As we enter into Lent, many of us are recalling last year, when we looked forward to going to St. Timothy’s Lenten Program, reading our lectionary, celebrating Easter with our extended family. Boy, did our plans change! But God has been with us every step of this COVID journey. He is with us now. However you may be affected by the COVID shutdowns, know that God did not shut down. We need to discover how to hear Him when our hearts are full of anxiety and worry.

Last summer my friend gave me book called *Daily Word*. It contains a spiritual lesson for every day of the year. I read one a few weeks ago that I’d like to share with you:

> “Entering into a silent time with God means turning away from outer activity, taking a deep breath, and fully relaxing into a state of calmness. In silence, I go beyond quiet repose. I am ushered into a place of inner stillness where I commune with God. In this place of stillness and communion, I know the tender touch of God, which fills my body and stills my mind. I feel the warm glow of God’s love rising gently within—soothing and healing my body, mind, and emotions. I know and understand God’s unconditional love for me. In silence with God, I remember who I am. I am filled with the peace that passes all understanding. From this place, I return to my daily living and savor the fullness of my life.”

When I read the above few paragraphs, I thought, “This is all there is to it!” Entering into a silent time with God is just quietly putting the world out of your mind for a short while and sitting in God’s presence. No rules are necessary. You don’t have to sit still for a certain amount of time, nor utter a phrase, nor even quote scriptures. Just rest in God.

I encourage you to use Lent as a time of prayer and meditation. Prayer is talking to God. Meditation is listening to God. My desire for each one of you is that you find a way that works for you to sit quietly in God’s presence. If you can plan the same time daily, great! But if family or career keep you hopping, you might use your shower time or your driving time. Do what works best for you. My prayer is that you will be filled with the peace that passes all understanding, and that you will savor the fullness of life.

Lenten Blessings,
Helen C

Editor’s note: These writings are the gifts of our authors. Please enjoy them and tell the author about your reactions. As always, our contributors come from all parts of the theological spectrum, and that is a good thing. We each find our path to God, and God loves us each exactly as we are.

As it is St. Timothy’s practice not to put last names on the Internet, I have removed last names this year. If you would like to contact someone to talk about his/her writing, please call me and I can share last names. And special thanks to Greg S, who designed our beautiful cover.
The three lessons share a common purpose—‘setting the stage’ for the future. In each, God is using the speaker to ensure the believers understand what they must do to follow God’s plan for them.

Deuteronomy was written in the form of a farewell address by Moses to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land of Canaan. The Israelites had travelled for forty years in the desert. By then a whole generation, the ones that had seen God’s provision and heard his laws had passed away. A new generation had arisen who only knew what they had heard. The purpose of Deuteronomy to the original audience was that of reiterating the law and applying it to their lives, as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Thus, Deuteronomy is intended to formalize the covenant between God and Israel, and calls for the people to live in obedience to God’s laws. It ‘sets the stage,’ providing an opportunity for this new generation to renew the covenant before entering the Promised Land.

Paul’s letter to Titus, a Gentile convert to Christianity who was organizing the Christian community on Crete, provides instructions for organizing the leadership and structure of Christian churches. The letter urges Titus to appoint worthy elders to positions of responsibility, to preach sound doctrine, and to exemplify in his own life the virtues that are expected of all Christians. It warns against the disruptive influence of “Jewish myths” and teachings put forward by “those of the circumcision.” The letter was written to Titus, but it was also written to the Christians on the island of Crete. Paul knew this letter would be publicly read among the churches on the island. Paul is providing instruction to the Christian community leadership on leading a faithful life ‘setting the stage’ for the future of the ‘beloved community’.

John’s Gospel issues the clarion call for the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. His witness begins with the reference to “John’s testimony” to priests and Levites who had been sent from Jerusalem to ask, “Who are you?” John made it clear to them that he was not the Messiah, but was sent to “Make straight the way of the Lord.” Then, speaking of the One on whom the Spirit descended, John said, “I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” His statement that “I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One” ‘sets the stage’ for the new order—based on the divinity of Christ.

During the past year I have, like all of you, encountered a reality that I could not have conceived of in my wildest imagination. So many of the events, the needless deaths, and examples of man’s inhumanity to man have caused me to examine my purpose as a Christian. In his book Love is the Way, Bishop Michael Curry discusses the issues of hate and our responsibility as believers. He clearly states that the opposite of love—is not hate—but selfishness. Placement of ourselves ahead of others destroys our ability to truly love our neighbors and see all of humanity as God’s children. These readings and Michael Curry’s writings have helped me understand that the ‘stage has been set’ for me to move to a more selfless life in serving Christ.

Mike O
The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). John 1: 25-42

I grew up in an intense “religious” environment and heard a lot of God and Jesus stories from their Bible*. I deliberately put the word religious in quotes because their denominational theology did absolutely nothing for my child or teen-age mind. In fact, I honestly don’t remember meeting and believing in Jesus at all, way back then. But as an adult I certainly do remember meeting, believing in, and loving Jesus. (Do you? Was it about 4:00 in the afternoon? Just checking.)

Yes, I still have times when I am not intimately, or even subconsciously, aware of Jesus’s presence and influence in my life. Yet when I open my heart, when I “come and see”, he is always there. If I just listen, Jesus is there in small and huge and surprising ways! For that I am so very grateful.

In these confusing and stressful times, I pray we all can be confident that we will find the Messiah. He is always with us, whether we are aware of him or not.

So when I hear a voice asking “What are you looking for?” I’ll try not to ignore it. Rather, I’ll try to embrace the opportunity and open my heart and mind to his guidance, strength and comfort.

“What are you looking for?”
“Come and see.”

Peace,
Sharyn M

*The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures is a translation of the Bible published by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
February 20, 2021

Deuteronomy 7:17-26
Titus: 3:1-15
John 1:43-51

Lent is upon us once again. Frankly when I wrote last year I never thought we’d still be in lockdown to this date, and it looks like for some months to come. So, I read and re-read the passages assigned to me with my Covid-19 eyes, in isolation. I kept coming back to Titus, because I think this has much to say to us at this very time….amazing isn’t it? Imagine the Bible being “au curant”! Of course it is because it is about human nature, and the fact that Jesus came to us to show us another way to live.

Paul said, “be ready for every good work, speak evil to no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, and show courtesy to everyone.” We surely have seen a lot of that lately! NOT!! I have tried very hard avoid talking politics, as it has (in my opinion) become a blood sport. I see what has happened between friends and within families, and weep. Aren’t we called to love one another? For this Lenten season and beyond, I pray, I will guard my tongue as to not upset anyone, or be a party to negativity. A tall order in today’s world, but something I can do, as God gives me strength.

Long ago and far away when I was a child, our Lenten discipline would be to give up something like candy. I would dutifully put the 10 cents that would have gone to buy candy into the little blue “Mite Boxes”. We children would present our Mite Boxes filled with our coins and place them on the Altar at the end of Lent. Then as adults we were encouraged to fast, give up dessert, or one’s afternoon Tipple. Now as a slightly older person, I am informed that the church doesn’t require such sacrifices. We are encouraged to add something… such as more spiritual readings, prayers, extra kindness, etc.

Years past at St. Timothy’s after the Easter Vigil, we were asked to bring and share what we had given up for 6 weeks. After the Service we would hurry to the Parish Hall and indulge in desserts. Does anyone (besides me) remember Joan Even’s Chocolate Pie? Had to make certain to get there fast for a piece!! And as for the wine…well, after all, this is St. Timothy’s!

So, my friends, I wish you a good, if very different, Lenten Season. We will come through, and with God’s Grace we’ll be stronger, more committed, grateful to all those who have helped to keep us connected.

Blessings,
Patti F
February 22, 2021

Deuteronomy 8:11-20
Hebrews 2:11-18
John 2:1-12

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me." Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

This time last year many of us were contemplating the Lenten promises we had made to ourselves for the upcoming 40 days. We were going to do more of something, do less of something, pray more, enjoy more alone time.

Oh boy! Looking back now it feels like Lent, 2020 has been never ending. Isolation, introspection, melancholy - these classic characteristics of the season have become the fabric of our everyday lives. Unlike Lent though, we don’t have the sure and certain knowledge that this experience will end on a certain date. Like the Chorus in TS Eliot’s play, 'Murder In The Cathedral', “we have to go on living, and partly living.”

So where do we find relief as we enter the season of Lent in 2021?

Today’s scriptures offer both joy and comfort. In the Gospel, the tantalizing prospect of a party. Who could resist a wedding party in sunny Cana with endlessly flowing wine on the house?

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find comfort in company, a sense that we have someone who walks with us. Christ offers a sense of companionship, of understanding. The essence of His divinity is His humanity: “...he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect...Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”

He shared our imperfections and our sins. Speaking personally, I find it much easier to listen to a sinner than a saint. Apart from the fact that they are generally more entertaining, I pay attention because they have faced similar challenges. This passage reminds me that Christ was fully human. He lived, He suffered, He died. He felt things I feel and understands the whole glorious mess of our lives. Perhaps most importantly of all, He does not judge, only forgives.

