

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40 days of preparation before Easter, Sundays are not included in this count. Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday** February 22, 2012.

During Lent many Christians prepare for Easter by observing a period of fasting, repentance, meditation and silent retreats. It is a time of spiritual discipline. The idea is to set aside a time of prayer and for reflection on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; his life, suffering, sacrifice, death, burial and resurrection.

We here at Hope Episcopal Church offer this book of meditation from our own parishioners as a time of spiritual reflection. Thank you for a job well done.

I encourage each of you during Lent to use these Scriptures offered in this book as a guide to spiritual enrichment in your life and the lives of your families. When we follow Christ in his suffering, Easter Morning or Resurrection Day will be so much more meaningful.

My prayer is that you will have a blessed Lent and a Happy and Glorious Easter Day.

Love and blessings,

The Reverend Bobbie Knowles+





A Beginning of Our Journey

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Season of Lent. It is a season of penance, reflection, and fasting which prepares us for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Following the example of the Nine vites, who did penance in sackcloth and ashes, our foreheads are marked with ashes to humble our hearts and reminds us that life passes away on Earth. We remember this when we are told

"Remember, Man is dust, and unto dust you shall return."

Ashes are a symbol of penance and they help us develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice.

The distribution of ashes comes from a ceremony of ages past. Christians who had committed grave faults performed public penance. On Ash Wednesday, the Bishop blessed the hair shirts which they were to wear during the forty days of penance, and sprinkled over them ashes made from the palms from the previous year. Then, while the faithful recited the Seven Penitential Psalms, the penitents were turned out of the church because of their sins -- just as Adam, the first man, was turned out of Paradise because of his disobedience. The penitents did not enter the church again until Maundy Thursday after having won reconciliation by the toil of forty days' penance and sacramental absolution. Later, all Christians, whether public or secret penitents, came to receive ashes out of devotion. In earlier times, the distribution of ashes was followed by a penitential procession.

The ashes are made from the blessed palms used in the Palm Sunday celebration of the previous year. The ashes are christened with Holy Water and are scented by exposure to incense. While the ashes symbolize penance and contrition, they are also a reminder that God is gracious and merciful to those who call on Him with repentant hearts. His Divine mercy is of utmost importance during the season of Lent. We are called to seek that mercy during the entire Lenten season with reflection, prayer and penance.

NOTES NOTES NOTES

February 22, 2012 Amos 5:6-15, Ps 95, Heb 12:1-14, Luke 18:9-14

HE WHO follows Me, walks not in darkness,” says the Lord (*John 8:12*).

By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ.

The teaching of Christ is more excellent than all the advice of the saints, and he who has His spirit will find in it a hidden manna. Now, there are many who hear the Gospel often but care little for it because they have not the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ.

What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.

This is the greatest wisdom—to seek the kingdom of heaven through contempt of the world. It is vanity, therefore, to seek and trust in riches that perish. It is vanity also to court honor and to be puffed up with pride. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the body and to desire things for which severe punishment later must come. It is vanity to wish for long life and to care little about a well-spent life. It is vanity to be concerned with the present only and not to make provision for things to come. It is vanity to love what passes quickly and not to look ahead where eternal joy abides.

Often recall the proverb: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing.” Try, moreover, to turn your heart from the love of things visible and bring yourself to things invisible. For they who follow their own evil passions stain their consciences and lose the grace of God.

Faith is the substance of things that are hoped for and the evidence of things not yet seen.

Faith is an action word.

Without faith our works are dead.

The Lord said, If you had faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to a sycamore tree, be up rooted, and be planted in the sea; it would obey you.

Let's increase our faith.

Let's make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

Let's come before his presence with thanksgiving.

Lets seek good, and not evil, that you may live an everlasting life.

God is our Father. No changes of earthly circumstances can ever rob you of that.

Our country is Immanuel's land, our hope is above the sky, and therefore, calm as the summer's ocean; we will see the wreck of everything earthborn, and yet rejoice in the God of our salvation.

Prayer:

Lord hear my prayerful voice, let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. My soul waits for you Lord. For with You there is hope, loving kindness and redemption from all iniquities. Make haste to answer me. Hide not you face from me. Teach me to do your will. Lead me in the land of uprightness. Bring my soul out of trouble. For I am your servant. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Be Blessed and Assured.

Stacey

The De ca lo g o n

Hear the commandments of God to his people:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.
You shall have no other gods but me.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

Honor your father and your mother.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit murder.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit adultery.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not steal.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not be a false witness.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

Mark 10:46-52
Jan Minturn

I like a scene from the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy is being held prisoner by the Wicked Witch in her castle. Her dog Toto has escaped and goes to warn the Lion, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man. This happens next:

The Tin Man thinks he has no heart, but he's crying at the thought of Dorothy in danger. The Lion thinks he has no courage, but he's saying 'Let me at 'em... I'll tear 'em apart.' He's ready to fight. The Scarecrow thinks he has no brain, but he's making a plan to save Dorothy.

Do you see it? Each of them has the very thing they claim not to have—a heart, courage, a brain. They already have these things... they just don't know it yet.

In a similar way, Bartimaeus didn't realize what he had. He was used to being the one in need, the one asking, the one defined by what he did not have... his sight. He didn't even realize what a powerful resource he had... his faith.

The presence of Jesus drew the faith out of him, but it was there all along, hidden, latent, waiting to come out. "Your faith has made you well."

Now I don't think faith is a blank check that will get us anything we want. But it is a powerful resource in life—like heart, courage or brains. Faith can lie hidden in us, waiting for the right day and time to come out.

Do you think you have no faith? Then think again. You have more than you know, more than enough. Whatever crisis you are facing, whatever castle is holding you captive, whatever heartache is plaguing you—know that you have the faith it takes to face it, endure and overcome.

When you don't expect it, the presence of Jesus will come, draw your faith out of hiding and bring you wholeness you have not known before. Then you too will hear those words, 'Your faith—your faith—has made you well.'

Habakkuk 3:1-18 portrays in vivid language what is described as the victory of our Lord over sin, death, and Satan. Two sets of verses struck me as particularly profound.

The first was vss. 10 and 11, which showed the powers of the universe are in awe of God: "10 The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands; 11 the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear."

These passages illustrate that the universe will tremble one more time like this, when Christ comes again to finalize his reign.

The second was vss. 13 and 14, which reveal the victory of the Lord over his enemies, smitting them with their own weapons, and in this I was forcefully reminded of how Christ defeated death by his own death, thus defeating his foes with the very instruments of man's subjugation: "13 You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof. Selah 14 You pierced with his own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter us, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding."

The moral of these passages is that, God, who knew no sin became sin for us and he, God, who is immortal died, so that our mortal body might live forever with him in heaven.

