really prepared to sing one of the two. So he made an executive decision; he said we would sing the Lord's Prayer only. I remember that he said to us, "I want you to pray it," and, we did. As a youngster I could see a cloud meandering around us as we sang. I am sure we kids were all praying as we sang. We earned a perfect 4.0 rating based on our performance.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.

Oh by the way, I got that book satchel and took it to school loaded with my belongings.

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 6:7-11

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent - February 20, 2013

Luke 11:29-30 - "...How evil are the people of this day! They ask for a miracle, but none will be given them except the miracle of Jonah. In the same way that the prophet Jonah was a sign of the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be a sign for the people of this day."

Remember "that guy" who was able to part the sea to "Let his people go?" Well, that was Moses. After parting the sea, God became angry at the Israelites for worshipping a golden calf. God told Moses that he would destroy the Israelites if they didn't turn from their sinful ways. Moses, being one of the Chosen ones, was able to convince God to give his people another chance.

Well, Jonah wasn't "that guy." Jonah was "that guy" who was swallowed up by a large fish, because he refused to send the people of Nineveh a message from God to stop their shenanigans. Jonah believed God would forgive the people of Nineveh. Well, for Jonah's sake and his people, God was willing to give the people of Nineveh a second chance. God asked again. Jonah abided and everyone listened to God's message and was saved from God's wrath.

It seems every generation or time period has "that guy." "That guy" for us is the Son of Man. So much evil and wrongdoing is happening in the world, from stealing, kidnapping, economic & political gains, to even someone setting a person on fire & having his body dumped in a land field. Plus with everyone's fears having been heighten from the recent mass shootings, people are running for the nearest shotgun. Yesterday, I was talking about this same topic with my friend and she told me she was planning to take self-defense classes and get her concealed weapon license to protect herself. She said, "What else do I have to rely on in this world?" I calmly said, "God." She looked at me blankly as if I hadn't said word.

We are at a time in our lives, when we need the Son of Man to rescue us. Hopefully, we are at a state of receiving forgiveness from Him and that we won't need to be destroyed, because at the rate we're going, "that guy" will be returning to us again, to tell us it's too late.

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 group 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 21, 2013

Matthew 7:12 - "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

I see this phrase and think, in what world is this even possible? I have found myself getting old and bitter with each growing day. Growing up, the church I attended through my First Communion was full of hypocrites. They were some of the nastiest people I had ever seen and yet, they were in church every Sunday. If this is what church was, I wanted nothing to do with it.

My mother was unwed when she was pregnant with me. Since she lived across the street from church, she was not allowed outside. When company came over, she was kept hidden upstairs. Once I was born, my Grandmother had an adoption agency come to convince my mom she could not raise me. At the time, my grandmother felt that it was best to pretend that I was never born. Luckily for me, my mom did not buy into that. My Grandparents had to accept me. Since I had to be there, I was thrown into the church. I was baptized, went to school through 2nd grade, and made my first communion. I hit a certain age where I had one too many questions as to why these people were so mean to my mom and me. We left and never looked back.

As I grew older, I got married and had my first child. When she was born my mom insisted I baptize her. I fought tooth and nail that it would never happen. I had tried Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist churches and was treated the same way I remembered as a child. Since my husband was Episcopalian, I agreed to come to St. James to appease my mom (and his for that matter). The second I walked into St. James my life was changed. There was a force that could not be explained. The people greeted us with excitement, joy, and kindness. I came back for another week to see if it was a fluke. It was not! People actually knew how to be kind and follow this "Golden Rule." I had never seen this in practice growing up. I was thrilled that my children would be able to grow up in this way of life.

I struggle each day as I continue on my journey of faith; however, I see the possibilities for the first time in my life. I may not have seen this rule in practice growing up, but I can still live it. I cannot let myself be the hypocrite I have run from.

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.

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

Friday in the First Week of Lent - February 22, 2013

Psalm 130:1 - "Out of the depths I have called to you, O Lord; Lord hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication."

Parents of 20 young children must have wailed and raised questions like the psalmist in recent days, in Newtown, Connecticut. Other parents around the country and even those without children were pondering "Where is our God at times like these?"

There is nothing I can really say in a short meditation such as this that will bring to bear any new comfort or wisdom for a nation that is still in mourning. I am reminded of the death of the Holy Innocents of Herod the Great's day. This remembrance causes me to ponder why we give that man the title, Great. Monstrous was he. On his orders, his guards committed murder of countless your children to satisfy this madman's fear that a child somewhere would supplant his rule. And, no one stopped him.

Only one child was spared this slaughter, and that was the child born at Bethlehem of whom the angels sang and shepherds watched and men from far away came and brought gifts for the infant. His parents took him to Egypt that he might escape death. That child grew in wisdom and stature, we so fondly say. This child grew and showed his promise when he stayed behind in the temple and confronted the scholars there with very pointed questions and offered such great insight. This child lived with his parents, learning a trade.

When this child reached his third decade of life, he launched a ministry, the likes of which many of his contemporaries had never witnessed. As I recall the stories about this child, now grown to manhood, he did good for those he encountered. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, taught valuable lessons about how people should live with and among one another. This child, now a man, showed that he was special by doing some impossible feats like raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, turning water to fine wine, walking on the water, and feeding thousands with a mere sack lunch. He preached love as what we should do to one another, and as how our God in heaven acts towards us.

This child never harmed anyone; his only crime being he loved too much. For that, this child finally experienced the fate of his contemporaries from when he was a baby, he was executed with those truly judged to be criminals. The people living at that time had to do what we do in this age: they had to wait for the Lord because in his word there is their hope and our hope, and with him there is mercy.

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 23, 2013

Matthew 5:44 - “But I say to you, Love your enemies.”

I sometimes say that if we ever need proof of God’s great power, it is that God loves *everyone*.

I say this jokingly, but I am serious about it too. There are few things as difficult as what Jesus commands us in today’s gospel—to love our enemies. It is especially difficult when we consider that Jesus actually uses the word “love.” Jesus doesn’t say for us to simply compassionately pity our enemies, or to tolerate them, or to just not let them get to us . . . Jesus tells us to *love* them. We are commanded to actively care and engage with our enemies, and not just politely or pityingly but *lovingly*. In my translation of the bible (the NRSV), the word “love” is actually capitalized, emphasizing its importance. Jesus, it seems, really means it: Love (with a capital “L!”) your enemies.

We sometimes have a tendency to think that anger and love cancel each other out. They don’t—in fact, sometimes anger can strengthen love, depending on how we act. For example, am I really angry with that politician I disagree with, as a person, or am I really more upset with the politician’s policies or his vision for the future? There is a difference between personal, petty anger, and anger born out of a shared love or concern. The politician and I disagree, but we both love our country—what is most important is how we move forward and act on that shared love. If we can tap into shared love, then anger can actually strengthen love, and we can act on both in productive ways.

