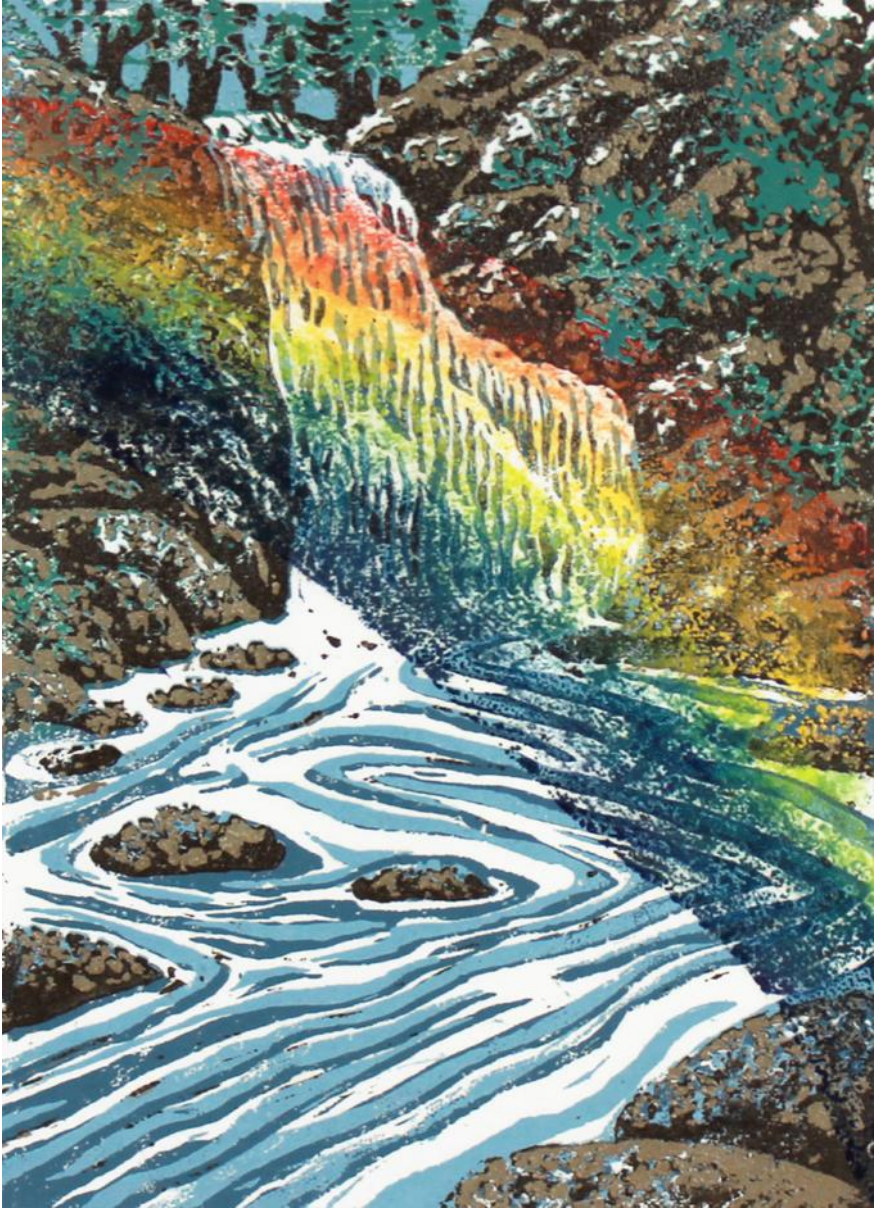


Our Living Water



Lenten Meditations 2024

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:13



Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd 2024

Written by our parishioners to the glory of God!

Cover art by Diane Castle Babcock

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

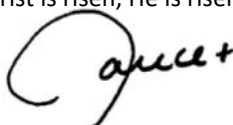
It occurs to me that our Lenten Book of reflections is a perfect example of what Paul is talking about in this passage from Corinthians. Each of us individually has contributed to this work for the benefit of all. We have all been given a manifestation of the Spirit and we all have unique thoughts on Lent and on these readings. I love that and when we read this during the next 40 days, we find a beautiful example of the fullness of the Body of Christ. God speaks to each of us in a special way and when we share our perspectives with one another, we build each other up for the common good. Through the years of using this guide for Lent I know I've been enriched by the insight, wisdom, humor and thoughtfulness of all of you.

While some of these readings are the same from year to year, the Spirit provides new and different insights for our current day. I'm always amazed how new and exciting thoughts arise from these pages each year. Every Lent is a journey and every time we begin this journey there are different lessons that we are to learn to become ever more fully who we are called to be, a beloved son or daughter of God.

We live in a very noisy and confusing world, and I hope this Lent you will be able to find some quiet time to reflect on the wisdom and insights found on each page. Spend some time with this resource and let these thoughts provide some real hope and inspiration as we live out what it means to be a part of the Jesus movement. It is an honor to travel on this journey with you, and I am blessed and grateful for your presence and thoughtfulness. Not many parishes provide such a rich guide for Lent, and I am always so grateful to Patti and Tom Curtin for putting this together for all of us. Your time and effort are very much appreciated indeed.

Let us now begin our journey together knowing at the end we will with full and glad hearts proclaim, “Christ is risen, He is risen indeed,”

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Patti Curtin', with a large, flowing loop at the beginning and a small cross at the end.

February 14 - Ash Wednesday

Psalm 103

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Isaiah 58:1-12

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21



As we arrive at Ash Wednesday in the beginning of Lent, I'm reminded of a time several years back when an Episcopal priest named John Locke preached a sermon on, Septuagesima.

He explained that although Lent is a season of preparation for Easter, Septuagesima is a liturgical moment of preparation for Lent. Every year, Western tradition celebrates a day called Mardi Gras, French for, "fat Tuesday," including the ensuing carnival and many indulgent activities focused on the hedonism that was about to abruptly end. Seemingly each previous year, Mardi Gras snuck up on me, and I found that I was unprepared, and not nearly fat enough, when Ash Wednesday arrived. Thanks to his good spiritual guidance, I am proud to say that every year since, I have always achieved sufficient corpulence and girth to proudly and fully enter into the appropriate liturgical state of Mardi Gras.

Years ago, my friends used to ask me after Christmas what I was planning for New Year's resolutions. At one point I told them all that I resolved not to make any more New Year's resolutions. I have adhered to that commitment religiously ever since. In similar fashion, my friends used to ask me what I planned to give up for Lent. I decided that I was going to give up giving up things for Lent, and I have enthusiastically kept that commitment as well.

Society has deemed that Lent is a good time to start on a new diet, cut out sweets, quit drinking beer, and all manner of other things focused on self-improvement. In all seriousness, none of these things have any spiritual value whatsoever. If fasting is to draw us closer to God, we should instead focus on our relationship with God and our neighbors. If your Lenten fast is not a part of that program, it's just another popular fad. Let's not confuse weight loss with spiritual growth.

And if you do decide to fast in order to become more deeply attuned to spiritual matters, for the love of God, don't go and brag about it. Jesus was pretty clear that isn't going to do you any good. In fact, if anything you were thinking of doing for Lent would result in you bragging about it later, you are probably better off not doing it in the first place. I think the primary goal of fasting is to be more attuned and attentive to what God is trying to tell you, or perhaps to stop ignoring what he has been trying to tell you for quite a while. You can do all that without giving up your favorite foods.

Remember the two men praying in the temple, and the one who was thanking God that he wasn't like the sinner, while the one he was looking down on was the one whose prayers were heard? You're almost better off having something you need to apologize for than thinking you've got it all together. The truth is we all need a savior every day. The difference is that we aren't all aware of it.

Do you have a family member that you haven't spoken to for years? Is there someone you stopped talking to because of a disagreement? Lent is a good time to reach out and make peace. Have you been asked to volunteer for charity or take on responsibility for a ministry of the church? The season of Lent is a good time to say yes. Becoming part of the prayer chain, or attending a new Bible study would be appropriate activities. It could be time for you to start leading a Bible study yourself.

The apostle Paul had his thorn in the flesh, and chose to boast in his weakness, because that was the thing that drew him closer to God. Perhaps my thorn in the flesh is my extra 30 pounds, and I should rejoice in my weakness rather than trying to remove it. God forbid that being in better shape would cause me an occasion to be proud and look down on others.

I hope some of these ideas will be helpful to you. As for me, my primary goal for Lent will be to talk less and listen more, and to assume that the person I disagree with has a valid point and knows something I don't. It's mostly a matter of making the needs of others more important than what I need (or think I need), and sitting at the lower end of the table so that I don't embarrass myself by having the master tell me that I need to move down further. I remember that the God of the universe came to serve rather than to be served, and it is His example that I desire to follow.

Greg Hartline

February 15 - Thursday

Psalm 85:7-13

Jonah 4: 1-11

Luke 10: 1-12

Psalm 85: 7-13

⁸ I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants

Jonah 4: 1-11

⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? ...though you did not tend it or make it grow”

Luke 10: 1-12

⁶ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them, if not, it will return to them.

I sometimes think that life is like a dad who takes his child to Disneyland. The dad wants his child to experience an amazing place. There might be scary moments, long lines, some trying moments, not everything is perfect, but there are thrills, fun and amazements. Of course, eventually it comes time to leave. The child, who did nothing to earn the trip, may be sad, angry, or even too exhausted to even say “thank you”.