Reflections on John 17:1-8

John 17:1-8 provides an account of Jesus' prayer to the Father, asking for his glory. The selected passage makes up part of the Gospel, which records Jesus' death and resurrection. John 17 is in the form of a prayer to God, and is one of the longest speeches from Jesus in the whole Gospel. Within the passage, Jesus speaks intimately with God and reflects on what he has achieved. The significance of John 17:1-8 is that it provides readers with an insight into the meaning of Jesus' death, as well as his last thoughts. The passage also contains guidance for followers; particularly in vs 3 "[...] this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God [...]". This suggests that by "knowing" God (having complete faith in the True God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit) a disciple may live forever in the Kingdom of God. It also solidifies that Jesus is the leader of all - the Messiah - by stating that he has "authority over all people" (vs 2). Interestingly, immediately after chapter 17 Jesus is arrested, put on trial and executed.

Reflections on Philippians 3:12-21

The bible passages in Philippians 3:12-21 suggests that we ought not to get caught up in what the world thinks of as accomplishments. Rather we should move close to Jesus by pressing and reaching out toward the "**Heavenly Citizenship**". Picture a hiker trying to make it to the peak of a mountain. A runner trying to make it to the end of a marathon. Whatever illustration you keep in your mind, the words hold true: forget what lies behind. There is no bigger defeat than to dwell on what you have already past, how many miles you have already gone how many steps you've already taken. Paul says that he was forgetting what lay behind and kept reaching forward. Today, where and what are you doing now? You see, the past doesn't matter - it's already past. Are you growing in Christ now? Are you ministering now? Are you praying now? You cannot rest on your laurels. What matters is where you are at in the Lord today. Thus, do not talk about what you did last year at HOPE Episcopal Church; rather, ask yourself, "What am I doing this year?" *Reflections on*

March 30, 2012 Exodus 9:13-35, Ps 141, 2 Cor 4:1-12, Mark 10:32-45

Mark 10: 38

But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

When I was three, a polio epidemic hit our town, and I was left with twisted bones. For years, I had to wear corrective shoes with special iron bars built in. My feet ached all day and halfway into the night, but, gradually, they straightened out, and I could walk again without stumbling.

I was lucky.

The other day, I was hauling myself up the stairs in my daughter's apartment and complaining that my constant companion, Arthur Itis, was sending the top of my foot some sharp pains. My hands were already hurting. My feet always ache. Now, the top of my foot hurt.

Dang. How much of this misery am I supposed to bear?

Well, my foot hurts, but not like there is a spike hammered through it. My hands ache. But not like I am hanging by nails driven through them. I am not trying to push up against the bleeding wounds to gasp for one more breath.

One tiny drop of the cup Jesus drank, and I'm already asking for mercy. If I stood beside an olive tree in the Holy Land, and Jesus asked me if I could drink of the cup that He was to drink of, I would not have the courage to taste. Obviously, I am not ready to be on the Lord's Dream Team.

However, I have my church and my church family to turn to, and, maybe, some more years to learn patience and obedience. Like David, I ask, "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."

Okay, so my foot hurts.

But, I'm lucky.

Jesus had more than just ouchy feet and hands. He hung for bloody hours, in agony, thirsty and suffocating. He died for me.

Kind Father, like the Pharaoh of old, my head is stubborn and my heart is hard. It takes a while for me to catch on, to accept Your will, to follow Your Son's example, but please keep on working with me. I know You love me because You sacrificed Your Boy. You gave Him a painful, shameful death so that I have a chance to live forever in glory. Thank You, dear God. I know I'm lucky. Amen

Freedom in the Lord Meditation:

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity (Ps. 133). While this is ideal and makes for a happy healthy family today many families and friends are divided for reasons they cannot remember or now sound too silly to repeat when questioned. As we progress in our journey of faith and seek God let us not forget our imperfections (not to serve as a handicap), but as a helping hand to aid in our forgiveness and acceptance of others. We must be like David in the cave who cried out to the Lord his refuge and asked to be set free from his prison so that he could praise His name and cause the righteous to gather about when they see the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 142). David and later Paul understood that turning to the Lord removed the veil (camouflage). Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 accepted that the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. With this freedom comes responsibility and accountability and we may have to make apologies for past faults, however we cannot allow them to hinder our journey toward perfection. This freedom may sometimes allow us to share our past errs with others who look up to us and hold us in high regard as a way to lift them out of their prison and show them that they too can be set free. Prison of lies, insecurities, drugs or anything else Satan chooses to let us feel prisoner to from our past. Set me free O Lord so I may praise your name and bring glory to your kingdom.

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Allow me to be a beacon of light to my children and others looking up to me such that they can be proud. Teach me to remember my faults, my life changing moments, not as a hindrance but as an offering of freedom in your name; as a symbol of future happiness, forgiveness, humanity and humility. Give me the strength O Lord in this freedom to openly share my past faults at appropriate times to uplift my brothers and sisters who may still be prisoner to old ways or prisoner to the guilt of former behavior such that they cannot accept the freedom you freely give. Thank you for putting your Spirit in me, offering your freedom. All honour and glory be to your name. Amen

Lesley Osazuwa

In Philippians, 4:2, Paul makes reference to two individuals “Euodius and Syntyche”. It seems that there is some dispute or division between the two. This division appears to threaten the good work they have done in the past in the church of Philippi.

Have you witnessed division in your church or perhaps in your own family? Perhaps you have had your own experience with another individual in the church. How can you love others and share the Gospel when there is disharmony in your home or church?

As Christians, we must stand firm in unity to advance the work of the Gospel. Each individual helps to advance the work by creating unity. Our efforts are stalled where there is division in our church home.

So what can we do about it?

1. We must know that we are bound together in God’s spirit. It is God dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit that enables us to live in unity with each other.
2. Paul said we should be “like-minded”, doing nothing of selfish-ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than ourselves. We must use tenderness and compassion – this is how God treats us, so we should be inspired to do the same with one another.
3. We must remember what we put in our minds because this determines our words and actions, Philippians chp. 4:8. “Watch what you say and how you say it”.
4. Read God’s word and pray. If we ask God to help us with our thoughts and words, our focus will be on what’s good, right and considerate. There is no room to be selfish and petty with our brothers and sisters.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for giving us brothers and sisters to fellowship together in order to do the work of the church. Help us to think about how we treat one another in our times together and when we are apart from one another. Lord, help us to not walk away upset with one another but in love to talk and discuss any dispute or issue. Help us to remember that we are united in your love and through your Spirit in each of us.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.

Saturday – February 25

Psalm a.m.: 30, 32 – p.m.: 42, 43

Epistle – Philippians 4:10-20

Old Testament – Ezekiel 39:21-29

Gospel – John 17:20-26

For this Lenten meditation I will reflect on Psalm 30, which I believe to be a Psalm of healing. Most of us at one time or another experienced the relief of recovery from an illness, either for ourselves, a family member or a friend. If we or someone we love was in the hospital we were happy to say goodbye to the sterile world of surgery, anesthesia, intensive care, intravenous feedings, hypodermic injections and the interminable pill parade! It is too easy to think that our recovery or the recovery of a family member or friend was “thanks to modern medicine.” We forget to sing a psalm of thanksgiving to the One who is ultimately responsible for all our healing.

In Psalm 30 David did not forget. It may be that he had just gotten over a critical illness when it came time to dedicate his house. In any case, the dedication was the occasion for this hymn of praise to Jehovah, God, his Healer. This Psalm teaches us to extol the Lord with undiluted thanksgiving for the return of good health and of all things in our lives. David, like us, had sunk very low but he never forgot his Lord; he always remembered the source of his goodness.

