Welcome to the 2020 Lenten Lectionary! As I thought about past introductions, my thoughts kept coming back to prayer. And not only how, but when and why, we should pray!

The Bible has several wonderful passages about prayer. 2 Chronicles 6 reminds us to approach God with prayer and supplication. And Psalm 5 tells us, “When I say my prayers in the morning, thou wilt hear me.” One of my favorites is from Luke. Jesus told them a parable to show that they should keep on praying and never lose heart.

When should we pray? Always! Acts 12 tells us that “prayer was made without ceasing.” Psalm 72 cries, “Prayer shall be made continually.” My favorite is Ephesians 6: Pray on every occasion, always interceding for God’s people.

Do we pray only for our loved ones? No! Matthew says to pray for those who despitefully use you. Pray for your persecutors!

How do we pray? Jesus responded to the question of how to pray by giving us the Lord’s Prayer, still used in Christian worship today.

My prayer life has shifted from only active praying to also more contemplative praying. I’m finding that the silence of being alone with God is very restful and fulfilling. And yet the prayers from the heart pour out in almost every circumstance—joy, fear, sadness, tenderness— you name it and I will pray about it!

I would like to issue you a Lenten challenge: Practice praying at all times and in all circumstances this Lent. It doesn’t mean only going into a quiet room; none of us have the time to do that all day long! It means keeping God front and center in our hearts and minds throughout the season. Hopefully you can start each morning with our Lenten Lectionary, followed by a time to prayerfully consider your agenda for the day. Then continue to talk to God in your heart all day—while driving, during a meeting, refereeing the kid’s fighting…Try it all day, and all Lent, and soon it can become a habit.

Lenten Blessings,
Helen Coleman

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.

And a special thanks to Greg Skuce for his wonderful Lenten artwork on the front cover.
Habakkuk 3:1-18  
Philippians 3:12-21  
John 17:1-8

In Habakkuk’s prayer we participate in the recollection of God’s power and strength. The descriptive nature of this prayer balances God’s ability to control the Universe and all things of nature and man with the great love God shows in his restraint. We are reminded of the confidence we should have in God’s power and the trust we must have in God’s enormous love.

In Paul’s letter to Philippi he is urging the Philippians and ultimately us to be an example. To live our lives as a disciple of Christ. Although we have a life filled with sin, God gives us the strength and confidence to push forward, to continue to strive to be like his Son. Finally, he is asking us to take personal inventory: if someone looked at you, your life, what would they see? Would they follow?

Finally, in John’s Gospel we see Jesus speak to His Father acknowledging that all of the strength and confidence was given to Him by the Father. That all He has done on the earth was to glorify the Lord. His journey, His struggles, His humiliation was not about him, but about showing God’s people that they could have confidence and trust that they were and would remain loved and protected. That they could always find the strength to face any challenge with God by their side.

When I read these readings, I was brought back to my conversion moment. I was 30 years old, a single mother of 2 very young boys, a USMC Recruiter working 16 hours a day, struggling to make ends meet, and had just had my ex-husband, who was not paying child-support, threaten to take my children away. The world was reeling around me. I felt like the mountains around me were crumbling and that there was no relief or hope in sight. I felt weak, defeated, and emptier than I ever thought possible.

You see, I had stopped going to Church years before because “I just didn’t have time.” I had not turned my back on God, but I had turned my face from his Glory. I had convinced myself that the only person I could depend on was me. That if this situation was going to change, only I could change it. That night as I lay in bed unable to sleep, I gave up. I looked at my ceiling and shouted at the top of my lungs, I CANNOT DO THIS WITHOUT YOU! I CANNOT DO THIS ALONE! LORD PLEASE HELP ME AND GIVE ME YOUR STRENGTH! As the last words came out of my mouth, I was filled with a sense of peace and strength. The next morning when I woke, I realized that the Lord had filled me with His strength, His confidence, and His love. Twenty-eight years later I still have not forgotten that moment, and I have not taken one step without God by my side.

I do not share this story for selfish reasons. I share it to illustrate that we should never lose confidence in God’s power to care for us, His power to Love us, and His desire for us to live in that knowledge. If we can do that, if we can acknowledge his Glory and power, we can face any challenge. In this season let us forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead; “…press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Nancy Arroyoavila
Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved, I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:1-9

How do we boil down the essence of Christianity? In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul tells us what we need to know. Paul loves this new church struggling to make sense of who Jesus was and His new way of living. Paul tells us to rejoice, not to fret over the little things of life, but to have peace, the peace of God. We need to keep our minds on all that is true, honorable, just, pleasing, and commendable, and God’s peace will be with us.

Isn’t it awesome that something written almost 2000 years ago still makes sense today? But now, sadly, we need to look closer at the second and third verses. I had left these out of my first writing attempt, because they spoiled my “perfect Christian” analogy. Why is Paul urging Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind? And why is he urging his loyal companion to help them? It sounds like there might be trouble in paradise. Are these two upstanding members of the ECW bickering? Whatever the reason, Paul is urging them to forgive each other and be of one mind. And he recruits his friend to help him.

What would we do if our church leadership stepped into our petty fights today? Would we be grateful, breathing a sigh of relief that all would be well? Or would we be angry and resentful, ready to go over to “that other church” where the leadership minds its own business?

I still remember a time in eighth grade when our principal (a member of our church) called me into his office because I was encouraging everyone to gang up on a friend. “What would Jesus think of your behavior?” he asked. I was ashamed, because he was right. This intervention changed my life. It caused me to see that my behavior affected—both positively and negatively—the lives of my friends.

Jesus wants us to love one another; we all know that. But sometimes loving means calling out unchristian behavior. Sometimes a quiet loving word can encourage a friend to see how his/her behavior is affecting others. How do we do this? With gentle persuasion, reminding our brother/sister that whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable -- to think on these things.

Helen Coleman
Sometimes I struggle to search for the path that God wants me to take. I question my strength and ability to follow God’s will, which I pray God makes clear to me. As I continue on my path to a deeper love and understanding, I have come to realize that loving God includes giving and receiving. It is important for me to give to others. Giving fills me with joy. But, I now believe that we need to be ready to receive God’s gift of love with an open heart and with an open mind. Truly, God wants us to give to others, but I believe He also wants us to open our hearts to God’s love even when we do not feel worthy. By giving and receiving God’s love, He fills our hearts with the Holy Spirit and provides joy that only God’s love can.

I try to smile at people that I pass while doing my daily tasks. Some people ignore me but there are people who will smile back. Give a smile and received a smile! It is not hard work. It makes me feel like God’s love is shining through my smile and, not only in the face of those that smile back but also those that don’t smile back. Not everything we do provides immediate gratification. God is asking me to let his love shine on others through my actions and words. That is the gratification—believing that I am able to do God’s work every day. I have many faults, but God continues to bless and love me. Sharing a smile with a stranger or saying thank you to a clerk are all ways of letting God’s light shine through me on to others. I am so blessed.

Linda Clark
Genesis 37:1-11
1 Corinthians 1:1-19
Mark 1:1-13

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’” 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judea countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Genesis scripture is succinctly summarized in the NRSV Annotated Bible as “Joseph’s dreams of power.” I would add it’s the basis of one of my favorite musicals!

However, the scripture from Mark (summarized in the NRSV, again: Preparing The Way of the Lord.) grabbed me for several reasons, some of which are:

- Baptism is very special for me. Some of you remember my own at the Easter Vigil in 2005. Although clergy didn’t wear camel’s hair or eat locusts and wild honey (that I know of), it was the greatest day of my life.

- The transition from good to not so good to good again is inspiring.

1:11: “You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”
1:12: “And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”
1:13: “…and the angels waited on him.”

- Also, the basis of one of my favorite musicals!

Prepare the way of the Lord. Prepare for trials. Prepare to be loved. I will with God’s help.

God’s blessings to you during this holy season of Lent, and throughout the year,
Sharyn Mitzo
Beginnings Start with an End:

All three of today’s readings reflect endings and beginnings. Beginnings are always rooted in an end. Peter, Andrew, John and James ended their careers as fishermen and left their families before they could begin their journey with Jesus. Gentiles and Jews were called to change their expectations from wisdom and signs respectively, to join with Jesus, leaving their old beliefs behind. And Joseph had to be abandoned by his brothers before he could start on the path to his ministry in Egypt with faith alone to guide him.

So, it is for us a time of endings and beginnings with our children; this spring, one will graduate from high school and the other from college. Each will be moving on to their next stage in life. What more than faith is there to guide them?

This is a time for all four of us to reflect on what to keep, and what to let go, and what choices to make moving on. While it is hard to leave the known behind and change is often difficult, new beginnings are the promise of joy.

Other thoughts on the Genesis reading:

What’s in a Reuben? Food for the soul, I say. For Christmas this year I gave my nephew, who lives in Brooklyn, a large Reuben sandwich. I’m not sure why a Reuben sandwich. First, a Reuben sandwich is delicious. And, I associate Brooklyn with its strong Jewish community, and I associate the name Reuben with its origin in the Torah, the foundation of our faith. It was he who had the moral courage to speak up for his younger brother Joseph when his other brothers were plotting to kill him. So, I like Reuben. Give me a Reuben any day. He’s my kind of sandwich.