The dad doesn’t seem to mind. He loves his child, and just wants to take his child to the comfort of home to get some much needed rest.

I often think about how blessed my life has been.

I also reflect on how I didn’t do anything to deserve it. It’s just all by God’s grace. This is why I have such gratitude, and I trust God for whatever His next adventure for me will be.



Gwen Brennick

February 16- Friday

Psalms 51: 1-10

Isaiah 58: 1-9

Matthew 9:10-17

My Rainbow....

As I Think about the fabric colors I choose for my sewing projects,

I wonder how color relates to our Lord

A rainbow comes to mind..

I pause a minute to think about what that means to me, during LENT



Red...The color of Redemption

Orange--- The Color of Friendship.

Yellow...The color of Glory

Green...The color of Life

Blue...The color of Revelation

Indigo...The color of Atonement

Violet...The color of Royalty

I look at a rainbow of beautiful fabric colors, and I thank God, for his long suffering, his mercy, his love, his faithfulness and giving me the gift of sewing.

Maggie Markham

February 17- Saturday

Psalm 32

Ezekiel 18:1-4

Philippians 4: 1-9

John 17:9-19

How do you experience God's Voice? I think there are so many ways that God speaks to us:

When someone said something to you and your ears "pricked up" as they spoke. Their words were special and sounded like "truth."

When someone grabbed your hand and you felt God's comfort when you needed that boost. When there was an amazing "coincidence" in your life.

When you read something that struck you as perfect for what was happening in your life.

When you happened to be at the right place at the right time.

When some thought came into your head that solved a problem or surprised you for its timeliness.

We all have times when we are "down". When that happens, I talk to God a lot! On one occasion I was surprised when four thoughts came into my head, one right after the other. I was sure those thoughts came from God because as always, they were perfect for the situation. They were:

Live today.

Be grateful.

Forgive yourself.

Forgive others.

During this Lenten season, may you reflect on the many ways God has spoken to you. May all our ears, eyes and minds be open to His Presence as His Spirit guides us on our Lenten Journey. Blessings!

Karyn Robbins

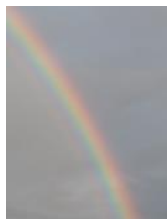
February 18- Sunday

Psalms 25: 1-9

Genesis 9: 8-17

1 Peter 3: 18-22

Mark 1: 9-15



Everlasting God, Creator and Eternal One,
To You, Oh Lord, I lift my soul.
The beauty of the rainbow joins your heart with mine,
with Your eternal promise with the creatures of Earth.

God, the Father of Mercies,
When I am misdirected, help me listen.
Take my hand and lead me the right way.
Thank You for your blessings and forgiveness.

Almighty Counselor, Faithful and True
Lead me in Your truth and teach me patience.
Relieve my troubles, distress, and suffering.
With Your unconditional mercy and love.

Christ Jesus, our Savior
Help me to surrender my resources to save others.
Work through me in our world to restore peace,
to cleanse our world from wickedness.

Jesus, Image of God,
Cleanse us with living water like the waters of our baptism.
Give all of creation a new beginning,
a new opportunity to live in the harmony that God Intended.

Debra B. Nelson

February 19 - Monday

Psalm 27

Exodus 23: 1-9

Matthew 25: 1-13



*“Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord”
(NIV, Psalm 27:14)*

Personally, patience is not a strong suit of mine. But this psalm reminds me that there is strength in waiting for God. What is it that I am waiting for? In verse 4, the “one thing” that the psalmist, David, seeks is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life.

I believe it is human nature to seek a relationship with God. Often, dwelling in the house of the Lord is thought of as being one’s reward in the afterlife. A rejoining with God, a place where God’s face is not hidden from me. (Psalm 27:9) For me, this psalm is a message of longing and hope for a loving relationship with God.

As I ponder while writing this reflection, a few ideas popped out at me. First, David asks to dwell in God’s house all the days of his life. This combined with verse 13 where he says “I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” leads me to believe that for David, it is not some far off thing; he is talking about God in the present tense. It gives me hope, in that I do not need to struggle with patience. Freeing me from my impatience, I can gather strength to do what I am called to do in this life.

The Kingdom is at hand, I only need to seek it out in the life that God has given me. Whew...

Julie Syracuse

February 20 - Tuesday

Psalm 85: 7-13

Isaiah 32: 11-18

Luke 4: 14-21

Whatever the time of day or season of the year, writers always carry with them a metaphorical golf bag filled with their specially made golf clubs called narrative devices. St. Luke never played golf, but I am sure that when he was writing the fourth chapter of his gospel, he reached into his metaphorical bag and pulled out his 1-Wood club equivalent: foreshadowing -- he was going for distance. If you can remember back to your high school English class, you'll recall that foreshadowing is how the writer plants hints for readers about what will happen later in the story.

As chapter four begins, Jesus is led by the Spirit to the wilderness where he successfully rebuffs the devil's three temptations. That fallen angel then withdraws to plan his next move – more foreshadowing. Verse 14 has Jesus embarking on a well-received teaching tour in Galilean synagogues. Returning to Nazareth, the town where he grew up and worked for many years, he goes to its synagogue. Asked to read from the Torah, he selects a passage from Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Jesus then tells those in the synagogue, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." What we don't get today is the familiar line about a prophet not being accepted in his hometown (verse 24) nor Jesus' additional words that so enrage the Jews that they took him to a cliff, intending to hurl Jesus off it, but he managed to elude them. Early on, Luke warns readers that Jesus and his populist agenda will be initially favored but eventually the crowd will turn against him, threatening death.

What is the message for us today? For me, it is the idea that following the way of Jesus' path (as cited in his Isaiah reading) may be no guarantee of happiness or success in our earthly life, but it is still the right way to live because it leads to one's ultimate salvation (Psalm 35:7-9 and Isaiah 32:15-18). Death may envelop us, but remaining faithful to Jesus will be our unfailing bulwark.

Richard Reid

February 21 - Wednesday

Psalm 51: 11-18

Jonah 3: 1-10

Luke 11: 29-32

The general theme of these three readings seem to be one of repentance, but also about forgiveness by God. Whether the wrong be by one person such as the Psalmist, a whole city as in Jonah, or humanity, such as in Luke, God is all forgiving. I am sure I try His patience by my thoughts, words or deeds at times.

This theme also is in our prayers, hymns, worship and praise music as well as the bible. I look forward to the seasons in the church where we have confession before starting the regular service. I feel prepared to hear God's words of forgiveness during the service.

The same holds true for the bible stories I have heard since childhood. The stories help to teach me right from wrong and how to live as God would have me do.

Music also touches my soul. Again, the theme is many times, having broken my relationship with God and the moment when I feel His forgiveness. So many times I hear my story in that I am lost and searching and God is waiting with open arms.

It is wonderful no matter how many times I have sinned, He is there, waiting for me to right the wrong and walk beside Him. I feel so blessed.

I try to remember, I do not need to have wronged or have been hurt to speak with Him, but I can talk about anything with Him even when all is well. I need to be thankful and praise Him.

Cathy Switzer

February 22-Thursday

Psalm 30: 6-13

Zephaniah 3: 7-13

Luke 7: 26-50

You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. ”The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Luke 7: 46-50



As I read these verses in Luke, I consider how special it was of Jesus to forgive sins. Even those who have done wrong.

Can we do that? Can I do that?

I often ask God's forgiveness for my wrong doings. Father Lance tells us that we are all forgiven. But though my sins are forgiven, can I forgive others who I feel have wronged me? Jesus gives us the ability to forgive others as he has forgiven us. It is not always easy to do!

Do I have the strength to follow his teaching and forgive others?
I pray that I do! How about you?

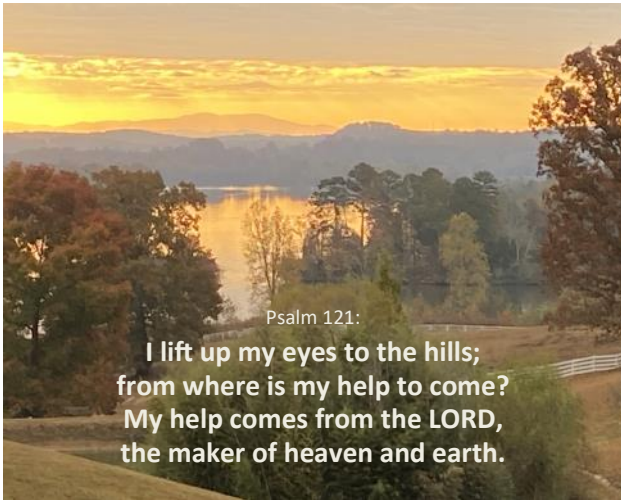
Betty Nohle

February 23 - Friday

Psalm 121

Revelation 2: 8-11

Matthew 20: 20-28



Psalm 121:

**I lift up my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the LORD,
the maker of heaven and earth.**

Life is complicated. From where do we look for guidance? How do we choose what we do and don't do? **Why** don't we always do the right thing?

