

Lenten Lectionary



2025

St. Timothy's Church

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Introduction

Welcome to the 2025 Lenten Lectionary! I am blown away by many of the heartfelt writings we have this year. Our authors have outdone themselves once again. Please be sure to let them know how their meditations have affected you.

I've found another portion of a Psalm that I would like to share with you. I think about David the shepherd who wrote many Psalms while tending to the sheep, and many others while hiding out from King Saul, who wanted to kill him. I don't know the background, but I think this one must have been written while he was in hiding:

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
He heard my cry for mercy.
Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.
The cords of death entangled me,
The anguish of the grave came upon me;
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow,
Then I called on the name of the lord:
"O Lord, save me!"
The Lord is gracious and righteous;
Our God is full of compassion
The Lord protects the simplehearted;
When I was in great need, he saved me."
Be at rest once more, O my soul,
For the Lord has been good to you.
For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death,
My eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling
That I may walk before the Lord
In the land of the living,
Psalms 116: 1-9

Have there been times in your life when you were in great anguish? When a family member or a friend turned against you? When you felt like you were all alone in the world? I think we have all been there at one time or another. And in that time, we can give in to despair, or we can turn to the Lord. I think David always chose the latter. So many of his Psalms start off in torment, and end glorifying the Lord.

My Lenten challenge to you this year is to be a King. Or I should say, be like King David. When things are going great, thank God. When you've had a bad day, pray to God. And when you are in torment, cry out to Him. He hears you, and will always be with you,

God's peace,
Helen C

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Deuteronomy 7:6-11,
Titus 1:1-15
John 1: 29-34

Ash Wednesday is complete, and today begins the season of Lent, culminating in the Easter celebration on April 20, 2025.

In the readings for today we are reminded of the faithfulness of God, calling us to love God and keep his commandments, remain pure, and reminding us that Jesus is the son of God.

Having grown up in the church, as Lent approaches I am remembering all the years, as a young person, that I gave something up for Lent, mostly choosing something that was easy to do, like chocolate, knowing that on Easter Sunday I could again eat the chocolate eggs in my Easter basket.

As I write this, on Monday, January 6, now I am looking at both what I could give up and what I could add during this precious time of the year for Christians.

I welcome the Lenten time, which reminds me of growing up in the desert of Yakima, Washington. The brown sage brush hills were a bold contrast to the green of the fruit trees and vegetation, due to the plentiful irrigation water flowing into that desert valley from the Columbia River and the Cascade mountains.

It seems as if this desert time is a perfect time to shed a few things, including my tendency towards negativity and catastrophizing, gossip and “unpure” thoughts and talk.

In this desert time, shedding these things provides an opening for new things to emerge, perhaps asking God to fill me with his Spirit, doing God’s will, not mine, asking for the strength to be who God wants me to be, a faithful servant, loving unconditionally, being accepting, and being authentic.

I could also add a daily gratitude practice, remembering that my very life is due to God’s grace.

Reminding me that since 1999, in the fall, when I was so warmly greeted by Helen Appleby, at St. Timothy’s, this congregation has been my spiritual home, providing me with a place to grow. That very first day, Helen asked me what I loved. I let her know that Outreach was my heart, and, immediately I was part of Deacon Derek’s group of people committed to justice and peace. I went to the Martin Luther King celebration in Washington, DC, surrounded by faithful people committed to a world of justice and peace. The most poignant part of that trip was meeting many transgender youth who had not been included in the church.

Martin Luther King reminds us that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” God is calling each of us to be part of building that world. Amen.

Peg M

Friday, March 7, 2025

Deuteronomy 7:12-16
Titus 2:1-15
John 1:35-42

Most years, when I write my Lectionary meditation, I can find a link among the three readings. This year, the links between the Old Testament and the Epistle are easy – directions on how the readers/listeners/recipients of the words are to behave. The Gospel seems to me to be talking about something completely different.

Historically, Deuteronomy, the fifth of the Bible, consists of three sermons by Moses to the Israelites shortly before they are to cross into the Promised Land after leaving Egypt and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. The Israelites are instructed to devour/make mincemeat of the people that God hands over to them, to not intermarry with them and to NOT worship their gods. In return, the Israelites are promised prosperity and an increase in their numbers and the numbers of their animals due to the birth and survival of their children and less sickness and disease. I wonder what Moses thought of their time in Egypt where they fled to escape famine. Perhaps he was not a fan of what they had done there to survive and multiply.

In the second Epistle to Titus, Paul instructs his disciple, messenger and the man he had put in charge of the church in Crete in how he is to instruct the old men, old women (and through them young women), young men and slaves in how they are to behave and to preach to them “solid doctrine” so that he and Paul are not criticized for the behavior of their followers. Only the slaves are instructed to not talk back to their masters and not to steal. Titus is further instructed to be a good example of Paul’s teaching.

After all these words about what people should not do, the Gospel is a relief. John tells the story of how the first disciples of Jesus came to be with him. The Gospel describes John the Baptist talking to Andrew and another of his disciples, telling them that Jesus was “The Lamb of God,” as he walked by. The two then left John and followed Jesus and stayed with him that day. Andrew then goes to tell his brother, Peter, about the encounter and brings him to Jesus. Jesus is said to have told Peter during their first meeting that he was Simon, son of John, and that his name was to become Cephas or Peter (which is translated as “rock”).

How much more inviting is something that a friend or relative has found that they are excited about and can’t wait to tell you about it and invite you to join them in experiencing the joy and enjoyment that they have discovered! Our challenge in 2025 is to find ways to tell others about the wonderful things we have found at St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church and invite them to join us in the journey with its discoveries, companionship, joys, satisfactions, and struggles. I know that I wouldn’t still be an Episcopalian if this church hadn’t grown and liberalized in the past 75+ years that I have been attending Episcopal churches. I’m not the same girl who listened to Bible stories about how girls and women were supposed to behave. I am amazed and proud of the growth of the church and women. I have no nostalgia for the 1950’s. Today there are over 150 women in Congress. In the 1950’s, there were less than 20. I have lived to see a female vice president and hope to live to see a female President.

Prayers,
Sally S P

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Deuteronomy 7:17-26

Titus 3:1-15

John 1:43-51

We live in a time of uncertainty, where it feels like our very being is coming into question. I am pretty sure Paul had many of those moments throughout his life. Paul wrote the book of Titus to share ideas on how to be holy and pleasing to God. Much of what he says to do I strive to follow. Verses 1 and 2 ask us to, "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show courtesy to everyone." Verses 9 through 11 are more challenging to follow. "But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, since you know that such a person and sinful, being self-condemned."

So how do we handle ourselves when we very much disagree with decisions and policies that are being placed into action? Paul also tells us in verse 14: "And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs so that they may not be unproductive." This last statement gives direction to how we can do the necessary work God has given us to do. I think God needs us to define what good works are and what stupid controversies are. These definitions help set boundaries on what we should be doing or not doing. I think we need to help our marginalized brothers and sisters who know no place, no livelihood, and no identity. The specifics vary with the situation. But we also need to make sure we stay in the confines of the law, even if we don't like it. We can and need to have discussions about these things. We should not get ourselves so wrapped up that we descend to name calling and the very behavior we detest. This is a tall order. But God never makes it easy, does He?

Blessings,

Cathy H

Monday, March 10, 2025

Deuteronomy 8:11-20 (NRSV)

Hebrews 2:11-18 (NRSV)

JOHN 2:1-12 (NRSV)

The wedding at Cana is a beautiful miracle where Jesus quietly intervenes and prevents a host family from great embarrassment. As the Gospel describes, when the wine ran out, Mary asked the servants to do whatever Jesus told them. After they filled the jars with water, Jesus said to draw some out, and the chief steward found that the water had been turned into wine.

There are many interpretations of this Gospel. One that I would like to focus on is the way Jesus helped the host to feel pride instead of embarrassment at the celebration. The setting for my interpretation is in modern day life, right in our neighborhood.