Psalm 30 also teaches us that we should not only thank God ourselves, but that we should share our excitement by inviting others to join us in praise. As we go through this season of Lent, let us look back over our lives at the many times God has healed and saved us from many dangers, seen and unseen and give Him praise and thanks for His mercy towards us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your daily blessings and make us ever mindful of your presence in our lives and in the lives of those we love. Amen.

Rev. Arthur Edwards

Growing up with a Scotch-Irish father, I learned the importance of hard work, independence and self-reliance. My dad was a “do-it-yourself” kind of man, and it seemed there was nothing on earth he could not do, nothing on earth he did not know. Though flawed, I admired him greatly. So naturally I grew up feeling that I had to be like him, doing everything myself without having to rely on anyone else, including God. Many long years were spent in disappointment and frustration before I realized the error in this thinking.

If you grew up this way, you’ll understand that one of the hardest things to learn is how to put your reliance and trust solely in God. In back of your mind, there is always the thought that YOU must be the one who does what must be done. But while there is a great deal of merit in being self-sufficient, all kinds of problems come when one holds firmly to the belief that he/she is the “doer,” not God.

Today’s readings focus on the importance of trusting God and following His direction and how peace and salvation comes when we do so. First, the Psalmist repeatedly affirms His love for God’s commands because “those who love your law have great peace, and for them there is no stumbling block.” Like the Psalmist, when we continually turn our attention towards God (and not toward ourselves and our problems), amazing things occur. Doors open, obstacles disappear, hard work becomes easier, miracles happen.

Conversely, our egoism and stubbornness can bring upon us all kinds of needless suffering when we stalwartly refuse to follow God’s commands as Pharaoh begins to discover in his first show-down with Moses in the Old Testament. But it’s not only God’s laws that we need to follow. When we do not tune into God’s guidance and put our unshakeable trust in Him when making everyday choices it’s easy to get off track and onto paths that eventually lead to sorrow and pain.

Further Bible readings take up the issue of the meaning of God’s laws and their seeming contradictions. In Mark’s Gospel, after once again thwarting the Pharisees’ attempts to trick Him into speaking contrary to written Mosaic laws, Jesus teaches us that we must accept God’s reign over us with child-like trust if indeed we are to inherit to His kingdom. Paul takes the matter a step further in his letters to the Corinthians by stating that our new covenant with God is to be experienced not through written law but through the Holy Spirit, which is our direct connection to Him as baptized Christians.

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, you are the source of all and without you I can do nothing. With you I can do all things. Help me change my “self-reliance” into “God-reliance” as I turn the thoughts of my mind and heart toward you more and more with each passing day. As a father watches over and guides his own precious child, so lead me on a right path toward you and my salvation. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Patti English

In this reading from Corinthians, God speaks about those who speak in tongues and those who prophesy.

It states “When you come together, let all things be done for building up”.

What I read into this is that it’s okay to be different, to disagree if it is done peacefully and for the good of the people. We may not always understand one another or want the same thing but if we can respect each other and listen to each other, we can do the work that God wants us to do.

We must not lose sight of the fact that we are all children of God, that we all have great value.

This passage reminds us that each one of us has a gift to offer and it is our duty to joyfully accept all the different gifts offered to God.

We are reminded at the end of this passage: “Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues, but all things should be done decently and in order”.

Prayer for the Church

Heavenly Father, please teach us to hear one another, to respect one another’s gifts. Help us to know your will and guide us to do your work and not our work.

Betty Elliott



The Lenten Season is a very somber time for Christians, as we walk the path that Jesus walked to his death. As Christians today, we can rejoice because we know that Jesus arose from his death after three days.

In Psalm 98, verse 4 through six, “*Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth; burst into song and make music. Make music to the Lord with harps, with harps and the sound of singing. Blow the trumpets and the sheep’s horns; shout for joy to the Lord the King.*”

May we live with a song and joy in our heart because we know that our Redeemer lives within our hearts.

As we commit ourselves to serve Jesus, we must surrender to his Will. In our “bootstrap” society, where we tough it up and do it on our own and take pride in being a rugged individualist, the one thing that seems to escape us is being before God on our knees –being before God, aware that we are helpless and in allowing him to assist us.

Can we say to Jesus, “This burden is too heavy for me? I want you to be my co-worker. I want you to carry this burden with me. I cannot do it any longer.” He says if you will come to him, if you will allow him to carry that burden with you, his promise is that you will receive rest.

Surrendering our life to Christ means going to him and saying, “I am yours; use me however you want to.” Once we have done this, we can begin to seek his will for our life.

Once we are honest with ourselves about who we are, then God can begin to remold our hearts...in total surrender.

Father, we need your assistance and powerful guidance. We do not have the strength to be transformed into your likeness. Nor should we conform to this world. May we understand more of what it means to say, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.”
Marie Kegel

Preparing for Battle

Throughout history, soldiers had to train and dress for warfare against an enemy. Although methods of training have become a bit more sophisticated and technical, the basics of training remain classically the same. Marching, use of weaponry, battle strategy and communication has evolved to the point of what people know and recognize in this day and time through news reports on television, pictures in periodicals, and of course motion pictures. For myself, I have found the development of battle gear most interesting. From head to foot a soldier had some kind of covering that would help protect him or her from an enemy's weapons and ammunition. I recall a picture in one of my history books of a knight in armor and the description of what it took to get into it. A knight had a Squire that took care of his every need including getting dressed in armor. First there was a heavy suit of chain mail, then came a metal upper torso protector called a chest plate, metal covering for legs, boots of metal, a metal helmet, metal gloves, a metal shield and finally, a sword. I can just imagine how tired a young squire could get carrying around 200 pounds or more of armor, dressing and undressing his knight on a daily basis, and you can imagine how hot the metal suit got in summer and how cold in winter. To mount a horse, the knight had to be lifted by a hoist due to the total weight. That must have been a sight to see.

We sing a hymn about being Christian Soldiers. We have a training manual, our Bible, and we even have a 'Squire', the Holy Spirit, to help us get dressed in our battle gear, which weighs absolutely nothing and is resistant to any temperature. Soldiers take a stand against an enemy just as we must stand against the powers of darkness, our enemy. Our chain mail is truth, breastplate is righteousness, our boots is the Gospel of peace, our shield is faith, our helmet is salvation and our sword is the word of God. This is a promise from God that we can claim daily for our battle with those powers of darkness and the schemes of the devil. Ephesians 6:10-18 is the instruction guide in our manual for the preparation of our daily battle in our full armor. Claim this promise daily. God's armor weighs nothing, and always remember the battle belongs to the Lord, 2 Chronicles 20:15.

¹In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.

²Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me.

³For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

How else can we survive in a world focused on the materials of life and not the spiritual? How else can we put one step forward each and everyday as we travel our life's journey?

We call on the Lord for strength, support, comfort, and forgiveness in order to make our life here livable. When we take up our cross and spread His word we begin to understand the importance of faith. Faith makes us believe that all things will come to us. Let us always remember that it is faith and grace that brings us to our God.