Whilst I can’t provide a specific date for a Bacchus-infused post-pandemic party, I can tell you that we will have Easter Sunday in 2021 on April 4th. So, put that in your calendar, grab a bottle of something you like, and get ready to celebrate.

James V
February 23, 2021

Deuteronomy 9:4-12  
Hebrews 3:1-11  
John 2:13-22

The words from Hebrews resonate in my being: “brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider…(Hebrews 3:1) Consider… As we experience our faith in the midst of this Pandemic, we are being called to focus our attention on Jesus. Whatever we do in faith, we do it together as companions. We are not always in agreement in thinking, practice, or understanding, but we are partners. The author of Hebrews desires us to understand Jesus as the center of our lives and uses reason, logic, scripture, and faith to guide our journey, and hopefully lead us away from the distractions that turn our attention away from God.

I begin there for my reflection this day because it is easy to see an angry Jesus cleansing the Temple as a righteous prophet casting out the cheaters and the people taking advantage of all the pilgrims that have come to meet God in the Temple. The image of an angry Jesus can sometimes be used to justify our own righteous anger against fraud or what we believe is wrong. In John however, casting out the sheep, cattle, doves, and moneychangers is not about a protest against avarice, but a demand that all the people recognize that the Temple is God’s House—not a place of commerce.

In the Temple resided the Ark—the Presence of God—the Temple was the place to meet God. The other Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tell the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple at the end of his life, as an event that leads up to the Jesus’s arrest, trial, death, and Resurrection. In John, it is one of the first stories told of Jesus—because John wants us to see Jesus as the place where we meet God. In Jesus we know God. From this early story John is already pointing to the tumbling down of expectations and systems that tell us where God is. We are being asked on a journey, to know that in following Jesus, we abide in Jesus and know God. It is Good News, but not an easy Way. Our notion of what is sacred changes.

Recently, I learned that my childhood walks were on Native American land—donated by a company who owned the land and later gave it to the town…I knew that the local museum had many, many artifacts but had no idea that Native Americans had lived in that place. I had not realized that men came to my town to become Christians to be safe from being killed, and as a sign, their braid was cut off. I wept. But I also give thanks for the powerful connection to nature those walks offered me. The land, the trees, the rocks, the ferns, and the ice crystals on the moss formed me. I listen differently now when I think about our cultural history and try now to listen more deeply to systemic change that begins inside of me. The sacredness of that land I knew; and now I find a different meaning when I think of pushing out commerce and listening to the sacredness of the land itself. God was not met because a family sacrificed a dove in the Temple. Jesus was saying—know my love, you know my Father’s Love in all places. We meet God where we are. Forgiveness is possible, change is possible, we can be become partners to be part of another Way.

A bird appeared out of nowhere and appeared to fly past me. The bright color of a Western Tanager woke me to look and listen and re-connect during a moment in the seemingly endless Pandemic when we also have systemic work we need to do—work I need to do. We are not alone.. I am not alone. We can do this hard thing together, as companions, partners in transformation for God’s new creation.

Susan G-O
February 24, 2021

Deuteronomy 9: 13-21 - Moses sees the golden calf and breaks the tablets containing the ten commandments
Hebrews 3: 12-19 – Take care that you don’t have an evil, unbelieving heart!
John 2: 23-3:15 – Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night

“There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night …”

Has there ever been a time in your life when you wanted to get to know someone better, but he/she wasn’t in your group of friends? I remember that happening in high school. I could hang with someone at 4-H club, but heaven forbid if I spoke to her at school the next day! Sometimes it would be me who was ashamed of my friend, and sometimes it was my friend who would be ashamed of me. Suffice it to say, we are known by those we associate with.

I’ll bet Nicodemus felt the same way 2000 years ago as we sometimes feel today. He was afraid to go to Jesus in the daytime, when the commoners were gathered, listening at Jesus’ feet, hearing His words of wisdom and love. You see, Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews. He was an important man in the temple. People looked up to him. He didn’t want to be seen talking to that itinerant preacher, that man they called Jesus.

Yet when Nicodemus sneaked out to see Jesus one night, Jesus welcomed him into his circle. He answered his questions about being from God with the statement that Nicodemus must be born again. And he ended with one of the most famous verses in the New Testament, “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3: 16-17

I wonder what Nicodemus was thinking just about then. Was he thinking, “Ah, man, just tell me who you are. Enough of the riddles! Tell me outright what you stand for and if it’s worth my reputation to follow you.” We’ll never know. However… In John 7, Nicodemus reminds his colleagues in the Sanhedrin that the law requires that a person be heard before being judged. And later in John 19, Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus’ body for burial.

Nicodemus had a change of heart. He went from hiding his association with Jesus, to standing up for Him to his friends in the temple, to removing Him from the cross and burying Him. It didn’t happen on the first visit; it took Nicodemus time to process what he’d heard and allow Jesus to enter his heart. And when he finally decided to be a follower, he went all the way to the end with Jesus.

Our meeting Jesus today isn’t nearly as physically personal as Nicodemus’ meeting was. And yet, by reading the Bible and listening to sermons, we learn about Him. Then it is up for us to decide: Do we keep our faith and our regular activities totally separated? Or do we merge them as our friend Nick did so long ago into such an important part of our being that we always have Jesus with us?

Blessings,
Helen C
Deuteronomy 9:23 ~ 10:5
The subject of this reading is about the intercession of Moses to humble his followers, God’s chosen people, who were stubbornly in the grip of, and belief in, a wrong-headed conviction to an un-truth. The only way out was Divine guidance. Moses was aware of the correct path and did guide his followers. The proof of the correct path was given to Moses in the form of the two tablets, which he was given upon scaling the fiery mountain. The tablets contained the writing of the 10 commandments by God Himself. Moses was able to dissuade his followers from the opinion of their own righteousness, and their transgression of false idolatry of the golden calf. Moses made a wooden ark, and placed the two tablets in it, when he came down from the mountain, as the Lord had commanded him to do.
I have been awakened on more than one occasion, by the realization that God is omni-present, and I should always remember that constant belief. Adoration of false idols is too easily acceded to in our days and times. I thank God every day for his love and for our church and its leaders. The true word is always around us, all we need to do is listen to what God is telling us and listen to those who speak God’s word to us and honor God.

Hebrews 4:1-10
This reading reflects on the “inward rest” which the soul of the believers has in Christ. The cautionary comment is a reminder to not fall short or backslide from that belief. The command is to not turn away, but to hold fast to faith, and the belief and confession of hope, and to not waver. Specifically, do not turn your back on God. Rather, examine your own spiritual condition and press for commitment on the part of others. Yet still, God provided an opportunity for those whom God’s message was of no value, as well as those who had the good news proclaimed, but were disobedient. God set a certain day, calling it “Today”, and that day is a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.

As I think about the thought of “turning your back on God”, it reminds me of the example of the grievous mother who has lost a child, or the parents who have lost children or a spouse who has lost a lifetime partner. The exclamation of “where are you, God?” can be heard at these horrific times. It is a time when people might be mentally in a deep dark place of acceptance to the idea of turning their back on God. As we live in this time of the coronavirus pandemic, and so many people losing the lives of loved ones, we pray for those departed and those survivors, and that the survivors do not lose sight of our Lord.

John 3:16-21
He who does not believe is condemned already i.e. Hebrews 4:2 – “the message they (non-believers) heard was of no value to them.” However, for the great act of God giving his only Son into the world, these non-believers would not be condemned by God, but are only condemned by themselves. Those men who sought darkness rather than light would prefer that their evil should not be exposed by the light. Those who come to the light will have his deeds wrought by God. Belief, love, faith, and the light of God is the salvation of man. He who loves his fellow man and God will be forever saved and will enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Mike M
February 26, 2021

Deuteronomy 10:12-22
Hebrews 4:11-16
John 3:22-36

I am so glad that in these strangest of times, I have the opportunity to do something familiar. Writing for the Lent Lectionary had become one of those regular experiences I use to mark the seasons. In years past I have committed to this task with some trepidation, but this year it is making me feel connected to you all. I am having a hard time imagining a virtual Easter – my favorite time of year in the church. But here we are at the start of Lent; if ever we needed a time to reflect calmly it is now.

To start with, the scriptures I was given caused me more than a little consternation. Firstly, if I am honest the Old Testament has always baffled me. Secondly, I spend more time wondering who wrote the Epistles and why than thinking about their meaning. Finally, the passage from John, the most lyrical and sometimes incomprehensible Gospel about John the Baptist who was definitely what we would call an outlier today. None of these pieces immediately resonated with me.

I decided to do a little research to give myself some context and discovered the Book of Deuteronomy was probably written between 7th and 5th Century BC. The book was to stand as a reminder of the laws Moses brought to the Jews. Re-reading the scripture, I could see how this makes sense. Wikipedia says the Letter to the Hebrews is considered a masterpiece; “to exhort Christians to persevere in the face of persecution”.