Here are three scenes that trouble me in our community:

A mother holding a child, asking for help outside of the grocery store where I have just shopped

A musician playing with enthusiasm by a sign asking for help with his rent

A veteran on the freeway exit holding a cardboard sign

In the Gospel reading, Mary asked the servants to “do whatever He (Jesus) tells you.” Just as she handed this problem over to Jesus, I too tried to hand over my concern and to receive some guidance when facing those in need.

I believe that Jesus answered me when it came to mind that I might try quietly acknowledging how those struggling might be feeling. Would a message of understanding be helpful?

I would not be transforming elements as Jesus did, but I would try using words to make a difference and to ease embarrassment.

Instead of just handing over a small bill and lowering my eyes, I decided to try looking directly at the person in need and saying: “I AM SORRY FOR YOUR HARD TIME RIGHT NOW.” I hoped that compassion would make a connection between us.

I learned that a small donation, a gift card, or even a lollipop (with parent permission) became much more meaningful when I spoke with respect while sharing it.

I have discovered that my small gesture multiplies in value when it is given with a few words of kindness. And embarrassment is lessened for everyone, including myself.

Gayle L

(In memory of John G, who was my Lectionary friend)

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Deuteronomy 9:4-12

Hebrews 3:1-11

John 2:1 13-22 (NRSV)

As I have been preparing to write this for several weeks now, I recently spoke to a good friend who described her anxiety about writing something like this. She expressed exactly how I was feeling. Once again, I began to read my three scripture assignments, and pondered over each one. Finally, as I so often do, I simply said, "God, help me with this."

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem to stop the marketplace in the temple by telling them all to remove all the items, including livestock that were being sold. The Jews reacted by saying the construction of the temple had taken forty-six years. Jesus replied, "Destroy the temple and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus was speaking of the 'temple, as "of his body."

"For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." The scripture is about the faithful servant Moses, as well as Christ, and the importance of the "builder" of the house.

In my very simple interpretation of these passages, I am able to think of our country right now as "God's house." I often get anxious, worried and scared for the lives of many people who are enduring quick changes, and for our government which is also 'quick changing.' I seek peace, comfort and hope, and these scriptures remind me that God is the 'builder' of our country (as well as our lives), and we can trust with faith that He has the power that we may feel is missing.

I thank my friend who shared her anxiety about writing opinion papers like this, for it gave me the courage to keep trying, even though at first I did not see a clear connection.

God has created everything, and our faith in Him through Jesus Christ will help us endure the challenges that some of us fear for our country and for all people today.

Margaret B

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Deuteronomy 9:13-21

Hebrews 3:12-19

John 2:23-3:15

Deuteronomy: This first reading: “the Lord said to me: I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people.” Coming down from the mountain to find the image and then the anger; anger because of a graven image of a golden calf. A worship symbol, a sinful idol. Both tablets and golden calf idol destroyed in rage. This Reading calls forth a representative allegory of divergent views of good versus evil; and opposing beliefs of what is revered and honored as truth. The Reading speaks to the destructiveness of anger when confronted with two situations of opposite and very diverse beliefs.

Hebrews presents an admonition: “Take care.”...that none of you may have an evil and unfaithful heart, that none may grow hardened by the deceit of sin.

John: “We speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen”.”If I tell you of earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about Heavenly things?”

These readings connect through descriptions of what and who determines how we believe and what determines our truth. The sifting out of truth versus falsehood, a process of struggle and fraught with conflict within ourselves and others, with very diverse beliefs. It makes us wonder: is conflict a necessary part of our human condition? As we look back on our individual walk on life’s journey, how much have we cast off as not helpful, true, or in the best interest of self-and/or others? How many struggles have led us to where we now stand and what values and truths help you to best live the two great commandments?

Walk in faith and peace.

God’s Blessings be on you, always,
Sheila W

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5

Hebrews 4:1-10

John 3:16-21

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life...Those that believe in Him are not condemned: but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God”.

John 3:16 is probably one of the more quoted verses in the New Testament. In it, John is telling us about how much God loves us. He does this by sending His own son to show us a better way to live and thereby avoiding judgement. By accepting this fact, a person will not perish and thereby have eternal life. What does this mean?

I am visualizing that there is physical death which we can experience when a loved one or friend passes away, or that we see on the news or read about every day. What we cannot see or hear about is the spiritual life that is the essence of who we are, and that this spiritual life will not perish (die). I am thinking that this is part of our faith journey. What we don't see is spiritual death and its relationship to God's love for us and the link to Jesus. It is a “faith” relationship.

Further, John states that all that is required is to believe in Jesus being God's son. In these verses, John does not tell us what that looks like or would be like, but he does note that a believer would not be condemned, and those that chose not to believe would be condemned to judgement. John does not tell us what “judgement” is in this verse. However, John uses “light” as a distinguishing point. A believer is not afraid of the light (exposure) because they have nothing to hide, and one that stays out of the light stays in the dark because they are afraid of their deeds being exposed.

The challenge for me is the desire or necessity of staying in the “light”. I can translate that to Jesus's statement of the greatest of the laws: “Love God first, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself”. That is a 24 X 7 requirement, not just only when I think about it or when irritated about something or someone; it's all the time. It's at that point that I give thanks for “God's Grace” to keep going, to try again. It's not by any good works or deeds I might have done; it's just pure Grace.

Joe C

Friday, March 14, 2025

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Hebrews 4:11-16

John 3:22-36

The Bridegroom's Friend

Last fall my daughter got married. It was a joyful occasion full of family, old and new friends, and love. We all came around my daughter and her husband and celebrated their new family and their new life together. Fortunately for us, no one made the event about anyone but the happy couple, and everyone played their part in the celebration. My daughter's bridesmaids were especially great, anticipating her needs and making sure she was having a great time.

In the Gospel passage, John the Baptist understands his role. Some of his followers are complaining that Jesus is pulling followers away from John, and they do not like the competition. John explains that this is completely appropriate, and in fact, it was the plan all along. He calls himself the Best Man to Jesus' Bridegroom, so he is genuinely happy that the marriage is off to a good start. He knows that it is time for him to decrease so that Jesus can increase.

John goes on to explain why this is good news for everyone. Rather than worry about losing followers, John understands the big picture that Jesus' is coming directly from God, which is a gift for all of us.

When a wedding is not about the bride and groom, it is usually not a good thing. I want to remember this Lent that my faith is not about me, my family, or even this church. Our job is to be good Bridesmaids and Groomsman, and make sure that the focus is on the one true Groom. This is not a vanity project designed to make us look good. We need to focus attention on Jesus and the Good News. We must, in fact, decrease so that He can increase in us.

Karen P

(wedding photos available on request)

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

Hebrews 5:1-10

John 4:1-26

Today's Gospel tells the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. The story seems to be another great example of how Jesus implores us to push away prejudices and cultural constraints that stand in our way of fully living in peace and joy in God's universal love.

To better understand the context of the story, I, of course, Googled what was going on at the time. A few things popped out. First, per Google, the relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was "marked by animosity and suspicion, fueled by religious and political differences. By the time of Jesus, the hatred was so strong that Jews would cross the Jordan River rather than travel through Samaria". Second, at that time, "it was considered socially unacceptable for men to talk to women in public", especially if the man was a Rabbi. And third, generally "pious" people looked down upon those who were considered disreputable (i.e., sinners) and did not associate with them.

In this short story, within the span of a brief conversation, Jesus breaks down all these barriers (race, religion, politics, gender, social status, cultural norms, etc.).

It also struck me on how intentional Jesus was in making this point. In Verse 4, John writes that Jesus was on his way to Galilee "but he had to go through Samaria". I think John may have been very purposeful about the word "but" and "had" here. "But" implying that this wasn't the normal or preferred path considering the norms of the time (John could have used "and" if it was). And, "had" as if Jesus felt compelled to do it. That is, it was not a choice. He needed to go that specific route and engage with that specific person to help us understand.