Dorothy Burchfield

Lord,

Thank you for your constant care and the strength that you offer to us each day. Help us to be strong in our faith and trust that you will always guide us in our efforts to spread the word about your love. Help us to be a constant source of encouragement and comfort for others and to never be a stumbling block to those searching for You. Please help us to build up your church so that it might be a light in our community. We thank You for the amazing gift that you have given to us. Let us never forget that what comes out of our mouth and how we treat others in our daily life should lift them up and point them toward You.

Ordinary Men Doing Extraordinary Things

Just as we have different gifts, each of us sacrifices to the Lord in our own way. This is ever true, but generally takes a more definite form during Lent. We are asked to deny ourselves something of this world that is dear to our hearts. We do this to remind ourselves that all comes from Him. We do this to put our connection with the Lord in sharper focus. It is our sacrifice to Him.

Most of the focus is on giving up the physical in our lives, be it a food, an entertainment, or a pleasure we otherwise enjoy throughout the rest of the year. Giving up something is a good thing, but refocusing on what we need to accept from God is at the root of what Lent is supposed to bring to our lives.

Consider what Jesus asked of us. He asked of us to make the sacred, God's desires, the focus of our lives. And, by moving to that focus, do we not give up the profane and the mundane by default? Rather than acting to deny ourselves something we want or desire, we should instead turn toward Him and a better life, ceasing, or at least reducing, to want or desire that with which we should probably give up anyway. Instead of sacrificing a worldly thing, we need to sacrifice ourselves. And isn't that what Jesus truly asked of us?

So, as we journey through Lent, rather than focus on what we have given up or might give up, let us instead focus on what we are going to do to accept a greater role for our faith in our lives. Let us focus on the sacrifice of our lives.

When we do that, we move to a closer connection to our Lord and our faith.

David Cochram

The story of Joseph has always intrigued me. Here was a youth, inexperienced in the ways of the world, who is taken down most cruelly by jealous brothers and sold into slavery. It is through God's will and Joseph's unfailing belief in the Lord, that we see Joseph rise up from prison to become essentially the number 2 man of the most powerful nation on the earth at that time.

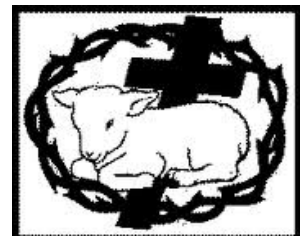
This theme of ordinary men doing extraordinary things once they are called by God and/or by Jesus permeates today's readings. We see fishermen become apostles. We hear Paul ask the Corinthians to have faith and pay heed to the call. He says: Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. "

God continually chooses the weak and the poor to bring shame and enlightenment to the world. He did not send his Son as a king or emperor to conquer the enemies of Israel. He sent Him as man, born in a stable, to two poor common people who had been asked by God through angels to BELIEVE! Believe in His goodness and love and promises.

Jesus was not recognized by those He came to save because he did not fit the "model" they were looking for. He established His own model and own style. He asked us to do only two things. He asked us for Love and Faith. Can we refuse His call?

Prayer: Oh Lord, today let me hear Your voice in all that I do and think. Let me know that though I am just a human being, I am yours. Keep me and mine safe in Your loving arms. Give me strength to overcome all and serve you.

Dorothy Miller



GENESIS

We are confronted with the almost unbelievable scene of mistreatment of Joseph by his brothers choosing to sell him into slavery instead killing him. In spite of this horrible set of circumstances – without them the following is true.....

- If Joseph's brothers never sell him to the Midianites, then Joseph never goes to Egypt.
- If Joseph never goes to Egypt, he never is sold to Potiphar.
- If he is never sold to Potiphar, Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape.
- If Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape, then he is never put in prison.
- If he is never put in prison, he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh.
- If he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh, he never interprets their dreams.
- If he never interprets their dreams, he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.
- If he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, he never is made prime minister.
- If he is never made prime minister, he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region.
- If he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region, then his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine.
- If his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine, the Messiah can't come forth from a dead family.
- If the Messiah can't come forth, then Jesus never came.
- If Jesus never came, you are dead in your sins and without hope in this world.

So we come to realize that in spite Even of this horror, God did not depart from Joseph. In some ways the story will get worse - and when it does, God will still be with Joseph. God is working not only for Joseph himself, but also for the larger purposes of God's redemptive plan.

Lord We remain ever thankful for the assurance of favor from our Father that comes from our faith in you. Help us to remember that like Joseph, we have entrusted our lives to you and know that we are part of God's plan. Help us to remember the responsibility granted to us with your grace to spread the word in spite of our weakness and inabilities – the word will complete our effort. It will be our joy to express the power of GOD not our own wisdom in the same manner as displayed by Paul in his many years of ministry. Like Paul we will joyfully announce that the day of Jesus Christ is here !!

Submitted: Rob Burchfield

Like I said earlier, I am writing this message on Valentine's Day. It only seems appropriate to be thinking about this extraordinary kind of love today. I have heard it said that the Bible is God's love letter to the world, and in it we read:

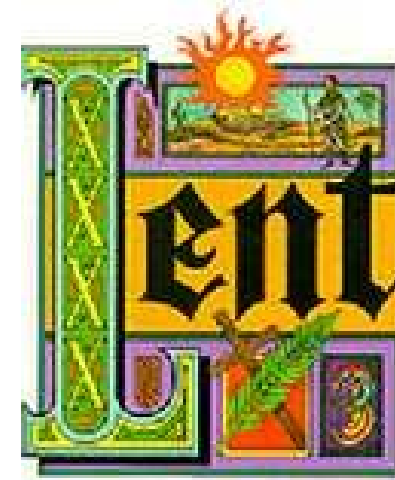
God is love. (1John 4:16)

For God so loved the world.....(John 3:16)

But the greatest of these is love (1Corinthians 13:13)

Hallmark will never be able to compete with a message like that.

Mark Latour



1 Corinthians 13

¹ If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

I am writing this devotional on Valentine's Day, so let me set the scene. You're in church surrounded by people and beautiful flowers. The organ swells, and you hear those first familiar notes of the wedding march. Regardless of the denomination, it is almost a given that you are going to hear a reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 13. You have heard it so often, that you can almost recite it from memory.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.... Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy....

Although I have heard this reading hundreds of times, these words never fail to move me, especially that last sentence:

“But the greatest of these is love.”

This passage is both inspiring and instructive. It inspires us to do more and to give more. And it instructs us to always act with patience and kindness.

Paul lays out a huge challenge for us. How can we possibly deliver this kind of love? It is not normal love. It is extraordinary love, and it is the kind of love that Christ had for his church.

I Corinthians 2:14 – 3:16

Building for Eternity

When we receive Christ by faith, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. God's wisdom is only known to the human heart through the Holy Spirit. We are all co-workers in God's service. Our foundation is already laid and that foundation is Jesus Christ. Without eternal life from Him, there can be no building. Some Christians have the foundation of eternal life but are still living by the world's standards. They will be saved from eternal death, but their lifework will burn up in God's presence and count for nothing. Our work for the kingdom must be done using quality materials that will withstand the test of time. That is, only work done through Christ by the Holy Spirit's power and wisdom survives and receives God's reward.