In this reading, the Psalmist helps by giving us some guidance. Our God can give us the way if we choose to listen to his voice. Isn't it amazing to think that we have a God who made heaven and earth, which is so vast; even now we don't yet know where the vastness ends. Furthermore, the psalmist notes that the Lord will watch over you from this time forth for evermore. How can we hear God in the hustle and bustle of today's society with a 24 hour news cycle?

In my personal life, listening comes during quiet times in my day: during Bible study, prayer, and taking a quiet walk to view the beauty of nature around us. With proper reflection, God's word can guide us to create a life without fear, a calmness from the knowledge that he is watching over us. A prayer for today:

"Dear God, please guide us to become a people who never forgets that our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth and that he will watch over us from this time forth for evermore..."

Bill Munch

February 24- Saturday

Psalm 15

Acts 1: 15-26

Philippians 3: 13b-21

John 15:1, 6-16

In my adolescence, I wanted my own rose garden. To support my dream, my mom surrendered an area of her gardens and helped me select several varieties of beautiful roses to plant. My sister's godmother, Christy, lived nearby and was knowledgeable about roses. She taught me about the different threats to roses and how to care for them.

A valuable lesson I learned was the importance of identifying and pruning sucker shoots. A sucker shoot grows straight and strong from the root stock, but it produces no flowers. The plant cannot differentiate between the healthy rose bush and the unhealthy sucker shoot, so it continues to support both. However, the sucker shoot aggressively "sucks" the nutrients necessary for growth and development away from the rose bush. If not attended to by a skilled gardener, it can kill the plant.

Grapevines, likewise, need a skilled gardener. When left unattended, the shoots and clusters overwhelm the plant and create barriers that block the sun. Also, ridding the vine of old wood encourages new growth and prevents diseases. Not cutting back the shoots limits the amount of fruit the vine can produce and hurts the plant in the long run. Pruning maximizes the light it receives and directs where it will yield fruit.

Our lives mirror life found in a garden, and Jesus reveals the nature of our Master Gardener. As we extend from our Source, our ministries, careers, relationships, etc., extend like branches from us. Many branches bear good fruit. However, as we move through life's seasons, some become old, wither and die on the vine. Others may overwhelm us, blocking the light, taking all of our energy, inhibiting us from bearing fruit. Some become unhealthy pursuits that threaten to destroy us. We need our Master Gardener. When we offer ourselves to Him, he enters knowing His plan for us. He identifies our struggles and mercifully sets us free from parts of us that would destroy us or are no longer bearing good fruit. Being freed from our dead works, we are able to stretch toward His great light. Through His careful attention, He shapes us into the ones He chooses and welcomes us at His table.

Amy O'Neill

February 25 - Sunday

Psalm 22:22-30

Genesis 17: 1-7; 15-16

Romans 4: 13-25

Mark 8: 31-38

This Lent, I picked Bible readings from the Psalms, Genesis, Romans, and Mark.

It's the Old and New Testament giving mysterious messages , especially to Abraham and Sarah; flat out directives specifically to Peter and impossible predictions for everyone to ponder .

Then comes Jesus, the head-liner: rebuking naysayers, stifling haters, and calling out anyone sitting on the fence.

I get a little panicky, as I realize I'm one of those fence sitters.

I'm noticing my loyalties are divided between cultural promises and visions of getting into the glory-land chorus someday.

I've got one foot on the platform and the other on the train. The platform is rife with exorbitant expectations and bright shiny objects. Conversely, the train is the one we all know. All I have to do is get on board, & I don't need a ticket.

Just pick up a cross and deny myself.



Yikes!!!! Can I really fully and deeply accept that this Dominion belongs to the Lord?

So many questions amidst so much doubt.

Have a peaceful Lent 2024,

Jack Brennick

February 26- Monday

Psalm 119:33–40

Genesis 24: 12-20

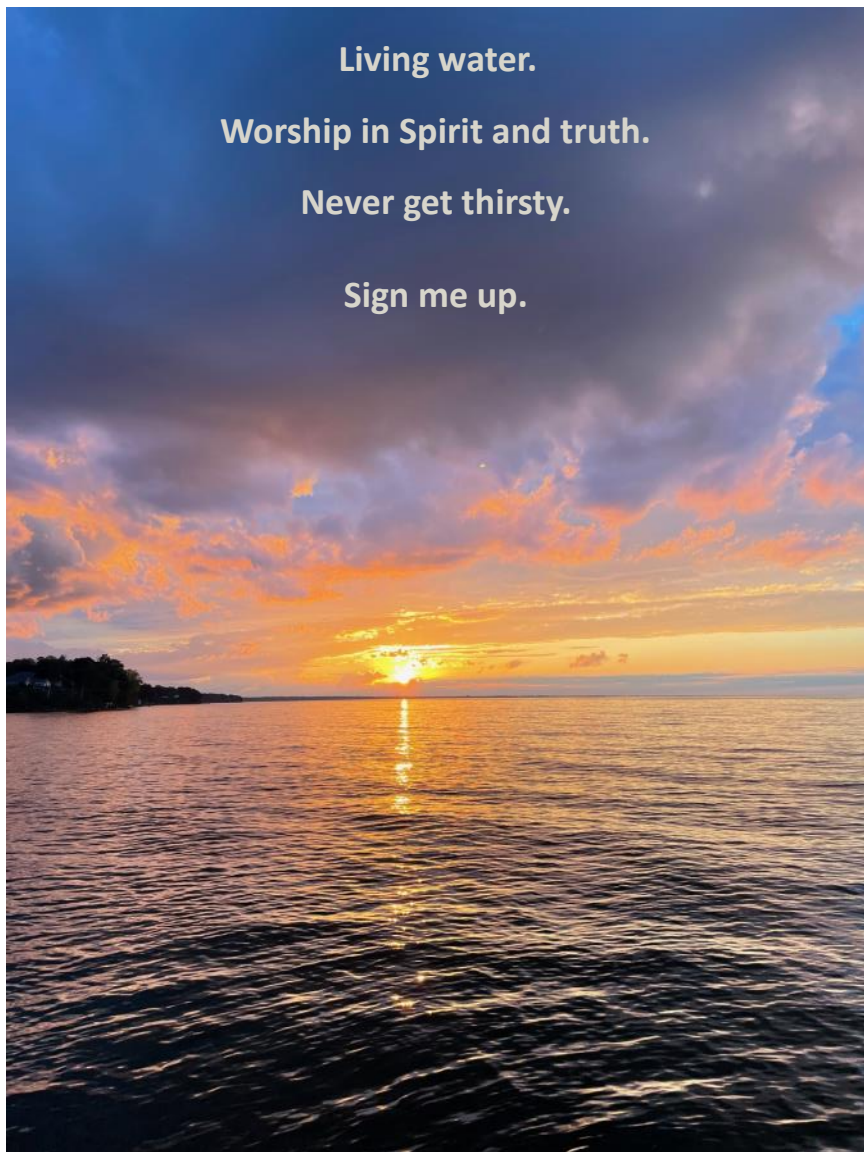
John 4: 4-26

Living water.

Worship in Spirit and truth.

Never get thirsty.

Sign me up.



Tom Curtin

February 27- Tuesday

Psalm 23

Ecclesiastes 4:13-5:7

Mark 9: 2-8



Mailani Brennick

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.*

Psalm 23

Mailani Brennick

February 28- Wednesday

Psalm 72

1 Corinthians 5: 9-6:8

Mark 4: 1-20

As I read Mark 4, I am reminded that the degree to which I remain open and attentive determines the clarity of my perception. Throughout each day, the constant arising of thoughts and emotions impairs my ability to fully experience that which God makes available to me.

I become one for whom “the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

Even in moments when I manage to avoid becoming lost in thought and burdened by desires, fears, and regrets, countless things clamor for my attention, as my laptop and cell phone offer a seemingly infinite number of alluring distractions.

Much of what God places before me falls “among thorns” and “[yields] no fruit.” If my attention is always compromised, I will remain deaf to His word. Only by earnestly seeking, through prayer and meditation, to be awake and aware in each moment can I become “good ground” for God’s word that I may more often “hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit.”



Jeff Curtin

February 29 - Thursday

Psalm 105: 16-22

Genesis 37: 3-4, 12-28

Matthew 21: 33-43



Of the three Lenten readings that were on my card, the passages from Genesis seemed (at least to me) to bring up a number of useful life lessons, applicable not only to family dynamics, but also in everyday life.

Jacob (Israel) is showing preference for his son Joseph, which creates a tumultuous situation for the family by enraging the brothers, sowing discord with their father, and creating an environment of resentment and jealousy. The angry brothers conspire to kill Joseph, but end up selling him to merchants, so their hands look “clean”.

It's an example of how bias and preferential treatment of some can conjure up feelings of envy, distrust, and bitterness among those who are not regarded as equal or worthy. Potentially causing them to act out in an undesirable way. I think anyone could see how this would create chaos within a family unit, but it is also a good reminder that even in daily life we need to be careful of how our actions can make others feel. Maybe using caution not to heap praise on one person, teammate, or family member, but to instead share our appreciation for each person's unique attributes and contributions. Even looking at it from the other side of the coin, if we feel like we aren't getting a fair shake, or we feel we've been overlooked for a promotion or recognition; we shouldn't let resentment creep in and make us act out or speak poorly (as the brothers did).

