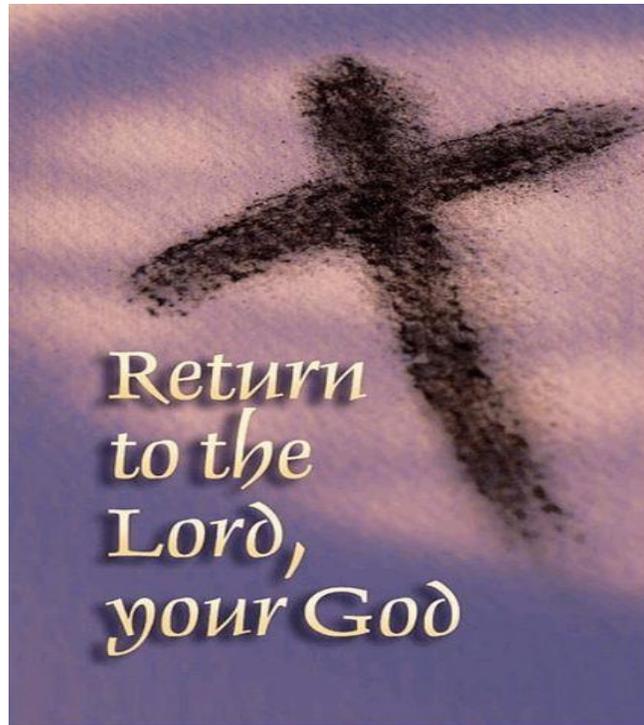


Lenten Meditations

2017



from
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
2245 Huguenot Trail
Powhatan, Virginia

We have prayed and reflected on the scriptures appointed for each day during Lent from the daily lectionary (except the Sunday readings, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, which are taken from the Year A cycle of readings).

We offer these meditations to you and we hold you in our prayers as you seek to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor, with God's help. Make time to read not only the meditations but also the scriptures listed for each day, at least the passages used in the meditation. Your meditation and prayer will be all the richer!

***Return to God with all your heart, the source of grace and mercy;
come, seek the tender faithfulness of God.***

Marty Haugen, © 1990, 1991, GIA Publications

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Scriptures: **Isaiah 58:1-12**
 Psalm 103
 2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10
 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

People of hope bring light into darkness. People of hope sow peace where there is conflict. People of hope raise their voices in defense of “the widow, the orphan, and the stranger”, in defense of those most in need, most lost, most suffering in our world. People of hope, know that there is always spring following winter, and resurrection following death.

Prayer:

Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know my heart and its longings. You know the world’s needs and hurts. Be with me in this dark moment. Teach me to advocate in words by using my voice to be a strong Christian and give me the courage to raise my voice for you. Amen.

Meditation prepared by Jack Speed

Thursday, March 2, 2017

Scriptures:
Deuteronomy 7:6-11
Psalms 37:1-18
Titus 1:1-16
John 1:29-34

Sometimes I get so busy in this world. I'm doing and doing and doing. I'm really good at getting tasks done. However, when I do take the time to slow down or change course and focus on what's important, things seem to fall in to place. Examples are: Sitting down with a friend or child in need and listening. Simply meditating and slowing down.

Don't focus on doing because others are (right or wrong). Don't focus on evil or meanness you feel others are doing. Instead – Focus on patience, understanding, slowing down and listening to God.

Meditation prepared by Cathy Ogle

Friday, March 3, 2017

**Scriptures: Deuteronomy 7:12-16; Psalm 95; Titus 2:1-15
John 1:35-42**

I am the unnamed disciple. I made a decision to follow a disciple of Jesus. When I heard the gospel it transformed me and unpenned the hurt in my life. Places where I did not expect to encounter God's world became filled with his divine surprise. I was transformed from a follower to a disciple wanting others to "come and see."

So, let me ask you, what are you looking for? What do you seek when you follow Jesus? Will you be open to see Him with eyes of faith?

John 1: 35-42 speaks of the account when two disciples, one unnamed (us), the other Andrew, saw Jesus. John said to them, "Behold the lamb of God" and they followed Jesus. This was due to the success of John's witness. The narrative continues with Jesus inviting them and saying, "What are you looking for?" Well, they wanted to know where he lived and Jesus invited them again to "come and see". The disciples spent time with Jesus and became transformed from followers to believers and then disciples. They stayed with him, not just physically but stayed open to encounter him. They abided with him and he with them. This was a relationship that they did not expect but only by accepting the invitation from Jesus would he then begin to reveal his divine surprise to each of them.

As we become disciples we share a responsibility among our community to stay open to encounter God in unexpected places, or people, or circumstances, to speak the truth about Jesus and expect him to transform the hearts and minds of others. Andrew brought his brother Simon to "come and see" Jesus. Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter which means stone. Peter was anything but a stone. He has been described as impulsive and unstable. But in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that Peter, "is the rock and upon this I will build my church." Jesus named him not for what he was, but for what, by God's grace he would become.

For those of you who are asking, "When will I have such an awesome experience of God's divine transformation and surprise in the world?" The "logic" of John 1:35-42 provides a start. "Come and See".

Prayer of Expectation:

Father God, I come before you today and I know that you love me and that you have a plan for my future. This is a plan of hope and goodness because you are a good God. As I wait expectantly upon you, may I never envy the sinner. May I never be jealous of how you are blessing others around me because I know that I am next. My time is coming! I will continue to walk in a worshipful fear of you on a daily basis. Even

though things may not look the way that I want them to in the natural, I believe that you have a beautiful future and reward for me. May my hope and expectation grow more and more each day as I look to your salvation and deliverance. Continue to direct my mind, heart and soul into the things that please you. May my feet ever walk in your path. I love you, Lord, and I wait in expectation on the fulfillment of your promises and ALL the prayers that I have prayed, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

<https://www.missionariesofprayer.org/2015/08/proverbs-23-17-19-the-prayer-of-expectation/>

Meditation prepared by Tammy Rogers

Saturday, March 4, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 7:17-26**
 Psalms 30 and Psalm 32
 Titus 3:1-15
 John 1:43-51

“But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.” Titus 3:9

Our lives today are filled with struggles that are vastly different than those described in the Old Testament and for the early Christians, but at their core they are the same. It is the difficult task of trying to keep the covenant with God, to follow the commandments, whether the 10 of Moses or the 2 of Jesus. I think of all the time we lose judging others or trying to project ourselves as more faithful, more righteous, and more moral than those we differ with. I hear the words and see the rancor of the political and social divisions that distract from the simple goal to love your neighbor as yourself. If we are not right with each other, we are not right with God.

For Lent, be penitent; accept your shortcomings and work to improve. Look to understand, not to dismiss, those that differ. Work for one goal to improve your household, your neighborhood, your community. Make one enemy a friend. Start with one and watch it grow. God is watching and will always be there to help.

Meditation prepared by Don Morris

Sunday in the First Week of Lent, March 5, 2017

Scriptures: **Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**
 Psalm 32
 Romans 5:12-19
 Matthew 4:1-11

“15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.””

In Genesis 2 man is now required to care for the earth responsibly under God’s authority. God instructed Adam that he was free to eat from any tree in the garden, except one. And the consequences of doing so and disobeying God were grave- death! God gives us so much, and yet we as humans tend to gravitate toward the one thing we know we shouldn’t do, despite the dire warnings. If we give in to temptation, we are liable to fixate on what we should not do. We become obsessed.

Sometimes we can’t see the forest for the tree!

Lord God, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Meditation prepared by Jon Brew

Monday in the First Week of Lent, March 6, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 8:11-20**
 Psalm 41 and Psalm 52
 Hebrews 2:11-18
 John 2:1-12

Have you ever offered sympathy and been told, “You don’t know what it’s like!”? Maybe that’s true and you really don’t know, but Jesus does. He was a man with joys, sorrows and frustrations, like everyone else.

He gets it!

He is also the Son of God, so by asking for his help and depending on him, he will be with you through any difficulties you are going through. They can be physical ailments, private sorrows, or temptations. Jesus himself was tempted. He wept over the death of his close friend, Lazarus. He healed the sick; he gave grace to endure suffering.

He loved us enough to become one of us so he truly does understand “what it’s like”!