Prayer: Eternal and everliving God, send your Holy Spirit who indwells in us, to direct us in building on the perfect foundation that has already been laid for us. Keep us ever mindful that the world's standards are not your standards. Guide us Father; to do the work that you have given us to do. This we pray in Jesus' name, our rock and our foundation. Amen.

Submitted by, Dorothy Colley



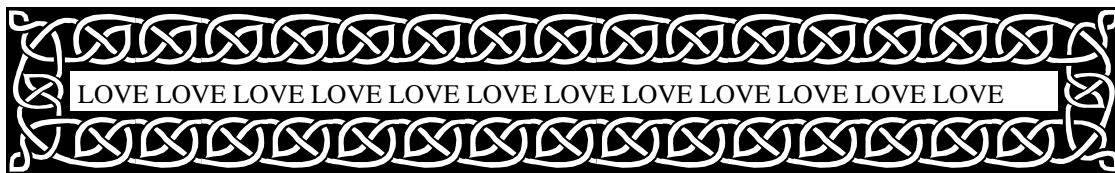
I am taking my devotional from 1 Corinthians 3:16-23.

God describes us as God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in our midst.

The wisdom of our world actually is foolishness in God's eyes. We just recently witnessed the tragic death of one of the greatest singers of all time and over a year ago we witnessed the tragic death of one of our greatest entertainers. Their deaths were so tragic and totally unnecessary because they believed themselves to be Wise beyond anyone else, especially God. By the use of drugs they violated themselves as God's temples and in spite of their worldly accomplishments they paid the ultimate price for being mere fools. We are not wise but merely crafty. We must not lose sight of the fact that we are of Christ and Christ is of God.

With respect and of sorrow,

Ken Miller



Prayer

Oh Lord of all, give us the wisdom to realize that the body we inhabit on earth is only a shell for our souls. But knowing this, we have been given the responsibility to take care of this body, this body of the Lord's own making. We thank you for your love and your care. Keep us ever in your arms.
Amen

God's love endures and is unfailing.

He gathers all from everywhere and loves each of us regardless.

The story of the birth of Moses shows us a mother's love and her diligent and deliberate efforts to save her baby. A mother and child is usually the ultimate example of unfailing love. How wonderful to know that it is a minute fraction of the love that God has for us! We should continuously try to put forth all the love we are capable of in return.

With His power and might, God could have just made us to be His followers without choices. Instead, He gave us the chance to choose to love. This love is demonstrated in so many ways. When we are attracted to someone, we find ourselves thinking of them constantly. We try to be at our best for them all the time. But that earthly love can hurt, can disappoint, can be misunderstood and can be betrayed. Yet we choose to put all our heart, soul and mind into it.

God's love never falters, it never fails, disappoints, is never misunderstood, never betrays. That is where we should put our heart, soul and mind and the rest will follow.

Prayer :

Dear Lord, please make me love you in the way you want me to. Please give me the strength and wisdom to stay focused on that priority and trust that every thing else will follow.

Lisa Hamilton



Mark 8:29

What about you? He asked. Who do you say I am?

Lent for me is a time of self-examination and reflections of where I am in my relationship with my Lord and Savior. I am called to step back and look deep into my heart to see who I am and where I am.

When Jesus asked “Who do you say I am”, the people did not know as they thought he might be John the Baptist or a prophet. When Peter was asked, his answer was “You are the Christ.” Jesus explained what was ahead, that there would be suffering, and rejections.

What about Peter, did he really know who he really was and what Jesus was asking him?

Do we really know what Jesus is asking of us? We read, study, pray but do we really take up the cross and follow Him? I do know I get too “busy” trying to do all the worldly things, so I lose sight of what I am called to do. Today, I ask myself, who am I, and where am I, in my spiritual life. I do know I am called to love and serve HIM with gladness and singleness of heart.

My prayer is her I am Lord, Use ME! Make me your servant.

I invite you to share this prayer so that we all may be one in the body of Christ.

Myrna Bray

Divisive Models of Church Leadership: 1 Corinthians 4:1—7

Ladelle M. Hyman

Among members of the churches, Paul has observed divisive tendencies of some: (1) to place leaders on an undeserved pedestal; (2) to pit them one against the other; and (3) to reward them with human praise instead of waiting for God to assess the merits of their work. It is this third one of these gross errors that Paul addresses in this reading.

In this scripture, Paul addresses divisions in the church. A consequence of divisions in the church is a loss of rewards. As a servant and steward of God, reliability is the one necessary virtue. Paul says that he cares very little about others' judgment of him. Indeed, he does not judge himself. He says that his clear conscience does not make him innocent. The final judgment rests with God who sees clearly our motives and all of our actions.

It is good for me to know who is in charge and what my responsibilities are. Managing my thoughts, time and other resources, actions, and inactions is a full-time job. I am trying to stay in my lane. When I learn better, I seem to behave better. Bible studying, prayerful meditation and fellowshiping with other Christians and believers are great learning and coping aids for helping me to walk the talk. Judging anyone—including myself—is not my job.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the generous blessings that you continue to bestow on me. Thank you for the body of believers who strive—without ceasing—to do thy will. Thank you for bringing me safely to this place. Please help me to keep my mouth shut until I know what I am talking about. Amen.

And death shall have no dominion.

I have noticed biblical references in the works of many well-known writers from William Shakespeare to Dylan Thomas. As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, these bible verses remind us that Jesus has promised us everlasting life.

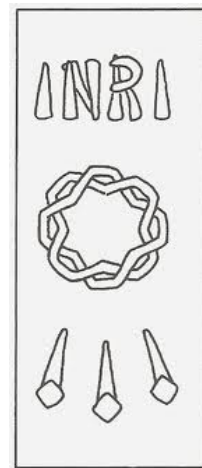
Take this cup away from me.

The path to heaven can be difficult. Each of us may want to consider what is at stake. Even Jesus had an episode of doubt, when he asked God to take the cup away. Thank God for the love which enabled Christ to endure his betrayal and crucifixion.

A Prayer for Today

Dear Lord, Give us strength to face the challenges of life in a fallen world. Help our church family to grow as we pray and study scripture together. Prepare us to drink from your cup and to do your will as we look forward to the celebration of Easter.

Steve Hale



God asks us to live blameless lives. However, while He asks this of us, He is aware, through Jesus Christ, of exactly what it's like to be human. God knows that as human beings we do not have the ability to be righteous or be in 'right standing' with Him, without His Holy Spirit.

When one receives Jesus Christ as their Savior and the Holy Spirit is invited to take up residence in our hearts and minds, then and only then can we even attempt to live a life that pleases God. The Bible states that without Faith it is impossible to please God and as we all know "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." 'Hearing' in this instance does not refer to the ability physically hear, but rather it speaks of understanding, so it actually reads, 'Faith comes by hearing and UNDERSTANDING by the Word of God.'