Today, I don't know any Samaritans. Nor do I live in a country where it is not socially acceptable for men to talk to women publicly (although there are places in the world today where I believe this is true). Even so, I wonder if I truly recognize my own prejudices and cultural constraints that Jesus is asking me to push away? How much "us" and "them" do I consciously or subconsciously hold in my day-to-day engagement (or non-engagement) with others that is preventing me from building true relationships?

I believe God's love transcends all race, gender, social status, political views, and cultural norms. I pray that God gives me the insight to understand own my prejudices and constraints, and the strength to break through them and live as He is teaching me.

John G N

Monday, March 17, 2025

Jeremiah 1:11-19

Romans 1:1-15

John 4:27-42

They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.

Jeremiah 1:19

. . .so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. Romans 1:12

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

John 4:42

In these readings, the Lord tells Jeremiah that he is with him. Paul tells the Romans to be encouraged by each other's faith. And in John, the people tell the woman they have heard for themselves that Christ is the Savior of the world. In all three cases, the believer is not alone. That's what community is all about!

When I come to Saint Timothy's to worship, study, volunteer or party, I do so because I enjoy being around others. I look forward to learning more about the people who surround me. I try to rise to the challenge to listen with an open heart to ideas that may be different than mine. Being part of a community is essential to me; and being part of a community that shares my basic beliefs is amazing. I am thankful every day for the community that is Saint Timothy's. There are so many opportunities to care, share and participate because we all share in the promise that we are not alone.

Carleen C

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

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

Old Testament: In this reading, we learn of Israel's early covenant relationship with God. The Israelites followed God from Egypt into the wilderness with trust, and, in the beginning, followed an idyllic pursuit. Unfortunately, that purity of faith did not endure, and the people proceeded to forsake God. God asks the Israelites what fault did they find in Him? The reply was that God asked them to abandon their "worthless things", which were wrongly worshiped by the Israelites. This stance reflected their ingratitude for God's protection and care. God tells them that their future descendants will suffer their folly. The analogy used is that of a "cracked cistern" or reliance on their own "wrong" choices. Ultimately, failure would not be avoided.

To me, this reflects a story which tells about a man making the wrong faith choices, based upon a shallow desire, and ignoring the most beneficial choice because of a rationalization of benefit of the material versus the spiritual. The lack of faith reflects a faulty foundation not grounded in trusting God or faith, but on materialism and/or power.

Epistle: In Paul's letter to the Romans, this reading declares Paul's commitment to the gospel as a means of salvation. As Paul states, "I am not ashamed" which underscores Paul's dedication despite the possibility of opposition or criticism. The "righteousness of God" refers to God's saving action and the status imparted to all believers through faith. The essence of living a life based in faith is pleasing to God. On the other side, the concept of God's wrath represents a righteous response to humanity's willful rejection of God, or in other words, human failure due to the rejection of God. This idolatry leads to further alienation from God and deepens the cycle of sin.

In similar ways, this reading is not unlike the previous reading from Jeremiah, which focused on the consequences of idolatry worship and the rejection of God. The ills of society have long placed a societal priority on worship of money and power while abandoning spiritual worship. Having witnessed the hunger for crypto currency in today's environment, I feel distressed to anticipate the eventual outcome which could lead to a downward spiral of moral and intellectual corruption as well as financial destitution.

Gospel: This Gospel reading reflects the story of Jesus' two-day journey from Judea to Cana (the site of Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine) in Galilee. Jesus encountered a royal official who had an extremely ill son who was dying. The official begged Jesus to come and heal his son. Jesus said to him "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." Jesus also said, "Go; your son will live." The slaves who worked for the official met him on his way home and informed him that his son was alive. Realizing that was the work of Jesus, the official did believe, along with his entire household, the power of faith and Jesus' divine authority.

This story of a second miracle performed by Jesus demonstrates what the power of faith in Him will reveal. When Jesus speaks His word of healing directed to the boy, and tells the father it has been done, the father's faith is tested. The father of the boy must trust in Jesus's authority without proof that Jesus has helped his son recover. When the father leaves Jesus' presence and proceeds to return home, and learning his son has been healed, he reflects a shift toward genuine faith. This miracle emphasizes the power of Jesus' Word and the importance of faith in His authority. These thoughts are a good reminder to me to not lose sight of the power of Christ's love and have faith in God every day.

Mike M

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Jeremiah 3: 6-28

Romans 1: 28-11

John 5: 1-18

Martin Luther King once said: "Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. He who loves is a participant in the being of God." After all, as John has said: "God is love." 1 John 4:16.

The world has been an unsettling place these last months. When I read today's Epistle excerpt, I felt inclined to read "God" as "Love". It gave me some food for thought. Perhaps, it will do the same for you. I've modified this passage to share with you today:

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge Love, Love gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, Love-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know Love's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die--yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. Therefore, you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. You say, "We know that Love's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of Love? Or do you despise the riches of Love's kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that Love's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when Love's righteous judgment will be revealed. For Love will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, Love will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first, and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For Love shows no partiality."--Romans 1:28-2:11

Emily G

Thursday, March 20th, 2025

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28

Romans 2:12-24

John 5:19-29

These were tough passages for me. They certainly reminded me of our continual struggle throughout history. I was honestly a bit downcast after reading them, but I also found some solace as I read other adjacent passages and zoomed out to think about our whole human story some more.

The verses from Jeremiah describe the horrors of yet another impending invasion of Jerusalem. This is just one of the many times the Bible describes a dire consequence after the Israelites have again left God and thus destroyed the peace He faithfully promises them. But, if I read before and after these passages, I think I can see that the inevitable destruction is always accompanied with the continual promise of His grace and renewal when they choose to return to Him.

The reading from Romans is an excerpt of Paul's epistle, which in-part contrasts the law of Moses with the new promise through Christ. He assures the church that even Gentiles who do not possess the law but still instinctively know what it requires are a "law unto themselves". I think this means that even though they were formally not educated in the laws of Moses, they still know how act in God's will. It is "written on their hearts". Paul says that it is "not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified".

The passage from John describes Jesus' speaking to the Jews after He has healed a man on the sabbath. The crowd has condemned Him for this and for proclaiming that He is the Son of God. In our reading, Jesus describes His authority to those who are perhaps focused on their own rigid understanding and past learning. He describes the new covenant: that we need only hear His word and believe.

There are a couple of themes I have tried to take away from these readings:

I think we humans continually (since the first sin in the Garden) seem to think we know better than God. Is this propensity what repeatedly threatens the peace He faithfully promises to provide here on Earth? I personally find I am constantly struggling with that familiar failing and then I have to turn back from it... again...

But, here's the other side of that coin that I think I see as well:

God never gives up on us. In each of the passages, all across time, He patiently teaches us a way to live in obedience and Love, whether written in stone or in our hearts. No matter how many times we have wandered away from Him, He provides a way back. So, zooming out, I take solace in the gift of that great promise that is so beautifully described elsewhere in the Gospel of John:

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God". (John 1:12-13)

Blessings,

Rob K

Friday, March 21, 2025

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

The gospel for today from John 5 is speaking in Jesus's own voice as he contemplates how the leaders and people of that time see him. He is calling out for them to believe and follow him.

He speaks of those who have come before him, like John the Baptist, and how the people accepted this truth from John that the savior was coming but now struggle with reconciling that truth with Jesus now appearing to them.

He speaks of Moses and how they all listened to Moses as he also told them who was to come in the future, but Jesus says, "how will you believe what I say, if you do not believe what he wrote."

The scriptures and stories had all spoken of the coming of a savior, but when the son of God did arrive, and he was not a King with all the pomp and circumstance, the church leaders and many of the people of the time struggled to accept Jesus.

This has a similar theme to our journey in faith. We are asked to believe in something that sometimes does not match our expectations. Jesus offers to us forgiveness and a guideline in how to treat our fellow passengers on our journey on Earth. I take from this scripture a renewed sense of accepting Jesus for what he represents to all the children of God.