Rena & Spencer Fulweiler
Jesus moves through the countryside, and heals as he spreads His word...

In the time of Jesus, women were unimportant, mostly uneducated, and definitely relegated to second-class citizenship. Throughout history, until modern times, we see that women’s roles were usually that of supporting player, not as a leader, or even equal. The occasional Joan of Arc or Marie Curie is an anomaly. Our twentieth century American foremothers brought us voting rights which began our own countrywomen’s move to come out of the shadows and have parity…legally, social, and emotionally. At least this happened here, with our country’s example opening doors for women in many other places in the world, although many others’ roles are still unchanged.

In Mark’s Gospel, he describes Jesus’ curing of Simon’s mother-in-law from her fever. She was made healthy again, and then…got right up and “started to serve them.” This is all that is recorded of this incident. Her name was not given. No description of what she looked like or how she felt about being returned to good health. We don’t hear the words Jesus said to her as he performed his cure. No congratulatory hugs from her family, no mention of appreciative words for Jesus’ cure of their loved one. She just got up… and went back to work.

This is much like the time when Mary and Martha had Jesus in their home as a guest and Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, but Martha hurried to the kitchen to prepare food for Jesus and the other guests. As a Martha myself, I have always taken umbrage at the rebuke Jesus gave Martha for not being like Mary and sitting to hear His words. I always thought, “Didn’t He realize that at some point everyone would be hungry, and the food would not be ready?”

Looking at Simon’s mother-in-law and at Martha, and their described participation in the events of Jesus’ life, we see their stories as reflected in the societal conventions of the time. They saw a duty which was proscribed and went right to work fulfilling it. They did this without questioning what was expected of them.

But if Jesus did nothing else, he encouraged us to do just that…question our lives and assess them for how best to use the gift of our life, and how we travel through it. To find how we can live our BEST lives, loving God and one another, and by doing so, showing God our appreciation for His gift of such a life, We are the ones who place limits on what we can do while we are on this earth, We need to open ourselves to seeing the best way we can live while we are here, before moving to the next, perfect life.

Martha (Patty) Alexanderson
Confession is good for the soul, so I must confess. I have read, re-read and digested these readings, and for a while nothing spoke to me. The fact that I am recovering from double cataract surgery, a viral infection and plain old fashion infection may have something to do with it!

I plowed on...kinda liked the story in Genesis about Joseph and his troubles dealing with the sexual advances of his boss’s wife. Then in Corinthians where it speaks about spiritual discernment, etc. That wasn't speaking to me now. maybe later. That left me with Mark. So I read and re-read, and finally in my haze came something that I would like to share with my Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

This is the time when Jesus has called Simon, Andrew, James and John to put down their nets and follow him. Jesus was in the Synagogue teaching and healing, upsetting the powers that be. News spread rapidly of the miracles that were happening. The crowds grew larger as he walked near the shores of Galilee. Scripture says, "When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home." The new normal was one of great crowds, some just curious, some needing help, some suspicious and hoping to entrap Jesus in being deceitful and blasphemous.

There was a man, a paralytic who lived nearby. His four friends were hoping that Jesus could heal him. They carried their friend to the home in Capernaum only to be confronted with that fact that there was no way to get him anywhere near Jesus, and thus dashing the hope of healing. Undaunted, the friends went up on the roof, and removed a section that was above Jesus. Then they preceded to dig an opening wide enough to lower the man on his mat down into the midst of the crowd right in front of Jesus. What a sight! What determination! These four men where not taking no for an answer. They knew that this was their friend’s only chance for a normal life. Scripture says that Jesus saw this, and it was THEIR faith that made the healing possible.

Fast forward a few thousand years to St. Timothy's and this Community. To me this speaks of Community, willingness to be of help, and faith. For me this says what we are all about here at St.Timothy's. If this is something you have not experienced, then I humbly suggest you give it a go...we have so many opportunities both in outreach, and what is referred to as "in-reach". Lent may be a good time to consider what you may wish to do in God's name and with God's love.

Back to Capernaum... I have often wondered if someone stayed on to fix the hole in the roof!

Blessed Lent,

Patti Farris
An amazing personal experience occurred because of this lectionary assignment. As preparation for an upcoming trip to Egypt, long a destination on our “bucket list,” my husband Tony and I recently watched one of the Great Courses on Egypt lectures which discussed the Biblical Joseph and his relationship with the Egyptian Pharaohs. Within a few days of that lecture, the lectionary assignment arrived which illustrates Joseph’s expertise in interpreting dreams. The professor remarked that interpretation of dreams was a valued skill in Ancient Egypt, one which would easily promote one’s status with the Pharaoh. Joseph eventually was made the Pharaoh’s vizier because he could explain the Pharaoh’s dreams.

When the three men in the parable were in prison together, Joseph interpreted the cupbearer’s and chief baker’s dreams and correctly predicted their fates. The cupbearer was to regain his job, but the chief baker would be killed. Joseph asked the cupbearer to “make a mention of me to the Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place.” However, the cupbearer failed to do so—a common human failing not to show gratitude. It seems that each man was desperate to find truth in his life and to follow someone who could provide it, in this case, Joseph. As soon as the emergency had passed, the cupbearer fell back into more self-focused behavior.

We, too, seek meaning to our lives and hope that someone can do it for us. I sought meaning that my lectionary assignment included a study of Joseph so close to the time we had learned about him and the Pharaohs in our course. Was this only a remarkable coincidence? Or was God preparing me to look for the Biblical connections in our trip to Egypt?

We make connections at St. Timothy’s that help us to find meaning in life, and we apply those connections to our daily lives during the week. Our lives have the capacity to be positive and fulfilling with many blessings, but, as the 1 Corinthians passage explains, “let no one boast about human leaders, for all things are yours.” We are the masters of our fate, for all that is within our control. For that which is beyond our control, we have to pray a lot and believe that all will be well or, at least, will be as God intended it. Nothing in this life is a guarantee.

For a time, Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams gave him value, just as we, too, seek to have our lives mean something important. This parable shows that we may have to be fools in order to become wise. We must interpret our own life experiences and apply them wisely as we gather new experiences. We have a direct line to help us: “All belong to you, you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”

As we travel, we feel blessed to be able to visit the area where Joseph lived and interpreted dreams as we will be doing today when the above Bible verses will be read.

Dee Geisler
Saturday, March 7, 2020

Genesis 41:1-13
1 Corinthians 4:1-7
Mark 2:23-3:6

In today’s Gospel, once again, Jesus challenges the status quo. After witnessing the disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath, the Pharisees challenged Jesus saying, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” Jesus first justifies their actions using logic/scripture. This did not sit well with the Pharisees, who believed themselves to be the experts. Jesus then stepped up the challenge with the question, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” No response. Finally, Jesus, after seeing a man suffering in the Synagogue, furthered his point by healing him (i.e., working). Seeing this, the enraged Pharisees immediately conspired against him, planning how to destroy him.

2000 years later, it’s easy for me to judge the Pharisees as arrogant and heartless. Upon reflection, I believe fear of change was at the root of their resistance. All their lives, they have studied scripture. In their core, the believed a strict observation to tradition and laws was critical to their faith. That the Sabbath was set aside to honor God. This is how it is now and how it has been for generations. Working on the Sabbath is a direct offense to God’s Law. No ifs, ands, or buts. Jesus is now asking them to change radically their way of thinking.

If I had been there (and at the time not really yet understanding who Jesus was), I wonder who I would have sided with? Would I have agreed with the Pharisees with their strict observation of tradition and law or with Jesus, a poor carpenter from the outskirts with non-traditional ideals? How would I have answered his question? Would I have agreed that we should challenge the tradition?

Even 2000 years later, Jesus still asks us to challenge our traditions…our convictions. But now to face this challenge, I have His guidance through His teachings, the support and patience of my faith community at St. Tim’s, and the strength of God’s love to make the change.

John Geraci
The story I was inspired by, of Joseph, son of Jacob of Canaan, is long a favorite of mine.

In Genesis we meet Joseph, one of the most blessed men to be found anywhere. He survived in the family of Jacob with some 60 members. He was handsome and productive. One day, his brothers felt they had had enough of Jacob’s favoring him, and, while he was grazing a herd of sheep, they took off Joseph’s lovely clothes and tossed them, along with him, into a dry pit. At age 30, he was soon sold to some passers-by on their way to Egypt, a little way west of Canaan, Jacob’s home.

Soon Joseph showed he was thankful, for once in Egypt he was sold to Potipher, Captain of the Guards of the Pharaoh in Egypt. Joseph was successful and pleased his owner. An unfortunate misunderstanding landed him in the dungeon for two years. But caring for others who were incarcerated with him helped, along with the ability to interpret dreams. Asked to discuss the meaning of a dream where cows were well-fed for seven years, and then spent seven more years of starvation, Joseph gave the Pharaoh his warning.

With God’s loving guidance, Joseph warned him that their country would have seven years of abundance, that would be followed by seven years of hunger. Joseph was blessed by being believed and then was given the job of saving surplus produce when available, and then doling it out when needed in the hunger years. The entire world was affected, but Joseph found miraculous solutions.