I think this is what Jesus means when he says we must Love our enemies. We need to remind ourselves of what it is that we—my enemy and I—both love. Do we both love our church, our country, our families? Odds are that we do. The moment we tap into that shared Love, that love with a capital “L,” the dynamic between me and my enemy changes. Suddenly we have something in common, even if we disagree on the particulars. The next time you find yourself with an enemy, try asking yourself, “What does this person love that I also love?” And then see how it changes things.

And if you get stuck, just remind yourself, as I often do: God loves *everyone*, me and my enemy and everyone else, so there is always at least one Love—God’s Love—that we all share in common.

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.

Psalm 119:1-8; Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-38

Monday in the Second Week of Lent - February 25, 2013

Luke 6:27-28, 37b - “[Jesus said] ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you... Forgive and you will be forgiven’”

I recall a time when a confused and broken woman wanted to tell me her story, to explain how she hit rock bottom. She had been abused her entire life. With tears in her eyes, she told me about unimaginable atrocities, going from a victim of incest as a child to a battered wife in her marriage, a marriage she thought would be a way out. She turned to alcohol to numb the pain and fear, to blur the dreadful memories. Then the evil of addiction crept up, caught her in its hold, and, like Satan himself, tempted her to commit all kinds of wrong-doing. She was deeply remorseful and took full responsibility for her actions. But, oh, how she hated her abusers – she bore a deep and vengeful loathing that consumed her.

How does one respond to such a tale of abuse? “I’m so sorry that you have suffered so much.” That was all I could muster – it was a sincere reply, but an inadequate one that didn’t convey much comfort or wisdom. And then, some words came from my mouth that I hadn’t planned: “You know, Jesus says we should forgive those who hurt us.” The woman looked back at me with an incredulous glare. How easy and trite for me to speak of forgiveness... how dare I suggest that she forgive those awful men, those monsters who didn’t deserve to be forgiven.

At that moment, the Holy Spirit came to my rescue and gave me the words this poor woman needed to hear. I acknowledged her right to be angry and full of hate. And then, together, we began to wonder *why* God wants us to forgive. For starters, we must forgive in order to be forgiven. Even though scriptural, those words still weren’t quite enough. Why should God care whether or not we forgive? What’s in it for God?

We realized that anger and hatred are indeed a heavy burden to bear, and that it takes tremendous energy to maintain hostility. Eventually, this becomes our primary focus and we begin to see everything through the dirty lens of animosity. Anger and hatred obscure our view of God’s love and limit our capacity to receive God’s love. We need to pour off the anger and hatred in order to make room for God’s love. Anger, hatred and vengeance can never un-do the abuse – nothing can. But the love of God can lift us to the place where we can clearly see hope. Through forgiveness, we allow our God of love – our God who is Love – to become fully present in our lives. Forgiving and forgiven, we choose to let God love us.

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.

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

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent - February 26, 2013

Isaiah 1:19-20 - "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword."

I always thought I made a great assistant, a number two. The lieutenant standing behind the general. The stoker working at the instruction of the engineer, just feeding that boiler, making the train move along. I never had a desire to lead. But, to glom on to a great leader and help him see the project through, now that is me, boy.

"Willing and obedient" no problem, bring on the "good things of the land."

In my world, it certainly was easier and less stressful, to follow. Especially, if you are not confident in your abilities or ideas. Be told what to do and complete to the best of my ability. Go home happy, get a good night's rest, then back at it, the next day. Confident in the fact, I was being useful. Plus, if things went bad, I'm not in charge.

But that rebellion, man it can sneak up on you. You're right there when all the decisions are being made. Perhaps even lending your opinion to the mix. Now the moment of pride. When the leader, listens to your opinion and says, "Wow, I never thought of that, great idea!" Suddenly, just being told what to do isn't enough anymore. Really, my ideas can be great. Well, I have a head full of them. But the next time, they overlook your idea, or worse, tell you you're wrong. Look out. The resentment starts to sneak in.

What makes them so special? Huh, I could lead this project, easy. Why don't they ever listen to me anymore? Boom, the blow to your pride can turn resentment in to resistance and then straight to rebellion, in a heartbeat. Fueled by anger, next thing you know, you are being "devoured by the sword."

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.

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

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent - February 27, 2013

Psalm 31:9 - "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly."

As I reflect on this psalm, it appears to truly be hitting home to me (of little faith). Today's trouble is enough for me. I find myself getting angry at seemingly insignificant events. I think the mental health folks would label this transference.

You see what is really making me sad and angry is my little sister is in the last stages of cancer. The cancer has spread throughout her body and she is in unbearable pain. I'm not certain how to talk to her and let her know all will be well. I remember reading somewhere, "It is the shattering awareness of my own mortality that brings me to brave the thought of a life beyond life and it's claim on me."

As I'm writing this I had to already stop and wipe the tears from my eyes. I've heard the ancients considered the gift of tears the sign of God's great favor. I hope they were right. TAO says "Free from desire, you realize the mystery. Caught in desire you see only the manifestations."

When my mother was dying of cancer I had to travel with her to bury my oldest brother in Minnesota. As she lay in the back of my car, with her oxygen tank, she told me not to be angry with God. You see her youngest son had also been killed. Mom said what a wonderful reunion she would now have with the boys and God. Mom was a spiritual woman who truly walked the walk.

I'm reminded of Jesus' love when Lazarus died. He cried with the people. He could have easily just said stop crying, I can raise him up. Instead he wept with them. I know for certain he is also with me and my sister. Maybe I'll remind her of the wonderful reunion she will have. Maybe I'll tell her what God told Joshua three times. "Be strong and courageous." "I will be with you." "I will not fail you." "I will not forsake you." These are my sister's and my promises from God.

I think I'll tell her how much I love her and try to keep my focus on the treasures in heaven. Jesus says he goes to prepare a place for us. I'm grateful he has many rooms for myself, my family, and all of humankind.

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

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

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent – February 28, 2013

Jeremiah 17:8 - “They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.”

As a teenager I would grab up my Bible and my journal and hop into my old beater car and cruise over to a local park when I was frustrated or anxious. Considering I was a teenager this happened quite often. One could walk along a path next to a river and eventually come upon a small piece of land that jutted out into the water. On what I considered my own miniature peninsula there was one tree under which I would find a shady spot and sit to ponder, read and journal my thoughts. The quiet lapping of water against the land, the way the trees reflected on the river like a mirror, a few meandering geese and that pretty tree is what I picture when I read this scripture.

That tree with its roots sent out towards the water, strong and mighty, was a place of comfort for me when life seemed to be rough and cruel or confusing and scary. I wish that I could say that as I matured into early adulthood that I behaved like this tree. I did not find good spots to take root that would provide water and fertile soil. More often than not I would be anxious and upset when the droughts of life were drying up my world. My leaves would wither and die and there was no fruit to bear.

As I have aged and looked back on my journey in life I have seen that through every drought God has gently used His rod and staff to guide me to green pastures and still waters. I realized that after so many struggles, He has always been there, just like the tree on my peninsula. He is my place of comfort.

I wonder, as Christians are we called to be like this tree in Jeremiah? Are we planted by God’s river so that when times of drought inevitably dry our lives, we are not anxious and can continue to bear the fruit of His word and message? Are we the tree that is a shady place of comfort for those who are in need?