Jim P

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Jeremiah 5: 20-31

Romans 3: 19-31

John 7: 7-13

This takes us to a time when Jesus was in Galilee with the Twelve and other followers. Jesus was being cautious because the Jews were looking for him in order to kill him. The followers were encouraging Jesus to go to Judea and show the people his power, the good work that he could do, saying that if anyone wants to be known, and not hide...."show yourself, and don't act in secret." Scripture says, "Not even his brothers believed in him."

How human that is! I can relate to and understand how those WITH the group, but not IN the group, would have difficulty believing. I ponder about ancient days at the time of Christ. I wonder if I were there with the followers of Jesus, would I understand what was happening? I would like to think that I would, says she (Patti) and look carefully in the mirror....Okay....Probably not!

I digress! There was a Festival of Booths going on near them. They wanted Jesus to join them there. Jesus said no, that "his time had not yet come, but your time is always here...that the world cannot hate you as it hates me because I testify against it and its works of evil." I wonder if those who heard that will remember it after the Resurrection....it occurs to me that this could have been a message to them. They should do likewise.

After everyone left for the festival, he followed in secret. He found out, as he knew, that indeed his life was in jeopardy. Some were saying that Jesus was deceiving the crowd, the Jews were looking for him, to find and kill him...."no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews." This is where we are left for this day's assignment...however I HAD to read the next verse, and "Jesus is preaching at the Temple!"

I could not leave without sharing what I learned about the Festival of Booths, aka the Feast of the Tabernacles and Sukut. This celebration continues to present times... and it is a reenactment of the time when the Jews were in the wilderness. It symbolizes that God provides and protects with an autumn Festival of the Harvest...think FOTH. A time of joy and gratitude, where huts (booths) are build simply with three sides and the front open to open neighbors and friends, sharing food, the bounty of the Harvest. The booths are decorated with paper chains, samples of the harvest on the tables, and even some with strings of lights. They put palm leaves on top so that they can see the stars at night. The Festival is one week long, and at the end there is a Blessing.

I wish you all a Blessed Lent,

Patty F

Monday, March 24, 2025

Jeremiah 7: 1-15

Romans 4: 1-12

John 7: 14-36

JEREMIAH:

The Lord came to Jeremiah with an admonition that all who enter the Lord's house to worship must reform their actions: the ways and deeds and dealings with neighbors. "Do not place trust in deceptive words". No longer oppress aliens, orphans and widows. No longer shed innocent blood or follow false gods. Putting trust in deceptive words adds to your own harm.

The wickedness and commission of evil deeds will precede a casting out of the perpetrators and their kindred from the sight of the Lord.

"Has this house, which bears my name become in your eyes a den of thieves?"

ROMANS:

...." the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works":

7. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered".

8. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not record.

This reading presents issues/questions about how *blessed* and *righteousness* designations are accredited to those circumcised versus those who were not. (The Jewish Rite of Temple ceremonial circumcision was/is a faith-based practice versus modern times as a health practice). This scripture emphasizes that beliefs and faith are determinants of blessedness and righteousness; rather than issues of the body.

JOHN

This reading is about Jesus preparing to leave his faithful followers as he prepared for his final time on earth. Sending his disciples on ahead to the Jewish feast of Tabernacles in Judea (due to threats against his life), he remained in Galilee. At the midpoint of the festival, Jesus came and began teaching. The Jews were amazed at his knowledge of scripture and questioned him. "My teaching is not my own, but is from the one who sent me". The Patriarchs took issue with Jesus performing a healing in the Temple on the Sabbath; while justifying doing circumcisions according to the law of Moses. He admonished them: "stop judging by appearances, but judge justly". The Chief priests and pharisees sent guards to arrest Jesus. "I will be with you only a little while longer.....You will look for me and not find me...."

These readings hammer home that mortal life has an expiration date. How can we best live and prepare with Christ's teaching as our roadmap? Travel in joy and peace!

Sheila W

Tuesday, March 25. 2025

Jeremiah 7:21-34

Romans 4:13-25

John 7:37-52

The theme from the Old Testament tells of the people's disregarding the words of the prophets and turning away from God's counsel. Their actions went as far as burning their sons and daughters alive in sacrificial rites. This was not commanded by God nor even thought of by him. God says: "they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it". As a result, the people will be known by these actions and God will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.

Paul's message contrasts relying on the law to show our status as righteous people versus exhibiting faith. Even people like Abraham who did not get to see God's full promises fulfilled is considered righteous because he showed faith despite the external circumstances he saw. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Jesus' act of faith is offered so that we can be justified in the eyes of God. Having faith means resting in grace, in the presence of the God in whom we believe, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

This year has been extremely difficult for me in this area. I have not been able to find a full time job for extra needed income. I have a car that the dealer doesn't know how to fix, and I do not have the money to buy a used car. I have a wound on my knuckle that has not healed after 2 months. And I have a family living situation that would not be good for my ongoing emotional health. Amidst all this I find it very difficult to trust in God's provision. But I am learning to take it one day at a time, not rely on my own logic, and surrender to God and ask for his peace in the middle of this chaos.

In John's gospel, the people are celebrating the Feast of Booths, a time of joyous celebration as the Israelites commemorated God's continued provision for them in the current harvest and remembered His provision and protection during the 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus' words harken back to Old Testament references to "living water", where that symbol represented God himself. In the gospel Christ is saying that he is offering himself as God to live in us as a gift through his Spirit. So, he is not only inviting us to celebrate his provision for our lives in the past and present, but also to experience his abiding presence in us today.

I am grateful for this gift and the ability to be open and real with God about my circumstances. And I hear him saying, "I love you just as you are, and I will provide for you now and in the future.

Eric S

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Jeremiah 8:18-9:6

Romans 5:1-11

John 8:12-20

There is a lot in these passages, a lot that could be discussed. What I am going to focus on is the importance of our knowledge of God, our awareness and relationship with God.

In Jeremiah, the passage for today is in the middle of a section where the Lord is lamenting that his people are not following his law, not listening to him, have turned their backs to him, that his people do not know him anymore. Further on, in Jeremiah 9:24 it states that one who boasts should only boast about knowing God. Nothing else is really important except our knowledge of God. The passage goes on to state that God exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus states, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." In Paul's letter to the Romans, he discusses that we are reconciled to God through Christ. Reconciliation opens the door to a deeper understanding of God. Through this we receive God's grace, God's peace and have God's love poured into our hearts.

For me, knowledge and awareness of God is an ongoing process. There are days I can see and feel God everywhere. There are days I know intellectually that God is here although I don't feel God's presence. When this happens, if I take the time to stop and look, I can find God. As Pastor Todd said, "God is terrible at playing hide and seek." As my awareness of God increases, I find my knowledge of God also increases.

A Story:

One Sunday, when I was finally old enough to pay attention to the readings during service (probably late high school or college), this passage from Romans was read and I almost burst into laughter. All my life, when we complained, our mother would tell us "Suffering builds character". She had been quoting scripture to us! It wasn't just an effort to get us to stop complaining (suffering builds endurance and endurance builds character, therefore suffering builds character), it was directly from the Bible! My brother once replied to our mother, "I am enough of a character".

Meg L

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Jeremiah 10:11-24

John 8:21-32

Romans 5:12-21

One of the themes in Paul's letter to the Romans is justification (being declared righteous) by faith. When we trust that the free gift of Jesus' death and resurrection is for us, we are made right with God.

In this passage, he starts with the sins of Adam leading to death. Adam chose to seek his own will rather than the will of God, and that led to death and separation from God. From that moment all people would be destined to sin and die. Then came Moses, who gave the Israelites the law, but that only defined what constituted a sin. The law didn't have the power to 'fix' sin. It just led to more sin because now humans had clear rules from God that they broke when they followed their own will yet again.