I have heard it said many times that the best thing to do when a resentment pops up is give it to God. He has a way of sorting it all out in the end.

Tom Nairn

March 1- Friday

Psalm 16

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

Mark 4: 26-29

Life is a little like hiking an unfamiliar trail through a forest. You've never been there before and each turn may take you in a surprising direction. At times, the woods become dark and overgrown and you fear that you've lost your way. But if you stay alert and focused, trusting that the path is there, and that the one who created the trail will keep you from danger, a great calm fills your heart. Just when you think that maybe you're really lost, a beautiful vista comes into view and you're filled with joy and wonder.

Faith is what keeps us hiking on the path, our eyes on Jesus, alert for his guidance and direction, filled with peace and trust in our Master trail guide...



*I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep my eyes always on the LORD.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

*You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Psalm 16: 7-8, 11

Patti Curtin

March 2 - Saturday

Psalm 84

Luke 14: 1-14

Leviticus 10: 1-3

Beginning last January, the purpose of my journey as a caregiver took a turn as my sister Beth began navigating unexpected challenges in her life. As we worked to find answers, I spent time supporting Beth at her doctor's appointments, physical therapy sessions, and daily life. Initially thought to be the early stages of dementia, we learned late that summer Beth had a brain tumor. The biopsy results were grave and the physical effects of the diagnosis had already begun. For 47 days, our family and her friends were at Beth's side. She was never alone. The daily 45-minute drive from Beth's home to the hospital in Allentown was filled with constant thoughts and prayer. As the days progressed, it was clear that long-term solutions would not be needed; this last road would be a short one.

Along the interstate, I passed the exits, "Nazareth, Bethlehem, Emmaus." The answers to my deepest questions and balm to my aching heart were right in front of me. The Lord was with us. The Lord was with Beth. Many helpers and angels were present during these days. On the very day that Beth's transfer to a LTC facility was being finalized, my most fervent prayer was answered. The hospital staff recognized Beth's need for in-house hospice care. That evening she was transferred to a hospice unit that could provide the medications necessary to give Beth much needed relief from her pain. She lived her final days in peace.

God's promise is that joy may be in us when we abide in God's love and ways.* This was not a joyful time in the traditional sense, but one where I could be present and support my sister. Prayers, phone calls, quiet music and reading, presence of family and friends, loving care, hand holding, the sacrament of last rights, anointment and Holy Communion were gifts of love that were given. When God's work is fulfilled through our actions, your faith, love and hope are realized. You will find strength that you did not know you had.

Thanks be to God for his gift of love, his son Jesus, and for our beloved family and friends.

Yvonne Arnold

*Beth-Sarah Wright, FDBD author

March 3 - Sunday

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

Exodus 20: 1-17

John 2: 13-22

We are all on a journey, feeling our way through the ups and downs of this life.

Many of us probably use the ten Commandments as a guide. The first four help us to keep our relationship with God going well. The next six help us keep our relationship with our fellow human beings straight. Pretty simple, right? Jesus simplifies them even further in Mathew 22:

“Teacher`, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

But wait, Jesus tells us in Matthew 5: 21-22 that:

““You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.

That isn’t so simple, is it?

My Lenten wish for us is that we can keep it simple in our own lives. If we do, we may find the truth contained in Psalm 19:7

7 The law of the LORD is perfect
and revives the soul; *
the testimony of the LORD is sure
and gives wisdom to the innocent

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Bob Markham

March 4 - Monday

Psalms 42: 1-7

2 Kings 5: 1—15

Luke 4: 23-30

All of this year's readings are great reminders for us to put our faith in God. In the Psalm, verse 5 says:

Why am I so sad?
Why am I so troubled?
I will put my hope in God,
and once again I will praise him,
my savior and my God.

It is so easy to fall into despair and worry. This world is so broken, crazy even at times. Political and religious divisiveness, a rise in mental health issues, deadly viruses, unstable economy....

In these times, it seems that if we return to prayer and ask for peace, some if not all of our anxiety can be lifted even if for a short while.

The Message translates v. 4 to read: *these are the things I go over and over, emptying out the pockets of my life.*

I like the thought of emptying out the pockets of our life. It mirrors giving everything, all of our troubles to God. Letting Him take the reins. Then our thanksgiving and praise when He does relieve our troubles, even if for a few minutes, hours, days....

In the story in 2 Kings 5, Naaman was a pretty high and mighty general in the army. He had leprosy and was given the chance to have his skin healed. When he arrived to see the King for healing, the King became enraged, saying he was not to be ordered to heal someone like a God. The prophet Elisha intercepted the disagreement and told Naaman to go to the Jordan River for healing. Naaman objected saying, "that dirty old river? I could get cleaner in a cleaner river than the Jordan!" But his servants implored him to do as Elisha had told him, and when he washed in the Jordan 7 times as directed, his skin was like a baby's. After this, he said:

"Now I know that there is no god but the God of Israel; so please, sir, accept a gift from me." His faith and commitment healed him and for that moment at least, he put God first and praised Him.

Kris Murray

March 5 - Tuesday

Psalm 25: 3-10 Matthew 18: 21- Song of the Three Young Men

The words truth, justice, love, mercy and humble were all over my readings. These are important words to my faith. These are important words in my life. Thanks to my parents, I am a lifelong rules follower. Truthfulness and justice are principals in my life.

Not everyone we encounter follows these words but, if I also practice love, mercy and humbleness I can live with that. I have been heard to grumble about fairness. All things should be equal but, they are not. I grumble but, then I have to go about the business of trying to make things fair. We need to show compassion and love for the people (and animals) we encounter. We should do it without the need for recognition. As the Nike corporation says, "Just do it."

"As one of my people, I hope you love mercy—for that is what you have received." I read this recently and I think it is what The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 25:21-35) wants us to understand.

This brings Micah 6:8 into my thoughts:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

I think what my readings boil down to is one of the central teachings of all major religions: The Golden Rule.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

"Love your neighbors as yourself."

Amen.

Christine Norris

March 6 - Wednesday

Psalm 78: 1-6

Deuteronomy 4: 1-2; 5-9

Matthew 5: 17-19

Today's readings are simple and straightforward. God has given to us a written 'owners manual' filled with great stories, lessons, and laws to guide us on how to best live.

Today's scripture instructs us to keep on telling the story, to share it with our loved ones, and to be sure to teach our children, be they biological, 'extended family', or others who are the children of God. The readings remind me of an old saying my folks used to say to us, God gave you two ears and one mouth, listen more, talk less. This is key to understanding that it is in listening, being quiet, that we are able to hear God.



Listen... to scripture... to things that inspire you to be the best that you can BE, not do. Today's Gospel talks about telling your family how much Jesus has done for you. It's really easy to share important things and relationships in our lives. The readings invite us to share our faith journey with others too. Our God is so near to us, that in the stillness of our heart, God is present whenever we need him.

Be brave and share the love of Jesus within you, with those around you... indeed, let the light of Christ that lives in your heart shine forth to others around you. How wonderful it would be if we could consistently demonstrate by our words and actions the love of God.

Mary Randall

March 7 - Thursday

Psalms 124

Hebrews 10: 32-29

Matthew 24: 9-14

Outside influences and personal problems can influence how we look at the world. Today's readings speak to this issue as it relates to our spiritual well-being. The messages found in these three readings: remind us of God's promises made in the past, caution regarding present and future difficulties, and reiterate the reward offered for staying the course. We are reminded of the changing, challenging nature of life and are encouraged to not turn away from faith.

Psalms 124 speaks of God's ongoing support for believers throughout history. God's children survive despite attempts by our enemies to destroy us. We are told that he will continue to protect his people forever.

The Hebrews passage highlights the 'new love' perspective of recent converts. This perspective provides recognition that the worth of our enlightenment far outweighs any losses suffered at the hands of the godless. But, over time we run the risk of losing that perspective and discarding our faith in an attempt to avoid abuse. Paul encourages us to stay strong.

Matthew instructs us regarding the abuse we will suffer as Christians. He warns us of the dangers of being led astray by false prophets and by the abandonment of faith. Finally, he reminds us of the salvation that awaits the faithful.

Through faith we become children of God. We become the authentic selves God desires us to be. The impact of faith in our lives is profound. Abandoning faith causes us to lose both our true selves in this life and our salvation in the next. It makes sense that love grows cold and hatred seeps into our lives once faith is lost. Holding firmly onto faith in the face of abuse and persecution cloaks us in God's protection. And this allows us to maintain the perspective that any losses we suffer in the name of God pale in comparison to the rewards we receive. It allows us to soldier on for God.

Jim Morse

March 8 - Friday

Psalm 81: 8-14

Hosea 14: 1-9

Mark 12: 28-34

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'¹ There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12: 28-31

Jesus made it so simple for us : "Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself" Why do people have to complicate things by trying to make Christianity all about who's following the rules and who's going to heaven and who's sinning and therefore a "lost soul?". Why judge and condemn others when it's not our place at all to do? Jesus made it very clear that our job is to love, wholeheartedly and unconditionally.

I read a news story the other day about a group of "Christians" who stood outside a library in Idaho to protest the "the Rainbow Squad" (a support group of L.G.B.T.Q youth and their parents that featured crafts, snacks and discussion). The protesters held signs that showed images of hellfire and damnation, and explicitly condemned teens, parents and librarians. One protester even carried weapons and the library had to beef up security.