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, forever and ever. Amen.

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

Friday in the Second Week of Lent - March 1, 2013

Most everyone remembers where they were on September 11, 2001. I was working on a line in a factory. Around 8:30 am I was relieved for a short break. The relief operator told me that the Stock Market was closed and a plane had just crashed into the Pentagon. I asked someone else what was happening. She told me that a plane also flew into the World Trade Center, the White House was believed to be a target and we were at war.

I went back to work — stunned. My heart began to sink and I became very, very scared for our whole world. I thought about my sons who were 26 and 22 years old. Could this mean that they would have to go to war? Then I wondered what type of war would it be, Nuclear? Would there be any hope for the World if this happened?

I decided that I needed to pray — I couldn't. I just could not focus. Thoughts like blast them to bits or knock them off the face of the earth consumed me. It took a while but I began to pray the Lord's Prayer. After the third or fourth time I began to focus on the words, "...Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...." Oh my God. How would I be able to forgive the terrorists if I lost my sons in a war?

About that time the second Trade Center building was hit and we learned of the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania. Later the two towers fell. I became so full of hate. I wasn't just angry, I wanted revenge.

The rest of the week I continued to say The Lord's Prayer. On Sunday I opened *The Book of Common Prayer* and on page 816; prayer number six; For Our Enemies.

...Lead them and us from prejudice to truth. Deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge....

I continued to say this prayer any time I thought about that day. I still say this prayer frequently. Over the years the prayer helped me to realize that praying for our enemies is as much for us as it is for them. When we begin to pray for them the hate begins to subside and we can begin to find peace. Somewhere down the road the vengeance recedes and we can truly have love for all our neighbors.

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.

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

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent - March 2, 2013

Luke 15:31-32 - "Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

I am a cradle Episcopalian. Growing up I was in the church choir, participated in the youth group and occasionally took care of the nursery. My sister and I would go to an extra service during Lent and when I went to college I'd attend a Wednesday service before classes. When I became an adult, I continued with my dedication and service to the church.

Every time I heard the story of the prodigal son I felt a kinship with the son who stayed home and did what was expected of him. I too was angry with the son who took his inheritance and squandered it. However, through the years I have come to appreciate this story and both sons.

As the prodigal son lost everything and struggled on his own, he came to understand that being a servant of his father's was better than what he had become. Many people are lost and struggle through life before they come to the realization that God the father will welcome them back into the fold and be there to help them with their struggles.

Like the son who stayed home, I was always a faithful follower of Jesus, I didn't understand, however, that He wanted a personal relationship with me. As I participated and worked in several renewal movements, I grew in my love and understanding of who Jesus is, and how he loves me and wants to be my personal savior.

We must be tolerant with one another and not judge where someone else is in their walk with Jesus. We all walk at a different pace and a different gait as we grow in His love and spirit. I now rejoice when I see another child of God return to the fold or grow in new understandings of the love Jesus has for them. One of my greatest gifts from God was the day my dad called to invite me to his confirmation when he was in his late 60's. I realized at that time that it's never too late to come home to God and He truly answers our prayers in His time.

I try not to feel guilty that my struggles have been few and my blessings have been many; and I pray that I continue to grow in His love and service.

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 4, 2013

As I read today's collect, I am struck by the phrases "heart-felt desires" and "humble servants." It is easy for us in today's age to think of all the things we desire. Most of our desires today probably fit into garages, wallets, bikinis, and the like. Many of us are quite heart-felt, or sincere, in our desires for these things. We may even pray for them on a daily basis. "Dear Lord, please bless me with a Mercedes, a beautiful woman, the lottery etc." You truly can pray for those things with all your might and sincerity.

Nevertheless, God added the second phrase that caught my attention as I read it: "humble servants." What does it mean to be a humble servant? A humble servant understands that it is his duty to look out for others and to do so without regard for his own needs. A humble servant puts his needs second to those he serves.

So what are the heart-felt desires of a humble servant? I cannot imagine they include Mercedes, winning Powerball tickets, or Beyonce. A humble servant would desire that needs of others be taken care of before his own, even if it meant his own needs were never met. I can only imagine the desires of a humble servant including basics that we all need to survive, such as, God's love, loving our neighbors and enemies, shelter, food, and water.

When a humble servant seeks out his heart-felt desires, it is God who defends him against all enemies. It is when we decide to humble ourselves enough to see the needs of others placed before our own needs and wants, that we discover God's great defense against our enemies. Maybe it is time we think about what we are praying for and for whom are we praying.

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.

Psalm 42:1-7; 2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:23-30²

² The following Psalm and Lessons may be used on any weekday in this week, especially in Years B and C. Psalm 95:6-11; Exodus 17:1-7; John 4:5-26(27-38)39-42

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent – March 5, 2013

Matthew 18: 21-22 - “Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’”

The Lord asks us to forgive, but sometimes forgiveness is very difficult to give. I went through the better part of my life unable to forgive my father.

He was an alcoholic and a violent man when he drank. He would beat our mother when he came home drunk. Our house on the block was where the police were always answering ‘family disturbance’ calls. The neighbor kids laughed at our dad, calling him the ‘town drunk,’ who staggered home every night. By the time I was 12 years old, our father was institutionalized. He spent several years trying to ‘dry out’ and get rid of his mental demons. Meanwhile, our mother struggled to care for five children on her own.

Our dad spent his life living on the streets, running from imaginary some ones out to get him. He died in 1986 at the age of 69.

Over the years, I’ve learned that he wasn’t always the way that I remember him. When he was young, he was a good-hearted, hard-working young man. His father died when he was young, he ran the family farm and it was going to be his, until his brother came home from WWII with a new bride and a baby on the way. He bought a small farm and in a few years lost that to the bank. He was a big drinker back then, but everyone I talked to seemed to believe it was a car accident that he had that changed him. Driving home, drunk, one night, he went off the round and by the time the car was spotted, he’d been unconscious for several days. That was when his drinking stopped being social and became a career.

He didn’t want to be what he became, but ‘it was what it was’. I’ll never know what was going on in his mind and his heart. The problems and disappointments in his life buried him, like an avalanche. I have finally forgiven him for the life that we had to live without him. I believe he knows that he’s forgiven and that ‘big chip’ on my shoulder is gone, but sometimes my heart still aches for the father that I never got to know.

Oh, 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 Men 2-4, 11-20a³; Matthew 18:21-35

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

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent – March 6, 2013

Psalm 78:4 “We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has done.”

I spend a lot of time wondering about the future of the Church. Not just the Episcopal Church, but every mainline Protestant denomination in this country has shrinking membership, and even some of the non-mainline denominations are also feeling a pinch. The world is changing at an incredible rate, and sometimes it feels as though the Church is struggling to keep up pace. I ask myself sometimes, in my darker moments, “What will happen to the Church?”

Then I remind myself that people have been worried about the future of God’s faithful people, for about as long as people have worshipped God. Scripture is full of reminders, admonishments, and promises that God’s law and stories of God’s deeds will be passed down through the generations. Every single one of today’s Scripture readings deals with this theme, whether from Deuteronomy, the Psalms, or Matthew. It seems that there has always been a concern about who will follow in the footsteps of the faithful. And yet here we are, still offering praise, worship, and thanksgiving to our God. And I remind myself that people will continue to worship God long after I am gone.