Paul then goes on to say that the free gift isn't like the sin. There isn't any comparison! One man's sin leads to death and separation from God, and that's it. You die and it's game over. God's free gift in the grace of Jesus brings so much more, to so many more. It gives us the beauty of everlasting life with God! And the best part is that God's grace is always bigger than our sin.

God's free gift is exactly that, free. Paul mentions free gift 5 times in this passage to make sure we understand it is *free*. We are made right with God not by our deeds, nor by following the law, but by faith in our redemption through Christ.

I thought long and hard about what this passage was saying to me. It brought me back to a time in my childhood when I was about 10 years old. I felt very grown up and wanted to go to a church that I could walk to with my best friend. This church was more about hell and brimstone than faith and love. I learned early to worry that my faith might not be strong enough and I was encouraged to go up to the altar so that I could be 'saved'...like every Sunday. This was the kind of church that would show the movie, 'A Thief in the Night' to scare us all to have enough faith. I spent a long time trying to figure out a way that I could 'earn' my way into heaven. I tried so hard to be good, but alas my human self was deeply flawed. I talked to my parents about my fears and my dad, being a lay minister in the Episcopal church, was horrified and quickly pulled me back into going to church with the family.

As I grew older, I listened to sermons and learned more about this free gift. I realized if we had to do something to earn it, it couldn't be called a 'free' gift. We are rescued from sin and made part of God's family because God loves us. All we need to do is receive this abundant and generous free gift of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Blessings during this Lenten Season,
Debbie K

Friday, March 28, 2025

Jeremiah 11:1-8, 11:14-20 Jeremiah reminds Israel of the consequences of ignoring the Covenant.

Romans 6:1-11 In Baptism we are dead to sin and alive in Jesus.

John 8:33-47 “...everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”

What is Sin?

I usually write on only one of the three choices. No one of these passages really seemed to hit me clearly, but in thinking about all three together, I began to ponder the question of, “what is sin?” This is the result.

In all these passages the concept of “sin” is both individually and corporately a theme. But what is sin, sinful behavior, corporate sin, etc.? Sin(s) are those actions and behaviors that result from, or are choices, that cut us off from God. Jeremiah reminds Israel that they have a covenant with many rules to obey with the intent to connect people to God. They failed to live up to the covenant not just in practice, but in principle, as God had hoped. They broke the covenant by rampant idolatry and injustice personally and corporately to groups of people. They were cut off from God. They suffered the consequences; being conquered by Babylon, and exiled. After a long time, God began again with a new covenant expressed by Jesus.

For Christians Baptism is the physical and outwardly visible metaphor for choosing to die to sin and rise again in Christ. That is our Covenant. The choice of the Baptismal covenant is key to building a connection to God in our faith tradition. It is important to note that this oft overlooked part of the Baptismal covenant is an acknowledgement of your humanness: “*Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?*” Perfection is not expected, quite the opposite, imperfection is anticipated in our covenant! The challenge is to be aware of your failures and return to God. Don’t beat yourself up for being failures, but return to God! This is a much more proactive and difficult task, than chastising yourself. Several years ago, Todd+ posted in a sermon this definition of sin, by theologian Jim Keenan: “*Sin is not where people are weak and struggling but when they’re strong and not trying. For Jesus, sin is a failure to bother to love.*” Love is work! Love is turning away from sin and turning toward God.

If sin is broadly defined as a “a state of choosing to act so as to be separated from God,” then if you are in sin, you are unaware of God; you are isolated. Similarly, countries can be separated from God. Jeremiah pointed to the failure of Israel’s leaders to not bother to care about the widows, orphans, and immigrants and permitted rampant exploitation and injustices as forbidden in the Torah - corporate sin. The leaders became separated from God and eventually so did the whole country.

As an example, consider this: as a child my greatest fear was being separated from my parents, and as a parent my greatest fear was being separated from my child. Recall that type of fear both as a parent and as a child. The goal of most kidnapers (and evil vices, the devil etc.) is to separate someone from those they love and replace that love with something else more enticing, creating a separation. It is not uncommon that after a while the ‘kidnapped’ individual becomes quite attached to the evil vice. Evil is a powerful force. Sin is the result of the ‘kidnapper’ fostering poor choices on an individual. Those things, idols, sex, drugs, money, power etc. draw people away from God because they separate people from being connected to God. The good news is this: **nothing** can completely separate you from God. God, like a parent, will seek the child. The child will rejoice in being found. That is why the Baptismal Covenant has this: “*whenever you fall into sin, will you repent and return to the Lord?*” God is always looking for you, even when you are captive to sin.

I do not know how many times the expression “fear not...” appears in the Bible but this is also a key thought to “keep in mind”, as God says it frequently. The choice to pause and turn toward God is not an easy one. That is when God puts the “fear not” card in your hand. The choice to play it is yours. Perhaps you do not need the “fear not” card your life, but maybe you can help someone else play their “Fear not” card and make the choice to turn toward God.

Jim C (ref: Bible Project YouTube videos Jeremiah, Romans, and John)

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Jeremiah 13: 1-11

Romans 6: 12-23

John 8:47-59

We enter this story in the middle of what has been happening between Jesus and the Pharisees. This story really begins with Jesus arriving at the Mount of Olives and asking those who are without sin to cast the first stone at a woman accused of adultery. When they recognize their own sin and no one is left, he tells her to go and sin no more.

When he speaks again it is in the temple, and he calls himself “the light of the world”. The Pharisees then challenge him for being his own witness as to his identity. He responds that his testimony is valid “for I know where I came from and where I am going”.

Jesus does not pass judgment. He is not of this world and judgment is not his purpose. His world view is God’s world view. He does not condemn anyone. If you die while in your sinful mindset, it is because you refuse to let go of your sin and live a better life. This reminds us of the story about the monkey trapped with its hand in a bottle. It is trapped simply because it will not let go of the rock in its own hand. It is God’s truth which sets us free by breaking our grasp on the rock of our own sin. There is no punishment imposed by God. The suffering one endures results from one’s own unwillingness to let go of their own sin. One must both stop sinning, and stop being defined by one’s sins, either through attachment to it or guilt about it.

Jesus then speaks to those following him (who are not really his “followers” for they are connected by proximity not ideology) and tells them “the truth will set you free”. This confuses them because they believe that as the descendants of Abraham, they are already free. He explains to them that “everyone who sins is a slave to sin”. Jesus knows that these people do not understand that merely being descendants of Abraham has not set them free. He knows this because they wish to kill him rather than accept his teachings. When he calls them the children of the devil because they are drawn to murder and lies, he is not judging them. He is merely identifying their relationship to sin. Their inability to hear his proclamation of God’s message proves that they are most certainly not the children of God.

Today’s reading begins with the Jews, whom Jesus has just called children of the devil, claiming that it is Jesus who is possessed by a demon. They do not understand his claim that whoever obeys the word of God will not taste death. Jesus knows that sin is death to the soul. Jesus is telling us who he is. But the message is really about who we need to be and how letting go of the sin that traps us will set us free.

Lisa G P

Monday, March 31, 2025

Jeremiah 16: 10-21

Romans 7: 1-12

John 6: 1-15

The miracle of the loaves and fishes teaches us timeless lessons that are still relevant to our lives today.

The miracle serves as a reminder for Christians to have faith in God's provision, especially in a culture that is filled with fear and shortage. It motivates us to depend on heavenly abundance instead of our own finite resources, as faith may transform the impossible into the achievable.

For example, Jesus motivates individuals today to perform acts of charity and service to others by feeding the needy. The call to love and serve others continues to exist, whether it be through community kitchens, food drives, or other charitable gestures.

Jesus not only supplies us with nourishment for our physical bodies, but he also feeds us with sustenance for our spirits. The miracle emphasizes the significance of addressing both bodily and spiritual needs, so confirming the value of a comprehensive approach to ministry and outreach.

The large number of leftovers that were gathered after the miracle is an indication of cleanliness. It motivates Christians to share their riches with others and to manage them well so that nothing is wasted.