What would he have to say about our climate change? We find parallels to his miracles used in Egypt. Our society has clever scientists. I am thankful for our church members’ contributions to providing the Lord’s answers to help victims with relief from hunger and homelessness and unemployment. I add my praise to their efforts. My part is more likely to be found in sending money when I can.

Thank you, St. Timothy’s.

Sally Goldner
I write this at the end of the past week: February 2-8, 2020. What a week it has been for our nation and our church.

- Super Bowl (sad day for Forty Niners fans)
- Presidential State of the Union address
- Impeachment trial and vote
- National Prayer Breakfast
- Democratic presidential candidate debate
- The Rev. Dr. Bonnie Perry consecrated as the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan (because, to quote The Rev. Susan Russell, “...what's not to love about a kayaking lesbian concerned about race, poverty and unemployment…")

Within the context of the events of this past week I ponder these sections of today’s Lectionary from the Gospel of Mark:

24} If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. {25} And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. {26} And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.

28} "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; {29} but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— {30} for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

{31} Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. {32} A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." {33} And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" {34} And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! {35} Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Friends, I believe that scripture has meaning and value for us today, and every day. When we consider the events of the week of February 2-8 through the lens of today’s Lectionary reading from Mark we have the opportunity to take a deep breath, take a step back from our immediate emotional responses, engage, consider, and prayerfully choose how to respond.

I constantly wrestle with scripture. What is most troubling to me in today’s reading from the third chapter of Mark is this:

{29} but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— {30} for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

I wrestle with this because I believe that we all can be forgiven.

Go in peace to love and serve our savior,
The Rev. Deacon Patricia W. Pearson
1 Corinthians 5:9-6:8 (NRSV)  I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons-- not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels--to say nothing of ordinary matters? If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer--and before unbelievers at that? In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud--and believers at that.

The main word that is written in 1 Corinthians is “judge”. Paul says that we should be careful who we eat with -- idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. God will judge those people. Paul says that we should drive out the wickedness inside of us. He does go on to say that even if you do this, you are not in a position to judge others. It is putting believer against believer in many cases, and it is a defeat for all.

Rather than shunning the people that Paul suggests, Thomas and I think Jesus would want us to try to help them. We don’t know their situations and therefore why they drink, rob, or have a less than stellar lifestyle. We can pray for them. We can support organizations that help these people, such as AA, Options Recovery, and others that allow individuals to make lifestyle changes. Let’s see if we as a society can find some of the roots of the problems people face. Jesus ate with sinners. We don’t suggest having dinner with the local bank robber. But instead, pray about why someone feels the need to steal and work towards solving the root cause of lack of money. Pray for someone to reveal the source of pain in their lives and a healthier solution than alcohol or drugs. Even bringing food to fill the food baskets at church will help with those who are hungry.

Blessings,

Thomas and Cathy Hager
Give me ears to hear, God. Give me courage and strength.

When we hear Jesus telling parables we can expect that they are stories that may work deeply in our hearts and minds. Apparently, the crowds didn’t immediately understand—Jesus spoke more intimately with his disciples later. The crowds, however, pushed forward pressing their bodies forward to hear and understand this man from God. When Jesus speaks in parables, he is speaking truth that disrupts—truth that disrupts the way we think, the world we live in, our assumptions about the way things are or even how we think things should be. We can be surprised to hear newness of God in hearts when we hear the familiar and it speaks to us.

Today I wonder not that we would of course shine a light when it is dark, use a flashlight or a candle when the lights go out, but what is that light in our souls that hears God speaking to us? Do we cry with the prophets and even Moses or Joseph—, “no, not me, some other wiser child of God, a better speaker, a better leader, a better pray-er.” In the new movie “Harriet”, I wonder that God used what was perceived as weakness and she listened and helped change her world and ours.

God is inviting us to think differently, to turn around and see God already working around us and in us. Perhaps we are being asked to have courage, not to be afraid and to believe that God will use these moments to lead a people as Joseph did even in his weakness of family jealousies, famine, loss and love. Perhaps we are being asked to listen with our whole being and not just with our reasoning practical minds.

Perhaps we are being asked to believe that God is asking us to participate in this new creation that Jesus spoke about when he declared: The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.

The sower is apparently not portrayed as an expert, diligently planting the seeds in this parable. Or is it God believing that the power for growth will land on us and God will help us to grow? It would seem that this parable is about more than God’s abundance. What if it is that we cannot control how or where the seed sprouts—that the harvest—the abundance of God’s justice and mercy and love is more joy than we ever imagined and that —“we do not know how” and it could change our world.

Sometimes I think about the phrase “God is working His purpose out” and how the complexities of this world -- God knows. The complexity of our personal worlds -- God knows. Listening in prayer and in the stories of God’s life in others is a way of hearing how we need to act.

God help me to listen with all my heart, my soul, my mind and my strength. Give me courage and a compassionate heart. I know you are with us. I know you are with me. Jesus, help me. Amen

Susan Geisler-O’Neil
Don’t let fear separate you from God.

What does it take to make a tentative believer have faith? It is no wonder that few people have strong faith today. Even the future apostles are clearly not in the strong believer camp on this boat trip! During the day Jesus has just told many parables to large crowds and is sailing back on Lake Galilee when a sudden storm catches them by surprise, nearly swamping the boat. His disciples, in full panic mode, yelp out, “Don’t you care if we drown?” to the exhausted Jesus, sleeping in the stern. Jesus awakens, calms the storm, and proceeds to rebuke his band, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” He must have been disappointed after all the parables and instruction he had given them. Their fears drove them far short of faith, even after a high intensity day of teaching by Jesus. I think fear is an enemy to faith. But faith in God can triumph over fear and make a better world. Eventually the Apostles did live up to their calling and did change the world, by spreading the Gospel, even to us today.

Fear is a tool used by many to elicit certain controlling behaviors. This is often seen in family relationships, advertising and politics. These are examples of externally generated fears. Even churches have used fear to control and modify behaviors. Sometimes we have our own internally produced fears. Fear of speaking in groups, our fear of rejection, etc. Both internal and external fears modify behavior. I suppose fear of heights, or certain animals, has a degree of self-preservation involved! But fear is not God’s tool of choice; love is God’s principal tool. Looking at this story, you can see how “nothing can separate you” from the love of God, not even fear. In this case, the disciples in the boat were afraid, but God calmed the storm, or gave them the sailing ability to navigate in a storm; but even more so, cast away their fears that separated them from Jesus. God’s call to us is to overcome our worldly fears and seek God. Even the quick cry from the men in the boat brought a response. Then they were no longer separated from God.

My guess is that there is more fear promulgated than ever before in history, because of the proliferation of electronic media and the ease of access to media to help spread fear. All fears, like the storm the disciples were in, are fears that might separate us from God. But if with even the smallest amount of faith we reach out to God, God will reach back to us. My thought is that we need to put these fears into perspective with the power and love of God. Making even a small cry out to God to overcome a fear might allow one to go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit, making the world a better place by fearless words and deeds.

Jim Coleman
1 Corinthians 7:10-24 To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife. However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches.

Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of uncircumcision. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.

So here we are with Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and some rules about marriage. It’s easy to get stuck in resistant feelings when we hear about rules. However, I don’t find that the salient idea in this scripture is really about marriage or circumcision or slavery, but about how we are to remain as we were when God called us.

I actually find that this scripture brings a profound sense of freedom. It’s incredibly liberating to understand that we don’t have to undergo some radical transformation to be worthy of God’s love. I don’t think that means that we can’t strive to be more Christlike. Paul tells us, “It is to peace that God has called you.” It’s by living in Christ’s peace and God’s love and showing that every day that we might bring others to the faith that would bless their lives.

So as we contemplate this season of Lent and Jesus’s sacrificing himself for us, it’s such an amazing gift to realize that sacrifice was made not for some future, transcendent version of ourselves, but for us just as we are. God’s love encompasses us and all of our imperfections. And that’s the kind of love we can strive to give to others- in our marriages, in our friendships and throughout our lives. We can give the gift of seeing others as they truly are - the beautiful children of God.

Rachel Wehenmeyer
Monday, March 16, 2020

Genesis 44: 18-34  
1 Corinthians 7: 25-31  
Mark 5: 21-43

I was so hoping for 3 clear, perhaps familiar, but connectable passages. My first pass at these readings left me fairly baffled; each one of them has quite a complex narrative and no obvious “message”. I put them aside for a while; convincing myself procrastinating would help. I should have known from my experience of returning to studies this year (to obtain my teacher credential), procrastination is never a good idea.

In the end I read the pieces out loud to James – a graduate of the Education for Ministries program at St Timothy’s – who gave me a piece of information which helped unlock what I wanted to say. James explained how some of Paul’s letters were written in response to a request for advice from Christians; I had to think about how new Christianity was at this time. People coming into the faith needing direction of what was expected, asking for clarity. I was able to see all the readings in a new light.

The Genesis piece sounds to me as if the people are negotiating with God, not something I normally associate with the Old Testament. In my interpretation, the people are trying to explain they cannot act in the way God wants, without incurring suffering. Similarly, Paul is offering Corinthians a different way of seeing things because of the circumstances they find themselves in.