Meditation prepared by Debbie Upson

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent, March 7, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 9:4-12**
 Psalm 45
 Hebrews 3:1-11
 John 2:13-22

Hebrews 3:1 *Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.*

This is the only place in the Bible where Jesus is called an apostle. The word means “one who is sent,” and Jesus was sent from God to us. He has a message, and we are to pay attention to what he says, but we are also to pay attention to Jesus himself, because he, as a person, is part of the message of God. Since Jesus is the basis of our salvation, we need to concentrate on Him.

Every day I wake up thinking, “Please Lord speak to me. I want to pay attention, I want to focus on you, am I missing something, am I not listening, am I not worthy?” I find it takes focus, focus on Jesus and his message. We need to make sure that nothing distracts us from that focus, but in reality, every day we have many distractions.

Sometimes it takes something very difficult to happen to shift our focus towards Jesus; sometimes it takes something good. I have personally shifted focus due to hard times. What I find challenging is the ability to always focus on Jesus when I am not facing something hard or being thankful for something. Each day we should begin our day focusing on the Lord. Give him thanks, ask him for direction, ask him to speak to you. To hear, you have to focus. Jesus is there, we just need to stop and listen. Before placing my feet on the floor each morning, I ask for guidance and ability to focus on Jesus and not lose sight, regardless of what is facing me, good or bad, or indifferent that day. It is through this focus you will feel the Lord’s presence. There are days that go by that I feel I haven’t been heard by our Lord but realize it is simply because I lost focus that day.

Dear Heavenly Father, as I begin each day, I pray that you start it with me. Let me not be distracted but let me focus on You. Give me strength and guidance throughout the day so that I may concentrate and hear YOU. In Your Name I Pray. Amen

Meditation prepared by Jo Anne Stephenson

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent, March 8, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 9:13-21**
 Psalm 119:49-72
 Hebrews 3:12-19
 John 2:23 – 3:15

In Deuteronomy, we read “**Furthermore, the LORD said to me, ‘I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people...**” A few verses earlier, on Mount Horeb (in Exodus we read Mt. Sinai) as God gives Moses the Ten Commandments and tells about the land he will deliver to the people of Israel, He wants Moses to clearly understand this is “**not ... because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.**” The word “stubborn” is what our translators write, but in the Hebrew bible is written “Am Kesheh Ovef” (stiffnecked people). Peterson in “The Message” writes “hard-headed and hard-hearted people.”

In Hebrews it is written that we have to constantly support each other, because on our own we will behave with hard hearts just as did the people of Israel in Moses’ time.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he may think he’s good enough to follow the law, but in fact, to enter the kingdom of God, he must be “**born again**” (or “born from above”). ...“**the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**” Thanks be to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit! Because on our own, we aren’t going to make it.

When I’ve occasionally done something that people feel is good and supportive of our Christian mission, sometimes I’ve been told “God has a special place in heaven for you.” And I think to myself “God is not fooled; He sees into my depths, and His standards are not our standards.” And I’m thankful for God’s grace and the Holy Spirit that give us life, and sometimes allow us to be a light to others.

Meditation prepared by Steve Moore

Thursday in the First Week of Lent, March 9, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 9:23 – 10:5**
 Psalm 50
 Hebrews 4:1-10
 John 3:16-21

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God. Psalm 50:14, 23

The word “thanksgiving” in these two verses literally means “thank offering”. In these verses this thank offering is called a sacrifice – this is what caught my attention as I read the psalm. It’s not difficult to offer thanks to God when everything is going great, when our prayers are answered, when we can see God at work in our life or in the lives of those we love. It’s really not a sacrifice to offer thanks then, is it?

Offering thanks to God becomes a sacrifice when we do it in faith, when we don’t see the answers, when life is full of frustration or pain or overwhelming with its demands.

Is today a day when it seems like giving thanks to God is too difficult? Then, offer thanks to God as a sacrifice. Call to mind just one thing, one person, one moment for which you can say, “Thank you, God!”

For a time, I kept a gratitude journal as a spiritual discipline. Each night before I drifted off to sleep, I wrote down at least one thing or person or situation for which I was thankful that day. Some days the gratitude list filled up a small page in the journal; some days, it was just one thing. Occasionally, I read over the lists I had made and was lifted up by remembering the stories and recalling God’s work in my life. Perhaps this practice could be something you adopt for the season of Lent this year.

As I write this meditation I offer thanks to God for all of you, for your faithful presence in my life, in the life of our parish and our community.

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Sandi Kerner

Friday in the First Week of Lent, March 10, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 10:12-22**
 Psalm 95
 Hebrews 4:11-16
 John 3:22-36

A title for these few verses from Deuteronomy might be “A Lesson from Professor Moses.” Moses begins with a question- “And now, Israel, what does the Lord require of you...?” – then he proceeds to give them a list- the theme of which is love. Love of God- humility before God- love of the stranger- reminders of how God has chosen and loved them. What Moses is doing is teaching the people how to live as a community, a people. Did they learn and remember? Well, not so much - they, and we, to this day, seem to have trouble remembering that we’re the creatures of a loving and just God- created to love and we especially have trouble remembering that the commands he has given us are for our good. We think we know better.

When I start feeling sorry for myself because of some real (or imaginary) slight God has a way of reminding me that my main task is to love and follow God - and to love my neighbor as myself. One of those reminders came my way just the other day from a daily meditation from inward/outward, a ministry of The Church of the Saviour. It’s a quote from Henry Drummond in *The Greatest Thing in the World* and titled “A School for Love.” Drummond writes:

“The supreme work to which we need to address ourselves in this world is to learn love. Is life not full of opportunities for learning love? Every man and woman every day has a thousand of them. *Life is not a playground; it is a schoolroom. Life is not a holiday, but an education. And the one eternal lesson for us all is how better we can love.* (italics, mine)

A lesson sent from our Creator via Professors Moses and Drummond. I pray for the grace to learn!

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Martha Jenkins

Saturday in the First Week of Lent, March 11, 2017

Scriptures: **Deuteronomy 11:18-28**
 Psalm 55
 Hebrews 5:1-10
 John 4:1-26

As a principal, I can remember telling children that it wasn't that they did not know the answers to many of life problems, it was that actually doing what they knew they should do was so hard. Failing a class, then study. Having a verbal confrontation with a classmate, then ignore him. Chronically late to school, then get up a little earlier. Simple answers are oftentimes not so simple or easy to implement.

In today's Old Testament lesson, the Israelites are facing the question of how they will conquer, and then prosper in the promised land. Moses tells them they know the answer. Obey the commandments. In our Gospel reading, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman (and us) that true life is found by drinking the living water that he offers. All we need to do is to choose to drink it.

Moses knows that the simple answer, following the law, is difficult, so he tells the people to write them on their hands and on their foreheads.

God too knows that living the great commandment is difficult. He knows that we face evil daily and that we are easily steered off the path to life, so he sends his only Son into the world to live as one of us, and to take our sins and missteps onto himself. His suffering, death, and resurrection provide us a way back to life.

The amazing love that God has for us and the sure pathway to life are highlighted for us each time we participate in Eucharist. Like a flashing arrow along a dark and lonely roadway, the Eucharist can guide us to life, but we do have to accept Christ's invitation to join him at his table.

Meditation prepared by Rick Cole

Sunday in the Second Week of Lent, March 12, 2017

Scriptures: **Genesis 12:1-4a**
 Psalm 121
 Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
 John 3:1-17

I was away when the Lenten Devotional was first promoted. So I was a little skeptical about selecting a Sunday in Lent. However, when I saw the reading list for March 12th, I knew I had found my calling as one would say. So here goes!

You may notice that the Gospel reading is from John. It includes one of the most important of all verses in John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

This verse is the foundation of the Christian faith. It is what I learned and what we have all learned as a young person in church. As I matured, I have found myself returning to this verse countless times to realize how fortunate I am (and all of us believers are) that Jesus came to Earth.

Yet I still find it hard to believe that God loved us so much knowing the future sacrifice Jesus would endure to rid us of our sins. It had to be. Jesus knew it and he obeyed his Father, our God, up until the end when he proclaimed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Can you imagine sacrificing someone as special as your son for the sins of mankind? That is some kind of person, in this case God, who can plan such a thing. He is truly a forgiving, merciful and loving God.