The disciples' involvement in the distribution of food emphasizes the need of working together and being united. Today, this may involve collaborating with people in companies or communities to accomplish common objectives and fulfill the needs of the group.

The narrative of the loaves and fishes is specifically contained in John 6. However, the limits of the major introductory Gospel must be carried over to John 1–5 in order to provide context for this miracle and what it could mean for people today. The first five chapters of the Gospel of John lay the foundation for understanding the divine nature of Jesus, the miracles He performed, and His teachings.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes, which is found in these chapters, is a powerful testament to faith, compassion, and divine provision. In a society that continues to experience both physical and spiritual hunger, its teachings remain relevant and impactful. They provide guidance and encouragement for putting into practice the concepts of faith, service, and stewardship.

Don P

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Jeremiah 17:19-27(NRSV)

Romans 7: 13-25 (NRSV)

John 6: 16-27

My Bible, my prayer book (and cook books!) are filled with bits of paper from the Sunday readings, sermon notes, greeting cards, prayers, poems that seem joyful, songs I love...One of the quotes from Pastor Todd's sermon notes in 2022:

“Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither”.

C.S. Lewis

Jerimiah, Jesus and Paul all seem to me to be telling us just what C.S. Lewis described. Jerimiah wants us to keep the Sabbath holy and sacred. That's vertical thinking. Jesus wants us to look for the food that endures (vertical) and not the earthly food (horizontal) and even Paul knows in his (and our) sinful nature we need to look for the spiritual, to Jesus, to God's law. I'd say that's aiming vertically and at the same time accepting our human nature that we need to work on every moment of every day. Aim high. My prayer for all of us...family, friends, the stranger: Always aim high. Find a way to set our sights on the goodness -- the grace that has already been given to us from above.

Kathy W

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Jeremiah 18: 1-11

Romans 8: 1-11

John 6: 27-40

I think each person who attends church services has basically the same reason for being there; to find support in the complicated business of being a human being.

Christians are told, in different ways, how they fit into God's plan for us. Some denominations are heavy on the "guilt" aspect, and others are more based in spiritualism. I think what we all have in common is our desire to be the best person that we can be, following the words of the Bible, and those of people over the centuries who have left us their thoughts.

In the three writings cited for today, Jeremiah, Paul and John act as spokespeople for God. Their words all seem to be similar, with the assurances of God's declaring of His love for us and His declaration that His sending Christ to us will define how we can/should travel through life. They give us examples, all with the same underlying message: It won't be easy, and there are times when we fail to follow the best path, but "We are in God and He is in us."

When I was small, my grandfather used to sit me down and give me age-appropriate "talks" about what we believe as Episcopalians, and why we follow the teachings of our church. He let me know that although the Bible might have mentions of some very drastic consequences for poor behavior, in the end the love of God that was shared with us through Jesus, meant forgiveness, and finally, eternal life.

In preparing me for my confirmation, he told me that Baptism meant being born into our biological family, but also into the family of God. Confirmation, he said, was like a small branch being grafted onto the tree of God's church. God would be with us always, supporting us through all the complicated days of our life. Okay, I thought, I don't have to worry about "turning away from evil" or fearing some drastic punishment for bad behavior. I had a "pass!" God loved me no matter what!

This ten-year-old logic let me think I could be *pretty good*, (not necessarily perfect) and that I was in no danger of a great loss of standing in God's eyes. Well, as I grew older, I began to see what it meant to BE good in God's eyes. I didn't see perfection as attainable, but something definitely to be aimed for, and WORKED at. Doing good in God's name should be an overarching way of living my life. However, I should be looking for *new* ways to be of service in the world. I need to act mindfully and remove the ME from the equation.

I look around at the people who are parishioners at St. Timothy's and see so many wonderful examples of doing just that. Working within the church to help with its day-to-day operation, helping other members in times of need, and reaching out to others we don't even know in our outreach programs. There is SO MUCH good being done by so many. I know God's love is moving in and through them. Just as they are a blessing to others, they are in turn being blessed and will certainly be *raised up on the last day*.

Patty A

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Jeremiah 22:13-23

Romans 8:12-27

John 6:41-51

"Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died, This is the bread that came down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." John 6: 49-51

Sometimes I used to take communion for granted. I would piously go forward and receive the bread and the wine, and I would kneel in my pew and think about what I needed to do when I got home from church. I can't give you a date when this changed, but gradually I began to seriously listen to the words before communion: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus is telling us that we are remembering Him and His sacrifice when we take communion. We recall His ministry and his death, but mostly we recall his rising from the grave. He is on an entirely different plane than any other prophet. He has transformed death into life. We know that when our earthly bodies die, our souls will soar with Jesus.

Now when I take communion, I remember His sacrifice and His suffering for us. I thank Him for all He has done, and I pray that I can take His word into the world this next week. It totally changes my Sundays from rote to life-affirming action.

If you have become a bit lax in your Sunday worship, I pray that you too can experience a change of heart. I pray that you will meditate on Jesus' words, and think of His sacrifice and ultimately His resurrection. God is there when we are lax, but so much more present when we purposefully look for Him.

Helen C

Friday, April 4, 2025

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

As I read and reflect on the scripture assigned to this day, we are six days from inauguration day. The country is deeply divided. The rhetoric is ramping up, again. The wildfires are still raging in Southern California. The heartbreak and destruction are almost unbearable. People are anxious and scared. It seems that we are collectively holding our breath.

On this day, April 4, I pray that more of our hopes than our fears have come to pass and that everyone has been able to take a breath.

The passage from Jeremiah seems to indicate that the people are in a time of unrest and division. Is there some comfort in that? Every generation, as far back as biblical times, faced times of unrest. That passage also tells us that God is in charge. He is not absent. We are not alone. Let us continue to work on putting our trust in God.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us that “all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.” He also says, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Again, God is not absent. We are not alone. God loves us! We should put our faith and trust in God. We are also called to work together for good.

Let’s work together to calm our fears and anxiety by doing the work. Let us be the hands, the feet, the listening ears, the compassionate hearts to those in our community and beyond. Let’s focus more on the things that bind us together than that divide us. Trust that God will guide us through uncertain times and always!

Cathy W

Saturday, April 5th, 2025

Jeremiah 23:9-15

Romans 9: 1-8

John 6:60-71

This Gospel is a pivotal moment in the lives of Jesus and the twelve apostles. It reminds me of the lyrics from the song by The Clash: "should I stay or should I go now...if I stay there could be trouble..."

Jesus is preaching in Capernaum to a crowd, and many are finding it difficult to listen and to follow his words, so they get up and leave.!

Some become angry and offended and also get up and leave.!

Twelve stay and listen to Jesus speak, even though they too are having some difficulty accepting Jesus' teachings!

The difference between the disciples who left and the ones who stayed was not whether they thought Jesus' teachings were offensive or not; each person had their own interpretation and it affected them personally. The difference is that the ones who stayed knew that Jesus alone had the words of eternal life. Jesus asked them if they wanted to go elsewhere, not because He needed to know the answer, but because they needed to say it. Peter is able to confess in this moment his belief that Jesus has the words that lead to eternal life and that He is the Son of God.

When we come into contact with things that cause us to doubt or struggle with our understanding of who God is and what He calls us to do, it's best to not panic but to dig in and try to figure out who He is and why we may be challenged by His teachings. We also have resources around us like friends in Christ to pray with us-- and we should consider the alternatives like...where else would we go? Jesus alone has the words of eternal life and will challenge our assumptions and our decisions, because he calls us to a deeper walk with Him.

During these difficult times, we all need to look deep inside and ask ourselves if we are willing to walk the walk, and not just talk the talk. It's not as easy as one thinks!

Rena W

Monday, April 7, 2025

Jeremiah 24:1-10 The Lord shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs, one good one bad.

Romans 9:19-33 "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'" v25

John 9:1-17 Jesus saw a blind man from birth and restored his sight.

What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.