And Mark? On the face of it, this is a fairly straightforward miracle story: a woman seeks healing and a child is brought back to life. But we are told the woman received healing without asking and that Jesus only wanted it known he had cured the child, not resurrected her; both have alternate outcomes of events. I see the central message for us is to trust in God's compassion. Whatever we think God wants, we can expect understanding of the human condition. With everything the world seems to be going through at the moment, wherever you find yourself, God will meet you where you are.

Caroline Fea
Tuesday, March 17, 2020


When I first received my scriptures, I felt that there must be a purpose for my having all three. The first one about Joseph reminds me of my daughter’s first year at the Air Force Academy, when she was chosen to be the narrator in the production of Joseph and his Coat of Many Colors. I had never seen the musical before, and I was amazed at the beautiful performances of everyone in telling such a wonderful story. I will be spending next week with my daughter and her family in Colorado Springs. My grandson, Garrett, is now a first year cadet at the Air Force Academy. We adopted my daughter Nicole 50 years ago on March 25, 1970 – so yes, this scripture brings precious memories. I am also keenly reminded to have faith in our Lord and to wait with prayer when things are not going well. God does have a purpose in all of our lives, and we are blessed with faith when we need it most. Joseph’s story can touch us in ‘coats of many colors!’

The second scripture from 1 Corinthians is a rather harsh one for me, since I have been divorced and am now remarried. Fortunately, this one was addressed most directly by Pastor Todd in his sermon last Sunday, ‘Paul can be hard to swallow.’ After thirty years of marriage, I still felt as if I had failed in not keeping my vow to God. I know many of us suffer from this feeling of not fulfilling what we had hoped for our families. I realize once again that God gave me these experiences as part of my life’s journey – and why not me? With faith that has carried me through all the trials and joys in my life, why would I not be prepared with God’s help to endure divorce? And yes, there are other trials that also can be devastating in our Christian walk, but by the will of God, we can conquer these challenges. I am grateful to all the people who were there then and are here now on my journey when I have needed them most, even if I did not realize it at the time. How blessed I am to have met a wonderful man to enhance the feelings of family and togetherness that I had always wished I could obtain. He is not a faithful ‘church goer’ as was my first husband, but he is the most Christ-like man I have ever known. He has the ability to give unconditional love without judgment of others. So I think as I was able once again to be comforted by Pastor Todd’s words last week, I realize that so many of us are blessed with faith that sustains the hurts that we must endure.

The third scripture quickly reminded me of the blessings in our lives that are not possessions and things. Having grown up in Mississippi, I can really appreciate that cars and homes were not so obvious and not so important in my life. My two older brothers (each of us a year apart) and I were raised by my dad, and we all three now know that our true gift from God was having each other. Realizing that Jesus was born in a stable vividly expresses the necessity of accepting all people everywhere. We are not given status because of our wealth, or our statue in the community, nor our political or religious beliefs. We are all children of God—and truly we are born in His glory and we shall die in His glory. All of that STUFF in between is a part of the journey and necessary. However, we have God to lead us and guide us and help us to love and appreciate every single person whom we meet and are honored to know and to love.

All three of these scriptures spoke to me in a very simple form, and I thank each of you for giving me this opportunity to share.

Margaret Klein Foster Batesole
The story of the final interaction of John the Baptist and Herod is one of those complex stories in the Bible. “Bring me his head on a platter,” is the phrase extracted from Mark 6. It is an oft repeated phrase as an expression of getting revenge or exacting the ultimate toll on someone’s enemy. Also, as the scripture is written, it is Herod that claims he did not want to kill John the Baptist but “was forced to” by his wife.

I think of this story as reference to a common problem we have these days that for us to win, others have to lose. We can also say it another way: that for us to get something we want, then we have to take something from others. While it is true in sports that there are always winners and losers, it should not be the way we live the rest of our lives. Someone does not have to be put down or insulted for us to win or to be happy, or to be successful. Why do people look for ways to reduce others for their own advancement? It is often a reflection of their own insecurities. There is a way to interact with others with respect, kindness, and love, and still achieve great things, as we have seen with both John the Baptist and Jesus.

Herod found that even as he had killed John the Baptist, he had not killed his spirit. In the coming of Jesus, he saw the return of John the Baptist and he believed John had been raised from the dead. He was not correct in his interpretation, but he had seen the power of the spirit and perhaps the errors in his ways.

The other scriptures from March 18th, 2020 include the interesting passage from Genesis that speaks to the brothers of Joseph coming to Egypt and getting treated with amazing gifts from the Pharaoh and their brother Joseph. All this, after the terrible way he was treated by these same brothers when they had left him for dead. They saw his power of forgiveness.

The thoughts I take from these readings are that of:

1. We have to forgive and move on from what we believe are transgressions against us because we will be much better off in the end without the anger of revenge.
2. We do not need to extract something from others (“a pound of flesh”, “a head on a platter”) for us to be the winners.
3. If you insist on the “winners take all” scenario then you will lose in the end.
4. We can and will be better people and followers of Jesus for finding a way for compromise and reaching a common ground with others.

God Bless,

Jim Pray
"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled." (Mark 6:30-46)

Today’s Gospel is the iconic loaves and fishes story. The apostles were worried about feeding all of Jesus’ followers, who were still in the deserted place where Jesus had taught them earlier that day, at such a late hour. Jesus simply took the five loaves and the two fish the apostles had and divided them up equally upon all of his followers; and in the end, everyone ate and was full and satisfied. A lot of lessons can be learned from this simple, yet deep, story.

The main message I take away from this story is that there is always enough to go around. You wouldn’t think five loaves and two fishes would be able to feed thousands of people, would you? But Jesus was able to do it. So why can’t we? I was trying to think of a modern application of Jesus’ teaching I could use in today’s world; and I think the saying, “a little goes a long way” perfectly sums it up. Jesus took the small amount of food the apostles had, five loaves and two fishes, and was able to share that small amount of food with thousands of people.

In today’s world, what small actions or gestures can we do in our everyday lives that can help others? One small action I tend to do every day, is to always have a smile on my face. Every day at school I walk through the halls and smile at anyone and everyone I walk by. You never know what’s going on in people’s lives and someone smiling at you can make all the difference in the world, some days. Sometimes, just seeing a friendly face can make your whole day. Your simple smile might make someone’s day a hundred times better and that’s what keeps me going and why I try to do this small gesture every day.

And the goal is that this small gesture spreads. Smiles are very contagious and when you smile at a person in the halls, it will most likely cause them to smile as well, which will then, in turn, cause more and more people to smile. And in the end, all the smiles that you shared and helped create will end up making a lot of people’s days a whole lot better.

So, this is how I interpret Jesus’ loaves and fishes story: a little goes a long way. Never forget that. Try to do one small gesture every day to make someone’s day better, to show God’s love and to truly help make the world a better place.

Allison Geraci-Novy
Personal Transformation

Many with non-liturgical faith traditions, or those without a faith, might wonder what we do in this time of year designated as Lent. In early Christian times, this was a time set aside for study and preparation in order to become transformed by the Resurrection experience. My childhood view of Lent was not so progressive, as, for reasons that escape all comprehension, we as a family had to give up ice cream as a Lenten practice, as decided by my father. Since celebrating the resurrection on Sunday was not considered as part of Lent, ice cream was permitted on Sundays. While failing to teach me much, the concept of Lent’s import was at least solidified. Perhaps that is all I needed to understand then. Now, I think of Lent as more of a personal journey of transformation with Jesus.

Personal transformation is not easy. It is that moving from the world’s comfort zone to become something more abundant in God’s ways. Paul discusses his transformation, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.” 1Cor 9:23. The Apostles are in a time of transformation, confusion, and wonder as Jesus entered their boat, “And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” Mk 6:53. From the very beginnings of Christianity, we see people making transforming choices.

In my own travels to several seminars beginning with vestry attendance in 2016 at our Diocesan “Beloved Community” gatherings, two “Invite Welcome Connect” Summits in 2016 & 2019, and the “Evangelism Matters” conference in 2018, I have become aware of new and exciting ways of learning and expressing the Gospel that fit nicely with my simplistic, “back to the basics” nature. I found the organizational simplicity of “InviteWelcomeConnect.com” to be clear way to understand how a church can function in the world when Christ - centered people work together. Presiding Bishop Curry’s “The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered life” helps people cultivate their faith by strengthening the ancient spiritual practices, “Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest.” I did not know that these were ancient; they sound quite relevant to me. New electronic media afford new ways to experience these practices. It is critical to have balance in all these areas and not dwell too long in one, but dwell long enough in each to grow. Then repeat these practices, each cycle bringing us closer to God. Personal transformation is not something that is ever completed; this a process of increasingly incorporating God into our lives and helping others find transformation in their lives as well.

“Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest,” spiritual practices for personal transformation. Your personal transformation will lead to transforming the world into a better place.

Ref: https://episcopalchurch.org/life-transformed

Jim Coleman
Earlier in Mark’s gospel, Jesus has caused quite a stir…he sends the twelve out to heal and cast out demons; feeds the 5,000 and walks on water. By the time he arrives at Gennesaret…word has spread—as he continues to preach and heal the sick.

