

**REFLECTIONS
FOR
THE SEASON OF
LENT
AND HOLY WEEK
2021**

**Written by Parishioners, Clergy, and Friends
of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church**

THE LESSONS FOR
FEBRUARY 18

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. 16 If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God[a] that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20 loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Luke 9:18-25

18 Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" 19 They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." 20 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." 21 He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." 23 Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. 25 What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"

Life is not prescriptive; God gives us the freedom to choose. We can choose to walk with God, to be in relationship with God or to turn away and be blind to God's generous love and mercy. In our old testament reading from Deuteronomy we find Moses, in his final speech to the Israelites, urging them to follow, trust, and have faith that God will provide. This choice requires obedience to God, his commandments, and laws. It also means experiencing true life and true prosperity.

In our gospel reading from Luke, we hear Jesus telling the disciples how Christians are called to live, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" Jesus' words carry a much heavier weight than those of Moses; it is not about following laws. It is about navigating the entrapments of the material world and making Christ and his teachings the center of our lives.

So what do these two readings have in common? Quite simply, we are free to choose how to live and how we can have life abundant. When we stop trying to do everything on our own and we let go of our pride, our brokenness, and our need to possess "things" then we can fully be in relationship with Christ. As C.S. Lewis describes it:

"Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with ever fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in." (Mere Christianity)

- Submitted by Jen Duncan

Isaiah 58:9b-14

⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.
¹³ If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;^[a]
¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Matthew 9:10-17

¹⁰ And as he sat at dinner^[a] in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting^[b] with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often,^[c] but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

Guess who's coming to dinner?

As I reflect on this passage, I ask myself, Am I at that table? In which of the three groups: the Pharisees, the tax collectors and sinners, or Jesus' disciples? Even though I am a "cradle Episcopalian," my faith journey began as one of the sinners, hearing the Good News of God's love and a recall to repent of past sins. But am I willing to truly repent? Will the cynic in me fashion some argument against deep soul searching and confronting the darker parts of my personality? That is where a bit of the Pharisee is found. As I come to His table, I pray that God will help me hear Jesus' call, and listen closely to His words.

And yet, this is not enough. It is not enough that I listen to the Gospel at His table on Sundays. I must invite Jesus to *my* table, each and every day. I must listen to His teachings and apply them to my faith journey on a daily basis. Only this way, I think, can I move from that group of tax collectors and sinners to His disciples. Because Jesus proclaimed that God desires mercy, I know I can.



THE LESSONS FOR
FEBRUARY 20

Isaiah 58:9b-14

⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
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and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Luke 5:27-32

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me."²⁸ And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

²⁹ Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table^[a] with them. ³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; ³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Reflections on Isaiah

I typed up this verse to save and refer to because it is definitely one that I will want to remember. It is very uplifting and reassuring to think of being like a garden that has plenty of water! This is a time in our nation's life that I feel we need a rebuilding. Between the pandemic and the political strife, it feels as if our country is in ruins. I truly hope we can rebuild both the health of our people and our trust in our government and each other.

I try to help with all that God asks for, to overcome oppression, to feed the hungry. I always wonder if I am doing enough or if I am following what God wants me to do. I can only pray that I am and for the strength to continue.

Reflections on Luke

I think for me the point of this passage is that we are all sinners and need God's forgiveness. Being clean, well-fed, and well-educated is no guarantee of not making mistakes. Jesus wanted to let the world know that He came for everyone, that everyone deserved to hear His call. I am grateful that He called us all. And by His example, we should treat all people with respect, not basing their worth on their success or their financial status.

In my life I try to be welcoming to people and not to judge. In the schools where I have taught, I greeted the custodians as well as the administrators. I listen to and respect the men who take care of our lawn. I thank and appreciate the people who keep our society running, whether they work in grocery stores or deliver packages or take care of people in hospitals. I pray for our leaders in government.

I believe that people of all backgrounds should be valued. Everyone, no matter their status, their ethnicity, their gender or sexual identity, their religion, the country of their origin . . . Everyone is a child of God.

- Submitted by Leslie Schulz

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

19 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

² Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

¹¹ You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. ¹² And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.

¹³ You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. ¹⁴ You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

¹⁵ You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer^[a] among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood^[b] of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

¹⁷ You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,^[a] you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

THE REFLECTION FOR
FEBRUARY 22

Several years ago, I was taking one of my granddaughters on a shopping trip for school clothes. As we were riding in the car, she asked if I believed that anyone who was not a certain religion would go to hell. This was not the sort of question I expected from a 16-year old with little interest in church. The look on her face told me this was a serious question for her, so I told her what I believe. I don't think God cares as much about what religion we are as much as He cares how we live our lives. In the end, I believe we will be judged on the things we did during our life more than the church we attended. There are rules to be followed, of course, because they are given by God: "I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19) Reminiscent of what our mothers used to say: "Because I said so," and that is a good enough reason. Matthew goes beyond the rules. The example of the sheep and goats isn't meant to say that sheep are good and goats are bad. Both live similar lives even though they are living in different flocks. The real difference lies in the fact that the sheep in the example follow all the rules of their flock, but they also actively look for ways to make others' lives better. They show their care of others by actively and selflessly working to meet others' needs. The goats, on the other hand, try to live the perfect goat life by following all the rules of the herd. Unfortunately, they are heedless to the wants and needs of others. They may see others in distress or need, but the rules only tell them to move with the herd and don't cause trouble. That's good, but is it good enough. Matthew asks us to examine our lives and see that real faith is more than rules. Living our faith requires action as well as belief.