Next, I let my mind wander to my personal imaginings; I have always thought of John the Baptist as being incredibly brave, possibly maniacal, and definitely obsessed with his mission. Not claiming center stage, but always telling people he was preparing the way for the Messiah, ultimately sacrificing himself for his beliefs. I am always amazed at the clarity and strength of John’s total belief in Jesus’ mission. In fact, when Jesus comes to be baptized, I always think John is more convinced of Jesus’ calling than Jesus is. His passion and total conviction are breathtaking.

Looking at the letter to the Hebrews again, I could see it as a calling to the early Christians to hold fast, like John did, while the passage from Deuteronomy was reminding the Jews to adhere to the laws of Moses. If I was looking for a theme, it appears to be one of commitment. I find this incredibly reassuring, particularly this year. John’s commitment to Jesus’ message, the Hebrews being shown they must commit to their Christianity, and the Jews in Deuteronomy committed to the Law of Moses. Taken as a whole, these scriptures speak to me about resilience and perseverance – just what we need right now.

Caroline F
The Gospel of John tells us the story of the Samaritan women at the well. Jesus is tired and taking a noon time rest at the well when a Samaritan woman approaches to draw water. It would not be normal for a Jewish man to interact with an unknown woman, and especially a Samaritan, but Jesus asked her for a drink from the well. He uses this as a chance to engage and interact and bring to us the story of living water. The power of water to give eternal life as we know from our own baptism.

The story is also a reference for me for redemption. Jesus engages with this Samaritan woman who is viewed as a sinner. He speaks to her about her 5 previous husbands. A common theme we have with the stories of Jesus is him interacting with others that are not like him and people that would often be shunned by others.

The third part of the scripture talks of where you should worship and the complexity that existed regarding the true place to worship God. There had been strict interpretations of the proper temples where God could be worshipped. However, in this scripture and another common theme told by Jesus was there were many places to worship God in “spirit and truth.” Jesus was trying to democratize the ability to worship God, and not make it only for those who could travel to the temple in Jerusalem.

The Old Testament scripture from February 27, 2021 gave me more pause to understand. The words of Deuteronomy give an ultimatum that if you follow the commandments you will be blessed, and if you do not then you will be cursed. Maybe it is simplistic, but it is driving home the point of having some real guidelines (commandments) to live by will make you a better person.

Therefore, some final thoughts I take from the readings from this day:

1. We should remember the power of the living water and of our baptism that Jesus is always there for us and not judging our sins. The living water is the healing and forgiveness offered to us by God.

2. We as individuals should learn from Jesus that we can and need to interact with others that are different from us. We need to go beyond our comfort zone to engage with other people outside our normal daily interactions and it will offer up a whole new beautiful world to us.

3. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are everywhere. We know that in these current challenging times we cannot worship together in traditional house of worship, but yet we are together “Spirit and Truth”. We have found a way to continue on during this most challenging past year and we continue to be together.

God Bless,
Jim P
March 1, 2021

Jeremiah 1:11-19
Romans 1:1-15
John 4: 27-42

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish --hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Romans 1: 11-15

Let’s Get Together

A Biblical Epistle is a letter to a group of people. Paul had many ministries. Like an itinerant minister, he traveled far and wide preaching the message of God. He was not handsome or charismatic, but he was a man on a mission to spread the word of God.

In this letter, he was letting them know that he thought about them while he was gone and he missed talking about God with them and teaching God’s message. My guess is that they missed him too, but transportation was slow and letters were also slow as well.

In contrast, right now we are sheltering from the Covid pandemic.

We are in a way in a similar situation in that we cannot physically get together with our fellow Christians, but we are fortunate enough to see Pastor Todd and Pastor Susan every Sunday along with the acolytes, readers and musicians on Live Stream. We also have Zoom to connect with members of the church for Bible study, book study, Education for Ministry, or just to talk at coffee hour. We too miss each other. But technology has made contact easier. Incredibly Paul with all his struggles to travel and connect with so many people is now known today as the person responsible for spreading Christianity throughout the world.

What might the possibilities be for us, if each of us were as dedicated to our own mission to convey God’s teaching in our own way?

Steve and Nora H
March 2, 2021

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

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee. John 4:43-54

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change…
In month ten of the pandemic, I hit a wall. It was right about the time that protestors hit the wall of the Capitol building in Washington DC; my seventh month of teaching high school English online. This was the day when one of my English language learners, a sixteen-year-old from Guatemala who fled the violence of her home country less than a year ago, said, “Miss, did you see what happened in Washington? We see this kind of thing in my country, but I never thought I would see it here. Will we be okay?”

In that moment, I was in the roll of the father – not a royal official, but a school official – charged with caring for the emotional and intellectual wellbeing of children in a situation that is completely beyond my comprehension or control. What could I say, what can any of us say, beyond, “Please.” Please be with us, please comfort us, please heal us. I cannot change this; I can only ask for grace.

The courage to change the things I can…
One of the things that I love most about Jesus is his humanity. He loves, he weeps, he curses fig trees, and he gets discouraged. In this story, I hear a note of despair in the words, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” He has already done so much, given so much, taught so much, and still people want their own personal miracle.

And yet Jesus heals the boy; heals the family. Knowing that it will never be enough for all of the doubting Galileans who each want a sign of their very own, he still heals the child.

And the wisdom to know the difference.

Jen C
March 3, 2021

Jeremiah 3: 6-18
Romans 1: 28-2: 11
John 5: 1-18

Paul writes, after listing many forms of wickedness, “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. It is so easy to judge the actions of others while making exceptions for ourselves. Unlike many people, I have more than my fair share of self-confidence. In my own mind I can do no wrong. This makes it very easy for me to fall into the trap of judging other according to high standards. For example, I sometimes criticize shows such as Star Trek for being inconsistent with science. I may or may not verbalize my thoughts, but the effect is still the same. I am hurt by my judgments. I cannot enjoy the shows as much because I see only the flaws, not the excitement. I do allow similar inconsistencies to appear in my own writing. I make an exception for myself by saying, “This is the best way to write this passage.”

This pattern may also be seen in my relationships with others. I am less likely to verbalize my judgmental thoughts and hurt someone’s feelings, but the self-destructive tendencies are still there. I can only judge others by the words and actions I observe in them. I often have no idea of the complete situation. That is why it is so much easier to judge others then myself. In my own case, I always know the extenuating circumstances. I know as I wait for five seconds before entering an intersection with a green light that a pedestrian is crossing the street. When I am in a long line of cars, the first of which will not go when the light turns green, I am considerably less tolerant. I do not know all of the information.

I need to be reminded that God is the only judge. I should also remember that God loves everyone, even me. I do not need to be a judge for God because he knows all of the information. I must trust him to do what is right. During all parts of my daily life, I must trust in God.

Beth C L
March 4, 2021

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28
Romans 2:12-24
John 5:19-29

Jeremiah, a prophet in Judah, failed to convince his fellow countrymen to reject paganism, hoping the return to their former Jewish faith would strengthen their resolve in the fight against the Assyrians. As a result, Judah suffered chaos in their most catastrophic time for years to come.

Paul traveled throughout the Mediterranean region after his conversion and spread the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul, a Roman citizen, created a series of Christian communities that survived him. Reaching Rome as a virtual prisoner but living in relative peace, Paul expressed his conviction that salvation and the return of Jesus Christ were near. He believed he would observe Jesus handing over the perfected Christian Kingdom to God. History intervened: Nero, the new Caesar, began to persecute Christians, crucify Peter, and behead Paul, a short time later.

John's Gospel illustrates the value of fathers to sons. What God showed Jesus, Jesus learned and did likewise. By extension, when Jesus shows us, we in the guise of a son try to emulate him. Then we hope to show the next generation what we learned from Jesus. But it isn't enough just to learn the law without practicing the "doing" of it. Teachers have the responsibility to practice doing the law faithfully. In this way, they honor God and reject idolatry of any kind (such as intentionally of love). At the time of death, they who followed what Jesus said by doing his will, quickly join the Resurrection of Life. Sinners will be rewarded with the Resurrection of Condemnation, so wrote John.

My take on all this is to consider how we respond to really bad news. Many of us seem to follow the Judah pattern, denying the reality and seeking pleasure. Paul was a failure as a prophet but scored high in organizing Christian communities and teaching the law of Jesus. His success shows in the vitality of his Christian teaching into our time. John asks us to consider the source of faith, how to transfer what is meaningful and good. Hear his word and believe. Avoid idol worship. God's peace be with us.

Sally G
"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"  

John 5: 30-47 (NSRV)

This Gospel selection takes me to the Book of Galatians. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”  (Galatians 11:1).