The interesting thing about reading and rereading Bible stories is that you can see something different every time you read them! They are not static. What you see and learn depends on you at the very moment you read them. The buzz around you at the very moment of reading may cause you to perceive something you were not aware of before. Of course, you must allow yourself the openness of perception to the world around you. This Gospel story starts on a Sabbath day with the disciples asking Jesus whose sin it was that caused the man to be blind. Jesus says "neither," and proceeds to heal the man's blindness. Many were amazed and eventually the Pharisees (temple priests) got word. Jealous and stunned at Jesus' power on the Sabbath, they argued about it. Eventually, they called the man in and asked him, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." This exciting story of confrontation between Faith and politics of the time continues to verse 41, perhaps discussed in other lectionary days. But my charge is just to end here at verse 17. What grabbed me was this end line, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

Jesus essentially flipped a switch in the blind man, turning on his ability to see-- a miracle. Not much is said of the man before this event. Unlike many stories, it is not said if the man even asked for this healing, or if he even had Faith to ask Jesus for it! But afterwards he got it-- Jesus was something special. He recognized his blessing. He told others, even the Pharisees who wanted him to deny what had happened. Have you had miracles in your life? Often, today, we dismiss them, as they did then, just too common to be miraculous. What can you see around you, that is miraculous? Is it a miracle that you are even reading this Lenten Lectionary? Are your eyes open to God's world? Do you see God in it?

I don't think that Faith is constant in people. At least in me it is not. It goes up and down. It is "up" when I see the things around me and God acting in and through them. It is "down" when I withdraw into myself, overwhelmed by those fears in life. God is always there; it is just my ability to perceive God that is down. The miracle is that it changes, like Jesus wiping mud on the blind man's eyes and telling him to wash and see. Several years ago, our housekeeper's daughter was attacked by her former boyfriend. The seventeen-year-old was shot in her home twice before our housekeeper stepped between the shooter and her daughter and was shot four times. Courage unknown to me. This is a big miracle that they lived. My eyes were opened to the living conditions of immigrants who are so easily exploited by others. They are God's children, too.

For those who have their eyes opened to God around us, what do you say about Him?

Jim C

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Jeremiah 25:8-17

Romans 10:1-13

John 9:18-41

John is reporting on the healing of the blind man at the gate. Although the reading starts on verse 9—the story begins on verse 1. When Jesus and the disciples were walking to the temple a blind man was begging on the road and the disciples asked Jesus if the man was a sinner. Jesus replied that he was without sin and blind so the glory of God could be shown. He placed mud on the man's eyes and told him to wash in the pool. He washed and came home seeing—his neighbors couldn't believe it was him. They took him to the temple and the Pharisees examined him and did not believe he had been blind.

In verses 18-41 the blind man's parents dodge the question of his blindness to avoid being shunned, so the Pharisees ask the man and he replies, 'one "thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see." The disciples condemn the healing because it occurred on the sabbath and the man says, 'If this man is not from God, he could do nothing.' They then threw him out.

Jesus had heard that the Pharisees had thrown the man out of the temple and queried him about who he thought Jesus was. He confirms his faith in Jesus and worships him. Back at the temple the Pharisees confront Jesus and ask if they were blind too. Jesus replies 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Social pressure, loss of status, false righteousness and condemning the 'different' were and are part of the synagogue life—and are present everywhere today. Not fitting in is not seen as an asset.

As Christians we too often are attributed with some Pharisee characteristics—not always an inaccurate assessment. I think the real question is, "what are we as Christians doing to live a faithful life?" One approach is, 'if you were accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?'

To me that evidence is based on Jesus' answer to the question of which is the greatest commandment.

'He replied, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all of your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.'

Following Jesus in this manner is all the evidence one would need to be found guilty.

Mike O

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

Jeremiah 25: 30 -38

According to Harper's Bible Commentary, "The book of Jeremiah was not the product of a single person...", further, "According to the traditional date Jeremiah prophetic activity spanned the last four decades of Judah's existence as a nation (626 – 587 BC: 1:1-3), this period was a time of increasing internal Factionalism and shifting foreign alliances." I continue to be amazed at how man has seemingly consistently repeated the same history many times over.

I sense the similarity of today's events with the stress that Judah felt. The tone of the writing certainly gets a person's attention. And the call is: "wake up you are on the wrong path, and The Holy is not pleased!" I submit that the message is as warranted today as it was when written. Have the intervening years provided an answer? I believe the answer to that question is yes, and his name is Jesus.

Romans 10:14-21

I hear Paul calling to the Romans and reminding them that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, that The Holy is God to all. But that there is a need to instruct the un-schooled to the message brought by Jesus. Although the passage uses the terms related to speaking and listening often, it seems to me significant that he uses the phrase, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!" It may be a stretch, but it seems to me that this places an emphasis on how we incorporate the teachings of Jesus into our lives rather than only what we say.

This interpretation, as incongruous as it may seem, may help explain the reference to the golden calf that the Hebrews created in the wilderness. If they had fully incorporated God's message that Moses gave them into their very soul, their DNA, would they have created the golden calf as soon as Moses left them to their own devices?

We human beings learn lessons in various ways. I have found that the most effective teacher is usually experiential. When I was young, I found that the lessons usually had physical consequences. Recently I have found that drifting off course results in anxiety, worry and loss of sleep. When I am focused on tasks that move me towards the path Jesus laid out, I experience peace, joy and sound sleep.

John 10:1-18

In this reading, Jesus seems to portray himself as both the gate and the Shepard. I admit to being puzzled by this passage for a number of years as it seemed to me to indicate that the sheepfold of Christianity was the only one. In reading it today I see it as, less us versus them than, as focused on community.

Although the author may have seen the wolf as the symbolism for Pharisees, for me, in today's world I see the wolf as being representative of one of the problem P's, pride, position and possessions. Maybe because wolves usually hunt in packs the wolf in the story is only the scout. Certainly, the false prophets, or hired hands, would be analogous to false gods such as consumerism. I, for one, find that the joy of purchase is very short lived, but participation in the ministries at St Timothy's, such as Warm winter's nights or others that reach out to our homeless brothers and sisters, leaves a glow long after the experience is past.

Steve M

Thursday, April 10, 2025

Jeremiah 26:1-17

Romans 11:1-12

John 10: 19-42

Jeremiah 26:11,16: Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God."

John 10: 31: The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?"

In the Old Testament reading, the people are ready to stone Jeremiah because he's telling them that God isn't happy with them. And again, in the Gospel of John, we learn that the people were ready to stone Jesus. In both cases, they escape death by telling the people that they are doing the work of God.

What amazes me is that the stoners (not druggies, but throwers of stones, ha-ha) listened when Jeremiah and Jesus both said, "I'm doing the work of God. Are you sure you want to go against God?" As angry as the people were, they listened and ceased their bad behavior.

When might we be annoyed with someone who is doing the work of God today? Is it the street corner preacher that we try to avoid? Or is it the social worker who is trying to get better living conditions for her clients? Or the priest who preaches a sermon that hits a little too close to home?

We all need to be aware of the voice of God calling us to repent coming from someone in modern dress. Let us be open to hearing His voice from an unexpected messenger.

Helen C

Friday, April 11, 2025

Jeremiah 26: 1-16

Romans, 11:13-24

John 10: 19-42

Do I have enough faith? When something would arise, I remember my Dad always saying, "You don't have **enough** faith!" That still may be true. Lots of years have gone by, but those words still echo in my mind.

Reading the Epistle from Romans, it talks of the "rich root of the olive tree....do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. Branches were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So don't become proud but stand in awe." **I am in awe**. I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors. My role models for faith have come through the genes of my Lebanese grandparents down to my father and maybe to me.

Abraham & Sarah came on a ship from Lebanon through Ellis Island in the early 1900's. They left because my grandfather wanted to avoid being conscripted into the Turkish army. They were newly married, (about 18 & 19 years old), and settled in Michigan. They **never** returned to their homeland. I think of the faith & courage it took to come to a foreign land with nothing! The word immigrant has taken on a sad connotation these days, something bad, something less. Sarah & Abraham were immigrants that wove the threads of their souls and talents into the American fabric. They raised five children, my father being the eldest son.