Therefore, when the Holy Spirit is applied to God's Word something amazing happens, God's Word becomes illuminated, transcending mere language, bringing understanding to our minds, thereby showing us how to live a transcended life while still in the flesh.

Genesis 50 tells of the story of Joseph and how his brothers sold him into slavery because they were jealous of his father's gift to him of a colourful jacket. Many years later, Joseph was in place to aid these same brothers when they were in need and when in their remorse they offered to be his slaves, through the Holy Spirit Joseph said, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Therefore as Psalm 109 states, "For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them." Once we have become God's children, we are never alone, we can be confident that God will always keep us, despite what is happening in the physical world.

God's Holy Spirit provides the tools that we need to live an enlightened life here on earth through His Gifts of the Spirit. As 1 Corinthians states, there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them, giving us, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, speak in tongues as well as the interpretation of tongues.

Despite the fact that life on earth is never perfect and we encounter obstacles and heartache every day, through the Power of God's Precious Holy Spirit, we have the tools to make it, to as the 23 Psalm states, "walk through the valley of the shadow of death... [and] fear no evil." So as a child of God, don't be discouraged when hard times come or when death steals a loved one away, just remember that God assures us in Psalm 101:6, "My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; the one whose walk is blameless will minister to me."

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you so much for loving us in the state that we are currently in and not waiting for us to improve as we often do to others. Thank you for realizing that it is not easy to be human, with all of our frailties and sin stained hearts, but we also thank you for providing your Sweet Holy Spirit to guide and direct our lives and to constantly provide fruit and gifts of the Spirit so that we may enjoy a tiny bit of heaven right here on earth. From your Word, Heavenly Father, we see that our time on earth is drawing to a close, and the time for a new dispensation draws near, please touch the souls that make up the Body of Christ and galvanize us into action, show us how to be true laborers in God's vineyard of earth. Dear Father please allow our lives, to bring the light of Your understanding into this dark world of ignorance. We love you Lord and these things we ask in the Holy and Precious Name of Your Son Jesus.

Brendalee Rae

March 20, 2012 Gen 49:29-50:14, Ps 97, 1 Cor 11:17-34, Mark 8:1-10

The Death of Jacob

Genesis 49:29- Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

Genesis 50:14- After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

Jacob had an unquenchable desire for God's blessing. He had a deep piety that habitually relied on God in spite of all else. Jacob committed many sins in his lifetime, but, in the end, he died as a man of genuine faith. He learned in his life where the real blessings came from; he fought with God and man to be privileged to hand them on to his sons. Here, the sojourn into the land of promise was temporary. The site of the grave was a claim to the land of promise. God had promised Jacob that He would return him to the land and that Joseph would bury him (46:4).

There will be times in our lives where we will be called to stand firm on the unchanging Word of God; even when we cannot see it or cannot, in our human understanding, foresee it coming to pass. Nonetheless, we are instructed through our Christian faith to hold on to God's unchanging Word. Think of a time in your life when a desire was just out of reach. Did you stand faithful or did you give up and give in? It is in these times that we are called to display unshakeable dedication and to know in our heart of hearts that God's Word will be fulfilled in our lives.

Dear Lord,

Please open the ear of our hearts to hear your voice at all times in all places. Help us in our faith journeys to develop and cultivate a dedication to your Word as deep and as committed as Jacob. These things I ask in your son Jesus' name. Amen

Edwina King

March 5, 2012 Gen 41:46-57, Ps 56, 1 Cor 4:8-21, Mark 3:7-19a

Mark 3:7-19a - But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed him.

As Jesus began to interact with people, teaching and healing, crowds started to follow him. As the word spread, people came from many towns and regions to see him, to take in his teaching, and to be healed of their diseases.

Jesus had withdrawn from the crowds to spend some time with his disciples. But, the crowds followed them, interrupting their plans. Jesus, anticipating a crush of people, told his disciples to have a boat ready as a speaking platform.

God is at work in people's lives around us. Are we prepared to disrupt our own agenda to welcome and respond to those who come seeking God? To plan for that, knowing that God is at work? Ministry can take place even when you do not want it or expect it. Here we see Jesus wanting to take a break and go to the sea for some down time. The people would not have it. Though He needed time off, Jesus gave out of what the people needed.

As followers of Christ we are all required to be prepared to give what people need, when people need it.

When the power of God is evident among us in our church, we too can have crowds gather to be healed and transformed by him. What kind of preparations do we make to be ready to look after the people who would respond to a move of God?

Prayer:

Lord use my life as an example of your love. Use my hands to show kindness. Use my tongue to speak praise. Use my mouth to spread joy and laughter. Let all that I am help others to experience Your love.

May I not hold so tight to my agenda and priorities that I miss out on what you are doing in lives around me. Open my eyes to see what you are doing. Help me to be willing to be a part of it, even when it is not convenient. *Amen.*

Reflections by Sherley Holden

Epistle - 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

The season of Lent gives one the opportunity to change, or give up sinful practices and to gain new concepts through worship, study and application of scripture.

In the early Church of Corinth, incest and sexual immorality existed. This behavior was not tolerated. The persons committing these acts were thrown out into the world of Satan. This abandonment to Satan was accomplished by expelling the person from the church and put in Satan's territory, severed from any connection with God's people. In this way their sinful nature may be destroyed. Being officially ostracized from the church, it may cause the person to repent and turn away from wicked ways.

Sometimes old habits cause one to withdraw from God and Christian teaching.

The question is: What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are we even to judge those inside the church? The lesson to be learned here is God is the judge and man does not judge. Through Christ who made the supreme sacrifice all sins are washed away by him, the Passover Lamb.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to read your word with understanding. Let us so live our lives that your teachings can be seen in our daily living.
Amen.

T. C. R. Randle



Genesis 49

Prophecy focuses our attention upon future things. Our tendency is to live our lives as though there were no future. We must have a future hope. The ultimate reality is not in things seen, but in things unseen. Faith focuses upon the future rather than the present.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Just like Jacob and his sons, we must focus on the future rather than the present. For Jacob, hope the fulfillment of God's promises lay in Canaan, not Egypt. The sons must look ahead. We must look to those things which God has yet in store for us.

Blessings will arise from our faith in the covenant of the Lord. Future blessings are intended to encourage us to live in peace and purity. Prophecy is given not to satisfy our curiosity, but to prompt us to purity. We do not look to prophecy to be all encompassing guide but rather to enhance our beliefs and truths.

But low to those who do not heed the Word. For your prophecy shall be full of gnats and snakes and the lowest creatures of this earth. Warnings to us of what it means to break our promise to the Lord.

So how do we respond when a prophet tells us: Repent—turn away! Do we say okay and go about our daily lives, blind to what is really about to happen? Do we keep our minds and hearts closed to the Lord?

For the Christian, the purpose of prophecy is to motivate him to live in this life in purity and hope, assured that God has even greater blessings in store for those who will trust and obey.

Prayer:

O Lord, help us to turn away from sin and turn toward your everlasting light. Keep us in your safe hands and protect us from all who would corrupt us. Make us ever your children and followers of your Word.