The earlier chapters of this Gospel tell us of Jesus turning the water to wine at Cana, how He challenges the Samaritan woman at the well, and how He heals the man on the Sabbath. John 5 finds Jesus telling all who will listen that He can do nothing on his own; rather the one who sent Him. Furthermore, Jesus says that “You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.”  (John 5:37-38).

Faith….the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

How often are we called upon to depend upon our faith each and every day? Most days do not require us to have the faith and to take action such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, or David; however, each day gives us an opportunity to step out in faith to believe that Christ begins His walk with us upon waking; praying, working, interacting and loving. As Christians, our faith becomes our truth when we worship, read the Bible, pray and share in one another’s lives. By doing these things we allow God’s words to abide in us.

Jacqueline C
March 6, 2021

Jeremiah 5: 20-31  
**Romans 3:19-31**  
John 7: 1-13

Paul writes that a person is justified by faith, not strict adherence to the laws, yet he advises that we uphold the law. This is heavy stuff. It raises questions and confusion.

My faith could be shattered if I spent time trying to resolve all the differences. I won’t let that happen.

There have been too many times when I have faced difficulties and finally let go and trusted that God would hear my prayer and lead me to a resolution. Sometimes it was not the one I would have chosen.

As I follow Jesus through the weeks of Lent, I come to new understanding every year. This trust in God’s love and goodness becomes stronger and stronger.

In Danville, we observe spring, summer, fall and winter, but I gained new respect for connecting seasonal changes to my spiritual journey when we lived in South Carolina. The Lenten season was observed in very cold, snowy winter. It was dreary and dark. Following Jesus to the cross took place in a very somber time. When spring arrived, surprisingly synchronized with Easter, it seemed that every Dogwood tree and Azalea bush burst into glory at once. It was awesome. God was shouting that Christ is Risen. This experience was repeated every year, reminding me that trust in God’s love never fails and that walking with Jesus through Lent to Easter strengthened my faith.

Sally J
March 8, 2021

Jeremiah 7:1-15: Jeremiah tells the people who are doing truly terrible things, that they can’t hide in the temple. God has brought down even Shiloh, a holy place, and He will bring down the temple, too.

Romans 4:1-12: Paul is making a case for the Gentiles. Abraham believed before he was circumcised, so his belief was righteous. Just being circumcised does not give you instant righteousness. Working hard does not give you righteousness. It is by grace.

John 7: 14-36: Jesus is teaching in the temple, and the people question where he came from. Jesus tells them, “I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you don’t know him.”

I have many fond memories of growing up in a small town. We knew just about everybody, and they knew us. This can be a wonderful thing, but it has its downside. It didn’t matter where we were, if we did something wrong, our mother knew before we got home. I remember picking flowers from someone else’s yard. Oops! The tearful apology that was so hard to get out. And riding our bikes where we had promised we wouldn’t. Oops! How could Mom have found out?

We went home after our escapades, thinking that we were safe. Surely our bad deeds couldn’t follow us home. Only we discovered to our dismay that the facts were known, and the consequences for our misdeeds were to follow.

The people of Jeremiah’s time seem to be a lot like me. They oppressed the alien, the orphans, and the widows. They stole, murdered, committed adultery, bowed before Baal, and then went to the temple, saying, “This is the temple of the Lord. Surely we’re safe here.”

But Jeremiah stood at the temple gate and warned them. “God already knows what you’ve been doing. He’s warned you to mend your ways, and you don’t listen. He can destroy this temple like he destroyed Shiloh. Don’t claim amnesty here. You can’t play that game with God!” They didn’t listen. The people were dispersed, and the temple was trashed. Just like me, the people of Jeremiah’s time had to suffer the consequences of their actions.

I was incredibly blessed to have parents who loved me and taught me right from wrong. They nurtured my spirit and loved me when I was unlovable. The ancient Jews had God who loved them and taught them right from wrong. He loved them so much when they were unlovable, that he sent Jesus to die for them. Maybe the earthly temple was destroyed, but the heavenly temple is there waiting for all of us.

Helen C
March 9, 2021

Jeremiah 7: 21-34
Romans 4: 13-25
John 7: 37-52

Where is our Lenten Journey leading us? What obstacles are we facing along the way? Will God reward us for our faithfulness?

In Jeremiah, God said, “Obey my voice and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.” Surely these are comforting words. These are the foundation of the covenant between God and his people and inspiration for our own faith. But the people of Judah did not listen, and they offered sacrifices even though God had not commanded them to do this. Not being faithful to God’s voice led them to woe.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he, too, shows us how relying on faith in God’s word is rewarded. For the faith of Abraham, who was promised that “so numerous shall your descendants be”, did not weaken, even when his old age and the barrenness of Sarah were considered. He did not distrust God’s word and he became “the father of many nations.” Paul also tells us that as the faith of Abraham was reckoned to him, so will we be rewarded, who believe “in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,”

In John, Jesus’ words are again comforting. For those who are thirsty for a relationship with their God may drink of Jesus and “out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of the living water.” This living water is poetic, New Testament Jeremiah, and for God’s promise fulfilled to Abraham in Romans.

But never is our journey of faith an easy one. The ancient Judeans were compelled to make sacrifices and burnt offerings, as must have been required by other gods in their day, even as God sent messengers and prophets warning of the consequences. Abraham overcame what appeared to be the obvious natural barrier of age to receive God’s gift. And in John, the people at the festival with Jesus faced the intimidation and threat of arrest by the temple police at the will of the Pharisees, who lived by adherence to the law alone, and who did not have faith in the way foretold by Jesus.

What sacrifices and burnt offerings are we making that obscure our faith journey? What artificial barriers have we erected in our lives that prevent us from inheriting the gifts of God? What laws: social, cultural, or written, lead us away from the rivers of living water, even as we thirst?

Spencer and Rena F
March 10, 2021

Jeremiah 8: 18 - 9 : 6
Romans 5: 1 - 11
John 8: 12 – 20

“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.’ Then the Pharisees said to him, ‘You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.’ Jesus answered, ‘Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going’” (John 8: 12 - 20).

In today’s Gospel, Jesus talks about trust. Specifically, about trusting the process and overall trusting in God. Jesus explains that only God knows about everyone’s past and what their future is going to hold. No one knows what their future is going to hold, that’s why you must trust that God will lead you down the right path. Just remember that God knows what is best for His children and he will always lead you down the right path.

As my high school years come to an end, I am faced with a big decision, what college should I go to? Every acceptance letter that I get back is accompanied by the stress of having to decide which one school, out of many, is the right one for me. Do I pick the school that is closest to home? Do I pick the school that is farthest from home? Do I pick the school that has the best program for the major I want? Do I pick the big school? Do I pick the small school? There are so many factors to determine that it gets overwhelming at times.

After reflecting on the words of this passage, I understand that when choosing the right college, putting my trust in God will lead me down the right path. I trust that, in the end, God will help me pick the perfect college for me!

Allison G-N
March 11, 2021

Jeremiah 10: 11-24
Romans 5: 12-21
John 8: 21-32

These passages deal with concepts that are related to each other: false gods versus the true God, sin, punishment, death and redemption.

Jeremiah is a discussion about the “gods who did not make the heavens” versus “he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom…” Though man has a choice to pursue one god or the other god, punishment is severe. “My tent is destroyed … my children have gone from me.” We humans plea, “Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure.”

In Romans, we are reminded that Adam brought sin and death—possibly helping to bring about the false gods of Jeremiah. Even though many died through Adam’s transgression, all is not lost for mankind. “Much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.” “One man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.” As sin has “dominion in death,” so grace has “dominion . . . to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

John illustrates that many Jews found difficulty in understanding Jesus as he said, “You are of this world, I am not of this world.” He also stated, “You will die in your sins unless you believe I am he.” When questioned further, Jesus praised the Jewish believers by saying, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.”

As Christians, our lives are inextricably tied to the true God, avoidance of sin, and the hope of redemption. As a child of Catholic parents, I went through catechism classes and avoided sin to keep from THIS world’s punishment from my parents. I happily welcomed the day of my First Communion as my entrance to the table of the Lord until a tall candle I was holding set my veil afire (doused by a quick-thinking altar boy). Still, it was a special day. The desire to stay close to the true God followed me into my 20s when I had lost faith in my religion, then worried about punishment from God for not believing. Deciding that God might give me a sign—like a lightning strike or something—if I missed church, I gave it a try. The lightning strike didn’t come, but I embarked upon a lifelong journey to seek membership in a church that filled my spiritual needs, which continued until finding St. Timothy’s.

I may always have a tug of war between embracing the “goldsmith’s gold” (false gods) —life’s frills that aren’t essential and may not enrich our spiritual lives—and that of the spiritual gifts we get from God. On the other hand, life’s frills are meaningless without love which is like a warm current that covers everything we do. God is the Great Teacher who tells us what we need to know about love.