I wonder what Jesus would say to these people who use his name in vain to inflict such hatred on others? Would he weep or would he become angry?

I know one thing for sure: He would remind them of the all important first two commandments, as quoted above and he would beg them to take these to heart and act accordingly., no matter what their personal opinions of the choices of others may be.

Oh what a peaceful world it would be, if we only asked ourselves, in every situation, "What would Jesus do?"

Patti Curtin

March 9 - Saturday

Psalm 119: 97-104

Wisdom 7: 24– 8:1

John 14: 23-26

Love and wisdom are our key words today.

Love - this is a much discussed and used word in our branch of the Jesus Movement. Today, the focus is on God's love. "God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom" (Wisdom 7:28) and "[t]hose who love me will keep my word" (John 14:23a). God loves us no matter what, but these words are where emotions become action. This is why we do good works. God loves us and so we will seek his guidance and do our best to be what he wishes us to be.

Wisdom - wisdom is "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit" (John 14: 26a) who guides us. We hear and see the Advocate in scripture, prayer, worship, and in the kind support and gestures of our community.

Because of love and wisdom, we live today's Psalm. It is a lot of work to meditate "all day long" (Psalm 119:97b) on God's word but the final outcome is that God's word does taste "sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103). It has taken me years to really taste the honey. This past year I read the Bible chronologically during our 2023 Bible Challenge. Not only did a chronological read give me some small but profound insights, but whole sections resonated with me in ways they hadn't yet. For example, I read every word of the Book of Revelation and understood them. Let me be clear, I did NOT interpret them but I registered them fully. In doing so, I tasted the honey that was in the Book of Revelation - yes, a very dark book and bitter but it has moments of blinding light and deep sweetness!

"Daily" and "all day long" are things I will always have my imperfections with but I am more than willing to keep on working on it, for I have felt the love and seen how my wisdom has changed and grown. And in having only had a touch of honey, I hunger for more of God's word.

Denise Junker

March 10 - Sunday

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

Ephesians 2: 1-10

Numbers 21: 4-9

John 3: 14-21



All of these Bible passages speak of God's power to save.

Numbers 21 tells the story of the Israelites being bitten by poisonous serpents because they had sinned. When they repented, God told Moses to put a serpent on a pole so that anyone who looked at it would live.

Psalm 107 starts with a song of praise: "O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever." Then the psalmist tells of many trials that people face, including times when they disobeyed God's laws. Yet, "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them . . ."

John 3 includes the comforting words that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. . ."

God created us all, and loves us no matter what we do or say. God is continually calling us to be our best selves, but when we fail, we have the chance to redeem ourselves with God's help and love. God saves!

Kathy Stokes

March 11 - Monday

Psalm 30: 1-6. 11-13

Isaiah 65:17-25-

John 4: 43-54

Looking across all of the assigned readings for today, I thought of the scope of the message of scripture, and how it tells a timeless, ever-repeating story of humanity.

The Psalm is a lament that focuses on the depth of despair that one feels when a person perceives that the whole world is an adversary. When we are in such a dark place, we have a hard time seeing that God is right there with us all of the time.



The passage from Isaiah speaks of a new creation that God has in mind for the world. It will be a time of joy and prosperity, and former foes will dwell together in peace. In today's world, we are still looking forward to God's promised future.

In the selection from John, Jesus returns to Galilee, where the people knew of his miraculous act of changing water into wine. An official asks Jesus to come and see his ailing son. Jesus tells the man that his son will live, and when the man sees the proof of this, he believes. Jesus performed miracles as God's presence in human form.

Jesus is still with all of us today in the form of the Holy Spirit, working through us, because we are God's hands in the world.

Kathy Stokes

March 12 - Tuesday

Psalm 57

Genesis 18: 1-15

Mark 10: 32=42-45

We celebrate God in times of happiness. But do we celebrate God in times of despair? It is certain that we will all face hardships at some point in our lives: illness, loss of a loved one, tattered relationships, rejection, change in employment, financial instability. The world can feel cruel. It is easy to become angry or fearful when bad things keep happening. As we encounter hardships it is easy to forget to trust in God.

In Psalm 57, David is hiding in a cave, fearful. He does not express anger for his dire situation. Rather, he calls on God to protect him, as a mother bird shelters her young until the storms pass. David trusts in God and remains confident, despite his difficult circumstances. Psalm 57 celebrates God's unwavering love. It is a reminder to rely on God, trust in God when faced with challenges.

Unexpected, unbelievable, unattainable. God appears unexpectedly and without warning in Genesis 18: 1-15. Abraham is quick to offer hospitality and respect, not knowing the true identity of the three visitors. As the reading recounts God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, we are reminded that God fulfills his promises, sometimes at unexpected times and in unexpected ways.

Jesus chose to be a servant. He could have had riches and fame. He chose not to be served, but to serve us. Mark 10: 42-45 reminds us to see everything we do as an act of service to others. The established perception of leadership and power is challenged. True greatness is attained by putting other's needs above our own; keeping our own selfish desires in check. With this, we will all be great leaders.

Shayna Tokar Schinaman

March 13 - Wednesday

Psalm 86: 11-17

Deuteronomy 6: 20-25

John 4: 31-38

John 4:31-34

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something”.

32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

33 Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

How many times do we catch ourselves thinking, if only I had more food, a bigger house, and a newer car, I would be happy? Many people in our society are continually yearning for more, thinking that material goods will satisfy the longing and emptiness in their lives. Somehow, no matter what they achieve, they are still wanting more. Material wealth does not provide the joy and contentment they seek.

Of course, it is important to have our physical needs met, but we who are fortunate enough to live above the poverty line experience hunger of a different kind. You may be familiar with an educational theory called Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow explains that yes, we all need food, shelter, and personal safety, but there’s more to life than that.

Once our physical needs are satisfied, Maslow says we need a sense of love and belonging (being a part of our church community), then self-esteem (recognizing our identity as beloved children of God), and finally self-actualization (living into the person God intends us to be).

We have all experienced the feeling of fulfillment in serving others, no matter what our ministry. May we use this season of Lent to listen to God’s call and do God’s will.

Diane Castle Babcock

March 14 - Thursday

Psalm 106: 6-7; 19-23

Exodus 30: 7-14

John 5: 30-47

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Today's readings remind me of that feeling of frustration which comes from being ignored, misunderstood, not being listened to. Like Rodney's line, "I don't get no respect."

In Exodus, God isn't feeling the love from Moses' people. They start out fine, but then they veer off into golden calf territory. God is mad enough (does God *really* get mad?) to wipe them all out. No respect. Thankfully Moses comes to the rescue, reminding God that they really are his kids, after all.

And then in John, Jesus is saying that no matter what he says or does, some people just don't get it. In one ear, out the other. He suggests that if you don't believe what I say, then at least you can appreciate my actions and the good words other folks say about me. Put them together – words, actions, and the respect of others – and you have the full package. Follow the law (scripture) and you'll find that stairway to heaven.

Some other Bible verses:

- ♦ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. – *Romans 12:10*
- ♦ Acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.
– *1 Thessalonians 5:12-13*
- ♦ A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. – *John 13:34*
- ♦ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." – *Ephesians 6:1-3*
- ♦ So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. – *Matthew 7:12*

Yes, I'd say that sums it up. Respect others. Respect yourself.

John Norris

March 15- Friday

Psalms 37: 19-42

Philippians 2: 12-15

Luke 12: 12-27

Verse 21: “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself is not rich toward God” and Verse 24: “Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn: and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?”

These verses show us how God takes care of all creatures. Being rich is not equated with possessions in God’s eyes. Our life is more than what we have.

These verses speak to the spirit of Lent. It is a time of reflection and sacrifice as we consider Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice—His life.

Many people offer up gifts and donations at Christmas time. Charitable contributions peak at Christmas. This is good. People feel a generosity towards mankind. But this generosity needs to continue all year.

Many people give up something for Lent. I have a Lenten practice that I have done for several years. I get a big box or two. Every day I take one possession to donate and place it in the box. That is forty items to gift out at the end of Lent. It is a good feeling!

I always ask myself why am I holding onto things that others could use! And this is nothing compared to the gifts we receive from the Lord.

Diane and Ernie Cole

March 16 - Saturday

Psalm 7: 6-11

Jeremiah 11: 18-20

John 7: 37-52

In the reading from Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah has railed out against the rulers about breaking the Covenant. They don't like what he has been saying and they are unwilling to heed his warnings of the consequences of their actions. Instead they plot against him.

Jeremiah says:

"I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" Jeremiah 11:19a

God reveals the plot to the prophet and vows to destroy those who do not heed his warnings and plot against him.

In our readings from John there is another plot, this time to lead the Lamb of God to the slaughter.

On the last day of the Festival of Tabernacles Jesus proclaims:

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." John 7:37b-38a

Some of those in the crowd said He must be a prophet, others said he is the Messiah, however most of the people, especially the Jewish leaders, did not believe. They claimed the people did not know the law and were being deceived by Jesus.

We all know how the story plays out: Jesus is arrested, like a gentle lamb is led to the slaughter, unjustly tried and crucified. Those who believe turn against him, even his disciples desert him.