Amen

In John 6:30, the people said to Jesus, “What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you?” This question clearly shows that man needs some physical evidence that Jesus is he Son of God. Today we cannot see Him perform miracles but we still need to see something awe inspiring to bolster our convictions when we waver.

Recently, I visited the Catholic Co-Cathedral that was magnificent with its soaring marble ceilings. It was massive, modern and impressive. I sat quietly in that church and wondered why people sent so much money building such monuments when there are needy people to care for. Something I have wondered before in places like the Vatican, the National Cathedral and Christ Church Cathedral.

So I knelt in prayer and the answer came to me.

Gifted men have been given the ability to create these beautiful places to help us reach into our souls and feel Jesus’ presence as we open ourselves in prayer.

These are places where in our souls can sing: “I know you, Lord!”

Shirley Nelson



This psalm is about the best king that there can ever be! Maybe David wrote it for or about his son, Solomon or maybe even Solomon wrote it. As Christians, we need to see that this King is Jesus Christ.

An important word of this psalm are righteousness which here means goodness or being very, very good. If the king is righteous then the people will experience this goodness all the day long from the leader to the lowest of followers. If we look at vs 1,2,3 we see this expectation.

Justice here means fairness or being fair. Once again, a just king is fair to all and does not put anyone above the other. He only holds his Lord above all.

Peace is the third word. Here peace means no more fighting. Remember that Israel was at constant odds with its neighbors. And even within the nation, there were groups vying for power. (Kind of sounds like our political system today!).

The good king looks out for the person in need, the poor and saves or rescues all who require it. Psalm 72 describes not a warrior like Goliath but rather a man who has humanity about it. It is describing the “king of all”. It is giving us a description of the Christ.

When we read psalm 72, keep in mind the stories of Joseph and how he helped to store up grain for the lean years. Remember the prophets for their wisdom. Remember Moses for his leadership. Remember that no matter how great the kings were before, one is coming who is GREATER THAN ALL!! He is the KING of KINGS—Lord of Lord.

Prayer: Lord, give us this day the strength to live into your house. Protect us from the evils of the world and bring us into your heavenly kingdom where all is well and we are yours. AMEN

Mediation.

Dear God, grant us your grace to be and remain steadfast in you in words and in what we do. Please continue to remind us why we are here and how short our lives are. Help us, your children to always know that whatever happens, you are still in control and that as long as you liveth, we will not regret trusting you.

Prayer.

Heavenly Father, We are weak and our ways are different from yours. Please God redirect our steps to honor and glorify you name in everything we do in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Maureen Ndubuisi



The Bread of Life
John 6:27 – 40
Jim Minturn

After Jesus says, “I am the bread of life” and “the Jews” (in the New Testament this usually means the Jewish religious leaders) begin to grumble that they know all about Jesus from childhood and he can’t really be a spiritual leader.

I wonder how often that happens to us. How often have we used the facts we think we know to limit or control Jesus, the life of another, or our own life?

Maybe it is a history of the things we have done and left undone or said and left unsaid that prevents us from eating the bread of life. Or perhaps we have a history of a particular way of thinking, believing, seeing the world, each other or ourselves. We live that pattern over and over. After a while that history says to us there is no other bread. Just keep eating the same old manna your ancestors ate in the wilderness. Sometimes the history of our fears, anxieties, guilt, regrets, pain, and losses become so established we are deceived into believing that we are not even hungry.

The bread of life releases us from our history and frees us from the past. To eat the bread of life is to seek a knowledge of and relationship with Christ that is bigger than the historical facts. It is a knowledge that does not simply inform (a knowledge the Jews had) but one that transforms. It is based not on past facts but on love. The bread of life nourishes us with new life, new hope, and new possibilities.

Every time we take Christ’s life into us, every time we see as he sees, think as he thinks, act as he acts, relate as he relates, love as he loves – every time this happens we have feasted on the bread of life; we have tasted eternal life.

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE READING

GOSPEL Mark 6: 47-56

Lent is usually a challenging time for me because I frequently identify too many things I want to change or improve. I realize that God is not concerned about whether during Lent we accomplish goals that we set for ourselves. He is concerned about us having a genuine relationship with him and setting aside some quiet time to reflect on him. If we truly believe and have faith that he loves us unconditionally, he can and will answer our prayers, especially during difficult times.

When we are going through difficult times it is important to realize that we are not alone. God will never forsake us. It is hard to feel and know that God is with you in the midst of a challenging time. Just like the fishermen, we are all working so hard to “weather the storm”. They were petrified when they saw Jesus, walking out over the water. The storm appeared to be so great they could not believe he (Jesus) was in their midst. This is why he told them, “Be of good cheer: It is I; be not afraid.” I imagine that the fishermen could not believe that Jesus would be with them in the storm.

I thank the Lord daily for his many blessings, but I especially give thanks for those challenging times too. Since now more than ever I realize that our Father in Heaven is with us in the midst of our difficult/hard times. I openly acknowledge that during those difficult times I am more prayerful.

Submitted: Sonja L. Randle, MD

LET US GO OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE! Mark 4:35-41

“Let us go over to the other side” usually implies: “It’s time to pray.” Indeed, the call to prayer came to the disciples unexpectedly in the form of a lashing storm that nearly swamped their boat. With no means at their disposal to bail out excess water, not even a “handy billy (for you old salts), fear gripped their hearts.

And where was Jesus? Soaked to the skin and fast asleep in the stern of the boat? This was a call to pray! “Master,” they called out, “don’t you care if we drown?” That too often has been my response in times of distress, when my bank balance edges close into the red. “Why have I come to Houston; why am I paying bills while staring at the falling fuel indicator of my Suzuki? Why, why, why?”

Then, after looking back in surprise, I see the Hand of Providence calming the storm. “Oh you of little faith” repeated again and again.

Doors do mysteriously open to opportunities never sought. As the Book of Common Prayer announces, “Who can guess His grace?”

JCS



Saturday - March 10

Psalm a.m.: 75, 76 - p.m.: 23, 27

Old Testament - Genesis 43:16-34

Epistle - 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

Gospel - Mark 5:1-20

Lent is a time of remembrance, forgiveness and repentance. In our reading from Genesis 43 we see each of these things taking place. Joseph himself hid the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack and then he detained Benjamin for the purpose of bringing his brothers to acknowledge their sin to remembrance, to make them confess it with their lips, repent and ask forgiveness of Joseph. As the story goes on we realize that Joseph planned worked. **But what about us?**

Whom have we wronged in recent times? Who is it we need to ask forgiveness from? How often are we brought to our knees and change of heart for something we have done and are sorry for?

During this Lent season, let us search our conscious and ask God and others to forgive us.

Prayer: Dear God, please bring us to remembrance of the wrongs we have done to you and to others and then work in us that our hearts may be changed. Amen.

Margaret Symonette



Why Me Lord?

Psalm 42, 43, 86 Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34, Mark 6:46.

When Joseph disappeared, Jacob his father thought that he was dead and I believed that Jacob asked the question “Why me Lord?” Remember that Joseph was his beloved Rachel’s son—now he is dead! In contrast Joseph was in exile and asking the same question “Why me Lord?” What did I do to deserve this treatment from my brothers? I can hear him praying Psalm 43 and 86 as he continued to put his trust and hope in God.