The struggle remains with how to love, even when we are unhappy with someone or something. It is a “work in progress.” Love doesn’t come easily in those circumstances, but I have to believe that Christ’s love will help me. “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Dee G
March 12, 2021

Jeremiah 11:1-8, 11:14-20
Romans 6:1-11
John 8:33-47 (NRSV)

They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God. John 8:33-47

What is True Freedom?

In John 8:33-47 we find Jesus in discussion with the Jews. A dialogue focuses on achieving freedom by listening to God the Father. The Jews cannot understand what he is speaking about. (39) They answered him, "Abraham is our father." To those Jesus replies (43) "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. (44) you are from your father the devil and you choose to do your father's desires" (47) whoever is from God hears the words of God". Jesus is trying to help them understand God the Father to help achieve true freedom. Although Jesus tried his best to teach the Jews about his Father all were not convinced. If I try to envision this scenario now, thousands of years later, I have some thoughts on why it was so difficult.

Our world is suffering from a terrible pandemic. Although we have the greatest scientists, economists, and health care providers addressing this problem, this pandemic has caused massive deaths throughout the world, and in the U.S., economic hardship, the creation of schisms which include those between science and economics, wealth and poverty, blue collar and white-collar workers, young and old, and an increase in mental health problems. Some experts are even analyzing what occurred in order to improve for the future. The question is; who can predict when or if we will overcome this problem or if or when it will be replaced by another problem even more serious?

I think Jesus had the right idea. The road to his Father is not an easy one. We still struggle with it today. But at the end of the day, we need to search deep in our hearts in prayer. And in the midst of mental confusion and chaos we may hear a soft sweet voice. It calls to us, “Come follow me and I will give you rest.”

Nora H
March 13, 2021

Romans 6:12-23 – “you must not give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives.” – The Message
John 8:47-59 - Whoever is from God hears the words of God (NRSV)

The Spiritual Practices

The summer of ’71 before I was to be married, I returned to LaGrange for one last time with my childhood family, instead of working on the ranch in Dixon as I had for the four previous summers. I worked at the EMD division of GM as a UAW where my father was an application engineer. I worked on the night shift from 4:00PM to midnight; it paid a lot vs. the $1.60/hour on the ranch. Being a college kid and a son of a “suit,” I was somewhat of an outcast. So I wound up working with a much older black man who was also an outcast. He said that he really didn’t really know his exact age. We liked one other at the extremes of this UAW group. We ate our bag lunches together and became work friends. While not making much national news, I recall a fair amount of racial tension locally. One time we discussed this. I asked him how he handled the meanness and hate directed at him. He replied that he ignored it as much as possible, but he said he refused to let it cause him to hate his tormentors. He said, “Hate is like a cancer; it eats at you from the inside, destroying your inner self.”

I have not chosen any one of these lessons, but what I see in them all are Spiritual Practices. First is a call from God to turn away from those things that separate you from God. In Jeremiah, the metaphor is about a separation from God leading to ruin. The finest of things, when separated from God, lead to ruin. This is a simple call to Turn toward God. The second Spiritual Practice is Pray, from Paul’s message to the Romans. It is a reminder that your baptismal covenant is a commitment that sets you free, but it is a continual renewal to try to hear the words of God and install them like software in the operating system of your life. It is a call to Pray. And lastly the Gospel is the Spiritual Practice of Go. “Just do it,” as an advertising slogan says. In the Gospel for today, Jesus is before a crowd of better-off religious people. This was largely a political confrontation, much like today. The church has always been about this work; “Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” It is a difficult job. The point is that it is not enough to just know God, but the challenge is to Go and make God visible in the world.

I think back about how the old black man must have kept spiritual practices in his life by Turning to God, Praying, and thankfully for me, Going and sharing his wisdom with me. So, I encourage you to look at the world around you this Lent, and always, to see and do the Spiritual Practices that help you connect to God.

Jim C
When I looked at today’s scriptures to decide on what I would write about, I was pleased when I found the familiar story in the Gospel reading and immediately decided it would be my choice for this writing. “The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes” is so amazing and full of wonderful “food for thought!” However, the last verse stopped me in my tracks, and my writing focus took a very different turn.

Verse 15 reads, “When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

Apparently, Jesus had no intention of becoming an earthly king. He made that clear several times during His ministry, so this is really no surprise. And just as often, what His followers thought would be in His best interest was at odds with what He knew about His purpose. They probably had a more marketable version of Jesus in mind that would appeal more to the masses, like maybe “King Jesus”, who ruled this world? History shows that since His life on earth, the followers of Jesus (aka “Christians”) have continued to re-invent Jesus to be a more culturally relevant figure for their time.

Jaroslav Pelikan, in his book *Jesus Through the Centuries* describes seventeen images that portray Jesus in the history of culture. A few of these are: “Rabbi”, “Light of the Gentiles”, “Cosmic Christ”, “King of Kings”, “The Poet of the Spirit” and “The Liberator”. The relevance of each of these images came from the cultural context of a particular time in Christian history.

I can identify with a cultural Jesus image shift that occurred in the early 1970’s when the rock opera “Jesus Christ, Superstar” leapt onto the stage with passionate responses from the mainstream Christian community such as “Irreverent” “Blasphemous” and “Shockingly Sac religious”. The question raised by the opening choral introduction was uncomfortably clear: “Jesus Christ, Superstar, do you think you’re what they say you are?” During the remainder of the story, Jesus becomes more and more uncomfortable with his Superstar status to the dismay and disappointment of His followers.

Today’s Gospel shows Jesus trying to avoid the possibility of attaining anything close to “superstar” status. He had just performed an amazing and undeniable miracle in front of a very large crowd. It might be described as a “perfect op to raise his street cred”. His response? Head for the hills. Now.

As we follow Jesus’ journey to the cross during Lent, let’s consider the Jesus who turned away from opportunities to attain those things we often chase after- the kinds of things that interfere with our relationship with God. We are surrounded by such things to the point that we no longer see them.

Jesus was Jesus for a reason. He modeled the heart of God and can lead us beyond ourselves to the promise of God’s kingdom, a kingdom not of this world.

Jan M
March 16, 2021

Jeremiah 17:19-27  
Romans 7:13-25  
John 6: 16-27

Sabbath: a day set aside for rest and worship

In reading this passage it appears that Jeremiah is the “gate keeper”, his task is to tell the people to obey God’s law on the Sabbath and there will be blessings for the obedient and punishment for this disobedient.

When I was growing up we had a normal routine on Sundays. Church in the morning, then stopping by the local delicatessen to buy meats and focassia bread for lunch. We would then find time to play outside, come in for dinner, watch Disney on tv and polish our shoes for school. We did our best to observe this as the Lord’s day. Fast-forward 50 years and things are much different.

I reflect back just a few years ago when I would walk my dog on a Sunday afternoon at the park across from our home. Sundays were very busy with youth sports, particularly, soccer. I myself most likely had come from church and was feeling full of thanks for the time I had spent with God. Unfortunately, my blissful balloon was often popped by what I witnessed; parents, screaming and yelling like crazy people, as they watched their children play soccer. Often, children were crying because they missed a goal or because a parent made it very clear how disappointed they were. My goodness, what has happened to Sundays??

Why is it so difficult for us to just take a break and enjoy a quiet day? Why do we feel the need to move through life at the speed of sound?

Let us try to remember what the Sabbath is all about? Stop and focus on relating to God. We should treat every day like the Sabbath.

Each day just stop what you’re doing and enjoy God’s world and his presence in our lives, even if it’s just a minute or two. Is this asking too much? Certainly not.

Rena W
March 17, 2021

Jeremiah 18:1-11 (NRSV)
Romans 8:1-11 (NRSV)
John 6:27-40 (NRSV)

In today’s Gospel, John tells me, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on Him that God the Father has set his seal.” (John 6:27). There seems to be a clear distinction between the food I need to eat to maintain my physical self and the “food” that I need to maintain my spiritual self.

Food for my physical self enables me to have a healthy body. For me, it seems tangible and relatively easy to understand. When I am physically hungry, my stomach growls, I grab something out of the fridge, take a few bites, and the hunger goes away. I also know how to recognize my unhealthy cravings. I enjoy nachos, but I know they are not what my body needs to be healthy. Beyond food, I feed my physical self through the constant pursuits of comforts…the big house, the nice car…all these things that I need to satisfy this hunger.

But, how do I recognize my spiritual hunger…the food that endures for eternal life? And, more importantly, how to I satisfy it? Upon reflection, I feel like spiritual hunger could be the absence of God in my life; the desire to build a stronger relationship with Him. Feelings of overwhelming loneliness, hopelessness, anger, impatience, greed -- all may just be my spiritual stomach growling. But, where the spiritual fridge? I believe it is a call to prayer, to self-reflection, to focus on people around me, to actively listening and embodying the teachings of Christ.

It amazes me how much of my time I spend each day, every day working to feed my physical self – getting the right job, the long hours at work, buying things I “need”, my workout routine… But, how much time do I spend each day, every day, working to feed my spiritual self…on building a closer relationship with God?