Why do I believe this? Because I have seen people’s lives changed by faith. My own life has been changed by faith. And because I trust in God’s power to transform lives. When I worry about the future of the Church, I am often really worried about my own legacy as a person of faith. Will all the work, the praise, the tears, and the joy that I have experienced and given as a person of faith somehow continue in the work of the Church? The answer is yes, but not because individual faithful people are the only foundation the church has to stand on, that without us somehow God will no longer transform lives. The Church is not our legacy, the Church is God’s legacy and the church will continue because *God* is timeless and eternal. As long as God exists—and Scripture tells us that God has always existed and that God always will exist—people’s lives will be transformed by the power of God working in the world. And with that, there will always be a community of the faithful—there will always be a Church. The Church may not always look or sound or even act the same as the Church that I know and love. . . but the Church will always be, because God will always be. So that we will always “recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has done.”

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.

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

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent – March 7, 2013

Psalm 95:6-7 - “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the lord, our maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would harken to his voice!”

On the surface, these words and statements from Psalm 95 seem so simple and straightforward. But the more I read them, the more deep and complicated they became for me. When in church I kneel and bow down (whether at the pew or altar rail). I am not educated enough to know if the actions of kneeling and bowing are requirements of old scripture, or just suggestions? I, myself, in my simple mindset do these actions as a sign of respect to Him, who I have come to worship. But how much do I worship our God when I approach Him? I most often stop in at church on any given day of the week and Sundays before mass to have alone prayer time. This time is precious and valuable to me. I love kneeling at the end of the altar rail near the votive candle rack. I will always light a candle either for someone else, or even for me. As I look up at the huge crucifix hanging over the altar, I ask myself, am I here to worship my Lord, or am I just here with my laundry list of prayers for others and myself? I mean well but my lists of prayer requests can be quite long. It seems I am always asking for favors for myself and others. I always approach my special prayer space with sincere respect but wonder if God ever gets weary of me? I do try harder each time to also bend his ear with prayers of thanksgiving to let him know I have seen, heard, and felt his presence in my life and in the lives of others. This part I get – but does it come across to God that I spend more time asking his favor on me, and not allowing more worship time for Him? It feels like I have listed more questions in this reflective process than any insight on the words of the above referenced psalm. My questions, however, are making me more aware of my relationship with my Lord. I pray, yet I somehow know that our God does understand my intentions.

The part above - being the “people of his pasture” and “the sheep of his hand” is most comforting to me. I should, and will, try to remind myself of this more often. Perhaps the comfort I feel is His answer that He truly does understand my feelings toward him and the church.

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.

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

Friday in the Third Week of Lent – March 8, 2013

Micah 6:8 - “Walk humbly with your God”

Its 3^o January 1st. I come inside singing “Baby it’s cold outside.” I had been outside in the freezing attached garage where I was dumpster diving! (Actually retrieving a newspaper from the big recycling can!) What was so important that I felt compelled to do this before even having my warm bowl of oatmeal? The death notice began: Montenegro III, Jose V., M.D.

It flipped me back to 1982. I had been involved in the Cursillo renewal movement for 5 years. Cursillo began in Spain and is often said to be a short course in Christianity. The weekend is lay led with team of laity & clergy. Considerable training is held over the months leading to candidates arrival for a 3 day weekend. I served on teams in many roles from kitchen to prayer chapel to conference room. In the summer of 1982, I received a call to be the lay leader of the November women’s cursillo. I prayed for guidance to accept this role. My father-in-law was in final stages of cancer; my children were young; but really – was I up to the challenge of this call? Was the call from God? I did say “yes” and training began. I choose assistants, music leaders & team. *I did this and I did that.* The time came and *I was ready.* As I arrived at Christ Church, Whitefish Bay, I felt a sore throat coming on and by Friday morning I had the full-blown “crud.” I lost my voice - all I wanted to do was sleep. It was all I *could* do!! As I lay resting, I had a visit from Montie Montenegro – *doctor* Montenegro. I knew him as husband of Diana from St. Francis, Menomonee Falls. Both were very active in Cursillo. But now he was here on official business. He had his black doctor bag with him and took out a syringe. He explained, “I’m a doctor – you’re a patient. I need you to lower your pants.” He proceeded to inject me with the needle. “Now you need to rest.” He received no argument from me!

So it was that I was taken out of my “starring” role as lay leader. My two assistants took over and flawlessly carried on. By Sunday night and final announcements I was able to step up to the microphone and in my froggy voice give God the glory for removing me from the limelight so the Holy Spirit could be revealed through the leadership of others.

And yes, I did “walk humbly with thy God” then and I strive to remember this lesson always - step by step and day by day.

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 9, 2013

Luke 18:14 - "For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great."

Americans like to say that humility is a great virtue. Yet, humble people are often thought of as weak. In our quest to be successful, we can become boastful as the Pharisee was. Someone once said to me that you need to "toot your own horn" because no one else will. Was the Pharisee tooting his own horn or was he exercising "crab mentality?" Crab mentality means to denigrate another for your own personal gain. The Pharisee said, "I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there." With that one remark he disparaged the tax collector's virtue. The tax collector was a humble man.

During my early years as a teacher, I worked with a very religious lady. She made sure you knew what a great Christian she was. She was very snide with her comments as she let you know that unless you could speak in tongues or had been saved - you were not heaven bound. She took great joy in minimizing as many adults as she could. One way, I fell into her web. I taught students with cognitive disability. Some of my resource students were in her class. Her class was putting on a program and she had invited me to see the production. Just as the program was going to start I was called to the office to meet with a parent. I sent her a note indicating that I was detained in an unscheduled parent conference. After my meeting I stopped by her class to see how the kids had done.

She tore into me royally. Her Pharisee-type statement was. "I am glad I am a better teacher than you. I care about my students and I see you don't. I'm going to pray for you." I was pregnant. I was not as gentle with her as I should have been as I screamed in the hallway, "Don't pray for me." Whatever this "I'm better than you religion" is, I wanted nothing to do with it. I feared that her praying for me would get me straight into h@//. If asked, I am sure that she would have quoted scripture to completely "nail the coffin" shut. She nor I were displaying a Christ-like attitude of humility. We were not gentle of spirit. Nor was it Namaste - we were not honoring the God in each of us. Humility reflects meekness, respectfulness and servility. We had missed the mark.

Be very careful that you do not allow yourself to be dragged down to your base level. That is a very ugly place in which to be. Be humble and respectful. Let us honor the Christ in everyone we encounter. Namaste

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 11, 2013

John 4:48 – “Then Jesus said to him ‘unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’”

Coming into faith is a difficult journey. We are all asked to believe in Jesus based on stories that have been regurgitated over and over for thousands of years. We are told He will come again. Well I don't know about you, but I grow impatient waiting for Him to come again. How bad do things need to be before He will come? How many senseless acts do we need to witness before He will come? It's time Lord, SOS! Then I find myself stopping to think, what would that be like? Would we really follow him? We would probably assume he is just some nut job off the street and send him to an institution. The world has lost faith. We see it in the way we all treat each other. After 9/11 we all came together as a nation for about 2 months. We treated each other with more kindness than I had ever seen before. Once the holiday season came, game over. As we recently saw with the tragedy in Newtown, we all came together and were kind to strangers. I have already seen that dissipate.