The Pharisees are unsettled by this unconventional challenger, so they come down to check out the phenom. Because of his preaching and healing miracles Jesus is immensely popular with ordinary people. The Pharisees are cautious about directly confronting him—so they seek to discredit him and his followers by condemning their failure to follow traditional rules governing unsanctified foods and other non-conforming practices. Jesus rebukes them by saying, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” He declares that what goes into a person does not make them unclean, but it is what comes from inside, the heart, that makes one unclean.

Do we have expectations for others’ behavior, lifestyle, and diction based in our worldly experiences? Our daily surroundings provide easily absorbed perceptions of correctness: family, church traditions, educational institutions and the media all contain messages of man and not necessarily of God.

Jesus was not congruent with his culture, faith, or community. His life challenged the established order. Are we willing to be incongruent, inconvenient or unaccepted because we are trying to live the simple but impossible challenge to follow Jesus? Are we willing to accept his ultimate challenge?

‘The message you heard from the very beginning is this: we must love one another.’ (1 John 3:11)
‘And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.’ (John 13:34)

This inescapable truth is, for me, the ultimate challenge of my life. A commandment that is so simple, so powerful and at the same time only attainable for a fraction of each moment, day and lifetime—but such a powerful experience.

Mike Oliver
The Old Testament reading is about Jacob preparing to die. He has his sons travel to be with him and to receive his blessing. Jacob speaks to each son and describes how he knows them and has experienced each of them in very picturesque language.

How do we support our children as they select their life’s work? Perhaps we attempt to steer (force) them into what we would like them to do, forgetting that God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform through the lives of individuals, including our own children and grandchildren.

Jacob’s blessings on his sons appear in some cases, to be curses, rather than the human kindness we want the best for our children. We support our children’s development into adulthood by being with them in the good times and the bad and helping them to work things out in their own lives. We do not insist that we know what is best for them.

In the gospel reading Jesus continues healing the sick, including those who were not Jews. He heals individuals, especially the poor, regardless of religious or social standing. In chapter 6 of this gospel Jesus had sent his disciples to heal the same kind of people. With his disciples his healing power was multiplied tenfold.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, reminds all Christians, including ourselves, to be imitators of Christ. All the things in Paul’s life as a follower of Christ are, in his own words, to “be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Whatever we do, we are called to do everything for the glory of God and we who are many are one body, joined together as sisters and brothers through the Holy Eucharist. We are Christians, Christ-in-us as the living body of Christ whenever we listen to someone who is suffering through illness, relationships, the dying or death of a dearly loved one. Christ is healing through his Holy Spirit in us as we listen or hold that person’s hand. Touch is so important to us. We hold other’s hands when during the holy Eucharist we say the words “the peace of the Lord be always with you” and when we are treated with these words our response, “And also with you,” reminding each of us that we are sisters and brothers in Christ and we care for each other, whatever age. We never forget to greet the younger generations and to let them know they are our sisters and brothers. Perhaps they are our younger sisters and brothers.

St. Timothy’s has a Stephen Ministry, which is a group of parish members who share their gift of being with those who are hurting and suffering to listen to them and have a prayer with them. One person at St. Timothy’s sings to the sick and dying with her special gift. All others have the ability of listening and encouraging with our presence knowing that Christ is with us and in us.

QUESTION:
Is your God given gift to listen to a sister or brother who is suffering and needs a person to listen and encourage them? Would you like to become a Stephen Minister?
Talk with a Stephen Ministry person or your clergy.

Father Maurice Turner
Mark 8:1-10 In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way--and some of them have come from a great distance." His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Doesn’t this story sound familiar? Just like the feeding of the 5000 with five loaves and two fishes, but this time there are only 4000 people and seven loaves and a few fish. Each of the four Gospels has the story of the feeding of the 5000, but only Matthew and Mark mention this story. I wonder why that is. Do you think that Jesus multiplied bread so many times that disciples got bored with it, and didn’t bother to mention it again?

Jesus was with His disciples for three years from the time of His baptism to His crucifixion. I like to think that He was probably working miracles every day: healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, getting food in the wilderness for hoards of followers…They were writing as fast as they could, but they couldn’t keep up with His miracles.

Probably not, but it’s a nice thought. The other thing he did over and over again was to teach his followers. He told parables, comparing the kingdom of heaven to mustard seeds, sowers with their seed, women finding lost coins, and so many others. He taught them to pray. He also got angry at those abusing their “religious” powers, overturning moneychangers’ tables and chastising the priests and Pharisees. He spent time alone to pray.

So how should we spend our days? How can we follow Jesus’ example of daily living? We can’t multiply loaves and fishes, but we can donate to the food pantries. We can’t heal the sick, but we can offer to drive patients to and from their appointments. We can sit with our friends and talk about God and how He affects our daily lives. We can share meals with those we love, letting them know what they mean to us. We can pray for those whose needs are known to us, and for those whose needs are known to God alone. But please, let’s NOT chastise our priests!

Please join me in living the life Jesus wants us to live. But, a warning: If you try to wash your friends’ feet, they may get annoyed with you!

With prayers for each of you,
Helen Coleman
My thoughts and conclusions on re-reading over and over; the story, Joseph and his brothers are reconciled (weeping). Joseph has his brothers and families move to Egypt to live in plenty, generations come to an amazing outcome because Joseph had been “sold out” by his own brothers and survived, rising above despair to a complete reversal of his life. Surprise! Forgiveness to prosperity!

In the WHAT? Mark tells of Jesus' healing powers. He restores sight. He lays his hands on the blind man.

“Miracles of Miracles!” We do no less than lay our hands on your brothers for their healing of brokenness and sightlessness = diseases.

The gifts are given from the Holy Spirit, reliving in Jesus Christ’s resurrection. The varieties of gifts for service bestowed (to each one of us individually). Empowerment.

WHY: Jesus talks to his apostles about how the loaves and fishes remind people of the bounty of God’s grace and plenty. My own mission? A shout out for Jesus.

The story of the Good News…

(AND THERE’S MORE)

Helen Robles
Throughout history the ruling class has been afraid of differing points of view, new discoveries, and new ways of living. From the Pharaoh’s fear of the Israelites to the Catholic Church condemning Galileo for believing the earth orbits the sun, to present day creationists who fear intelligent design threatens their God.

These people are all members of God’s body, and while their methods can be painful and destructive, I believe they make our “body” stronger in the end. We live in a world that is proof that churches still exist, and people still believe in God, even if it is widely accepted that the earth orbits the sun.

My children have the privilege of growing up in a diverse area where they are in the minority. My older son and daughter are Cub Scouts, and every year the Scouts have an adventure called “Duty to God.” My children are the only Christians in their dens. I look forward to hearing all the Scouts talk about their religions, what they believe, how they celebrate, and how that teaches them to be better people. We talk about how each of us may pray differently, or our Gods may have different names, but in the end, we have more similarities than differences. My children have a better appreciation for and understanding of their religion exactly because they do not take for granted that it is the only way to believe.

It is now known that there are at least 100 billion to 200 billion galaxies in our universe. For me, this only strengthens my faith in God. It also makes it apparent that as humans, we really are one body with everything in common, and everything to gain, or lose, together.

Meghan Goldman
Friday, March 27, 2020

Exodus 2:1-22
1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3
Mark 9:2-13

What does one say about this passage that hasn’t already been said? However, the point of Lent is the struggle, so I have to try. Perhaps some basic Biblical context might help get me started? Well firstly, assume nothing and state the basics. 1 Corinthians is a letter, an ‘epistle’ that Paul wrote to the leaders of the church he had founded in Corinth, a city in South Central Greece, in AD 50. Scholars believe Paul wrote this (or more likely dictated it), while in Ephesus, sometime in AD 53-54. It was the response to a letter he had received from Corinth, requesting clarification of some areas of emerging Christian doctrine.

Paul’s most important message in this passage is to emphasize the importance of what should be the driver of all spiritual activities – love. Whatever spiritual gifts and talents the Community may have, if their actions are not fundamentally motivated by love, they lose their value. It is though, a very specific type of love, a translation of the ancient Greek word, ‘agape’. Love in this sense does not encompass sexual love, family love, or even friendship (with the typical precision of the ancient Greek language, there are other terms for these).

“Agape’ is the fourth word for love. “It is a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting repayment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected.” (source: ensuringword.com).

Paul is saying that the ego has to be absent from spiritual practice, whether evangelism, prophecy, performing miracles, speaking in tongues or even healing. It’s tough, surely, we are not human if we don’t get pleasure and personal satisfaction from the apparently selfless acts of giving our time, talent and treasure. Whether it is the preacher receiving props from the congregation after a particularly effective sermon; the organizers of a successful fundraiser; the teenager volunteering at the homeless shelter, or the benefactor writing a large check to fix a leaking church roof.

The selfless, self-denying love of ‘agape’ is a state of being that is Christ-like. The use of the term was deliberate by Paul because that is the example he saw in Christ, manifested most perfectly in his death on the cross. However, Paul makes clear that even martyrdom is not a meaningful spiritual act without love.