Both Jeremiah and Jesus were persecuted for teaching the truth. The persecution did not end with the death of Jesus,; his disciples and the church endured persecution. It continues to this day; people are still being persecuted for their beliefs and standing up for justice.

Today we live in a highly polarized country and the division is growing. During this season of Lent, let us take some time for meditation, time to listen and try to understand the views of those whom we disagree with. Time to pray on bringing the country together, time to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, time to think: what would Jesus do?

Ed Kushall

March 17 - Sunday

Psalm 51: 1-13

Hebrews 5: 5-10

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

John 12:20-33

HAPPY SAINT PATRICK'S DAY!

Did you know there is spiritual meaning to a shamrock?

According to legend, St. Patrick used the shamrock to teach the native inhabitants about Christianity in the 5th century. He used the three leaves as a metaphor for the Holy Trinity, with the three leaves representing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while the single stem represented their unity.



According to historians, the number three had significance in Ireland long before St. Patrick began to convert the masses. According to Blarney.com, the number three was believed to have magical properties and was a recurring theme in Celtic folklore. The three leaves are also believed to signify the concepts of faith, hope and love



which tie in nicely to God and the Holy Trinity. Roman Catholic theology names faith, hope and love; three Theological Virtues that order man to God, allowing him to participate in God's own Trinitarian, divine life. They provide the foundation for the Christian's entire moral life because they guide, direct, and give life to all other virtues. These virtues are gifts given to us by God freely and it is up to us to decide whether or not we want to accept and use them.

How fitting that this Saint Patrick's Day falls on a Sunday, our day of worship. As we go about our day today, let's keep the image of the shamrock in our minds and remember that our faith is in God the father, God the son, and God the holy spirit; our hope is to one day be united with God in heaven; and our love is for God as well as for all of our brothers and sisters.

Peace...

Nan & Roch Whitman

March 18 - Monday

Psalm 34: 1-8

Ecclesiasticus 47: 2-10

Mark 9: 38-41

The bible says, "the angels of the Lord camps around those who revere and worship Him to rescue them."



The psalmist encourages us to "taste and see" that the Lord is good. Think for a moment about your favorite food. Can you imagine how it tastes and the pleasure it brings? How infinitely greater is the pleasure of knowing the goodness of God! Let the sweetness of His praise be on your lips continually!

*Taken from The Everyday Life Bible. Featuring Notes and Commentary by Joyce Meyer

Kim Gould

March 19 - Tuesday

Psalms 89: 1-29

Romans 4: 13-18

2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16

Luke 2: 41-52

Spend a moment and ask yourself: what comes to mind when you think of a *house*?

All today's readings, for me, center around houses. There are literal houses, like where a young Jesus grew up, and where Mary & Joseph wished him a Happy 12th Birthday not long before their adventurous trip to Jerusalem described in Luke. When they spend 3 days looking for him in Jerusalem, where do they finally find Jesus, but "in my Father's house" – the temple.

Separately, 2 Samuel's house references are of a different type: God's prophet tells David, "The Lord will build you a house", meaning David's line. And likewise in Romans, Paul calls back to God's promise to Abraham to build his house: his name and people that would spread throughout the world.

How many of us build our own houses, though? Did Abraham build his house, his line? No, Paul writes, it came through "the righteousness of *faith*". Did King David build his own line? No, *God's faithfulness* to David was the foundation of his line, as declared in 2 Samuel: "I will not take my steadfast love from him", and "your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me".

And Jesus, did he build the house where he grew up? Again no, but then again Joseph might have – he was a carpenter, after all.

God's faithfulness is the foundation and structure of all those houses, and that's made clear throughout today's scripture readings, like in Psalm 89: "I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever...your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens."

And while none of those folks built their own houses, we all get to be builders of a sort, taking concrete (pun intended) actions that build God's "house" in the world.

Matt Daniels

March 20 – Wednesday

Psalms 23

2 Corinthians 6: 1-10

Matthew 6: 24-34

Today may be a good example of how looking at multiple translations of the Bible really comes in handy. Consider just a single verse from today's readings: Matthew 6:34.

The King James Version (1611): "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The New Revised Standard Version (1989):

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

The Living Bible (1971):

"So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow, too. Live one day at a time."

Except for verse 24 of Matthew, the entire excerpt (itself a fragment of the "Sermon on the Mount" delivered by Jesus) devotes itself to realistic human fears – worries about having enough food and drink to sustain our health and continued existence and having sufficient clothing for inhospitable weather. Despite the march of time since Biblical days with its attendant growth in knowledge and improved standard of living for much of the world's population, nearly all of us are just one disaster caused by nature (hurricane, earthquake, fire, flood, disease, etc.) or by humans (economic, political, societal) from losing everything, even our lives. It's as true today as it was two thousand years ago. And likely to remain for countless centuries to come – so stop worrying about it!

We know we have eternal life through Jesus's death on the cross and we are thankful for His love that enabled such a sacrifice. But if we focus on that idea alone, we might easily forget to thank God for something else: the humanity of Jesus that enabled God to see and feel every human emotion: every joy and every fear. We should take God at his Word because we know He walked the same daily walk we all do. When Jesus said we are much more than birds or flowers are to God, as difficult as that may be at times when we consider our problems, we need only trust and believe it to be true to receive comfort from the Good Shepherd, who is forever guiding us.

Richard Reid

March 21 - Thursday

Psalm 34: 1-8

Philippians 4: 4-9

Luke 16: 1-9

Whenever I can, I try and grab a date of personal significance for my Lenten meditation. This would be my mom's 95th birthday. I think about her often and what she would say to me, especially as I've gone through some chronic health issues this past year. She left us to be with God two years ago, just one day after her birthday.

I had the meditation for her birthday then, and coincidentally the Psalm and the Epistle were the same passages. What struck me then and strikes me even harder now is that I feel like David and Paul collaborated with my mother in writing each of these because it is very similar to what she would have said. One of the lessons she has always taught us is to place things in God's hands....to let go of fear and worry (which is a bit hypocritical since she is always worrying about us.)

Nevertheless, that is exactly the common thread in both of these readings.

Whether it's David (who was on the run from Saul trying to kill him, in Psalm 34)—

4. I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. 8. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

OR Paul in his letter to his friends in Philippi (while he was in prison in Rome)

6. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

These are powerful lessons for the anxious times we live in (written by two guys who had their own share of trouble and every reason to be worried). They also remind me so much of one of my favorite messages from Father Lance on what is the best thing to give up for Lent. That is, instead of giving up sweets or booze or social media.....give up worry and fear, trust in God's love and place yourself, at peace, in God's hands! **So, take it from David... Paul....Father Lance ...and my Mom... place your concerns in God's hands, find peace and have a blessed Lent!**

Mike Rosato

March 22 - Friday

Psalm 84: 7-12

2 Timothy 2: 10-15

Matthew 13: 31-33

Two of the readings (Psalms and 2 Timothy) have encouragement, praise, prayer and joy as their themes. They express different feelings (David's psalm in particular) and also pleading and petitions. We read about:

- 1) The evidence of God despite his people's unfaithfulness.
- 2) The lament of the righteous
- 3) The exhortation to faith

We all can find a verse or two that apply to us.

Psalm 84 expresses a longing to be in the sanctuary (heaven?) or the courts of the Lord and be blessed. "Blessed are those who dwell in thy house ever singing thy praises" (vs 4). Verses 8 & 9 express petition and trust..."God, hear my prayer". Verse 11: "The Lord God is a sun and a shield...no good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk upright".



Sunset on Canandaigua Lake by Jonathan Ragan

2 Timothy is similar in that one is encouraged and exhorted to set good standards to live by.

There is so much to help and guide us in all these verses...a wealth of blessings!

Carol Markham

March 23– Saturday

Psalm 33: 6-11

Acts 17: 22-31

Mark 2: 18-22

Feasting or Fasting? The Disciples of John and the Pharisees made a practice of fasting. Some people confronted Jesus: “Why do the followers of John and the Pharisees take on the discipline of fasting, but your followers don’t?”

Jesus said, “When you are celebrating a wedding, you don’t skimp on the cake and wine. You feast. Later you may need to pull in your belt but not now. As long as the bride and groom are with you, you have a good time. No one throws cold water on a friendly bonfire. This is the Kingdom Come! He went on, “No one cuts up fine silk scarf to patch old work clothes. You want fabric to match. And you don’t put your wine in cracked bottles.”

Jesus is doing things differently than the Pharisees. They are questioning his actions. He is letting go of some of the traditions and starting anew. Imagine yourself as a Pharisee – What would you be feeling about Jesus’s actions?

3 Lessons noted: -Jesus came to save sinners, not to call the religious
-Jesus brings gladness not sadness
-He came to introduce the new, not patch up the old.

Jesus enjoyed sharing meals with friends, with the disciples, with sinners. He wants to be in a relationship with us. He wants us to talk to Him and stay connected with Him.



Imagine yourself as a follower of Jesus sharing a meal with Him....

Pam Trompeter

March 24 - Palm Sunday

Psalm 31: 9-16

Philippians 2: 5-11

Isaiah 50: 4-9

Mark 14:1-15:47



Palm Sunday – the start of Holy Week. This is one week out of the year where the entire substance and meaning of being a Christian is taught and celebrated. It is a roller coaster of a week.