I, for one, have had enough. Jesus cannot come if we do not allow for that opportunity. We are not ready. I feel I should be asking what can I do to help instead of being selfish and waiting for Jesus to come fix MY mess. I created the “world” I live in, He did not. I am the one not getting off my behind to do the best I can, He is not to blame. Maybe if I stop and take a closer look at myself, I will not count so heavily on Jesus to “fix” the world in which I live. We CAN do this ourselves. If we can all live with faith and not need proof at every turn, perhaps we will have a fighting chance. Do we really need to see something in order to solidify our faith? Maybe Jesus is waiting to see that we have faith before he comes again? I don't know, but I hope I can find the strength and courage to live His word which is what I go to hear every Sunday.

I continually look for signs, but I must keep in mind, there is not a sign off the freeway stating “Jesus 1 mile ahead.” There is no rest stop for Jesus. We will not have the Police directing traffic toward Christ. We need to have faith and find ways to keep Jesus in our hearts at all times, not just when the holidays are upon us, or when it is convenient.

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 12, 2013

John 5:8 – “Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’”

A wave of panic swept over the young woman as she rifled through her duffle bag. “Oh, no! I can’t find my lucky socks!” She was a gifted and dedicated athlete, passionate about her sport. To her coach’s delight, she displayed tremendous focus and discipline at every practice. In competition, she was even more intense. Yet, despite her love and talent for the sport, she felt a knot of insecurity within. She knew she was good, but those lucky socks were such a comfort... she had worn them to victory in several championships. Although not especially superstitious, the young woman had decided that these particular socks were an extra measure of luck. They gave her confidence.

She fretted – how could she have forgotten something so important? But it was too late to do anything about it now. The most important game of the season would soon be underway. She had no choice but to play without her lucky socks... her courage would have to come from somewhere else. She stood up and walked.

She faced the opponents with her trademark grit and determination. She had to compensate without those lucky socks and, to her surprise, her resolve to win overrode her anxiety – she played as she had never played before. It was a close match and victory did not come easily, but the young woman rose to the occasion.

Today’s gospel tells the story of a handicapped man who sought healing from the water at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Jews and pagans alike considered Bethesda to be sacred. According to N.T. Wright, a biblical scholar and bishop in the Church of England, early gospel accounts explain how sick people came to the pool, desperate for a cure, and waited indefinitely for the water to bubble as it did from time to time. When the water began to stir, it was believed that the first person to get in would be made well. Of course, to our modern intellect, this is a silly myth – one might say that it doesn’t hold water. But it’s not any more ridiculous than having faith in lucky socks...

The man in today’s gospel never had a chance at reaching the water. Instead, Jesus simply told him to get up and walk. The man didn’t argue with Jesus or protest with “But I *can’t* walk.” He just did it. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the man trusted Jesus’ ability to make him well and at once he walked. Years of waiting by the pool of magic water were for naught. Our source of healing, new life and victory is never to be found in superstition, but only in the mercy and grace of God continually at work through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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.

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

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 13, 2013

John 5:25 - "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."

This passage speaks to me for several reasons:

- In it, Jesus informs us that to truly hear and be open to His message – to take it in, beyond an intellectual understanding - is to be open to transformation.
- It is a message of salvation through Him, certainly, but it is not at the same time a message of condemnation. Hear His Word and you will live, He says. He does not add: "or else." To me, that's hopeful.
- I like to think of death and life, in this passage, as referring to spiritual death and life ... as much as eternal. Viewed in this way, I feel, Christ's words speak to any who feel a void spiritually.
- It reminds me that, if I so choose, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit is accessible to me anytime I read or hear the words that come from the voice of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a mystery to understand? Not when I perceive it this way.

Jesus' perfect teachings have been twisted many times over the past 2,000 years by those seeking to gain unjustly, to promote a distorted message of hate, to create a culture of polarization, and to advance any of a host of other similarly sinister intentions.

This passage leaves no room for confusion. It is impervious to distortion. It is as pure as Christ himself.

Hear the voice of Jesus; be accessible to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit; and welcome the mighty and magnificent transformation that follows

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.

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

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 14, 2013

John 5:39-40 - "You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me! Yet you are not willing to come to me in order to have life."

I was raised in a religious home and continue to share many of the same beliefs as my parents. I was taught the Bible was a place for guidance when you were lost or in pain. A thing you turned to when you wanted understanding of Christ's presence in your life and also when you just needed reassurance that you weren't alone in this world. So, how is it now that I'm older, it is harder for me to turn to Jesus in the times when Scriptures tells me he's my Savior; my rainbow, promising no more flood?

Within the last decade or so I have struggled with an illness that can "knock the socks off you." Some days I'm absolutely great and life can't get any better. Other days, I wish it would all go away. For both of those days, it was easy for me to turn to Jesus and ask Him to be by my side through my storm, but when I began to have too many of those horrible days, it seemed so much easier to turn away from God in anger, hurt, and abandon. I thought to myself, "Why should I waste my time turning to God when he has left my side?" My mother often reminds me that God is not a magician and that He only promised to be by my side during the storm.

So I've been spending many of my years opening up my Bible to "find the clues" to what Jesus says about a "good life." I used *The New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV* to figure out what Jesus was saying, but I was lost. It wasn't until I borrowed my mom's bible, *The New Catholic Study Bible St. Jerome*, that I finally "saw" Jesus' words. They were in red! Jesus is clear in what he requires from us and how we can have eternal life. He desires of us to look beyond Scriptures, but seek Him first, for he will show and give you eternal life. Your faith, trust, and, most importantly, your desire to seek out God first will surely ensure you a spot beyond the gates of Heaven.

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 reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent - March 15, 2013

Psalm 34:15 - "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry."

If ever there was a righteous man in this world, it was my grandpa. I will attest, the eyes of the Lord were upon him and His ears heard his cries.

My grandpa died at 88, after what anyone who knew him, would describe as a full and happy life. He brought joy to all those around him and his complaints were few.

Did he cry out to the Lord for help? Yes, and he was answered.

My grandmother suffered a stroke at the age of 74. It was devastating for her. Never one to sit around, she was now confined to a chair, with limited mobility, even there. A portion of herself was taken. She could no longer, run the house, care for her family, be herself. In her mind she was an invalid and this realization brought on major depression. My grandpa happily became her caretaker. This wasn't a big step, for him. He had always been her devoted companion. But now, new items were added to the list. He cooked, he cleaned, he learned to bake bread, he completed all the Christmas Cards. None of the tasks, enjoyments, abilities of my grandmother, were put aside because she could no longer do them. No, grandpa took them on, with her instruction on how they were to be done, properly. For 2 years they struggled. my grandmother with her own demons of body, mind and spirit. My grandpa going to school on how to be grandma.