Each week at Mass, I ask God to “Give us this day our daily bread.” I need to remind myself, that I am asking for more than food on my table. I am asking for strength and guidance to help me build a more close, loving, and enduring relationship with Him.

John G
This reading from Romans is about hope. It starts by differentiating living according to the flesh from living by the Spirit. I take this to mean that we can choose to live in our limited physical experience of our world and our need to feel in control or we can live as heirs of God. We can trade fear for hope.

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.”

Several years ago, my family hosted two members of a South African church in our home for a week. They generously answered our questions about their life at home, foods they enjoyed (and food they didn’t), typical daily activities, what they did for fun, and their work as educators. Music was a big part of worship and also daily life. When they sang, it was full of joy, energy, and glory. They sang with beautiful smiles, clapping and bouncing movement. They also shared some of their experiences during apartheid. This included injustices, harassment, being jailed, and an unknown future. I asked how it was that their songs held so much joy in the midst of the pain they were experiencing during that time. Very simply, they explained that they did not give up on justice, but the suffering they were living with was in this world and they were embracing God’s promise of life everlasting and it was glorious.

“But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

So often we feel the need to plan everything, control all the variables, create goals and measure success. It is heartbreaking when we fail or face unexpected crisis. The pandemic has brought this experience to all of us. To expect a specific outcome as the only success brings more heartache. This reading reminds us to put hope in the Spirit, to remember we are children of God and saved. I don’t believe this reading instructs us to give up on our efforts to change our situation but to release our attachment to our expectation and have hope in the will of God.
March 19, 2021

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

I was raised Catholic, and now attend St. Timothy’s, so perhaps I am not supposed to say this out loud, but I never believed I was consuming actual flesh or blood during communion. I love metaphor, and for me, the act of consuming the body and blood of Christ has always felt like committing myself to not just read the Bible, or listen to an inspiring sermon, but to try to embody Christ’s word in my own life. I frequently fail, but hopefully sometimes succeed.

I am reminded of the saying, “I am going to make him eat his words.” Not a Christian sentiment to be sure, but a metaphor worth reflecting on, and one connected to the idea of consuming God in your life. I should never utter words that I am not willing to eat. I should never commit acts in my life that I am not willing to own. Of course, I too do things that are not palatable. I recently liked a mean post on Instagram, it was a post using an expletive to curse a politician I don’t like, and a friend called me on it. She and I are on opposite ends of the political spectrum and have had many discussions about where the hate that we see all around us is coming from. She pointed out that I was liking hate, and it tasted bitter.

Consuming God in your life could also be “practicing what you preach.” As any parent, teacher, leader knows, it is far easier to tell other people what rules to follow, what to study, or what philosophies are best, but it is meaningless unless you are willing to do it yourself. Recently politicians have made terrible missteps by failing to follow the same rules they set for the people they lead. Similarly, Christians that like to quote the Bible, or take communion, should strive to consume and embody Christ’s teachings. As any good cook will tell you, take a bite of what you are feeding others to be sure it tastes as good as you intended. If not, change the recipe! (I told you I love metaphors.)

Meghan G
March 20, 2021

Jeremiah 23:9-15
Romans 9:1-18
John 6:60-71

These three readings have a similar theme and caused me to reflect on MY need for control. When it comes to my relationship with God, it is NOT my choice. It may be my choice to read scripture, go to Church, or even act in a “Christian” way, but being loved by God is NOT my choice.

Jeremiah reminds us of the power of the Lord, and that it is His words that save us. While there may be Prophets (learned people) that will fill our heads and hearts with unicorns and rainbows, they are not the words of our Lord. Jeremiah also reminds us the price that is paid when we foolishly think we can find joy through our own acts or the word of anyone but the Lord; “they will be banished to darkness and there they will fall.”

In Romans, Paul reinforces Jeremiah’s prophecy but quickly shows us that the questioning of faith or disbelief, or even family heritage does not determine or reduce God’s love for us. His promises are ever present and never forgotten. There is nothing we can do in the natural world to change God’s plan. God’s mercy is His to give, not ours to earn.

Finally, in John, Jesus provides us with a reminder that coming to Him or the Father is not a human act. That no one can experience God’s grace or God’s unending love unless God allows; again, God gets to choose. We do not choose God, God chooses us.

I challenge each of you to open your hearts and feel God choose YOU. Allow His love to wash over you. You are NOT in control of this and in fact, CANNOT be in control. God has chosen you. God’s love and grace is His to give and yours to simply receive.

Nancy A
March 22, 2021

Jeremiah 24:1-10
Romans 9:19-33
John 9:1-17

These three passages have a common theme of good and bad woven in. We questioned who decided what is good and what is bad. Ultimately God makes the final judgement, but in order to live our lives, we have to make some decisions ourselves. For instance, deciding to eat the good fruit is pretty objective as bad fruits can make you ill. On the other hand, parts of the Epistle and Gospel had us thinking about right and wrong and good and bad. Maybe we need to agree to disagree on some topics.

In Romans, how were the citizens supposed to strive for righteousness? Is it faith-based like the Gentiles or law-based like Israel? We decided that we would work towards righteousness with both faith and the law. One without the other isn’t complete.

Even the Pharisees couldn’t decide who was healing the blind man. He was working on the Sabbath (which is against the culture). He was also called a sinner. The cause of the man’s blindness wasn’t from sinful parents, but rather God’s way to have His works revealed to him. At the end of the day, it was the blind man who said Jesus was a prophet. The Pharisees agreed to disagree.

Our takeaway is that we should not be too quick to judge good and evil. It may or may not be our place to do so. But to have a conversation or two or many about the events we see will help keep the peace with others and our eyes and hearts open to our brothers and sisters. Of course, if the food is spoiled, it must be thrown away. But if there is merit and good to come from discussing various topics, traditions, and matters of the heart, then we can learn from each other and grow.

Blessings,

Thomas and Cathy H
March 23, 2021

Jeremiah 25:8-17
Romans 10:1-13
John 9:18-41

Jeremiah: Confusing! A vengeful God declares that as the Israelites didn’t obey, they would be exiled to Babylon for a 70-year captivity. Then after the 70-year captivity, God punished Babylon for taking Israel captive. Confusing? Questions…. Questions…. Why did God change his allegiance between Israel and Babylon? Is God really changing his mind? Or is it that the author is trying to explain events that occurred hundreds of years ago?

What is God asking of us and our culture today? Having the opportunity to question my faith demonstrates to me the value of the season of Lent. It is a time to take stock of my understanding of faith and to ask again: What does God ask of me? Listening to Paul in the Epistle, he declares that if you have faith in your heart you will be saved. So, is this what God is asking of us? To have faith in our hearts and not just feel righteous because we are following the law?

The Gospel reading extends this idea by showing how having faith will allow the blind to see, but following the law without faith in one’s heart will mean that while our eyes can see, we are still blind to the truth.

Rena F
March 24, 2021

Jeremiah 25:30-38
Romans 10:14-21
John 10:1-18

As I read the Old Testament reading today, I can resonate with sometimes seeking the God of the Old Testament, to be “Like a lion (who)...has left his covert, for their land has become a waste because of the cruel sword, and because of his fierce anger.” I continue to grapple with living in a nation that is so divided in so many ways. Of course, I think my way is the just and righteous way, and, fortunately, God isn’t responding to my wishes.

The epistle reading seems to direct me to what I am seeking, God. The prophet Isaiah, in the epistle reading, declares, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.....of Israel, he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’” Who has found God? Who are those disobedient and contrary people? As I read this, I am wondering about all of this? How do I live according to God’s will, rather than my own? To what is God calling me? To whom?

In the gospel reading, Jesus declares who he is, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep....I know my own and my own know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father...I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Which flock am I in, Lord? How do I know? This Lenten time is a good time, always, to listen for your voice, Lord, in all the voices clamoring for my attention. Since I believe your voice is often in the stillness, I realize that I must find time to be quiet, and still, to listen attentively to your voice. To follow you, Lord. I am so relieved to know that, even if I am not in your fold, you will bring me out and I will listen to your voice. I have often been the wandering sheep, following others, which you label the thief or the hired hand, and, always, you have been there, Lord, to call me back, into your fold, and to listen to your voice.

By the time I read this in the Lenten Journal, I will have been over a month into the Lenten journey since Lent starts this year on February 17. And Easter will be just 10 days away. Something has shifted in me for this Lenten journey. I may have surrendered to knowing that I am led by the good shepherd, and, even if I go astray, I know that you will find me, and bring me back into your fold. I think, Lord, I am learning to surrender to my “sheepness”, being grateful that I have always had, and will always have, the good shepherd, to lead me.