This idea of doing the right thing for the wrong reason is the central theme of one of my favorite works of art, T.S. Eliot’s play, ‘Murder in the Cathedral’, first performed in 1935. It explores the murder of Thomas á Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1170. The assassination was completed by knights who believed they were carrying out the will of the English King at the time, Henry II. Henry had become deeply frustrated by arguments with his beloved friend Becket over the issue of primacy between the Pope and the King of England. To his dying day, he denied that he had ordered the murder of Becket and was devastated by the event. In Eliot’s play, Becket sees his martyrdom approaching. At his darkest hour, he is assailed by four tempters, mirroring the voices that tempted Christ during his 40 days in the wilderness.

All Thomas has to do is change course. The first Tempter offers Becket protection from the threat of violence. By the second, he is offered wealth and power if he comes to an accommodation with the King. The third offers him the blessings of the Pope, the Catholic Church and those English Barons who oppose the King’s will. However, it is the final tempter who has the most compelling offer: pursuing martyrdom – “You hold the keys of heaven and hell.” Like Christ, Becket rejects all of these and achieves clarity and a peace of mind which enables him to maintain his integrity in the face of a terrifyingly inevitable conclusion, like Christ:

“The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

This is so difficult for us to understand. Surely if the consequences are positive, what does it matter? If houses for the poor are built in developing countries by wealthy kids seeking to meet their volunteer hours for college applications, so what? If the hungry get fed or a threatened species is saved, who cares about the motives of those that made it happen? Unfortunately, I think Paul and the model of Christ’s life is saying that it does matter. It is one of those uncomfortable truths that the Bible and our faith asks us to face. Love is at the root of it all; it has to be. Being at peace with ourselves and with others requires us both to accept our frailties. It demands that we continue to put our egos aside, to find that place where “love is patient, love is kind and...endures all things.”

For now, I continue to “look through a glass darkly”, still waiting and working on putting away childish things and searching for true ‘agape’. Good luck and Lenten blessings to my fellow seekers.  

James Vila
Power revealed through Name and a Covenant Relationship.

In the Exodus story God is stirred to action by seeing and knowing the suffering of the Israelites. In response, he remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Hebrew, “Covenant” means God’s eternal promise to always strive for our benefit. He then encounters Moses in the burning bush and calls him by Name. In the context of Egyptian magic, knowing someone’s name meant one could understand his true essence and coerce him to do what you wanted. Moses is first called by Name and then given the Call to help liberate God’s people out of Egypt. God knows Moses’ true heart and also the capabilities that he has yet to discover in himself. Before he accepts this Call, Moses asks for God’s name in return. God replies, “I will be-there with you.” God’s name is synonymous with His Presence. Because Moses now knows God’s name, he can coerce him to help him live out his Call. But in its root meaning, the word coerce is not negative. It simply means to wield power together. Despite his many misgivings, Moses is promised that God’s presence and power will be with him. We too are given that same promise as we live out our Call to be Christ in the world.

Corinthians expounds on how God’s presence is shared and experienced. It is shown through love or Agape. The word literally means wide-open, empathetic, and universal love. It is also a perfect description of God’s character shown towards us.

_Fear not, for I have redeemed You,  _  
_I have called You by Name and You are Mine_.  
_Because you are Precious in my sight and Honored_  
_and because I Love You,  _  
_Therefore I give Men as ransom_  
_and peoples in exchange for Your Life._  
_Everyone who is Named as Mine,  _  
_Whom I formed and made,  _  
_I have created to be_  
_Until Reflections of my Glory._  
_Isaiah 49_  

Eric Soderstrom
Monday, March 30, 2020

Exodus 4:10-31
Corinthians 14: 1-19
Mark 9: 30-41

Here we find Jesus telling his disciples that his death is near...he will be killed, buried and rise on the third day. I can visualize the group walking down the road giving each other looks like, "What the heck is he talking about?" They start arguing amongst one another, bragging that they are the greatest in the Lord’s eyes, saying they know what He’s talking about. When Jesus confronts them and asks what they were arguing about, they do not answer. They are ashamed at their behavior. It’s an emotional and frightening time for them all.

Why do so many of us have to be right all the time? I have a friend that will argue and argue his point when in fact, he’s not done his homework and his platform for argument is riddled with holes. I have found myself, deep in an argument with someone and not being able to let it go. I so want to get my point across and let them know that I am right and they are wrong. I have been working on this flaw, trying to breathe deeply and think clearly before I jump into the topic. It takes enormous strength and composure to do this, something that I don’t always have, especially when it’s a something that I feel passionately about.

Where did the art of meaningful questions and discussion go? What if the disciples had asked Jesus what he was talking about? What if they sat down and had a calm and meaningful discussion on the events that are about to take place?

It takes courage to admit when we are wrong. We are not perfect, especially in Jesus’ eyes. He recognizes our faults and wants us to strive for humility in our daily lives. As Christians we must not put ourselves at the front of the line, but rather be at the end to help others along that need to follow the path.

The three scriptures together seem to have one common theme: YOUR WORDS, YOUR THOUGHTS, YOUR ACTIONS.

How can we use these messages in 2020?

Open your eyes and ears, and close your mouth. Often people need to just be heard. Offer no opinion, unless asked; just offer your ears and maybe a hug!

Don’t be afraid to speak up, but do it with kindness, thoughtfulness and compassion. It’s ok to disagree, but don’t make it World War 3.

When you regret something you have said, the best words to use are…. I AM SORRY. Simple and effective. No one can argue with this.

Lenten Blessings,

Rena Waterson
For many years, I took an interest and a perverse pleasure in the shenanigans of the God of Israel as He is revealed in the Old Testament. Turning Lot's wife into a block of stone as she glances back for a last look at her home, turning loose a pestilence of locusts to the great misery of his people, calling up a thousand year flood to destroy civilization, even testing the faith of a father by demanding the blood sacrifice of his son: these are acts we would expect of jealous, petulant, capricious, and vindictive pagan deities who were, by some accounts of their priests, afraid and envious of mortals.

In this passage from Exodus, Pharaoh inflicts cruel measures on God's people, and when he will not relent and let Israel go free, God prosecutes a terrible retribution on Egypt. We know the story. the Passover is just beyond the next sunset. Red paint marks the doorposts of the Israelites; angels fly overhead in the dead of night, bombing the homes of Egyptians with a deadly plague that will take the sons of ordinary families as well as those of the house of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh may well deserve the loss of his sons, but the poor and meek of Egypt? I have never been able to reconcile the Passover narrative with the stories of the loving God of the New Testament. (That may be the influence of VBS and the gentle priest who instructed me for confirmation.) But lately something new has occurred to me.

Is the sacrifice of the sons of Egypt for the freedom of Israel a foreshadowing of the great sacrifice God will ask of His own child? Egypt's sons die in ignorance and innocence of their king's wickedness. Jesus, on the other hand, goes knowingly to a hideous death, aware that His father can spare him if he chooses. Would Pharaoh, who loved his son, have had mercy on Israel if he had had foreknowledge of the consequences? Who knows?

Both the Father and the Son know how Jesus' life will play out on Calvary. Yet neither wavers. I wonder if God, through the willing sacrifice of His son, provides an avenue, not only for our redemption, but also for atonement for His destruction of the children of Egypt. When He set the angels of death on Egypt, He saw, in Egypt's people, their love for their children. God had not yet given His heart in love for His own child. Might it be that the experience of the perfect love between a father and son explains in some measure the gentleness and the arc toward understanding and forgiveness we see in the God of the New Testament? I would like to think so.

Elizabeth White
Exodus 7:8-24
2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6
Mark 10:1-16

Break It

You take my heart and break it
When you, you fall like the rain
Like love left on the floor
His hands are worth it
Even when they are the last things
You think you need to lift you up
When you fall
I know that pain
I've been so low, so low like someone
Who didn't know
Like love, love left on the floor

And you say you have no right to his love
But you have to know you're wrong
So wrong

You take my heart and break it
When you, you fall like the rain
Like love, love left in the floor
But you won't feel like that anymore
I won't feel like that anymore

Michael Olden
Thursday, April 2, 2020

Exodus 7:25-8:19
2 Corinthians 3:7-18
Mark 10:17-31

I struggle daily with the compelling “important” activities of my life here on earth and, many times, I feel like there is just not time or energy to tend to my relationship with God and concepts that aren’t physically tangible. Then, a crisis, an upset, a shattered plan, and suddenly I need help, so I make time for my faith again… As I read these passages, trying to figure out how I felt about them, and how they might relate to Lent, I began to see a common theme.

The Old Testament passage initially finds Pharaoh, in the midst of a flood of frogs, perfectly willing to surrender to God’s demands, made clear through Moses. Then, the plague is lifted and, hey, everything’s just fine, so: “Never mind what I said about letting your people go! Things are good now, so I changed my mind…” Pharaoh’s heart has hardened yet again. I wonder, how many times I have turned away just like that myself? We are not forced by God to believe in, to love, and to honor Him or each other. But, He continually asks us to do so, and He teaches us through Christ and the prophets that this what we are designed to do, first and foremost. Because my mortal human mind can be focused on the stimulus of my physical reality, I am tempted away from that design. So I wonder, when am I likely to distract myself with the constructs of this temporary existence, just like Pharaoh?