But they came through the other side. They were rewarded. They grew closer together, as a couple. More devoted to each other, than they had ever been. And after a time, grandma was grandma again. The family often remarked, our expectation, that the stroke had taken her away from us, but by a miracle, she was back.

When it was near the end for grandpa, he often remarked, how happy he was for having 10 more years, after the stroke, with her. He too, recognized the Lord's attentive ears to his cries.

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 16, 2013

John 7:37 & 38 - "On the last day, the climax of the holidays, Jesus shouted to the crowds, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.' 'For the scriptures declare that rivers of living water shall flow from the inmost being of anyone who believes in me.'"

As a child I was raised, baptized, and instructed to believe in God and fight my battles on my knees. All that changed for me, at age 15, when on February 12, 1959, my little brother was struck and killed in front of our house, shortly before his tenth birthday. I remember at the service I heard the scripture "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." After paying a visit to the cemetery, I asked this "give-and-take," God, to get out of my life. I asked this God to never give me anything and promised I won't ask him for anything ever again.

Today it saddens me to reflect back on all the years I went without God's guidance. I remember well when I was 35 an old friend Carl invited me for coffee. Carl said he was concerned about me and he wanted to introduce me to his God. After the brief introduction, Carl said he would loan me his God interest free. All he asked was that I pray in the morning and thank God at night when I put my head on my pillow. I recall telling him that was the stupidest thing I had ever heard - a loaned out God??? Carl reminded me that perhaps I had done a few other stupid things over the years.

As I recall I thought what the heck. Carl was 84 years old so I prayed "Dear Carl's God help me through this day and at night Dear Carl's God thank you." I don't remember the months that passed but recall surprise when I recognized I no longer was saying "Carl's God." I had come to believe in a God of my own understanding.

You see I was thirsty and God sent Carl. Today I thank God for my valleys as well as my mountains and I have loaned my God out to thirsty men and women on many occasions. Yep - they usually say that's quite stupid.

So, this Lenten observance I commit to reading my bible daily and work toward resting in God's wisdom and power and remembering Jesus never said to his disciples - obey me - he always said TRUST ME.

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

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

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent – March 18, 2013

John 8:12 - “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”

This year I made my very first advent wreath. As each week progressed the wreath grew more brilliant. On Christmas day, with the whole family, we slowly lit each candle watching as our wreath grew bright and vibrant. When we lit the large white candle in the center of the wreath we thanked God for sending His light into our world.

After our wonderful Christmas dinner, when the cat decided to try and play with the candles of our wreath, I blew out the light. A sense of sadness hit me for a brief moment. I wondered if this was the feeling the apostles, friends and family felt when Christ was laid in the tomb? Did things seem darker and less brilliant, like when a cloud goes over the sun? Did it feel like the day we take down our Christmas lights and trees, when the house feels empty and has a funny echo?

I did not have time to contemplate this rather Lenten thought so I shook off the feeling and continued to embark on a wonderful evening with my family. It was not until I began to pack up Christmas that the same feeling hit me. It actually felt a bit like putting Jesus in the tomb as I put Christmas into boxes to go into the basement.

I stood looking at the big white candle when the poem I wrote in my Christmas card crossed my mind.

Christmas is all year long, even when the lights and gifts are gone.
Like the green on our trees of pine, God is with us all the time.
He sent us the Savior, a precious gift, so that our sins He may lift.
Winter, spring summer or fall, go ahead and decorate it all;
Because Christmas can last all year through In all you say and think and do!

It occurred to me to take this candle and set it up next to my prayer chair so that I could be reminded daily that Christ is the light of our world. During lent I am not lighting this candle in order to remind myself that without Jesus I would be walking in darkness and to better contemplate how everyone must have felt during those three long dark days.

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, on God, forever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 23; Susanna⁴ 1-9, 15-29, 34-62 or verses 41-62; John 8:1-11 or John 8 12-20⁵

⁴ In some Bibles Daniel 13

⁵ See next page for another proper

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent – March 19, 2013

Years ago, when Mother Martha was our interim priest, she told us about lamb grafting. Lamb grafting or imprinting is a procedure to help a mother ewe accept an orphaned lamb as her own.

A mother ewe recognizes her own lamb by smell, so help is needed to imprint an alien lamb to her. When a ewe gives birth, an orphaned lamb is smeared with the birth fluids from the birth. Then the three sheep are kept in the birthing pen for several days. If it is successful the ewe will allow the orphaned lamb to nurse, and eventually they all can be joined with the herd.

Before we are baptized, we are separated from our father by Original Sin. Baptism washes away that sin. After we are baptized with the water, the priest prays over the candidate and then using Chrism he makes the sign of the cross while placing his hand on the forehead, he will say, “N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever. Amen.”

And thus! God will recognize you as His own.

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

Psalm 102:15-22; Numbers 21: 4-9; John 8:212-30⁶

⁶ The following Psalm and Lessons may be used on any weekday of this week, especially in Years B and C. Psalm 17:1-8; 2 Kings 4:18-21, 32-37; John 11:(1-7)18-44

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 20, 2013

Daniel 3:14 - "Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up?'"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were Israelites who were exiled to Babylon and selected by King Nebuchadnezzar to be educated and trained to serve in the king's palace. Rather than bowing down and worshipping the king's statue, they chose to be thrown into the burning furnace. As you probably know, they were not only unharmed from the fire, but there was a fourth person seen in the furnace with them who had the appearance of being a god.

How many of us have such great a faith in God that we would submit to this certain death, rather than follow the king's command; how many of us look the other way when challenged about our religious beliefs; and, how many of us worship idols in our everyday life? Such as money, prestige, food and any number of things that are more important to us than God.

During this Lenten period we're asked to take a good look at who we are and where we are in our relationship to God. I keep myself busy with other things rather than take the time to think about this, as I know I'm lacking in so many ways. I don't set aside time to study the Bible; I don't take the time to pray and listen to God; I don't do the thing that I ought to and I do the things that I ought not to do.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in the old testament time, and had a faith in God so great that they honored Him to the point of being thrown into the fiery furnace. We now have Jesus who is continually calling us back to Him and forgiving our transgressions, but I wish that I could have the faith that they had to challenge anyone who questions my religious beliefs.

My favorite scripture is Psalm 46:10 "Be still and Know that I am God." I challenge myself and you to take time each day, especially during Lent, to be still in the presence of God and absorb the peace and grace that only He can give.

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.

Canticle 2 or 13; Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28, 18-20; John 8:31-42

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent - March 21, 2013

What does it mean to be a child of God? I suppose we all have our own take on this question. For myself, I find it quite a daunting task knowing that God has called upon me to be his son. It is made even more daunting when God acknowledges that in being His children, we may face suffering.

God, knowing the disposition of his children, has sweetened the pot a bit and has promised those of us who suffer with Christ, that they will be heirs of His glory. One of the meanings of the word “glory” is thanks. God has promised us his eternal thanks for trusting in Him when He calls us into His service. That is a pretty amazing gift when you think about the stature of the giver versus that of the recipient.