We all know the story of Abraham who was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-12) as a burnt offering to God. Abraham’s faith and obedience were tested. Are we fortunate that we aren’t tested to the same degree as God tested Abraham? You can bet we are!

However, we are tested daily with temptation of many kinds. God knows that evil can arise from these temptations. Therefore, it is imperative that we lead a Christian life by following the examples and guidelines provided by Jesus serving the needs of others rather than indulging in the needs of ourselves. Simply put: live generously.

Lent is a great time of year for us to reflect on the teachings of Jesus as we proceed to Holy Week. For me it all starts with the verse of John 3:16. God loves me and he loves you too!

Meditation prepared by Ben Bruno

Monday in the Second Week of Lent, March 13, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 1:1-19**
 Psalm 56 and Psalm 57
 Romans 1:1-15
 John 4:27-42

Psalm 56:12-13. My vows to you, I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of Life.

Many years ago, I had to repeatedly go to court to get and to keep custody of our small child. His father was going to be living out of state and was determined to have full custody. I prayed and begged God to help me be granted and retain custody to raise our child. I felt that I could do a better job of parenting and was more tuned into our child's needs.

My vow to God was that I would raise him to know and love God. I would try to teach him to show kindness and compassion in his actions. I was blessed to have won all court cases, and to raise our son - with frequent visits to his Dad.

Unrelated, a few years ago, someone asked me what I would do or buy if I could "have my heart's delight". I thought a moment, and told her that I had ALREADY been given my "heart's delight." I had raised my child! Still later, I realized that my vow had influenced his choice of careers; he is a clinical social worker.

I often feel that I can never thank God enough, for his gift and strength in my time of fear.

Meditation prepared by Peggy Sincock

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent, March 14, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 2:1-13**
 Psalm 61 and Psalm 62
 Romans 1:16-25
 John 4:43-54

For God alone my soul in silence waits; from him comes my salvation.

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly, my hope is in him. Ps 62:1,6

Whenever I read or recite Psalm 62, I always am touched by the words “*for God alone my soul in silence waits.*” There is a rhythm, a pulse that brings these words to life. It is something so poignant, so hopeful, so trusting. In verses 3-5 of the psalm it seems that the psalmist is in some difficulty. Yet he has turned toward God in recognition that God alone suffices; God alone loves unconditionally.

These simple words are a call to rest in God and trust. They point us to the core of our faith that God loves each of us unconditionally. God desires to be an active participant in our lives upholding us and guiding us each day. This psalm points the way calling us to stop and simply be – to be still – to consent to God’s presence, to trust, to listen, to hope, to seek.

It’s not easy, for daily we are confronted with activities and demands. Our days are often chaotic, noisy, busy, even overwhelming. It is all too easy to let the “*shoulds*” and “*oughts*” crowd out what is most important – our relationship with God. It is in these times that we most need to let these words of Psalm 62 permeate our being – to be silent and rest in God’s presence. They call us to deliberately step apart to be still, to open ourselves to God’s presence – an offering of ourselves to the one who creates us, redeems us and sustains us.

Let these few little words – “*for God alone my soul in silence waits*” – open new doors in your life drawing you into a deeper awareness of God and God’s love for you.

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Ruth Partlow

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent, March 15, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 3:6-18**
 Psalm 72
 Romans 1:28- 2:11
 John 5:19-29

John is my favorite of the four Gospels because Jesus is very outspoken about who He is and why He was sent. Yet His followers continually misunderstood and underrated His mission on Earth while his detractors continually challenged Him and His purpose.

When I read this passage, I think of my relationship with my own Dad. Parents teach their children, often without even realizing it. My Dad taught me how to write a rental contract, hang and paint drywall, change a tire, mow the lawn, drive a car and many other things. He wanted me to be able to cope with routine, mundane, daily things and hopefully handle the unexpected as well.

I have tried to do the same for my own children. I sought to prepare them for their lives and their calling. If parents do so much for their own deeply loved children, think how much more so God prepared His only Son to do His works and ultimately sacrifice Himself for us all.

In the verses prior to this passage, Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath which goes against Jewish law. The Jews persecuted Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and were seeking to kill Him for this and for calling God His own Father.

In today's verses, Jesus is explaining to the Jews that God, His Father, has been preparing (teaching) Him to do works, to fulfill His life's calling. He explains that God loves Jesus and shows Him all the He (God) Himself is doing and will go on to show Jesus even greater works. That like God, Jesus will raise the dead and give them life, and anyone who hears Jesus' word, believes God has eternal life and has done good (works) will be resurrected in life and those who have done evil will be resurrected to condemnation.

Our preparation for life is so easy in comparison to what Jesus underwent as he walked towards the Cross. Let us seek to follow God's will and do good works as He has taught and admonished us. Don't allow detractors to dissuade you from trusting in Him or following Jesus' footsteps as we fulfill our own calling in God's Kingdom.

Meditation prepared by Kathy Theado, Parish Administrator

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent, March 16, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28**
 Psalm 71
 Romans 2:12-24
 John 5:30-47

An ominous message to us busy people of the 21st century; coming to church doesn't do it, serving on the vestry doesn't do it, making sure our children get to Sunday School doesn't do it. You must love God with all your heart and actively live that love every day. For it's not enough to know the law and yet ignorance of the law is no excuse. Romans 2, 16: *"And this is the message that I proclaim - that the day is coming when God through Jesus Christ will judge everyone's secret life."* Yikes!!! It reminds me of the SNL skit of "church lady", are we so focused on doing it "right" that we are hopelessly wrong?

Jeremiah 5, 22 *"My people do not know me says the Lord. They are stupid children who have no understanding. They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right."* For unless you actively seek and live out God's love, we aren't really "getting it", even if you've never heard the word of God, as human beings we are called upon to seek the fulfillment of God's love.

It makes me think of one of Brene Brown's TED Talks, paraphrasing here, *"We are the most in debt, overweight, medicated, unhappy adult population in human existence."* We are mindlessly running from one task to another and wonder why we feel unfulfilled at the end of a day, a week, a month, a year. If we could watch drone footage of our daily life would it show us swimming mightily against the rip current most days? Can we be brave enough to give ourselves permission to release the need for control and float, until we can swim parallel to the shore? If we release control, will it open our eyes and hearts to actively live God's love?

The penalty for living mindlessly sounds quite dire as outlined in Jeremiah. It feels like a metaphor for much of modern life here on earth today. During Lent let's pray together for the courage to release our false ambitions, to "let go and let God". If we can reflect on this during Lent, perhaps it will create an awareness to help us course correct the rest of the year.

Meditation prepared by Laurel Harrelson

Friday in the Second Week of Lent, March 17, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 5:1-9**
 Psalm 69
 Romans 2:25 – 3:18
 John 5:30-47

This meditation is on the passage from Romans.

One interesting experience of college dorm living was having Jewish suitemates. I had noticed in this Baptist institution that Nancy and Gail had their own clique (other Jewish students) and stayed somewhat to themselves. They were smart, popular bridge players, and through them I met other interesting Jewish friends. During this time I felt that their relationship with God was very special and different than mine. A highlight for me was visiting their families and going to temple, to several bar mitzvahs and weddings. When reading from the Torah took place, my belief was reinforced that the Jewish people had a special "in" with God. As a young adult, this idea continued to stay with me. When I attended the bris of Nancy's first child, I could sense that unique connection again. While I didn't consider myself "second-rate" with God, I did feel I was missing something.

Some years later, as my own faith grew stronger, I became a better listener. We all are sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike. Hearing God speak in my own heart, I felt that his promises were not just to certain people or a particular race, but to all who have an open heart and try to live a certain kind of life. Growing up, I had been very focused on history and tradition. I needed to concentrate on what was in my own heart and what I believed: that God offers ALL of us love and grace through his Son Jesus Christ.