They were Christians and when they discovered no Orthodox church in Lansing, Michigan, each of their children was baptized in a different church. My father's baptism was in an Episcopal church, so my immediate family remained in that denomination. An Orthodox priest came along to teach religious studies at Michigan State University and discovered that a church was needed. He appealed to several people from different nationalities to help in the building of this church. My grandparents became founding members of St. Andrew's Orthodox Church in East Lansing, MI. along with Greek, Macedonian, Lebanese, Syrian and other Middle Eastern residents in the area. A church for all!

Grandma (siti) practiced her faith with prayers, morning and night at a small altar built for her bedroom. It was adorned with Orthodox icons, a burning candle and a "different" cross from the one that I knew. As a very young granddaughter, watching her pray made quite an impression. I should not "boast." My grandparents were "the roots" of our family, made from God's love....my father carrying on that faith with his branch. How strong is my "branch?" It must not be "broken off!"

May you discover the strength of your faith during this Lent.

Cindy M

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Romans 11:25-36

John 11:28-44

Today's gospel reading brings us into a difficult time in the life of a family living in Bethany. The familiar story opens with the death of Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus. He had become unexpectedly ill and died. His sisters were devastated. Days earlier, they had called called for Jesus, their friend and known healer, to come to their aid. But for reasons unknown, Jesus chose to delay and didn't come to them until several days after Lazarus' death. Mary, in her grief and despair lashed out at him, "If you had only come sooner, my brother would not have died". Jesus was also deeply upset and wept. A senseless death. All seems lost.

The next scene in the story is among the most powerful and moving images of the gospels. It is so moving and vivid, words seem barely able to contain all that there is to see. To gain a different perspective, I would like to turn to a work of art by the Italian painter Caravaggio (1571-1610). Caravaggio (pronounced kar-uh-vah-jio) is most known for his realistic painting of both body and emotion as well of his use of light. In this work, "The Raising of Lazarus" (1609), he crafts these elements together to help us see an astounding moment in time with new eyes.

Allow yourself to take in the image:

On the left side of the work is Jesus, his hand outstretched towards the body of Lazarus. It is said that Jesus' unusual gesture is reminiscent of Michelangelo's famous image from the Sistine Chapel (1512) of God reaching out to give life to Adam.

In the center is Lazarus' body, in an outstretched pose that is said to be reminiscent of Michelangelo's *Pieta* (1499). A bit of foreshadowing is at play. In this image, an unnamed man is holding Lazarus' lifeless body, with his sister Mary cradling his head.



In the middle of the image is the pivotal point in the scene. Though obviously dead, Lazarus is responding to Jesus' call. His hand upraised, his palm bathed in light, like Adam reaching out to God, life is filling his body.

It is astounding. Simply astounding.

I encourage you to hold on to this image as we move into Holy Week. There might be more for you to see as we move through the days.

Shelley W

Monday, April 14, 2025

Jeremiah 12:1-16

Philippians 3:1-14

John 12:9-19

"The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"

If I were standing in the crowd on Palm Sunday, the crowd calling out "Hosanna" to the teacher Jesus who healed, performed miracles and even raised a man from the dead, what would I be thinking? Would I have paid a little money to an enterprising child who sold palms to the people who had come into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover? Perhaps—I have done it for my child, joined the parade and waved a token of recognition to a passing celebrity.

If I were a Jew, whose family had felt the oppression of the Roman soldiers in my neighborhood, would I want a change, a king of my own people? Yes, surely, I would want a person who could feed all the people, bring healing to the people sent into the desert because their minds were unable to let them live with their families and could cure the disease of the body and help us to see God again in this time of turmoil. Perhaps I would have been one of the ones who would have preferred to see Jesus in a chariot—and yet his calm and simple move on the young donkey might have made me wonder if perhaps he knew something I did not.

Would I have noticed that the donkey carried him lightly, as though accustomed to carrying a king and one with the mystery of the road, the man and the crowd waving branches? A palm in my hand and a cry in my throat, "Hosanna", I am sure I too would have been caught up in the excitement. Would that symbol of a palm for victory provoke the Romans? Would the detail that Jesus did not ride a war horse make a difference? Palms are symbols of gratitude and connection at the time of harvest in the Jewish tradition. I also wave a branch joining the excitement of Jesus coming into the city, even as teens run in front of Jesus placing palms cutting the down the ever-present dust.

Would I have noticed the seething anger of religious leaders, Pharisees, and watchful soldiers on the periphery of the crowd? What kind of king was this man who so silently rode toward the temple? Would I think of my cousin who was healed of her lameness by one of his followers, or of my uncle who told stories of being in a crowd on the Jordan river and had been baptized by John? If I had been there, I might think all these things. Most of all, I am sure that I would believe that God is acting—something is happening and here I am a part of it. The noise of the crowd would not have drowned out my longing for the Bread of Life. I believe I would have been glad to be part of that crowd and excitement.

I wonder how many felt Jesus' sorrow that the people did not understand that his Love would lead him to death. What were the disciples thinking, as they too walked silently, unable to talk for the noise of the crowd? I too pray for a leader in our times who can confront the challenges of our times. I realize no kind of king can lead and change the hearts of people as we work to care for one another, to feed the hungry, cure the sick, heal the ones broken in spirit of mind and renew the earth, water and sky so we may be in harmony.

As we approach Good Friday and Easter, I pray we may find ourselves the ones who turn with compassion and kindness out a renewed understanding of what it means to serve the One who invites us to walk with Him from Death into Life.

Susan Geissler-O'Neil+

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

Isaiah 49:1-7

The "Servant":

This passage is part of the "Servant Songs" in Isaiah, where the "Servant" is often interpreted as a prophetic figure representing Jesus Christ, highlighting his mission to serve and bring redemption to all people.

Universal Calling:

The opening line, "Listen to me, O islands, and hearken, you peoples afar," emphasizes that God's message is not just for Israel, but for all nations, signifying a universal call to serve.

Purpose of Service:

The servant is described as one who will "bring forth justice" and "open the eyes of the blind," signifying a call to advocate for the vulnerable, fight for social justice, and bring light to those in darkness.

God's Presence and Protection:

The imagery of being "engraved on the palms of His hands" signifies God's intimate knowledge and constant care for His people, providing strength and reassurance even in challenging times.

Beyond Personal Salvation:

While individual transformation is important, the emphasis is on actively engaging with the world to bring about positive change and embody God's love through service to others.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

"Foolishness of the Cross":

Paul emphasizes that the idea of a crucified Messiah appears nonsensical to worldly wisdom, but to believers, it represents God's profound love and power to redeem humanity.

God's Upside-Down Logic:

The passage highlights how God chooses the weak, lowly, and despised to demonstrate his power and grace, challenging human notions of strength and status.

Humility and Dependence on God:

The message encourages Christians to not boast in their own understanding or achievements, but to rely solely on God's work in Christ, acknowledging their dependence on divine grace.

The Holy Spirit's Revelation:

The "wisdom of God" is not accessible through human intellect alone, but through the Holy Spirit's illumination, allowing believers to understand the deeper meaning of the cross.

John 12:20-26

The "Grain of Wheat" Analogy:

Jesus uses the image of a wheat kernel dying to produce a bountiful harvest to illustrate how his own death will bring forth abundant life for others. This signifies that his sacrifice is not a meaningless loss, but a necessary act to bring salvation.

"Hating One's Life":

This phrase is not meant to be literal hatred, but rather a radical commitment to prioritize God's will above personal desires, even if it means facing hardship or persecution.

Following Jesus:

The call to follow Jesus is not just about intellectual assent, but actively living out his teachings, embracing the cross and the potential for suffering that may come with it.

Service and Humility:

The passage emphasizes the importance of serving others with humility, mirroring Jesus' own act of self-sacrifice.