Palm Sunday starts the week on a high. This is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowds are going wild! Cheering, shouts of Hosanna... his path is strewn with palms and cloaks. He enters on a donkey as prophesized by Zechariah. But less than a week later, this celebration and triumph ends with his betrayal by one of his own and ultimately his crucifixion.

There is so much symbolism to Palm Sunday that I have learned over time. The palms are thought by some as a symbol of resistance to Roman rule. The donkey was a symbol that Jesus was coming as the Messiah of peace. The same day, Pontius Pilate rode into the city on a war horse surrounded by his army and a show of strength. There were many at the time who were hoping that Jesus would be a political Messiah and save them from the Romans. The people were shouting Hosanna, which is a plea for salvation. Jesus came to give us salvation from our sins; many wanted salvation from Roman rule.

My point really isn't to get into the politics of Palm Sunday, but there was a lot going on behind the scenes. As I have thought about the day and the readings, I am struck that Jesus so often surprises us with his actions. He knew the whole story, he knew how it would turn out, and he most importantly knew the price he would need to pay. He came when the people needed him the most, and he gave them what they needed, not what they asked for. That story continues. I try to remind myself when I pray for something, that Jesus will always answer my prayers. Just not always when or how I want them answered.

Brenda Munch

March 25– Monday

Psalm 36: 5-11

Hebrews 9:11-15

Isaiah 42: 1-9

John 12: 1-11

This Lent, I am reminded of our Good Friday, which happened on Christmas Day. On that day, our dog, Deacon stopped eating. Not a huge deal because his cousin had visited Christmas Eve and they had consumed a ton of dog treats, but still I felt a little concerned. The day after Christmas was Monday, and I called our vet. The message was that their office was closed till after the holidays, but we were able to get him an appointment for Jan. 1st. They had said they would keep him most of the day to run tests. We got a call around 5 to say we could pick him up. When we got there, they said he had been a wonderful dog – but they had no idea why he wasn't eating. We were getting very nervous now. We called our vet back and found out the Dr. had contracted Covid so the office would not be able to open till Jan. 8th! We were losing him! As a last resort we got an appointment at the Cornell Animal Hospital on Friday Jan 5th. Same thing, very nice dog but no answers. And worse, with no food he was getting weaker. The doctor at Cornell had to carry him out to the waiting room, then out to the parking lot and then the car.

My prayers to God became extremely urgent now! Somehow we made it through the weekend and saw our vet on Monday. She had been studying his blood chemistries from the two other vets and thought she found something. She said it was a long shot, but she would need to confirm her suspicions. I carried him in the next morning, we went home, and I had a pretty angry conversation with God! The doctor called us back about an hour later and said she was right. He had Addison's disease, which was causing his not eating. The other 2 vets did not consider this, as the textbooks all said Addison's only presents in young dogs, and Deacon is 12. It's hereditary, so one of his parents in North Carolina passed the gene to him and it just appeared now. It is incurable but EASILY treatable! Two prescriptions and 5 days later, we had our boy back and he keeps getting better each day. There have been many apologies to God! I fell into the patience trap – Lord grant me patience for this trial, but give it to me NOW!

Humbly, *Larry Therkildsen*

March 26 – Tuesday

Psalm 71: 1-14

1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

Isaiah 49:1-7

John 12: 20-36

When I come to Holy Week, I believe I am reliving the Scripture in slow motion. Everything seems slightly out of balance as I reflect on the faith and trust of the Psalmist along with the prophesy of Isaiah. A servant called from the beginning of time is foretold along with a complete job description. The anticipation begins to build as people await Jesus' coming only to be confused by his talk about his death in the Gospel of John.

I am comforted by Jesus' words that God has great plans for the ones who are not the sharpest knives in the drawer. I know that the entire story is still a mystery to me, even though I believe in the love of God and the promises of Christ. My job on earth is to believe and to follow. I hope that in some way I have been able to answer God's call on my life as you have answered God's call on yours.



Moving through Holy Week, I think of what I would have liked to hear from Jesus. I do not think I would have asked him many questions because I dreamed of hearing his voice and his message of hope for a challenging future.

As I read the scriptures for today, my mind went back to the Sermon on the Mount. I believe in that message. I also look to readings from the lens of the world today where there appears to be a great deal of unbelief. My only conclusion is to continue to believe, pray, and comfort when I am able. No matter what, I do know that God is with me, and I am not alone.

Jesus went through so much to fulfill his purpose on earth. His strength and commitment give me strength to move forward.

Sharon Therkildsen

March 27 - Wednesday

Psalm 70

Hebrews 12: 1-3

Isaiah 50: 4-9

John 13: 21-32

Hebrews 12:

"Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."

Shame is the word that resonates with me in these readings.

In our faith, we are not to feel ashamed, for God loves us and Jesus "endured the cross."



Life is hard. There are sufferings. Jesus did not seek the cross; he prayed for it to be taken away. There are times when our sufferings are taken away and we can rejoice.

And, as seen through Jesus' resurrection (Easter is coming), his sufferings were ended and he was raised to glory. Our sufferings will be raised, too. But, again, Jesus did NOT seek the sufferings. And, we have a choice to not make things worse as Judas Iscariot does.

Let us turn to God when we suffer and let us turn to God when we rejoice. In all things, live fully for God IS with us.

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Denise Junker

March 28 – Maundy Thursday

Psalm 116: 1, 10-17

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

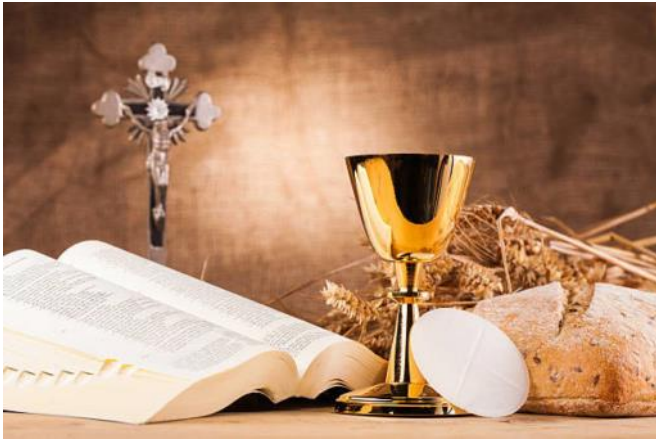
Exodus 12: 1-10

John 13: 1-17; 31b-35

I am going to ask you to indulge me in a childhood memory. Back in my grade school days, on the evening of Holy Thursday, our Polish-American Church had a special celebration of the holiday. The Evening Mass was complete with incense, hymns sung in Latin, and school kids in procession. After the Mass was over, the priest, nuns, and altar boys then proceeded to remove all decor and linens from the altars, and cover all statues with cloth. Then the priest reverently took the Host from the main tabernacle and put it in an elaborately decorated monstrance and transferred it into another locked cupboard called a tabernacle, or in the case that it was made into the wall, an aumbry. This area was then veiled in linen, decorated with flowers, a few candles, and a spotlight was shown directly in the door of the tabernacle. It was noble, visible, prominent, and suitable for prayer.



In the custom of many Catholic residents of Olean, New York, we would pray at our church, then jump in the car and visit all the Catholic churches in the area. We would say a few prayers and check out the beautiful simplicity of the other places of reverence. I always thought it was a nice way to recognize a very important evening in the history of the Church, and reflect on the joy of being God's beloved. It was cool that other parishes welcomed members from all over the area, and that parishioners felt welcome in other churches. I remember feeling like an included member of a large family, and I suppose it was quite a large family after all. Since that time, parishes have consolidated, churches have closed, and some rituals have been abandoned, but the consecration of the bread and wine and the sharing of God's love, has become the focal point of the Mass. This celebration has survived the test of time.



One of the beautiful ideals of the Church is the message of total inclusion of anyone who believes in God, can live with God in them or beside them without a special invitation or structured service.

Jesus, as God, has offered to share of his love and grace with everyone, no matter your race, religion, or history of bad behavior. God's love is not gone when the statues are covered and the Host is put away, but is everywhere all them time. We need to remember that we are all God's most beloved and precious children, and welcome to participate as members of Gods family, no matter how we choose to do so.

Brenda Lyaski Pierce

March 29— Good Friday

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10: 16-25

Isaiah 52: 13-53:12

John 18: 1-59; 42

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” “I am a worm... everyone who sees me, mocks me.” How often do we allow our inner voices to crush our confidence? As Psalm 22 begins, I thought of Father Lance’s sermon back in February. In that Gospel, Jesus was casting out demons from a man in Capernaum. He did not allow the man to speak, as he knew what the voices had to say and did not listen.

Reading on, we follow David’s tale of anguish as he travails one crisis after another. “...fierce bulls of Bashan have me hemmed in!” he cries. David was God’s beloved. Why do bad things happen to good people? (Although ‘good’ may be stretching it a bit for David-lol).