Meditation prepared by Kakki Rogers

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent, March 18, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 5:20-31**
 Psalm 75 and Psalm 76
 Romans 3:19-31
 John 7:1-13

Jeremiah 5:21: *Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear.*

I have been nearsighted all my life. Until I got my glasses in fourth grade, I thought the tops of the trees were just large green blobs. I did not see the individual leaves. My glasses opened a whole new way of seeing for me. Just as my physical vision has prevented me from seeing clearly, so my spiritual vision is not flawless. And as aids exist to improve my physical vision and provide me with new ways of seeing, so too there are aids that can improve my spiritual vision and allow me to see God's will more clearly. Bible studies, prayer with others, teaching Sunday school – all of these have contributed to better spiritual vision for me. As I aged, my vision continued to change. I needed stronger and stronger lenses to overcome my myopia. Then I hit the age where I could no longer see close up either and needed bifocals in order to see both near and far. My vision continued to change as I aged. So too, I need different spiritual aids at different times in my life.

Jeremiah does not tell us we are foolish and senseless because God has given up on us. He tells us this to wake us up to the fact that we have work to do to better understand God.

I can refuse to get glasses and continue to not see. I can get a pair of glasses and keep them for years, even though my vision gets worse and worse as the years pass. Or I can go back time after time to have my vision rechecked and seek the aids that will give me clearer vision again and again.

The leaves on the trees were there all along. It was my vision that needed improvement, not the tree.

Meditation prepared by Anne Larrick

Sunday in the Third Week of Lent, March 19, 2017

Scriptures: **Exodus 17:1-7**
 Psalm 95
 Romans 5:1-11
 John 4:5-42

Jesus, wearied from his journey, sits by a well and waits for refreshing. The man, Jesus, has walked in the heat of the day and has grown tired but as he waits for his disciples to bring him material refreshment, a woman appears before him to draw water from the well. He must have seen the faith in her eyes. He must have sensed her longing and understood her heart's desire for he proceeds to answer the deep, burning questions in her heart. He says to her, "I have the living water that you want. You never have to thirst again. You can stop searching for love and fulfillment and find rest for your soul. You, even you, can worship the Father in a way that the chosen Israelites don't yet understand: in spirit and in truth." The moment arrives when she finally declares the single most important truth she knows. She doesn't phrase it as a question (although she acknowledges that this man she is speaking to is indeed a prophet) for she *knows* this truth. She says, "I *know* that Messiah is coming... When he comes, he will tell us all things." One can hear the crescendo in the background music as the camera pans in for a close shot at these two characters as Jesus speaks the words every searching heart longs to hear, "I who speak to you am he."

Father, I come before you as one who is thirsty and tired. I become parched as I watch the pain and suffering in the world and I often succumb to the exhaustion brought on by worry and anxiety. But I read in your word that there is living water available. In your Son there is a constant stream of refreshment and grace and rest. Father, give me grace to experience this stream and find the promised rest for my spirit even as I keep my eyes open to the world around me. Grant me vision to see the glorious kingdom of your Son advancing throughout the world. Enable my hands and my mouth to spread only blessing and so become a conduit for this incredible stream of living water.

In the Name of your Son, the unquenchable river of life. Amen.

Meditation prepared by Alexa Boyt

Monday in the Third Week of Lent, March 20, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 7:1-15**
 Psalm 80
 Romans 1:1-15
 John 7:14-36

As the parent of a teenager, my daily life is similar to riding a roller coaster. Maybe I should say riding a roller coaster in the dark. I'm grateful for the few quiet moments I have to reflect and allow the Holy Spirit to enter into my daily life. The readings for today seemed to focus on faith. I have found in my own life when I'm so confused and don't understand anything, just having faith that it will all work out knowing God is with me is about all I can do. When my daughter was recently confirmed she made a comment that "I made her swim in the God pool." It was her way of letting me know she was beginning to feel moved by the Holy Spirit. I'm so proud of her. Having faith is what allows me to "just keep swimming" on a daily basis knowing that God is always with me. I don't have to be perfect; I just have to keep trying and returning to God, just as I am, again and again.

Meditation prepared by Carla Hunt

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent, March 21, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 7:21-34**
 Psalm 78
 Romans 4:13-25
 John 7:37-52

John 7:51 *Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?*

Have you ever justified your position or actions on a particular topic based on your perceptions of someone who disagreed with you?

Have you ever defined anyone not in agreement with your cause in less than polite terms—*racist, uneducated, unchurched?*

I wish I could say that I have not. I am also pretty sure most people are in the same boat with me.

In today's reading we really get a sense of how difficult the law is to follow. In typical human fashion, the difficulty is blamed on a particular generation, uneducated neighbor, or in Jesus' case his birthplace. The circle continues.

Yet these readings give us a great and joyful message, "God's promises will not be fulfilled by the law, but by faith."

Today, let us pray for faith.

Meditation prepared by Lee Kramer

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent, March 22, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:6**
 Psalm 119:97-120
 Romans 5:1-11
 John 8:12-20

When I was a kid and did something worthy of punishment, the words “wait until your father gets home,” brought a special feeling of sadness for me. Not dread, because my father was not a man to shout or react to things in a violent or physical way. Rather, he would sit down with me, review my discretions, and with a sad face say something like, “I am disappointed in you. You must work to regain my trust.” And with those quiet words, I was crushed. By some reckless action, I had separated myself from this person I loved so much and wanted nothing more than to please.

Our readings today took me right back to those feelings, but in a much more hopeful way. As humans, we are going to sin. It’s inevitable. Whether our actions are deliberate or impulsive, none of them are perfect. And like fighting with my brother or telling a fib, our sins separate us from God. God didn’t go anywhere, we did.

But Jesus gives us the very best news: He is the light of the world! If we love him, we will never walk in darkness. If we love Jesus, He will always be within reach. The most amazing part is that Jesus knows we’re going to sin! He knows we will separate ourselves. But He suffered for us anyway. He’s there for us anyway, because He loves us. All we have to do is ask.

Meditation prepared by Kriston Feldpausch, member of Church of the Redeemer, Midlothian, Cursillo, and the Education for Ministry (EfM) group

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent, March 23, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 10:11-24**
 Psalm 42 and Psalm 43
 Romans 5:12-21
 John 8:21-32

“Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man, deliver me! For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me?” Psalm 43:1,2

How often in our lives do we demand something of someone, then when they don't respond in the way we like, we blame that person? How often do we place the burden of our unmet expectations on others? I do. With my kids, with my husband, with my job. “I asked you to unload the dishwasher, why didn't you do it THIS way?”

In Psalm 43, the writer asks God for a performance. But God is not our employee, or children, nor our spouse. So often, we want God to behave like us. Do this for me, God. And do it this way. Right now!

“You are the God in whom I take refuge, why have you rejected me?” So, God didn't do what we wanted, how we wanted it and when. We wail and ask why God has forsaken us. Further in the psalm, the writer requests God to “send out your light and truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.” Again, asking God for a performance. And if God does this, the writer proclaims, “I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.”

We are all about conditional love. We place limits on our relationships. Perhaps this is out of a desire to avoid being hurt. We withhold our affection and appreciation until the right emotional boxes are checked.

God is not human; nor bound by our limits. God's love is unconditional and requires no checked boxes in an inventory of our salvation. If my salvation depended on jumping through religious hoops, it would never happen. God's love is boundless, so that even in our petulant demands for God to behave like all the other people in our lives, he remains. He waits for us to catch up. When we forsake God, he never forsakes us. Like the Motel 6 slogan: He leaves the light on for us.

I admire Christians who can praise God even in the middle of life's hardships. I aspire one day to be that mature in my relationship. To be able to lift my voice and sing even in the depths of life's struggles. It is an attainable goal, and I believe it with all my heart because I know God is there, especially when I cannot be. Even when I cannot see it, I know the light is on. Thanks be to God!

Meditation by Sheri Blume, member of St. David's, North Chesterfield, and Cursillo

Friday in the Third Week of Lent, March 24, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 11:1-8**
 Psalm 88
 Romans 6:1-11
 John 8:33-47

Jesus spoke in the temple about freedom. He said, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." He spoke to those who neither understood Him nor his message. And yet, as He told them the truth, He exhibited the grace that recalls the psalmist, who sang, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Many years ago my father and I were on a fishing trip off the coast of the island of Hawaii and I do not remember a word that was said between us that day. Yet, I have seared in my soul a look he gave me, a look of such kindness and love, that I carry it with me always and do my best to pass it on. When Jesus speaks of freedom, He speaks to all that is best in us, and also at the same time He speaks to that which gives us satisfaction in ourselves; does that not seem to be a self-inflicted limit? Let us pray that in these days we may come to hear, to understand, and to reach out for that which Jesus offers freely to us all.