This theme is also present in Mark, during Jesus’ encounter with the wealthy man who asks the Good Teacher to help him understand the path to eternal life. Jesus loves the man for being faithful to the commandments. He tells him to give up his fortune and to follow Him. The man becomes sad and leaves, we assume because he felt unable to make that sacrifice. So, what are the trappings of my own life, made important only in my mind, that sometimes take precedence over following the Lord’s quiet, all-powerful voice? Even when I do shut up and listen; do I sadly and stubbornly disagree with, then ignore, what I hear?

I see a related theme once again in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. He is speaking of how Christ’s new covenant of forgiveness replaces the old laws of Moses which, at least in the context of this letter, were about condemnation. I think Paul means that the new covenant represents a different approach. It is anchored in the perfection of God’s love for us. With it, there is eternal forgiveness of our eternal human imperfections. It is there for all those who seek it and who follow God with all their hearts. I wonder then, how is my own world view limited? Does it lead me to watch and judge? Or, can I simply accept, love, and forgive?

Three passages that seemed to ask me to turn to God, to filter the falsehood of human importance and the compelling illusions of this temporary world we live in.

So today, in this season of Lent, I think I will attempt to turn my focus aside from the trappings of my position in society, the benefits of monetary wealth, and the judgement of myself and others. Maybe I’ll try to spend that focus asking to hear that quiet, powerful Voice of forgiveness, love, and guidance that I know is always there.

Blessings,
Rob Koteskey
Friday, April 3, 2020

Exodus 9:13-35
2 Corinthians 4:1-12
Mark 10:32-45

Why does life have to be so @#^! hard?!

How often do you think this – or even dwell on the thought? I know I’m guilty of doing so far too often. When challenges, or even traumas, seem to pile up, one upon the other, I sometimes throw my hands into the air in desperation and rant, until I feel better. The problem is, it doesn’t really make me feel much better (at least beyond the initial cathartic release of that first primal scream!) Our own health issues and those of loved ones, financial challenges, emotional aches and pains…the list can go on and on if we indulge that whiney side of ourselves that is sometimes just inching to burst out! After we pass through the “woe is me period”, don’t we begin to metaphorically look to our left and right, seeing that we’re not the only ones with trouble? In fact, aren’t we often smacked in the face with the reality that you don’t have to look far at all in this world to find those with even greater challenges than our own? But that’s not the point, is it?

So, back to our premise – why does life have to be so hard?

The Epistle today reminds us that “…it is God who said, let light shine out of darkness.” “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” It’s no surprise that Jesus reminds us so often to help one another – life is HARD! But by helping each other, aren’t we inspired by the strength and love that others are able to exhibit, even in the face of often devastating circumstances?! Doesn’t that example help us take a very deep breath, pray, and then dust ourselves off? In helping each other, not only do we obey our Lord, but we “let light shine out of darkness”, and allow “…the life of Jesus to be made visible in our bodies.”

All easier said than done! But this life is a journey we are all on together, and we have new opportunities every day to walk the talk. Yes, it can be, and too often is, a tough journey, but I’ll do my best to help you. I know you’ll do the same! I’m pretty sure that’s why we’re here.

Wally DeYoung
Saturday, April 4, 2020

Exodus 10:21-11:8
2 Corinthians 4:13-18
Mark 10:46-52

Stumbling Blocks. Impediments. Obstructions. Frustration rises when something keeps me from accomplishing my plans or gets in the way of something I want. I often wonder why simple things can’t be easier, and why I must deal with problems that I hadn’t planned on.

Today I wanted to hang a wind chime from a hook that I had bought the other day. It was just right for the purpose, and even included two screws for mounting. Frustrations began to build when first I couldn’t find the hook, then after finding it the drill/driver needed charging, then I dropped the screw, then the screw wouldn’t go all the way into the post, then I had to find a drill bit to drill a pilot hole, then the hole was not deep enough and I stripped the screw head with the driver on high torque, then I had to find a new screw, which finally went in far enough to hold the hook in place, and THEN I could hang the wind chime.

Each of today’s readings include elements of frustration- an obstruction, and impediment or some sort of stumbling block. The Old Testament Lesson is an excerpt from the Exodus Story, and Moses is experiencing the frustration of trying to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites. He is angry, but he speaks plainly to Pharaoh about the consequences that the land of Egypt will behold and eventually finds success in his mission.

Paul writes in Corinthians about a “momentary affliction” that is preparing us for “an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure”. Our frustrations are what we see, but they are temporary. What cannot be seen is eternal.

The blind man in the Gospel Story surely experiences frustration as a constant companion as he tries to navigate in the world of the sighted. As he called out to Jesus, others told him to be quiet. However, he didn’t give up on his intent to meet Jesus, and as a result his sight was regained.

Perseverance is how we can get under, over or through whatever gets in our way- even things that appear to be insurmountable at the time. Moving forward in the face of frustration is difficult but may be essential to walk the path that we are being led to walk. Moses, the Corinthian congregation and the blind man needed to keep their “eyes on the prize” rather than become a victim of the frustration that each experienced.

My windchime is in its place and responding to the afternoon breeze with peaceful and calming sounds. Somehow overcoming the day’s challenges makes it sound even sweeter!

God of All, fill us with your peace and love as we travel difficult and challenging pathways during Lent. Sustain us with your Holy Spirit as we face frustration and keep us mindful of the heavenly prize that awaits us in your Kingdom. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jan Mahoney
2 Corinthians 1:1-7 (NRSV)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

As a Healing Prayer Minister, I always wonder and pray for those special words that will console those with afflictions. This carries on in my daily life as well. I find myself doing what I can --speaking, singing and writing --with the same question.

At 52 I lost my husband suddenly due to Complications of Cancer of Unknown Primary. My daughter was 13 years old at the time. The only thing I could think of at that time was how painful it was for her to lose her father and closest friend with no preparation. Doctors had no answers for us. I did my best to console her, but we had very different paths and I felt very alone in my own grief. Luckily, she and I were there for each other during that first Thanksgiving and Christmas/Channukah and on the anniversary of his death. I can’t help thinking of the special bond that we formed that would help us move on in life much stronger than we had been in the past.

For that reason, this passage is speaking to me. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who consoles us in all our affliction so that we will be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God”. It is a powerful reminder that with Christ our Savior we can continue on the path that is laid out for us, resting assured that we are not alone.

With unshaken hope we can rest assured that we all share in our afflictions and our consolation, as well to be able to move on in life to do God’s will.

Nora Hudson
Wow! “See, O LORD, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me, because I have been rebellious……Let all (my) evil doing come before you (Lord).” The amazing thing about this Lamentations’ passage for me is the total acknowledgement of all transgressions. I am very good at the first part, admitting my rebelliousness and transgressions. It is the second part of this verse, acknowledging that the LORD is right in what has happened as a result. I see how quickly I want the Lord’s forgiveness so I can just move on. I am humbled, however, by how I almost never let go of what another has done to me. I continue to use others’ accumulated sin as a knife I wield whenever I want. Perhaps I, like the LORD, could let the natural consequences be punishment enough, without resorting to adding my “righteous” two cents.

“He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again….we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God….in him (the answer) is always Yes……every one of God’s promises is a Yes” As I read this Corinthians’ passage I am most familiar with the continual vacillating I do when making decisions, which this passage suggests, means that I am making my plans according to ordinary human standards. Nailed on this one. Sometimes, when God nabs me, like Jonah in the belly of the whale, I can be obedient, for a time. Then, like Jonah, my humanness returns, which usually sounds like whining and complaining, rather than blessing God for the enormous gifts of life, including, always, God’s absolute love of me, no matter what.

In Mark, we see how easily Jesus discerns the deceit in the seemingly just curious questioning of the chief priest, the scribes and elders, as they pretend to want to know by what authority Jesus has done what he has done. Jesus then masterfully asks them a question which leaves them in peril, rather than himself. And they, of course, don’t like having the tables turned on them. How often have I thought that I, too, can outsmart God, by not really admitting to where I have fallen short, by blaming another for my actions, and/or by seeming to be interested in pursuing God’s will for my life, when I just want God to okay my plans for my life.

So, for this Lenten journey, God, I surrender to your will for my life, knowing that your unconditional love is infinite, suffering is only for a season, and, by turning to you, the answers will always be yes. Please empower me, LORD, to be honest about my part, to trust you totally, to always seek you and your will for my life, realizing that you never leave nor forsake me, no matter what. You, God, are an awesome God….and you love me.

Peg Miller
I was not the popular kid in school – far from it. I always had a weight problem, excess hair, no athletic ability, and not very pretty. We lived a modest lifestyle. We had what we needed, but buying a dress was a luxury. Mom was a talented seamstress, so I did have good clothes. My parents were also strict in our upbringing. I was invited to a party once where there would be alcohol and would have been expected to bring some. My excuse for not going – my parents would miss it as there wasn’t that much in the house. I did do quite well academically in school and my friends were pretty much outside of school in youth organizations or if in school, the band. The academics were my saving grace. I may have not been wise to worldly happenings, but I could read, write, and even dabbled in computer programming before it was the norm. I was also the oldest of three girls. I was expected to set the example – academically, socially, and in almost anything. I could do the academic part, but my sisters were better at other areas of teenage life than I was.