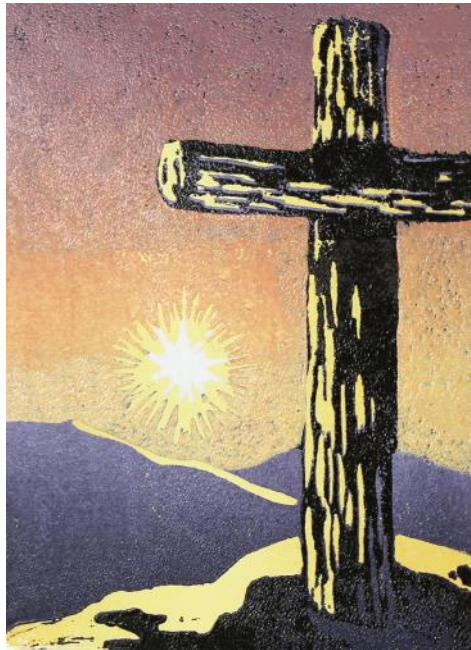
Brother Juniper posed this very question in Thornton Wilder’s novel “Bridge of San Luis Rey”. The monk studied intensely the lives of the five people who died one morning as the 100-year-old bridge over a river gorge in the Andes quietly collapsed. In the end, searching for divine meaning and revelations, Brother Juniper found neither.



For me, Good Friday is about the bottom of our lives. A reminder of the times when we were besieged, doubted, emotionally crushed, or simply had the bad luck to be on a bridge that is about to collapse. But it is also about recognizing that life can be a circle, rather than a straight line. Resurrection is ahead. And it comes in many forms, many of which we may not recognize at the time.

Jesus lays out his New Covenant in Hebrews. “I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds... I will never again remember their sins and their lawless deeds.” Christ forgives completely. No need to hash over our past sins. No need to listen to the voices. We put ourselves in God’s hand, just as Jesus did on a Friday afternoon.

The Resurrection always follows.



Artwork by Diane Castle Babcock

Chris Nuccitelli

March 30 - Holy Saturday

Psalm 31: 1-4, 15-16

1 Peter 4: 1-8

Job 14: 1-14

John 19: 38-42

High on a shelf in Karyn's office is a basket of bells, that for several years were used at the end of the Easter Vigil service: audibly and physically symbolizing the joy of Christ's resurrection. The bells had been given to me when I was a teen, by a dear family friend, Helen.

Mostly brass, they range from delicate little ones to school bells to cowbells. (I should note that the cowbells have been in several Christmas pageants and Sunday School events at Good Shepherd!)



When Helen was much younger, she did an apparently “unforgivable” thing by marrying outside her race. Disowned by family and likely many friends, Helen and her husband instead found joy in each other.

For many years, Helen helped her husband publish Syracuse's only newspaper for the black community. The couple also traveled extensively, and during their many travels Helen collected the bells. Starting with the Roman Catholic tradition (and now throughout many other denominations), bells are not rung throughout Holy Week, until the end of Easter Vigil. I am fascinated to learn in France, the bells stop ringing on Maundy Thursday. French tradition/legend holds that the bells gather up the people's grief regarding Christ's death, and fly to the Vatican. They then fly back home on Holy Saturday to help proclaim his resurrection. In more recent times, the bells are said to bring back chocolate and Easter eggs for the children. I kinda like how they pushed the Easter Bunny offstage!

I am a big fan of metaphors, parables, symbols that all help teach us lessons in life. The image in my mind of flying bells makes me both smile and reflect at the same time. So, I'm glad to imagine that Helen's bells will be flying off on another journey soon. Helen would be proud.

Laura Rosato



Peace

*On the mountain tops
Among the tips of the trees
You perceive barely a breath
Even the birds in the forest
Keep still and are silent
Wait then
Just a little longer
And you too will find peace at last.*

*J.W. von Goethe
translated by Patrizia Collard*

March 31 - Easter Sunday

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15: 19-26

Isaiah 65: 17-25

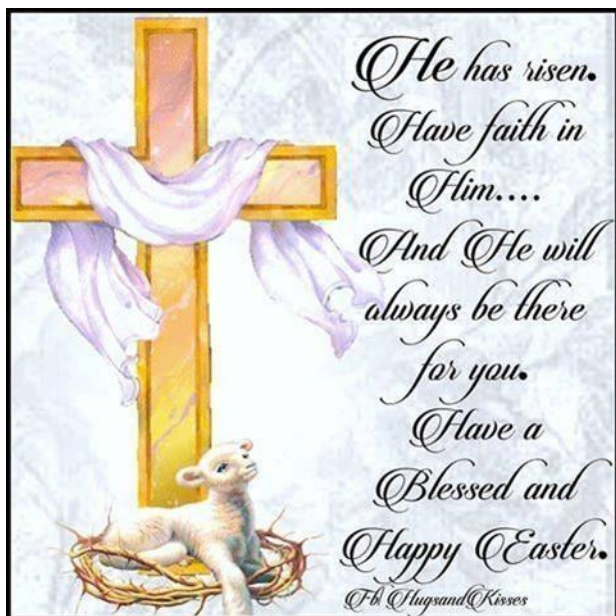
John 20: 1-18

Halleluiah ~ He is ALIVE!

As Paul Harvey, a radio broadcaster's famous statement is "and now you know the rest of the story". And what an incredible story this is ~ how our Lord and Savior, came amongst us as a human child, a baby, small, helpless, and dependent upon his family to care and raise him. The scriptures are filled with stories of his journeys, teachings, and healings. This past forty days we have walked the journey to the cross, and today, we are gloriously celebrating Jesus' victory over death!

Today's scripture is filled with how God's love is eternal and that today, we celebrate the Lord's victory. We are instructed to be happy, so let us celebrate! Today, we remember the recounting of the women's journey to the tomb and their surprise to find the stone rolled back. We recount the tale of Peter, Simon Peter, and the other disciples trip to the tomb to discover the stone rolled back. We recount the interactions with the angels and Mary, and how Jesus spoke to them. We recount Jesus's glorious resurrection from the dead and appearance to the many followers and people of the area.

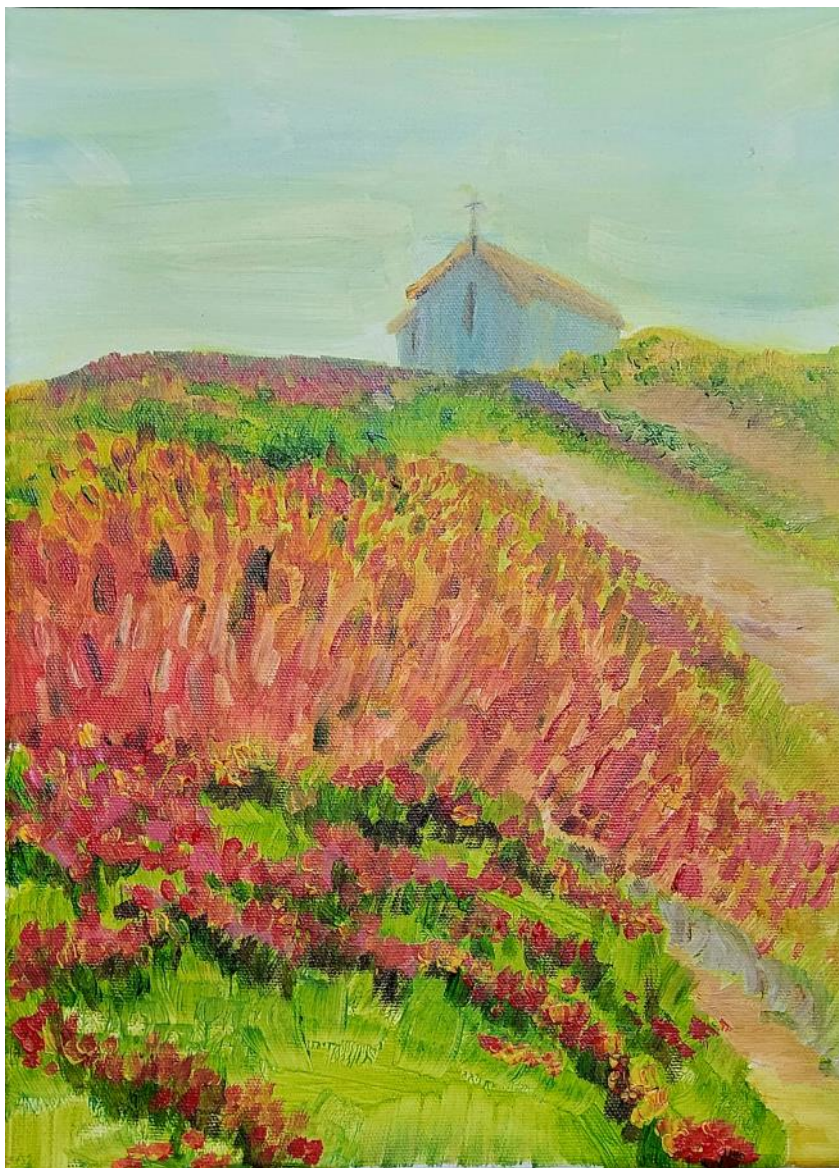
Today, we celebrate this journey, of the resurrection and the love God has shown us. Perhaps today, we can encapsulate that love, that power of God's spirit and store it into our own spirit. Perhaps today, we can create an indelible mark within our heart of God's love for us, so when on those days when we need guidance, help, and understanding, we can turn to that place in our heart, where God lives, and share the love that today offers. Halleluiah, He's ALIVE!



Mary Randall

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14: 27



Artwork by Gwen Brennick