Meditation prepared by Peter Boone

The Feast of the Annunciation, Saturday, March 25, 2017

Scriptures: **Isaiah 7:10-14**
 Psalm 45
 Hebrews 10:4-10
 Luke 1:26-38

“...Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.” Luke 1:30

Have you ever been asked to do something you thought you couldn't do? Move to new town, take on new job responsibilities, write a meditation, etc.? Imagine being Mary when Gabriel visited her. She must have been very afraid, yet she still had faith and trust in God to do what was asked of her.

“...If your faith is not enduring, you will not endure.” Isaiah 7:9

We are often asked by others to move out of our “comfort zone,” to try something new. Perhaps it is because others see something in us that we don't see in ourselves. God entrusted Mary to give birth and care for His Son, Jesus. Without question, she did what was asked of her.

“That is why God, your God, has chosen you and has poured out more happiness on you...” Psalm 45:7

We often do not know what we are capable of until we try to do what is asked of us. Provided the task isn't dangerous to ourselves or others (of course). By trying new things, we can discover new talents, new skills that we didn't know we had. Life is a series of learning experiences. Having trust in God, ourselves, and others helps us along in our life's journey.

“...Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!” Luke 1:28
Though you may feel uncertainty, say “yes” to God and “yes” to yourself.

“He will sustain you.” Psalm 55:22

Meditation prepared by Shelly Shock

Sunday in the Fourth Week of Lent, March 26, 2017

Scriptures: **1 Samuel 16:1-13**
 Psalm 23
 Ephesians 5:8-14
 John 9:1-41

Ephesians 5:8. *For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.*

Once again we have readings about sight. God tells Saul that “the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” In John we have the story of the man born blind who is given sight by Jesus and the inability of the Pharisees to acknowledge that this is a miracle. Paul speaks in Ephesians about darkness and light. He tells us to take no part in the works of darkness, but to expose them.

These readings help me understand that I can choose what to see in the world around me. I can look for what humans find pleasing and try to find happiness in outward appearances. I can let myself be blinded by the darkness around me, unable to see the workings of Jesus in my life. Or I can choose to use the sight given to me by Christ. This sight allows me to see God with me in the darkest valley; to see that my cup always overflows. The light of Christ shines in the world, but whether I use this light to live by or not is up to me.

Lord, give us the ability to use your light when we look at those around us, to see them as your beloved children. Help us to use your light to guide us through times of trouble and to reflect your light out onto others, that they may come to see that Christ shines on them.

Meditation by Anne Larrick

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent, March 27, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 16:10-21; Psalm 89:1-18; Romans 7:1-12**
 John 6:1-15

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. John 6:8-11 (NIV)

Do you remember being told as a small child that you could not do something because you were "too little?" That adult remark is childhood's call to action: "Oh, yes I can. I'll show you!"

Imagine the little boy's mother rising early, working hard to gather ingredients and to bake the loaves of bread. See his family's fishermen drawing in nets teeming with fish. Now the boy's basket, packed with the work of his parents' hands, is handed over to Andrew...who says, "Five barley loaves? Two small fishes? How far will these go in this mob?"

Imagine the boy looking at Andrew, then at Jesus.

Visualize the crowd of five thousand hungry men sitting down all at once the green hillside. Jesus didn't organize the men, or have them line up--he took them as they were, hungry and ready. Isn't that how Jesus takes us?

The mind of Jesus wanted the hungry crowd gathered in one place, listening at the same time in the same way. Jesus' first act in front of them was to pray and offer thanks to God for his providence. The first five loaves and two fish were the work of human hands gathered from the Father's creation, and the rest would be the work of the Father.

But Jesus knew that these people needed more than a meal to satisfy their physical hunger. He revealed their spiritual hunger to them the next day: "I am the bread of life."

What would happen if we thought and acted in Jesus' way the next time we face problems that seem insurmountable? It's easy to respond to such situations with words. But John's passage teaches us that Jesus acted in compassion, love, and hospitality. He acted!

And the people were fed with the bread of life.

Father God, Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your gifts of daily and spiritual food. We pray that you grant us compassion, charity, and patience for those who walk beside us and for those distant from us. Let us feed those who sit on green hillsides waiting to hear your Word. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to see ourselves and others in love as Jesus Christ does. Amen.

Meditation prepared by Betsy Brandt

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent, March 28, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 17:19-27**
 Psalm 97 and Psalm 99
 Romans 7:13-25
 John 6:16-27

Keep the Sabbath Day Holy. In the frantic pace of life today, we frequently forget to stop, rest, and reflect. When God made the world, He did so in six days, and rested on the seventh, and “It was good.” Sunday should not be a day to catch-up on what you didn’t get to this week. It should be a day that you relax with your loved ones, and spend time with the ones who love you most, God, and Jesus Christ. Only by taking time to “recharge our batteries” can we truly carry out what God has for us to do. In Germany, they have the right idea. Sunday is a day of rest, where it’s against the law to mow the lawn, or go shopping (stores are closed), and there are no trucks moving, because they aren’t allowed to (with a couple of exceptions). It is a day that you use to go to church and worship God, and spend with your family and friends. Monday will come quickly enough, and then begin a new week of work.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you made this world, and everything in it in six days. You rested on the seventh day, and you have instructed me to do that also. Take the burden from me, and give me the understanding that I can’t do it all, and that you will take up my cross, if only I will ask. Give me the ability to make Your Sabbath Day holy, and to follow Your instructions to stop, relax, and to reflect on all You have given me, and how much You love me. Lead me to better understand Your word, and the desire and ability to live the life You have set out for me. This I ask in the Name above all names, Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Meditation prepared by Stew Wolfe

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent, March 29, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 18:1-11**
 Psalm 101 and Psalm 109
 Romans 8:1-11
 John 6:27-40

Romans 8:5-8

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Living in the world today, there is much hate, deceit, disrespect, divisiveness and intolerance. All matters of the flesh.

Clearly, this is not what God had in mind for his people and we are definitely not pleasing God.

How do I turn this craziness around? How do I set my mind on the Spirit? It starts with me as an individual. It starts at home by loving, caring, sharing, respecting, opening our hearts to understand each other, teaching each other and setting good examples as God commanded.

I try to carry the Spirit with me wherever I go. It starts with the little things like a smile, a hug, a kiss; holding the door open for a stranger; picking up litter; volunteering and serving within our Church, our community and surrounding communities.

I try to listen to God and obey him. I try to be conscious of, and live by, His laws.

It may not always be easy to live in the Spirit but this is where I find prayer to be helpful. Prayer is a powerful tool that is available to us all 24/7. I believe that God is always listening and watching.

Living by the Spirit will set us free of hate and give us peace. That is what we need to focus on.

Meditation prepared by Dolores Gennari

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent, March 30, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 22:13-23**
 Psalm 69
 Romans 8:12-27
 John 6:41-51

I have chosen to isolate Romans 8:4 and 25 on which to meditate. *“For we were saved by hope. But hope being seen isn’t hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we don’t see, we’re eagerly expecting with perseverance.”*

I think Paul in his Letter to the Romans is equating faith and hope. Paul is saying that hoping excludes seeing its object, for seeing it makes hoping for it unnecessary. The confidence shown by hope enables our perseverance and eagerness of expectation. As Christians, we have hope for the future and faith in things that we cannot see.

As children, from our earliest exposure to scripture and to the concept of church, we are taught to believe in a God that we cannot see, just like our hope for things that we cannot see, and faith in things we cannot see. In scripture Paul was describing hope as confidence of receiving salvation at the Last Day. That confidence connoted by hope enables both perseverance and eagerness of expectation.

Meditation prepared by Larry Lyons

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent, March 31, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 23:1-8**
 Psalm 102
 Romans 8:28-39
 John 6:52-59

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.”

John 6:56

As we pray our way through the Holy Eucharist, a young man, Seth, rocks back and forth in his pew, audibly whispering to his mom, “It’s working! It’s working!” Seth can scarcely wait to take his turn, kneeling at the rail, with hands outstretched, longing to receive. “Seth, the Body of Christ, the bread of heaven.” “Yes!” he replies, his shining eyes meet mine with great joy. He informs his mom, “I go eat Jesus Christ!”