Recently on social media, a group of us who are now friends were discussing how back in the 70’s, we couldn’t talk about being different, mental illness, self-loathing, and what to do about it. I am not sure our parents were well equipped with the tools some of us have today. And I had a phone call with a friend who’s relative is going into hospice. She was the bubbly, athletic cheerleader that had so many friends. She was smart too, but not everyone saw that in her. She was the youngest child, so she had her own set of expectations from her family and our school. After she finished telling me what was going on, we talked about all the things that two of us our age would talk about – aging or deceased parents, our kids, our hair, and our less than perfect bodies. Over the last few years we have become good friends. People had put her on a pedestal in school. I told her she is special to me because she is my friend and loves me, not because she was the cheerleader and a cute little thing in school. She was always nice to me. Some from that clique weren’t – in fact, most weren’t. But now that most of us are dealing with the same issues, we have found new and deep friendships.

What does this have to do with the passage from Isaiah? I read Isaiah and my life’s journey and where I am now spoke to me. I am seen as a teacher, and many times, I am called upon to be that listener: “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.”

Isaiah also goes on to comfort those who have been bullied. As a child and even a teenager, I was teased and bullied. “I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard: I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced. … Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.” I accepted Jesus as my savior as a teenager, and He has sustained me through the years. I feel blessed now that some of these ladies I call friends share their insecurities openly and we find out we are more alike than not. It was hard 45-50 years ago to be the ugly duckling. But this swan is now gracefully being a presence to others, and it is that passage in Isaiah that really helps me understand why life as a teenager, while not the worst, was not the idyllic life that many appear to have.

Blessings,
Cathy Hager
Maundy Thursday – April 9, 2020

Exodus: 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14
1 Corinthians 11:23-25
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

It is interesting that the readings for the Thursday of Holy Week – do not change – unlike most of the readings specified in Years A, B and C. It would seem that the telling of the commands to the Israelites regarding the Passover feast, the description of the blessing and distribution of the bread and wine by Jesus during the Last Supper (where they were observing the Passover feast) and the description of the Last Supper in the 13th chapter of John were felt by those who designed the Lectionary cycle to be so important that they are read every year – not every 3 years.

In the reading of Exodus, we hear the instructions to the Jews as to how they are to celebrate Passover. The instruction that the month in which Passover is celebrated is to be the first month of the year, would seem to emphasize the importance of this event. There are a flood of symbols that are a part of this feast. The lamb (young sheep or goat) is to be young, probably symbolizing innocence. The animal was to be roasted – which is probably how meat would have been prepared during the journey from Egypt to Israel. All the meat is to be eaten – again reminding them that on the journey there would not have been time to dry the left-over meat. Along with the lamb, the Jews are instructed to eat unleavened bread – perhaps the only type that could be prepared during a journey when there was not time to let the bread rise or build an oven to bake it in. Along with the bread and meat, they were to eat bitter herbs – chicory, wild lettuce and similar greens that might have been found along the way. The bitterness would also remind them of how hard their lives were in Egypt before they fled. Finally, they are instructed to put blood on the side post of the doors of the house. This reminds them that the Lord killed the first born of every house in Egypt that was not marked with blood before the Jews were permitted to leave Egypt.

The Christians of Corinth were probably not familiar with the Passover and all the symbolism connected to that feast. Paul skips explaining all that history to them and instead interprets the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples as symbolic of his upcoming sacrifice of his body (the bread) and his blood (the wine) for the salvation of his world and the people who believed in him. Paul is passing to his followers what was passed to him – a ritual to remember the God who became a man and sacrificed himself.

John does not talk about the bread and wine that Jesus shared with his disciples at the Last Supper. That part of the evening is described in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Instead, John focuses on the actions of Jesus in washing the feet of the disciples – probably before they began eating their Passover meal together. This would normally have been the task of a servant, usually the lowest ranking servant of those present. For their Teacher, Rabbi and Messiah to do this humble task for them was probably profoundly disturbing, as evidenced by Simon Peter’s protest. Jesus makes it clear to him and to all the disciples that being a part of him included being a servant to others – not an exalted leader who was served by others. He says: “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

It seems to me that all these readings echo the admonition: Remember, REMEMBER, REMEMBER!

We are given symbols to help us to remember: the innocent lamb, a frequent symbol of Jesus, the bread and the wine and the humbleness symbolized by washing feet. Why then is it sometimes so hard?

Sally Shea Potts
What is good about Good Friday? In John we read a brutal narrative about the wildly unjust demise of a faultless man and we have to wait until the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday to experience the joy of proclaiming, “He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!”

Some sources indicate that the “good” in "Good Friday" comes from Middle English usages of good as pious, holy or even God. Holy or Pious Friday would certainly underline the transcendent nature of the courageous and inevitable sacrifice we commemorate.

Personally, Good Friday and its very necessary recitation of the passion narrative pommels my soul… causes me to weep inwardly. Prophecy fulfilled through pain and anguish leading to joyous fulfillment on Sunday.

So, the “Good” is about the realization of Jesus’ journey as man and son of God to achieve what is necessary for our salvation. In selfless determination, unbelievably courageous sacrifice and horrid death comes perpetual grace and eternal life for all believers. On a more human scale I wonder if the “good” also signifies that Lent ended yesterday and with it our 40 days of penance, redemptive discipline and reflection.

Today in worship, prayer and contemplation may we strive to grasp the magnitude of God and His Son’s immense sacrifice for our sake. Let us rejoice in the “goodness” of that act and the salvation we freely gained as a result of the Son’s inconceivable courage and the Father’s unbounded love.

- Gil Jardine
After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden, there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

The star characters of this passage are Joseph of Arimathea who was described in Matthew’s Gospel as a ‘rich disciple” and in the Gospel of Mark as a respected member of the council and looking for God’s kingdom. Similarly, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is the man who visits Christ at night so that no one will know of the encounter. The well-known conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus takes place when Jesus tells Nicodemus that one must be reborn before entering the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus takes the comment literally but believes that no one could perform the signs Christ was doing if God was not with him (John 3:2). Like Joseph, Nicodemus is looking for God’s Kingdom.

Reflecting on Pastor Todd’s sermons in January lead me to understand that these two followers of Christ had courage. There is no doubt that Joseph and Nicodemus were afraid and anxious, but they chose courage…certainly courage for the good.

Joseph, to me, was the more courageous since he too was a secret disciple of Christ but put that fear and anxiety aside and asked Pilate to let Joseph take Jesus’ body away. In years past in my reflections of scripture for The Lectionary, I would often write about placing myself in the role of the characters. This year is no different. I can certainly relate to Nicodemus in sneaking a meeting with Christ given the fact that Jesus was considered an enemy to many. I can also be a follower so having Joseph in the lead would make gathering the myrrh and aloes and spices easier, but I would need Joseph to pave my way, methinks. Still need to work on putting my fears aside.

Joseph and Nicodemus are able to put their anxiety aside and respond to Christ’s crucifixion with deep respect and love for Jesus and to live in faith rather than in fear. May I have faith to do so too.

Jacqueline Chiavini
Ashes to Easter Overview

Shrove Tuesday, February 25th
6:30pm - Mardi Gras Cajun Dinner and Dessert

Ash Wednesday, February 26th
12pm & 7:30pm - imposition of ashes and communion

First Sunday Worship, March 1st, 5pm - projected worship

Taizé Prayer Service, March 6th
6pm - Leave St. Timothy’s for Mercy Center in Burlingame

Winter Nights Shelter, March 9th - March 23rd
Go to “serve others” on the website to sign up to help

Endowment Workshop, March 14th
9am - planned giving, graceful aging, and end-of-life planning

Wednesday Evenings in Lent, March 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th and April 1st
5:30pm-6:30pm - 4yrs old to 5th grade:
7pm - adults

Not on April 8th - the Wednesday of Holy Week

Thursday evenings in Lent
6pm - contemplation/meditation

The Stations of the Cross
12pm - Fridays during Lent and on Good Friday, April 10th at 1pm
February 28th, March 6th, March 13th,
March 20th, March 27th, April 3rd

Palm Sunday, April 5th
8:30am - communion
10am - special non-communion worship service of music and poetic meditations
11am - Palm Sunday activity
5pm – communion (First Sunday 5pm Worship)
All three have blessing of the palms with procession into the church

Holy Wednesday, April 8th
10:30am - communion
6:30pm - contemplation/meditation

Maundy Thursday, April 9th
7:30pm - communion, hand washing & stripping of the Altar

Good Friday, April 10th
12pm & 7:30pm - Good Friday Liturgy
In church, no communion, 1 hour

Good Friday stations
1pm - Stations of the Cross on labyrinth, weather permitting

Holy Saturday morning, April 11th
9am - Holy Saturday service, no communion (about 20 minutes)

Easter Vigil Saturday evening, April 11th
7:30pm – incense outside and bring your bells. (about 75 minutes)

Easter Sunday, April 12th
9am - Communion with Easter music
10am - Easter activity for kids and youth
11am - Communion with Easter music
Christ is Risen
CONTACT US

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