As Joseph thought about home—Jacob his father—he didn’t know if he was living or dead, and Benjamin his mother’s son—does he remember me? Both Father and son probably prayed Psalm 42. While Joseph was literally in exile, Jacob was emotionally in exile; so both longed for God as a deer longs for some water to drink. Perhaps both found a solitary place as Jesus did in Mark 6:46 “... he [Jesus] went away to a hill to pray.”

We also long for God and need to find that solitary place where we can go and cry out to God. G. T. Byrd in the hymn *All Alone* wrote, “There are days I’d like to be all alone with Christ, my Lord, I can tell Him of my troubles all alone...” The Psalmist said in Psalm 42:3 “Day and night I cry, and tears are my only food.” It’s time like this when we ask “Why me Lord?” Joseph’s question was answered when the famine occurred and he was finally reunited with his family once again. Have we received the answer to our question “Why me Lord?”

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be responsive to your word and to your leading. Even when we don’t understand, let us be obedient like Joseph and Jacob so that your will and purpose would be fulfilled in our life today and you will be glorified. Amen.

Yvonne Person



Read: Psalm 119:97-120

How do you fall in love with the law?

Most people understand that laws are necessary as part of society, and appreciate them grudgingly. In this passage the word translated “law” doesn’t merely mean rules in a rulebook. It expresses the totality of God’s law and gives us a reliable guide for living—like pavement that you enjoy walking on after you have been stuck in the mud, figuratively speaking (verses 97-104).

Life is filled with joys, sorrows, fears, happiness and disappointments. Throughout this passage there is evidence of the psalmist intimate relationship with God. God’s activities and qualities are sharply brought into focus, motivating expressions of praise and thanksgiving, obeying God’s law is no penalty, it is freedom (verses 103-105).

His law channels his love into our lives. God’s law protects us and gives us the wisdom to cope in everyday situations. New life flows into us as we find God.

Real Happiness can be ours today as we apply God’s words/laws and keep his commandments (verses 105-120).

Prayer:

Almighty God, Grant your eternal light during this Lenten season to shine and enlighten me daily to give up old things and focus anew on you, Jesus Christ. Amen

Nelna Randle

Psalm 93 and 96

Our God is great and most worthy to be praised. His words stand firm. He has promised that his words will always accomplish what it says. Like His throne, His words are established forever.

The flood and the waves of the sea are powerful, but none is more powerful than God who is holy and reigns forever and ever. His words are sure and we are confident that His words accomplish whatever He sends them to do.

Always praise, worship and fear our God because He is worthy of them all.

He is great and greatly to be praised. Honor, majesty, strength and beauty belong to him.

Let us encourage people to come to know God and to realize that it is He who established the earth and all that are within the earth for a purpose. It is our duty to be happy and joyful on this earth. The trees and waves acknowledge God our creator by their movements. We too, must acknowledge Him by praising and worshiping Him in our own unique way. Remember that the Lord will return to judge us for our thoughts, words and deeds. Let us, therefore, guard what we think, say and do.

Genesis 44: 1-17

Just as God revealed his son Jesus Christ to us Joseph in similar manner revealed himself to his brothers. Joseph was kind and forgiving to his brothers for their mean behavior and God forgives us for our mean spiritedness and sinfulness. Those of us who are in authority must be merciful to others and we must exercise God’s love and forgiveness to those who mistreat us.

John 5:25 -29

Non-Christians or non believers are spiritually dead without Christ, but with hope in God our Father and His son, Jesus Christ, they will become spiritually awakened when they hear God’s word. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” which clearly reveals the purpose for which God sent Jesus who gives us life and saves us from the evil and wickedness of this world

Romans 8: 1-10

As we celebrate the life that Christ gave to us we are to seek after God’s spirit which will free us from the power of sin and death.

Once we have experienced the true spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we are guaranteed a peace that will surpass all human understanding which will guard our hearts and mind in the knowledge and love of Christ Jesus.

LET US PRAY:

Dear Father God, In the precious name of your son Jesus Christ, we thank you for your love and tender mercies to us which are renewed every day. We praise and glorify your name and worship you for giving us life abundantly. We acknowledge that we are sinners and we humbly ask for your forgiveness. We bring before you all those who have not accepted you as the Savior of mankind. May you reveal yourself to them through your Holy Spirit thus giving them a change of heart and mind. Heavenly Father, we appreciate you. Son of God we magnify you. Holy Spirit what a comfort you are. May the three be with us now and always. AMEN.

Arthurlue Rahming

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. Psalm 77: 1-2

When someone is hurt, what do you say to them? It is difficult to know what to say to someone who may be hurt or who may be grieving. You often question whether you should say anything or whether to say nothing at all? Often we say “I know how you feel,” to someone who is hurt or grieving, but do we really? The Psalmists seem to pour out their grief and sadness to God. They are not ashamed. They talk about crying out to God in their grief. They beseech God to shine down upon them so that they can be saved. They even question whether God has turned against them. But the message in all this seems to be that in spite of the circumstances we may face, we are never alone. We can call to God, and he will hear our prayers and comfort us, even as our spirit grows faint.

In Mark 5:21-43, Jesus met a very sick woman and a father who was desperate to have his sick daughter healed. In this story Jesus deals with two people who are very different. Jairus is well-to-do and influential, while the woman with the hemorrhage is financially impoverished and socially outcast. Jesus does not favor one over the other. In spite of her illness and her financial situation the woman never lost faith in God. Perhaps the message here is that nothing is too big or too little for God. He will take time to heal and comfort his children no matter their age, gender or social status. Maintain faith in the power of God. Call upon God for all of your needs. Never lose hope in God, as he never loses faith in us.

Maybe that is the real miracle here. Maybe having faith in Jesus who will touch us is really the thing that makes us well. I hope that when I am in distress, and I will be, because of things beyond my control, such as, death, or illness, or disease, that I will remember the faith of this woman. I will reach out to touch Jesus like she did. But I also know that if I forget, Jesus will continue to touch me with grace and healing, and somehow I will be made well through it.

Prayer

Oh Lord, I thank you for the beauty and excitement of your world, for the gift of loving and being loved, for the church and a world filled with beauty. By raising Christ, your son, you have opened for us the way to eternal life, grace and healing. Help us to maintain hope and faith in your power and to know that you will respond to all of our needs.

Amen

Danita Bailey-Perry

Meditation.

Almighty God, unto whom all powers belong to, please forgive our stubborn ways, remember the days of your mercy and continue to be our God. Help us to understand that where ever we find ourselves at any time is for a purpose destined by you. And please help us to continue to worship you in any condition we find ourselves married or unmarried. May we see you in the eyes of our ministers and respect them because of you, please bless and send us out into the world to continue with the ministry of preaching your word and healing the sick in your name our Lord Jesus.

Prayer.

Heavenly Father, please do not destroy us due to our stubbornness, help us dear Lord by softening our hearts to be more acceptable of your word and be obedient to your will. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

John Ndubuisi