Seth intuitively knows what Jesus is teaching in today’s passage. To participate in the true life of Jesus, we must feed on him, even “crunch, munch, and gnaw” on him, as conveyed by the Greek verb *trōgō* in several of these verses. No one can miss the point Jesus hammers home here. His language is purposeful and graphic. Feeding on Jesus, taking in the Word made flesh, inwardly digesting Holy Scripture, and feasting on his presence in the worshipping community deepen our mutual indwelling with him and one another. Moreover, when with faith we feed on Jesus, we receive “the medicine of immortality”, as Ignatius of Antioch reminds us, echoing Jesus’ words, “whoever feeds on this bread will live forever” (6:58).

What will you feed on today? How will you choose to nourish your spirit, soul, and body this day? What is one way you can intentionally feast on Jesus, taking into your being that which gives everlasting life? As nutritionists often remind us, “You are what you eat.”

*He was the Word, that spake it:
He took the bread and brake it;
And what that Word did make it,
I do believe and take it.*

(attributed to John Donne, whose Feast Day is March 31)

Bread of heaven, feed me now and ever more. Amen.
(Hymn 690, *The Hymnal 1982*, words by William Williams)

Meditation submitted by the Rev. Sandi Kerner

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent, April 1, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 23:9-15**
 Psalm 107:33-43
 Romans 9:1-18
 John 6:60-71

“He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” These words from our liturgy threaten to desiccate and spoil even the most palatable of our societal wisdom. We are taught to work hard, so that we can have a good job; to save money, so that we will have financial security; to avoid the wrong people, so that we will maintain respectability. Whatever truth may be in such maxims, our liturgy is more interested in confessing who God is and how this determines who his people ought to be. Our God is the God of the oppressed, the orphan, the widow, the exiled, the outcast, the stranger, the hungry.

In Psalm 107, the word translated as “hungry” carries the sense of “those ravaged by famine.” God gives this people a land. He inhabits their famine and transfigures it into blessing, abundance, community, leisure, and children. The image is beautiful because it is historical: it is the story of Israel; it is our story.

In Jeremiah’s day, the blessings of the famished people were turned to bitter food and poisoned water (Jer 23:15). We might do well to consider our ancestors’ failings (see Jer 2:33–35; 7:5–7; 22:16–27): it is the story of Israel; it is our story.

Our societal wisdom might say that Israel simply did not maintain the right disposition toward its abundance—as though we might hold onto our jobs, financial security, and respectability. But this is not Israel’s wisdom; it is not our wisdom. Christian wisdom speaks different words: empty your being, exhaust your blessing, become cursed for others (Rom 9:1–4).

Consider the miraculous feeding in John 6. The people were fed bread with a mystical ability to satiate, a meal for which they longed, and then were immediately called to eat the body and blood of Jesus’ physical death. This teaching was/is difficult, but the imitation of Christ is not merely about our dispositions. In the Eucharist, we too become famished, emptied, and exhausted. After all, scripture’s unappetizing precedent is that the transformation of the elements in the Eucharist has a counterpart: God can just as surely turn fortune into wormwood and poisoned water.

Meditation prepared by Jim Chapman

Sunday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 2, 2017

Scriptures: **Ezekiel 37:1-14**
 Psalm 130
 Romans 8:6-11
 John 11:1-45

Michelle is one of the women in my Thursday night Bible Study at Goochland Correctional Center. She is an inmate. She is a Christian. She is the director of the Prison Choir. Recently her father died. He was the one positive influence in her life, her rock. He didn't want her to know he was sick, so by the time she found out, death was imminent. She was able to visit him before he died. After his death, she became fixated on where he had gone. Was there a heaven, and what did it look like? And would she get there? And would she ever see him again?

After the death of Lazarus, Jesus says to Martha: "I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

These are the opening words to our liturgy at The Burial of the Dead, but they are words we should proclaim not just at the time of death but in life. These words offer a promise of how those who believe in Jesus will live their lives, not just about how they will end them.

Even though we say we believe in Resurrection and eternal life, if we are honest, death is scary, and it feels like the end.

We have faith, but we hold on to the fear. We don't really know what is on the other side, what is waiting for us. Will we walk from death into life with Jesus Christ? Will we be "asleep" until the end of time? Is death final? Is life in this world all there is?

In the raising of Lazarus, God refuses to allow death the final word.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me, will never die."

This is the answer to Michelle's question. This is the answer for us all.

We wrap ourselves in doubt and are buried with a narrow vision of what God can do with us today. To that Jesus says, Unbind one another . . . And live.

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Linda Ricker

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 3, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 24:1-10**
 Psalm 31
 Romans 9:19-33
 John 9:1-17

John 9: 1-17

In this reading, Jesus and his disciples encounter a man born blind. The disciples treat this man's blindness as a theological problem, asking Jesus whose sin it was that caused the man to be born blind--his or his father's? At this time, people assumed that if something horrible happened to someone, it was because they had sinned against God in some way. So the disciples want to know--whose sin was it?

Instead of getting involved in a theological debate, Jesus tells the disciples that neither the man nor his parents sinned. And then Jesus heals the man.

When looking at this man born blind, the disciples see an interesting problem. Jesus sees a human being. To Jesus, the sin or choice that lead to the man's blindness is secondary to the man's suffering. He's blind and cannot fix that. Jesus can help him, and does. End of story.

How often have we heard people say "Don't give money to pan handlers--they'll just spend it on drugs or alcohol," or "If someone is homeless, it's her fault," or "These kids who need Christmas presents shouldn't ask for such expensive ones"? How many times have we thought the same things ourselves? We decide who deserves our help. We turn people in need into problems that conform to our view of the world.

By healing the blind man, Jesus shows us that the only circumstances that matter are need and ability. If someone else is in need and we can help them, nothing else matters. It's not our job to determine how deserving another person is. It is our job to help where we can, and give thanks that we are able to do so.

Meditation prepared by Molly Duncan

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 4, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 25:8-17**
 Psalm 121, 122, 123
 Romans 10:1-3
 John 9:18-41

John 9:18-41

He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'

My journey in faith has had its twists and turns. Sometimes, I'm amazed that I've gotten as far as I have and so grateful that I'm still on my way.

Christ gave the gift of sight to a man who was blind since birth. When pressed by the Pharisees, he couldn't explain why or how and didn't seem to know anything about the man who healed him other than "I was blind, now I see". He was challenged and threatened and finally thrown out of the synagogue. Later, when Jesus found him, the once blind man with an open heart was given the chance to see in another and much more profound sense when he accepted Jesus as the Son of Man.

In this story, the gift of sight didn't lead to an automatic acceptance of Christ as the Messiah. There were more steps in the man's journey, including encounters with doubters, threats and banishment from the synagogue before the Christ revealed himself and the man's simple profession of faith. Two thousand years later, Christ is still revealing himself in the loving acts of His people, prayers answered, healing and the gift of peace.

Meditation prepared by Bill Pawelski

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 5, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 25:30-38**
 Psalm 119:145-176
 Romans 10:14-21
 John 10:1-18

John 10:1-2:

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

One morning, many years ago, I was delivering a package in the city. I had forgotten to get gas the day before and was running very low. It was a rough part of town. An unfamiliar place where I did not want to be. I pulled into a gas station. It was run down but crowded.

No sooner had I pulled up to the pump, than this scruffy looking guy walked directly to me. He was big and had a crazy look in his eye. “You give me some money, so I can get something to eat?” he asked. I had no money, only a credit card and some change. But I had a honey bun that I had wrapped for later. Through the window, I quickly gave it to him. He took it and with a grimace and looking disgusted, he threw his nose up and with a cynical “thanks”, he walked away as fast as he approached.

In John’s gospel lesson, Jesus teaches us about the relationship between the true shepherd and the sheep. It’s a relationship based on honesty, faith, and obedience. We also understand that both shepherd and sheep have something to offer and something they need. The Good Shepherd doesn’t drive his sheep to some roundabout way, to brown, overgrazed pastures.

The Good Shepherd opens the gate early every morning. He calls his sheep by name and guides them to some distant green pasture. Then after some weeks of good grazing the sheep will relinquish their wool.

The man I encountered that morning started a relationship with me. It lasted only a moment. He wanted something. He saw me as out of place, but someone with possibly something to offer.