As an all powerful being, God does not have to offer anything in exchange for following his demands of us. Much like our birth parents did not have to offer all that they did growing up in their homes. They simply could have laid out expectations of us, claimed superiority due to their status as parents, and left us with no choice but to follow. Nevertheless, God and our parents sought fit to see that we know of their love and appreciation for us when we followed their demands.

Too often I have looked upon God’s calling for myself as a burden, or as something to be delayed for as long as possible. Maybe it is time I change my thinking on the matter. Maybe it is time I trust that whatever the Lord calls me to do, He will be there for me. Maybe it is time to ask Him to arm me with enough trust that I have no fear in His service. Maybe it is time I realize that glory awaits those who follow God’s demands of us. Quite simply, we receive God’s glory when we trust that He will be with us as we fulfill His demands.

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.

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent – March 22, 2013

Jeremiah 20: 9 – “If I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

Jeremiah is one of my favorite people of the O. T. because he laments and whines as he goes about his work for God. The above passage is his sixth personal lament.... However, my favorite one is found in verse 20:14 – “Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me....” Oh, sure. Blame it on your mother.

Since the O. T. people were so adept at kvetching when called by God, I have decided to compile my own excuses to be used the next time God knocks on my door.

The Top Five Reasons Why I Can't Help You Out, God

1.) I don't speak well.

Hold it. Moses used that one. Look what happened. God had him wandering around the desert for forty years. I prefer the seashore, so that excuse is out.

2.) It's too dangerous because:

- a.) It's snowing – hard to drive.
- b.) Too sunny – it hurts my eyes.
- c.) It's raining – umbrella broke.
- d.) All of the above.

Hold it. Jonah used that one. God had him swallowed by whale which swam across the lake and spit him out on the shores of where God wanted Jonah to go in the first place. Scratch that excuse. It would be embarrassing to be puked up at the door of the church

3.) I didn't sign up for this. My friend signed me up.

Hold it. Adam used that one when he tried to put the apple blame on Eve. Then sin entered the world. Well, we certainly don't need any more sin here, so that excuse is definitely out.

4.) I'm too old.

Whoa! Abraham's wife, Sarah, used that one. And, look what happened. God made her pregnant in her old age. Better I should run around the desert than risk pregnancy. Besides, I don't think Medicare covers birthing.

5.) I'm a sinner and not worthy.

Hold it. I have to answer my phone. I just received a Tweet from someone. “LOL. Everyone is a sinner. I need you. – God”

I'm so tired trying to think up excuses. I give up. What do you need me to do, God?

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 23, 2013

Ezekiel 37: 23b “I will cleanse them, then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

In the past, I’ve written about my personal experiences, today, I’d like to put into print my personal thoughts and feelings about the above verse and share them with you.

This verse refers to the split between Israel and Judah and God’s forgiveness and calling his people to be one with him. A restored Israel, under one covenant, with God. He calls his people back to him and blesses them and their descendants. They had fallen away from their God and not been following the rules of the covenant handed down from God to Moses.

To me, this sounds like the Christians of today. We were given a new covenant made with and through Jesus Christ, but we are wandering off, too. We are lured by ‘stuff;’ stuff we have, stuff we want, and stuff we want to do; the world outside of our life with God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is with us everyday, to love and protect us, but we sometimes forget that he is there.

Oh, we remember God, when bad things are happening to us, but when our lives run smoothly, we, maybe, don’t pray to him as often or our attendance at church falls off. We become so absorbed by our own lives and all the other ‘stuff’ that we feel is more important. We’re all guilty of this from time to time, but isn’t our salvation more important?

Our civilization has fallen away from religion. Surveys that I’ve read, about current trends in religion, say that fewer people belong to a church now, than, say, fifty years ago. More people seem to doubt the existence of a God. Others ask, “Where is God?” when something terrible happens. I’ll bet that God is asking, “Where are you ?” The fact that is that God has been taken out of our lives, either by our own doing or by circumstances around us. Personally, I think that this makes God very sad.

We have free will, but sometimes things happen that we have no control over. God may not always step in to change things to our liking, but I believe he will always give us the strength to endure; so, love, believe, have faith in God, and love and treat each other fairly. This is what I will be reminding myself during Lent.

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 preparing 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 25, 2013

Mark 14:3 - “And while she was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.”

This reading sounds so basic and simple in the application of oil poured over Jesus’ head. I, however, find this act as not so simple, but quite complicated in a good way. I do not know if this act of love and compassion by a simple woman was considered as a sacrament at that time in the church’s history, as it is now? All of the sacraments are of course special to so many of us, but I often wonder how many of the Holy Sacraments we take for granted? I know that I, for one, probably unknowingly take many aspects of what our church offers for granted. I referred to the woman mentioned as simple, as she was not identified as having any special title or place of honor at that point in time. I see myself as like this woman, in that as unknown and uneducated as I am, I have been privileged to be on both sides of the Sacrament of Holy Unction. Anytime this sacrament is offered to me, be it a Sunday service or in most instances a weekday service, I am truly blessed to be able to take advantage of it. The laying on of hands, the words spoken, and the application of oil for my anointing put me in a “special place” for this brief, but holy time in my life as I continue my walk toward and with Jesus. Even more special than receiving the Sacrament of Unction, have been the times I was allowed to apply it to others. God has blessed my life with clergy who have also allowed me to lay hands and anoint them with this holy oil. I take this act of unction very seriously and hope to be able to continue to receive, and provide to others, this simple but very special act of love, compassion, and service to others.

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.

Psalm 36:5-10; Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 11:39-12:3; John 12:1-11 or Mark 14:3-9

Tuesday in Holy Week – March 26, 2013

Mark 11:15 - "...and he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons"

Wait a minute – what’s this? Our Lord and Savior – The Prince of Peace – anger and rage... upset? As I took in these words, a real visual image popped off my Bible page. The scene came to life and people & things were flying everywhere. Jesus didn’t just “enter” the temple. He came in with a deliberate mindset to do something about what was taking place there! Enough was enough! I saw those who sold being driven out, not politely being asked to leave. I picture Jesus moving swiftly, arms in motion; people jumping out of his way. Then he overturned the tables and the seats. Whoa! Stuff flies everywhere – tables tipped over – money rolling every which way – pigeons flapping wings & making noise!! Not all in the temple were guilty. Some were innocent bystanders. Have you ever been an innocent bystander who had to witness a scene where things went flying & someone caused that upset by *their* righteous anger? I have and remember the day vividly. A plastic milk jug and food from a kitchen table went everywhere. I was a child and my alcoholic father sat with his head hanging over his plate. Things went flying everywhere because of my mother’s rage. Clearly frightening to me. It got my attention. I wonder what those who were caught up in the rage of Jesus in the temple thought? Is this the rabbi? The teacher? The miracle worker? The one who told us to turn the other cheek? I looked at my mother differently that day. I saw a different side of her.