May we all surrender to the Good Shepherd so that Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men, is the reality of life on our beloved Earth. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

Peg M
March 25, 2021

Jeremiah 26:1-16 (NRSV)
Romans 11:1-12 (NRSV)
John 10:19-42 (NRSV)

In the Old Testament reading for today, the prophet Jeremiah stands at the courtyard of the temple (approx. 609 BC) to speak a warning from the Lord; if the people do not turn from their wicked ways, disaster will be released on both the city and the temple. The preceding chapter contains Jeremiah’s warning of the impending siege by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the subsequent 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah, speaking for God says, “Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not arouse my anger with what your hands have made (25:6).” The New Testament also warns against idolatry, which is the practice of putting created things above God. In reading these warnings, we might be tempted to think that God is deficient or that He needs us to be complete. St. Paul states in Acts 17:25, “… he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”

Lent is a reminder to return our focus back to God’s love for us in Christ. Here is a simple practice to consider. As we “let go” of whatever we deem to be an idol, we might at first feel a tremendous sense of loss and grief. These unpleasant feelings are important to ponder without shame or self-criticism. As the feelings subside, we might feel more of an open posture in our being, like the gentle loosening of a tight grip. From a spiritual standpoint, this conscious act of “letting go” can create a willingness in our hearts to receive God’s grace. We might take time to be quiet before God in contemplative prayer and/or journaling. Let us be open to what insights come from our experience; this is spiritual food which we can share with others who are on the journey. The Gospel reading gives us assurance, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Let us allow God’s love and compassion to overflow in our hearts and to pour out of us to impact others.

Today is the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Let us pray for the memory of the enslaved and for their descendants. Let us pray for the modern victims of slavery and trafficking, which is borne out of idolatry and human greed.


Thomas J, M. Div.
tjajeh@gmail.com
The three readings for today seem to focus on listening and believing in the word of God. The Old Testament verses from Jeremiah talk about his efforts from Jerusalem to counsel the Jews who had been transported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after he conquered Judah. Jeremiah tells them that they should be patient in their exile and that God has said that they will be in exile for 70 years. During their exile they should build houses, marry and bring up children. At the same time, they should not forget Jerusalem (who probably needed their financial support). He expresses deep concern that they will listen to the people who tell them that their exile will be brief. God is going to bring them home but not soon. He is counseling those in exile to not lose faith but believe and persevere.

In the second reading, Paul talks about the relationship of the new believers (Gentiles) in Rome to the Jews in Israel. He uses an odd analogy for a non-country person writing to believers also living in a city – Rome – that of grafting new branches onto an olive tree after cutting off the original branches of the tree. However, it is probable that Paul and perhaps his audience in Rome were more familiar with the practice of grafting and its importance in creating a tree that produced a good crop than most city dwellers in 2021. Certainly, grafting was widely used in Israel, which got far less rain than Italy, to get a good crop from a wild olive tree that would not have produced a lot of fruit from its native branches. Paul wants the Christians in Rome to be conscious of their blessings for having found Jesus and are now following his teachings, but not to forget that God came to the Jews in Israel first and that their being added to the company of believers does not prevent or preclude the Jews in Israel from finding a belief in Jesus and rejoining the company of believers. The root stock which nourishes both groups is the same. They should remember that losing their belief in God has caused the Jews in Israel to suffer hardship, and the same thing can happen to the believers in Rome if they lose their belief in God and Jesus.

The Gospel for today talks about the familiar story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Mary and Martha are the sisters of Lazarus and send word to Jesus that their brother is ill. Jesus does not go to them immediately. When he does decide to go to Bethany, which is near Jerusalem and a dangerous location for him to go to, Thomas, the twin tells the other disciples that they should go with Jesus – despite the danger to them and to him. He believes enough to risk his life to go with Jesus.

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has died and been buried. Martha goes out to meet Jesus, leaving Mary in the house. She tells Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She seems to believe that he can heal someone when he is with them but not from far away. She does say that she believes that God will give Jesus whatever he asks for. Jesus’s response to her is repeated many times in the Episcopal liturgy – particularly during Memorial Services.

“I am the resurrection, and the life. Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”
Martha’s response: “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

It is not easy to hold that belief when everything around us seems to be going wrong and the challenges to life and belief are overwhelming. Certainly, the past year has shown that again and again. Perhaps that is why we need to keep repeating the phrase.

Sally S P
March 27, 2021

So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.” “And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Paul was convinced that he was called to enable as many of his fellow Jews as possible to repent and accept Jesus as messiah partially in anticipation the new covenant prophesized by Isaiah (above). Ideally, he would lead the Jews to Christ before the imminent second coming. The conversions were few and his fervent advocacy of the new way led some Jewish communities to become his greatest persecutors.

Saul/Paul was confronted with irrefutable, startling evidence about Jesus’ Lordship as he approached Damascus intent on persecuting mainly Greek speaking Jews (Hellenists) who followed the way of Jesus. His encounter with the risen Lord brought repentance and the redirection of his considerable energies to creating converts and faith communities true to the beliefs he had so fervently rejected. The Jews he visited in Asia Minor and Europe didn’t have the benefit of such a transforming event.

Jews had to rely on Paul and other evangelists (not a potent vision) to convince them that Jesus was messiah. The Jews’ expectations of a redeemer messiah didn’t concur with what they understood of Jesus. Indeed, they may have perceived Jesus as most unlikely candidate for the role of warrior king of Israel. Most of the people of Jacob (Israel) did not read their holy book as a prophecy about the coming of Jesus and Jesus’s qualifications as messiah… how could God be so “inscrutable” as to allow a messiah to die pinned to a tree by a foreign conqueror? It is likely that converting many Jews was not a prerequisite for the second coming and Paul in his zeal failed to fully accept his role as faith ambassador to the God-fearers and other gentiles until circumstances and the Holy Spirit compelled him to alter his focus and build or encourage and guide hybrid Christian faith communities with great success.

As a convert from Judaism, I wonder if this failure to convert most of the Jews really represented an urgent lost opportunity. The Jews are still a people of the covenant with a firm place in God’s kingdom. Our Christian faith benefits greatly from the diversity of faith traditions that continue to inform our understanding of the nature of God and the nature of God’s grace. The remnants of Israel’s diaspora have contributed greatly to our understanding of grace in their courage, sacrifice, faithfulness, scholarship, and holy insight. Let us rejoice in their persistence and in the diverse perspectives that their faith tradition provides! God in His in inscrutable mercy has enriched both our interdependent faith traditions.

Thanks be to God!
Gil J
March 29th, 2021

Jeremiah 12:1-16
Philippians 3:1-14
John 12:9-19

This time we live in... It is so hard! Where is God's Grace? What is a person to do? I struggle with these thoughts nearly every day. I suspect all of us do.

Could those words have been said by Jeremiah? By Paul? By John?
Perhaps these thousands of years haven’t changed us as much as we modern humans believe.

In the old testament reading, Jeremiah is perplexed by God’s seeming lack of action in the midst of a civilization destroying itself. God’s promised land has become corrupt, full of human deceit, and false gods. His opening words to the Lord closely resemble mine at the top of this page. In His answer, the Lord assures Jeremiah that there will most definitely be a reckoning, but that God’s Grace and order will be restored while bringing everyone back to the fold.

Centuries later, in Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians, he encourages them to continue their good works, and writes of the folly of valuing human priorities in our fallen world over the true Law of Love through Christ. Paul’s admonition here is similar to the Lord’s as He assured Jeremiah in ancient Judah. What are our human governments, leaders, political movements, or economic systems in comparison to the Way of Christ? Paul (once himself a pretty powerful, murderous Pharisee) tells the Philippians, and us, that our mortal possessions, trappings, and conceits are “as rubbish”.

Finally, we have John’s account of how the first Christians and the Pharisees reacted to Lazarus’ resurrection. One group honors Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. The other fears that His power will destroy theirs, and so, plot His death. Amazingly, it took both groups to fulfill prophecy so that God’s new covenant could begin. God, again, working in ways we can’t fathom.

As I think about these three passages together, I feel like they are a renewed assurance for me to trust in Him always. They tell me that even though I cannot possibly understand the complexity of His design for our world, I must have faith and courage in the face of human corruption and always try to do His work. He will protect me even when that isn’t popular.

So, perhaps I should revisit those words of despair at the top of the page again:

Where is God’s Grace?
It is always with us, even when we can’t see how. Jeremiah, Paul, and John assure us of that.

What is a person to do?
Trust in Him to redeem and restore us all.

This Holy Week, I think I will renew my commitment to do my best to Love all God’s people, and to trust in God’s beautiful, unfathomable plan which invariably leads our world to redemption.

Blessings,
Rob K
March 30, 2021

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
John 12:20-26

A little background ...for 67 years of my life I used my middle name, Kay. Family and friends called me a rock. Most of the time it was in the sense of being steadfast. There were times it meant being stubborn. I had also abandoned the church in favor of solo spiritual practice for decades. This is the story of calls; to soften the rock, return to church, and to reclaim my first name.

At first, my brain could not connect with the readings. For days I took them out and reread them ...nothing special here ...where did Helen find them? Finally, what I was reading hit me (like a rock) and the word that would connect the 3 readings for me popped out ...CALL.