In coming to our relationship with insincerity, he did not come in through the gate; he climbed in by some other way. We both left disappointed.

Whether as calling shepherd or listening sheep, we should live our relationships with sincerity, honesty, obedience and truth.

Meditation prepared by Matthew Rogers

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 6, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 26:1-16**
 Psalm 131 and Psalm 132
 Romans 11:1-12
 John 10:19-42

Have you ever asked God's guidance for a decision or difficult problem? How do you recognize His voice?

My husband, Bob, bicycled 17 miles to work. This let me have our car. One afternoon in the '80's, I realized that a severe thunderstorm was brewing outside and I needed to pick Bob up. First, sand blew across the road (bad for eyes and skin). I set out to meet him, but I had a problem. Bob had changed his route recently and I couldn't remember which road he took now. Small branches were breaking off and blowing across the road. Sand was bad enough, but next came small branches, which would be followed by larger ones.

I prayed regularly and had asked for guidance in the past, but never like this! I had to choose the correct road! I prayed as I drove and tried not to worry.

The Pharisees didn't recognize the Father's voice and person (in Jesus), so they said He was demon possessed and mentally ill. They didn't believe because they weren't His "sheep" and didn't know His voice.

What does this mean? How do we hear God's voice? For me it has been the "still, small voice of calm." He has spoken to me very clearly and in detail. When we believe in Him, and accept his sacrifice for our sins, we are His "sheep" and recognize his voice.

As I drove along, I prayed and listened and knew which road to take. I pulled over to load Bob's bike and we drove home together.

A friend told me about a book on how to seek God's will. Ask God your question. Tell Him you will listen to what scripture says through prayer and meditation. Listen to the wisdom of others, like sermons and advice from Christian friends. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. I have done this many times since. I have heard God's answer and it has been wonderful. This works because I know His voice.

Today, with all the distractions of this age we need to learn to be still and listen. With all the noise around us it can be hard to hear God's voice. Set aside time to pray and limit your TV, internet and radio listening. Be still and listen!

Meditation prepared by Sally Ford

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 7, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 29:1, 3-13**
 Psalm 95
 Romans 11:13-24
 John 11:1-27

Jeremiah 29:11- *For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

In today's reading, God instructs the people to settle in and go about their lives despite being in exile. He even goes so far as to tell them to pray for the city in which they are exiled, because as the city thrives, so will they.

How often do we undermine our own success by not following this advice? How often do we hope for others to fail, so that we might succeed?

When we engage in a win-lose paradigm, we are hardening our hearts to God. We are not meant to live in opposition to others, even those whom we consider enemies. The abundance of God's grace eliminates the inequity we insist exists between us, and our insistence of this inequity, is ultimately what separates us from God- we exile ourselves.

Perhaps the most difficult task we face is to relinquish our perceived control of our lives, to move humbly with faith and trust. This hits home when we least expect it, when we feel most assured about the direction things are going whether at work, at home, or with our health. When we are faced with failure, divorce, or catastrophic illness, we recognize finally, that we in fact, have very little control over anything, but the way we treat each other. And how we treat each other is how we realize God's plan for us. Our hope lies in the acknowledgement that there is hope for everyone.

Today, let us pray to let go and let God.

Meditation prepared by Jen Kramer

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 8, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 31:27-34**
 Psalm 137:1-9
 Romans 11:25-26
 John 11:28-44

Anyone who knows my family will also know that we cry easily. No surprise, then, that these passages are guaranteed to make me tear up. Two of them are among the purest expressions of grief in the Bible.

Psalm 137 finds the Israelites beside the waters of Babylon, remembering all they've lost in the destruction of Jerusalem and their captivity. Worse, their captors want them to sing happy songs, which reminds me of those in our own time looking for 'closure' among the grieving! It's all there - the tears, the sorrow, the anger – and I'm right there with them until verses 8 and 9. I draw the line at dashing infants' heads against rocks.

But why? Their desire is for revenge, a natural human impulse. The reason, of course, is Jesus. These Israelites wouldn't have understood him, and their descendants won't either. In the midst of the story of Lazarus is the comic relief of the voyeuristic mourners following Mary around. When Jesus arrives, they can't wait to see the drama between Lazarus' sisters and him. After all, he didn't show up when he was supposed to! He could have saved Lazarus and he didn't! And then, Jesus does, not just the unexpected, but the incomprehensible. He raises Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus brings the opposite of what is expected – life, not death; love not hate. Even as he moves toward Jerusalem and, ultimately the cross, revenge and hate are never part of things, only love.

I'm not sure I understand Jesus any more than the Israelites did. All I can do is work toward that one goal – life not death; love not hate.

Heavenly Father, help me to remove the hate from my heart and replace it with love, for only through love will we truly have life.

Meditation prepared by Elizabeth Forrest

Palm Sunday/ Sunday of the Passion of our Lord, April 9, 2017

Scriptures: **Isaiah 50:4-9a**
 Psalm 31:9-16
 Philippians 2:5-11
 Matthew 26 and 27

Fickle *Adj.* Wavering, vacillating.

Palm Sunday is sometimes called Fickle Sunday. Does that surprise you? As we look at the Gospel readings for this Sunday, from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the Passion Narrative, it shouldn't. This becomes clear as we focus on one of the constants in that picture – the crowd. On that first "Palm Sunday," as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey, the crowd shouted out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" But a few days later, on that first "Good Friday," it would be those same voices crying out in response to Pilate's question on what he should do with Jesus who is called Christ? "Let him be crucified!"

"Hosanna to the Son of David!" – "Let him be crucified!" Truly a *fickled* crowd. But there was one present throughout who was not fickled – Jesus. Jesus knew the path he was on, from being lifted up on that donkey to being lifted high upon the cross. His singular mission was to do the will of his Father – to atone for our sins, to bring new and eternal life to all who would believe in him.

If truth be told, we too can be a fickled folk – even as believers. The question is this, how do we become more like Jesus and less like that crowd in our own Journey of faith? More resolute as we walk the path that Jesus trod - the way of the cross, but our walk the way of the cross *victorious*? It is only possible as we die to ourselves and grow more and more into the image and likeness of Christ. And as we turn our lives over to Christ, we will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to remain steadfast in our faith to experience the full grace and power of The Cross.

Almighty God and Father, strengthen us in our journey of faith to empty ourselves of self so to be filled with the Spirit of your Son. May we lift high the Cross of Christ victorious to shine throughout the world. In the Holy Name of Jesus our Savior we pray. Amen.

Meditation prepared by Father Larry Crowell

Monday in Holy Week, April 10, 2017

Scriptures:

Jeremiah 12:1-16

Psalm 51:1-20

Philippians 3:1-14

John 12:9-19

Psalm 36:5-11 (appointed for the Eucharist on this day)

Meditation on Psalm 36:7:

To me this verse is very comforting, bringing feelings of peace and safety to those seeking shelter in the arms of a loving parent. In the current troubling times of our world, we, as Christians, need to remind ourselves that we are the hands, feet and voices of God. We are commanded to love one another, treat one another with respect, providing shelter and safety to those seeking refuge from their storms. And always remembering that some storms rage violently in open seas, while others rage beneath calm waters. Kind words, actions and gestures can provide shelter and peace to those seeking refuge.

Meditation prepared by Pam Cole

Tuesday in Holy Week, April 11, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 15:10-21**
 Psalm 6
 Philippians 3:15-21
 John 12:20-26

“Under the weight of your hand (God), I sat alone,” laments Jeremiah. As a prophet he has been so faithful to proclaim God’s words of judgment and comfort to his people, serving as God’s mouthpiece at a great personal price. “Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?” Jeremiah has had a belly-full of this vocation – ENOUGH! To him God seems “like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail.” In effect, Jeremiah resigns.

Ever had one of those days? One of those weeks? One of those seasons? For a long time you have done your best to be faithful, but it seems like everything, everyone, and even God is conspiring against you. “Enough! I give up! I quit!”

At this point in what we now call “Holy Week”, Jesus is preparing to face into the eye of the storm, the culmination of his faithful, earthly ministry. In this season he will be bullied, betrayed, abused, and abandoned. He will suffer the worst we can dish out; he will carry the weight of our sin, our grief and pain. He will be flogged and crucified; all this he knows. And it will seem that his Father abandons him in his greatest hours of anguish. Why not give up now? Escape into the Judean desert? Abandon the mission? He will have plenty of opportunities to do just that in the days ahead.