And now I pictured a different Jesus. He begins a shift. Urgency to his ministry emerges. I shift from the lyric of Franz Grueber’s Silent Night: “All is calm, All is bright” to the lyric of Rob Mathes When the Baby Grew Up: “the Baby grew up, the Boy became a man, Oh when the Baby grew up, He led my soul to the Promised Land.”

It is Holy Week in the church year. We hear the words of Jesus: “Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me;” “thy will be done;” “it is finished.” For this He came and for this my heart sings with joy.

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 71:1-12; Isaiah 49:1-6; I Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:37-38, 42-50 or Mark 11:15-19

Wednesday in Holy week – March 27, 2013

Isaiah 50:4 - “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens - wakens my ear to listen to those who are taught.”

This verse from Isaiah is from one of the four sections referred to as “The Servant Songs.” The Israelites are suffering humiliation at the hands of the Babylonians. The Servant is a student, a “disciple” and a prophet. The mission of the servant and his followers was to restore Israel by the goodness and faithfulness of these good and holy disciples. Later, in the time of Jesus, the Jews suffered at the hands of the Romans. Jesus’ disciples watched our Lord suffer horribly and had the courage and zeal to go out to teach. Jesus too was a Suffering Servant.

We are all called to be disciples and to restore God’s kingdom. We teach by our words and by our examples, of our love for one another. We learn if we open our ears. Each morning as we wake we choose what we will do with our time today. Will we take time to pray and listen to God and talk to him? Will we have a day of speaking gently, lovingly? Will we take the time to help the weary or those in pain? Isn’t that what the suffering sometimes need the most, someone to just listen? So many people in our church and community are suffering from illness or loneliness. Many have buried brothers, sisters, spouses or children. How grateful we must be for our Faith to see us through these times. We can be assured these loved ones are at peace with God. We are left to suffer, to miss their voices and their smiles. Jonah praised God from the belly of a big fish. Imagine.

So today let us open our ears to God and to others, let us pray often, let us be strong in our suffering and let us speak healing words. This truly is what gives meaning to our days.

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 our present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed: thorough Jesus Christ your son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, Amen

Psalm 69:7-15, 22-23; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-28; John 13:21-35 or Matthew 26:1-5, 14-25

Maundy Thursday – March 28, 2013

Psalm 78:14-20 - “By day he led them with a cloud and all night long with the light of a fire. He split rocks open in the desert and gave them water from the depths. But they continued to sin against God and in the desert they rebelled against the Most High. They put God to the test by demanding the food they wanted.”

Food played an important roll in the Jewish escape from Egypt. God told the Jews to cook and eat a perfect lamb or goat and mark their houses with the blood. The Lord would pass over the marked houses and save those people. God told them to celebrate this Passover in all future generations. (Exodus 12:1-14)

Although God gave the Israelites food and water on their journey, they were not satisfied and sinned. They wanted meat. They taunted God to give them what they wanted. They spoke against God asking if he could give them bread and flesh in addition to water. God provided everything they asked for: birds and feathered fowls. They ate and were filled but still not satisfied and sinned. The Lord was angry and slew the strongest, chosen men of Israel. (Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25)

When I was in the hospital, sometimes the food was not very good, but I didn't blame God. I know that God always does what is best for us, even if we don't understand why. I blamed the dietician with whom I had a meeting. Nothing changed. I was thankful I didn't receive the punishment the Israelites got for their complaints.

During the Last Supper, held on the Thursday before Christ's capture and death. He washed the feet of his disciples, showing that no one should consider himself above service to others. After dinner Jesus presented the disciples with bread (His Body) and wine (His Blood), saying “Do this in remembrance of me.” (John 13:1-15)

Have you ever knowingly denied Christ? Have you ever ignored him? Being human, we sometimes ignore the faith we received from God at our baptism. I have at times in my life ignored all the blessings I have received. It's finding my faith that has helped me find my way to Jesus, and the food that helps is the food found in the Holy Communion.

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, forever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25; Exodus 12:1-14a; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26(27-32); John 13:1-15 or Luke 22:14-30

Good Friday - March 29, 2013

Isaiah 53:4 & 5 - "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did not esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

I needed to see three religious works of Salvador Dali (1904-1989) - *The Crucifixion* (1954), which hangs in the Metropolitan Museum in NYC, *The Last Supper* (1955), which hangs in the Smithsonian Art Museum in D.C., and *Christ of St. John of the Cross* (1951) which hangs in St. Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow. I finally got to see the third one in an uncrowned room without time limitations for viewing.

A docent gave interesting details. In Christ's left shoulder the Madonna and Christ Child form the shoulder muscle while in the lower right arm the muscle depicts a dove. The two controlling forms used in the painting are a triangle (Christ's arms) and a circle (Christ's head). Interesting, too, is the painting depicts God's plane and man's plane simultaneously, each from his own perspective. There are no nails holding the strong, young figure to the cross. There is no crown of thorns. There is no blood as Dali thought those three things would mar his depiction of Christ.

For me, nothing represents God's suffering in the crucifixion of his only Son more than Dali's depiction of the crucifixion from God's vantage point. It reminds me of the saying "Greater love hath no man than this that he lays down his life for his friends." John 15:13

Several years earlier I had read Spanish literature in translation for a course. Among the authors was St. John of the Cross (1542 - 1591), a Spanish monk and mystic whose drawing of Christ crucified from "The Dark Night of the Soul" was Dali's inspiration. I was surprised when many years later, upon viewing a show in NYC of Dali's work in his youth, to learn he was friends with Garcia Lorca and Miguel de Unamuno, my other two favorite Spanish writers.

I never cease to be amazed by the circles in which my life and my interests seem to take me. Although we have Free Will, there must be a plan for our lives.

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 22:1-21 or 22:1-11 or 40:1-14 or 69:1-23; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Genesis 22:1-18; Wisdom 2:1, 12-25; Hebrews 10:1-25

Holy Saturday - Saturday March 30, 2013

1 Peter 4:8 - "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

Throughout scripture; in myriad songs, stories, poems, and languages, love is a theme. In the New Testament alone, love is referenced at least 180 times.

And yet, though I have read and heard about love literally every day of my life, and though I have loved friends, family, a spouse, and my children, still I am not sure what love is. I do, however, know this: whatever definition I have found for love is to me wholly inadequate. Here are a few:

1. a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person.
2. a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection – as for a parent, child, or friend.
3. a sexual passion or desire.
4. a person toward whom love is felt; a beloved person; a sweetheart.

I began writing this with an idea that I would be describing remarkable feelings as the benchmarks of love.

- The deep sadness we feel when a loved one passes.
- The profound heartbreak that overcomes us when someone we love is suffering.
- The tremendous happiness we feel when a loved one meets a difficult goal.
- The great joy we may experience when we perform even the simplest, private acts of giving – acts done so secretly that *only* God could have seen it.

But – like definitions that cannot capture the essence of love – it seems to me feelings bring us only a bit closer to understanding what love is. Which leaves me, still, searching

Then I look to Jesus' life – and I find my answer. Love is, I think, giving myself over completely – to someone; to something.

Wherever and whenever I have personally given myself over – there is love.

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 130 or 31:1-5; Job 14:1-14; 1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42.