2008. I was newly living alone on ten acres of wooded land in gold country. I avoided thinking about my “divorce” with thoughts of filling the woodshed and getting the garden ready for winter. Later I would think about filling the long winter evenings. An “After the Woodshed/ Garden” list got started. As the list grew, I recognized the gift I had been given ...time. There was time to read, time for grief, sacred drumming, and to decide on my personal intention for the next year. Reading was high on the evening list. A lifetime collection of unread Bibles called to me from the bookshelves. The bookstore called with more titles for my reading list. Earlier that year, after meeting a group of monks from a nearby Zen Monastery, I was invited/ called to meditate with them on Sundays. That became my day of rest from wood splitting. The road to the monastery took me past several churches. One Sunday a ringing church bell and an empty parking space called to me. I turned into the parking space and went inside. That was the start of Sundays at church.

Bible reading and work on the land continued ...and as I worked I recalled verses I had read. The wind in the oak grove whispered “in whom we live, move and have our being”. I thought, “remove this heart of stone”, as I rigged a come-along to move a large rock in the garden. Grief work and that 2009 intention eluded me until a friend sent the words, “I soften my rock”, with the injunction to “just do it”. Being “a rock” was me; this would be ego work. The stubborn aspect of the rock took hold and I resisted. I read Ezekiel again, it was a call -- Ezekiel was after my heart of stone. How it happened is a long story. The short story is that it happened; the rock softened, and I grieved.

In the meantime, Trinity Episcopal Church in Sutter Creek had called via yet another friend. After a few months there, I renewed my baptismal vows. When asked what name I wanted to use, Isaiah immediately came to mind, The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me, “Gloria”.

Life isn’t all big events and loudspeakers ...there are many little things that happen in our lives; whisperings, a two minute phone call, a brief notecard. Here they have been elevated to callings, for they have guided my journey. Listen to whispers.

Peace be with you.
Gloria R
March 31, 2021

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Hebrews 12:1-3
John 13:21-32

The Lord God has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.  Isaiah 50: 4

As a follower of Jesus, I have had the experience of making a statement of faith, where, after the words left my mouth, I had a flash thought, “Where did that come from?” The result is that I believe that on occasion, I have experienced the first stanza of Isaiah. This is a reminder that we each bear a tremendous responsibility to examine our faith journey in an attempt to determine what it is that we truly believe. At the same time, we probably realize that we will never actually know a discreet answer.

All the while as we are traveling through this faith journey, we are chartered to enter into respectful conversations with others describing where we are spiritually. As explorers of faith and members of a democratic society, we are charged to become workers to assist in moving our secular society towards a closer reflection of a more just society. The Sacred Ground Episcopal program is a wonderful, although sometimes personally challenging, initiative to help us understand systemic racism and move towards a more just society.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that our God in wisdom created infinite varieties of what we call the human species. Even the person of Judas was a creation of our God and in retrospect, played his role in life. With that in mind I pray we always remember that we are all children of God and are therefore loved by Her.

Steve M
April 1, 2021

Exodus 12: 1-4, (5-10), 11-14,
1 Corinthians 11:23-26,
John 13:1-17,31B-35

As I read all of my three scriptures for the third time and am pondering over my responses, I am reminded of my lack of religious intelligence. I am a ‘cradle Episcopalian, and I have been blessed with faith all of my life. No matter what hurdles or troubles have come my way, I have been led by faith to know that God is with me. Not that I have never been afraid nor worried, but deep down, I have been blessed with faith by knowing that my Heavenly Father is always with me.

EXODUS 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14
The first scripture; however, left me baffled. I have heard the scripture and the story many times before, and I appreciate the celebratory nature of the story, but the “I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals……” is beyond my explanation ability. So I will move quickly to the next two. Others will understand and explain this one better than I am able.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26
We know this passage well, for it is an essential part of our communion service in our Episcopal Church. Without doubting, I can visualize Jesus giving these instructions, and I feel humbled to know that I am sharing in the commandments that He gave before His death. I even cherish the memories of all gathering at the altar together and having the sacraments at the same time. For me this is a unification of all of those who believe and know that God is with us at all times.

JOHN 13: 1-17, 31b-35
This, too, is a familiar passage, and for me it is apparent, especially during these times that I am not often forgiving nor accepting of those who believe differently than I do. “For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said,’ Not all of you are clean.” During this pandemic and this extremely volatile election season, many of us stand so strongly in what we believe. But then again, it is still factual that almost half of us Americans believe differently. I think both sides are constantly wondering how we can see things so differently and yet so clearly in our own eyes. In conclusion, the answer is somewhat evident, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” It is a simple, but extremely difficult, lesson to follow. I pray I will be more understanding. Thank you all for letting me share.

Margaret B
April 2, 2021
Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Hebrews 10:16-25
John 18:1-19:42

“And let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching”.

I know that when I am exhausted, both mentally and physically, my sarcasm appears in full force and could easily be open to misinterpretation. It is even worse for the person on receiving end if it only appears in print without the warning that it is sarcasm and not meant to be hurtful. This last year has been challenging for most everyone. Between COVID, the political climate, and just life in general, our ability to positively encourage others has been tested far beyond many of us could imagine.

Yet we are asked to do just that – encourage one another to get through life. We have had to become quite creative to accomplish these goals. Boy Scouts is mostly online; however the Troop and I have conducted over 50 Boards of Reviews via Zoom and watch these boys advance in their ranks. Some requirements are meant to be done as a group. I ask how they did them and their answers are great. We could get into the great debate about online schooling. I applaud the teachers who help make sure that the kids can learn and keep their spirits up. Yet, the kids and teachers crave the community that school offers. At work, we have hired several people online, as we have been home since March 13. Our fun activities include the occasional virtual cocktail party and photo contests. It certainly isn’t the same as being in person and being able to collaborate daily. The hard part has been doing the work fully remotely and separating the work/home balance well. And, of course with church, redesigning a worship service that feels like we are together but physically aren’t, has been the ongoing mission. Thanks to technology, we CAN connect in new ways that will stay with us after this pandemic is over.

Yet, we encourage each other with phone calls, texts, Zoom calls, and the new creative ways to live our lives. We can still do good in the world; it is just in a different way. We have had several socially distant birthday parties, a graduation party, and a New Year’s Eve party on our court. We have donated food to each other’s food drives and in general supported each other through life’s activities.

God wants to raise us all up. And He wants us to help others. We long for the day we can safely be physically together again. For now, we can do our best to encourage others even for a moment. And even though I am exhausted, I will do my very best to leave my sarcasm at home.

Blessings,

Cathy H
I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God’s wrath.
Though I cry for help, He shuts out my prayer.
But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in Him.”

These words were written by Jeremiah in the 6th century BCE, when the people of Israel had been enslaved by the Babylonians and had given up hope of God’s help. They were convinced God had abandoned them. Jeremiah wrote of those terrible times, but included the promise of better times, saying he knew God was forgiving and loving.

The year of 2020 was filled with political strife, natural disasters, and a world-wide pandemic. It seems that today there are many parallels to the plight of the Israelites with no end in sight to many of our current woes. In a time of great need, all people hope that God has not turned against them and punished them, as He did when the Israelites were enslaved in Babylon. Our current days are hard to endure, and we find ourselves acknowledging that we cannot come through them without His help.

Two millenniums after the book of Lamentations was written, an American named Henry Hill answered the call to join the Army. He left his family to enter combat far from home. Henry wasn’t a young man, but he went because his belief in the cause was unshakable. He was poorly supplied and lived in conditions that were unsanitary and made him terribly ill, but he felt it was his duty to remain. He saw the disasters that war could produce, and the desperation of the soldiers around him. Though he was weak and sick, he turned down a discharge, to work in a field hospital, to help “his boys”. This was his way to continue to serve. Through it all he kept his faith in a caring God. He often wrote his family that he knew God was with him and all those men he fought with. He said that though sacrifice was necessary, “No one should doubt the goodness of God!”

He cooked, nursed, and prayed for, those in the hospital. He gave away his own blankets to the wounded and slept on floors. He worked long hours to the detriment of his own health. He wrote letters for the men who were too weak to write their families, and if they died, he wrote letters of consolation to the people who lost their loved ones. He wrote his wife, “I have not been well all summer, but I want to do what I can, as long as I can do some good here. None can tell the sacrifices this war will cost, or how many separations will be final. Let us try to do our duty and leave the rest to the great Ruler of the Universe. This has been a hard time for me, but I will work as long as I can. I put all my trust in God. Let us believe in God! God is just!”

Henry was my father’s great-grandfather. I recently found a box of dozens of letters he wrote home during the Civil War. Through all of the letters runs the thread of his devotion to “his boys” and his belief in a loving God who would not abandon them. Henry’s faith led him through his troubled days, and he serves as an example to me of living a God-centered life in spite of trying times, and unlike the Israelites, maintaining unshakable faith when it is hardest to do so.

Patty A