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Jesus presses forward into God’s mission of love, saving and delivering us, at the greatest personal price. An invitation from Jesus follows in this passage: “Whoever serves me, must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (12:26).

On our worst days or in the toughest times, most of us have cried out with Jeremiah, “Enough, God! I am done.” But God’s steadfast love will not let us go. God invites Jeremiah back into service and promises to fortify him, “for I am with you to save and deliver you, says the Lord” (Jer 15:19-21). And Jeremiah turns again to God.

Thank you, Lord, that “your love never fails, it never gives up, it never runs out on me.” (*One Thing Remains*, Jesus Culture, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_KXsMCJgBQ)

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Sandi Kerner

Wednesday in Holy Week, April 12, 2017

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17**
 Psalm 55
 Philippians 4:1-13
 John 12:27-36

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers." Philippians 4:6

Reading this passage in Philippians was like a smack in the face.....what? *Don't worry?* Isn't that what most of us do at any given time? We worry about kids, our significant others, our friends, parents, jobs, money.....the list is endless.

What if we were to turn our worries to God in prayer and not just thank him for his answers, but really listen to what those answers are. That being said, maybe we might not like those answers, but as the old saying goes "Things happen for a reason" and He has His reasons for those answers. After all, he knows better than us what our path is in life; why things play out the way they do. The reading promises God's peace and what could be more calming than that?

I'm up for a little peace :-)

Meditation prepared by Isabella Worrell

Maundy Thursday, April 13, 2017

Scriptures:
Exodus 12:1-14
Psalms 78:14-20, 23-25
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31-35

"I thought the Baptists did the foot-washing thing, not our church," Mum said after our first Agape dinner at St. Luke's. "Well we do now," I said. It was an intimate gathering with the tables set up in the shape of a cross. We ate dates and lentils, the food that Jesus would have eaten, by candlelight.

I didn't know what to expect when the foot washing started. It's such a mundane task and we live in a time of shoes and indoor plumbing; far removed from the days of sandals in the dusty desert.

It's just water--except it's *not*. Just as wine and bread are consecrated as the blood and body of Christ, so too is this water blessed to be something more, something sacred. The significance of foot washing when Jesus did it is that he was performing a job that only servants did. This was not something a master and certainly not a messiah, would do. And yet, there he was commanding us to love one another and showing us that no task is beneath us to help our fellow man or woman.

In a time of tribal exclusion, Jesus came into our world with the radical idea that *all are worthy of God's love*. Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, masters, slaves, tax collectors. He said "Brothers and sisters," and united humanity as a family. A radical idea at the time. Perhaps in these times, it's a radical idea that might just help us to get along.

Meditation prepared by Hali Chambers

Good Friday, April 14, 2017

Scriptures: **Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12**
 Psalm 22
 Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
 John 18:1 – 19:42

“What is truth?” Pilate’s question rings in the air as though it could never be answered—like the endless pseudo-philosophizing one might hear at a Starbucks. Such a question seems out of place at such an important moment in the story of salvation: Jesus claimed to testify to the truth, but what relevance could Pilate find in such an abstract inquiry? At the very least, it does not seem to have helped Pilate decide whether Jesus ought to be put to death.

But perhaps “truth” in this passage does not mean “honesty” or “veracity” as we are accustomed to think about it. In addition to meaning “truth,” the Greek word used throughout John was also used to translate two important terms from Hebrew, *hesed* and *emet*. The two words refer to the deepest dimensions of relational commitment: the generosity of a party beyond contractual obligations; the love by which a parent might accept a wayward child’s return; the hospitality offered to a stranger. Israel breaks the covenant, but God returns because of his *faithfulness*.

The Hebrew heritage of John’s “truth-talk” makes better sense of Pilate’s questioning: when Jesus says that he has testified to God’s faithfulness to his people, or that he *is* God’s faithfulness, Pilate wonders what this could possibly mean for a people held captive under foreign rule. Pilate seems to have judged such statements to be foolish given Israel’s political realities, but the explicit irony of John’s gospel is that the true implications of Jesus’ words were pressed *by* the covenant people, who made clear both that any claim to kingship was a direct affront to Caesar (John 19:8) and that they have no king but Caesar (John 19:15; cf. 1 Sam 8:18).

In Jesus’ death, we see the full embodiment of his claim *to be* the truth/faithfulness (John 14:16): he died *for us* even when we forsake God’s justice to align ourselves with an earthly power. On Good Friday we repent for pledging allegiances to our modern Caesars, but let us also ask what it means for us to turn our loyalties to God. What is truth? It is the sanctification of God’s people through their faithfulness in the face of oppression (John 17:19).

Meditation prepared by Jim Chapman

Holy Saturday, April 15, 2017

Scriptures: **Job 19:21-27**
 Psalm 88
 Hebrews 4:1-16
 (no gospel is assigned for the readings today)

No Gospel Assigned

The gospel reading for this day on the guidelines sheet caught my eye and demanded that I choose it: “No Gospel Assigned.”

Could it be that there is any place or any time in this world in which there is no good news available? What do you think? Does the nature of this world ever allow for no good news at all?

I looked up what Archbishop Cranmer published in the earliest *Book of Common Prayer* editions. The Bible text there is from Matthew 27 recounting what people did on that Saturday. Joseph moves Jesus’ body to the tomb and seals it up. Two Marys sit facing the tomb. High “Priestes” and “Phariseis” requested “Pylate” to post a guard of ... “watchmenne.” That’s what they DID ... and our modern lectionary recommendations seem to consider how they FELT.

Psalm 88 is about feeling abandoned by friends, foes and God alike. Job 19 describes expecting the struggles of death after which Job will see God. Hebrews 4 lists results of Jesus’ experience of death: resurrection not only promised but demonstrated.

And the lack of a gospel text shouts that Jesus walked this path of death alone.

This is the great turning point of history as revealed in the Bible. This is the point at which faith in God’s promises to help us with our sin somehow is expanded to reveal the specific way God has arranged for us humans to have the help we need with our sin.

This was and is easy enough to proclaim after Jesus’ resurrection but while he was dead? I like to think that the two Marys still had hope in God’s help with sin, and that this would somehow come through Jesus ... or were they simply grieving?

What about you? Can you see that God reaches into this world to help us see the good news that this world isn’t all there ever was, and is not all there ever will be?

Just as God raised Jesus from death, God reaches out to help us. As we face the nature of this world we have hope because Jesus lay in that tomb for those days, but it wasn’t the end for him ... or for us.

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Bob Ford

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, April 16, 2017

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Scriptures:
Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10

I will never forget this passage from Acts 10. It was the first scripture I ever publically proclaimed as a Lector during the Holy Eucharist! Essentially, it's Luke's Gospel, the short version! Peter's sermon here has a long backstory, worth reading (Acts 10:1-33) and it has a profound climax (10:44-48). Even as Peter is still preaching, the Holy Spirit falls on all who were listening. No one can deny it: The gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out – even on the Gentiles, just as the Holy Spirit was poured on Jewish believers at Pentecost (Acts 2) and upon Paul (Acts 9). This gift is for ALL.

“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.” Matthew 28:5-6

The angel had just rolled back the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb where Jesus' body had been; the angel now greets the two women who had come to properly anoint the body for burial. But there was no body to be found! Can you imagine their terror and awe? An angel? The heavy stone rolled away? No crucified body? The angel comforts them, “Do not be afraid. He is risen!”

It seems to me that the first reactions to the resurrection of Jesus were usually fear, awe, and disbelief. Even after the resurrection, perhaps several days or weeks after, Matthew tells us some of the disciples still doubted (28:17). After the ascension of Jesus they were instructed to remain in the city until they received the Holy Spirit, the “promise of the Father” and only then were they sent out to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were given great courage to proclaim the resurrection, to effect healing, to announce forgiveness and to face persecution and death, for the sake of the Name. No more fear!

In order to boldly proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, to be his witnesses, to heal, to forgive, to endure persecution, and to love as he loves us, we must also ask for and receive the promise of the Father, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, what are we waiting for? Just do it! Ask!

Meditation prepared by the Rev. Sandi Kerner