- Submitted by Cathy Tolliver

Isaiah 55:6-11

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Matthew 6:7-15

⁷ “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.^[a]

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,^[b]
but rescue us from the evil one.^[c]

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The Organ at St. Martin-in-the-Fields

A few months ago as a newcomer to the Dallas organist community, I met a couple of colleagues who were familiar with the organ at St. Martin’s, and who had unflattering things to say about the instrument. According to them, the instrument is inadequate because it is small, old and lacks the tonal luster provided by the most recent advances in electronic sound technology.

As they were speaking, I thought of the small, “inadequate” keyboard instruments of the past – the instruments that the great Baroque and Classical Masters played. The harpsichord, the clavichord, and the pianoforte all produced a shallow, lusterless tone when interpreted through the filter of our modern ears, and yet composers such as J. S. Bach, Mozart and Beethoven entrusted some of their greatest works to them. Are we more musically sensitive, smarter than they were – I don’t think so! These composers rejoiced in pitch and tone itself, not the surface glitter of a superficial timbre. They embraced, explored and fully exploited the instruments that they had; and in order to create for future generations, they first had to accept present reality as they found it.

Isaiah tells us that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts,” and Matthew tells us that we must “forgive our debtors.” It seems to me that if I cannot accept the present moment as it is in my life, if I demand that reality “should” be different from what it is, and if I continue to hold on to the past in the form of grievances against those that have hurt me, I will not be able to see God’s higher purpose as it unfolds in my own life and in the lives of those around me. In short, I need to remember to keep my focus on what I have, rather than what I don’t have.

The organ at St. Martin’s brings us together as a community in the various ways that our spiritual tradition has been expressed through music and poetry. It is adequate for the function that it serves.

– Submitted by Dr. Joe Henry, Organist/Choirmaster

Jonah 3:1-10

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 2 “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. 8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. 9 Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” 10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Luke 11:29-32

29 When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. 30 For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! 32 The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!

The Sign of Jonah

Consider this:

Sen. Whitehouse drops the mic after 279 speeches on one issue

Once a week, every week since 2012, when the Senate refused to take up a House-passed climate bill, [Sen. Sheldon] Whitehouse (D-R.I.) has delivered what he calls his “Wake Up” speeches, often accompanied by a blown-up photo of the Earth with the words “Time to Wake Up.”

[Opinion](#) by Paul Begala

Sen. Whitehouse has decided he can stop his weekly speeches on the floor of the Senate because he is seeing our government doing things that might actually help save the earth rather than hasten the time when it will be uninhabitable.

Now consider the two scripture readings for today.

In the OT reading, we hear about Jonah finally doing as God directs him. He goes to Nineveh to the middle of the city and starts preaching that if the people there do not start living as God wants them to, God will destroy the city. Jonah fully expects to be killed. Trying to avoid that fate caused his adventure with the big fish.

Even 750 years before Christ’s time, prophets’ admonitions were unwelcome. This time, surprisingly, Nineveh’s king accepts the truth of what Jonah says and commands his subjects to repent along with him. They do. God relents.

In the second reading, we learn that Jesus is not so fortunate. The naysayers to Jesus’s preaching want a “sign.”

I can easily picture Jesus screaming at people. His tone seems harsh. Like, “What do you want? Smoke and mirrors? A lightning bolt from Zeus? I am greater than Jonah and wiser than Solomon. You have ME, Jesus! I am telling you this: you will wish you had listened to me.

I AM THE SIGN.”

We all know too well how this all turned out for Jesus.

There it is.

When God sends prophets today -- scientists, thinkers, philosophers, teachers, how do we treat them? Do we listen and heed their words, or do we treat them as Jesus was treated?

Oh God, give us the wisdom to recognize the prophets you send us, listen to them, and treat them well.

- Submitted by Gay Pogue

Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14

Queen Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord. She took off her splendid apparel and put on the garments of distress and mourning, and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she utterly humbled her body; every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair. She prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and said: "O my Lord, you only are our king; help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, for my danger is in my hand. Ever since I was born I have heard in the tribe of my family that you, O Lord, took Israel out of all the nations, and our ancestors from among all their forebears, for an everlasting inheritance, and that you did for them all that you promised. And now we have sinned before you, and you have handed us over to our enemies.

"Remember, O Lord; make yourself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage, O King of the gods and Master of all dominion! Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him. But save us by your hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, O Lord."

Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

THE REFLECTION FOR
FEBRUARY 25

Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit and strengthen our faith in you, Give us your Grace and teach us to submit to your will, in Jesus Christ name we pray.

A boy once asked his father "What is the size of God?"

The man looked up at the sky and saw a plane and asked his son, "What is the size of that plane?"

The boy replied "it is very small and I can hardly see it."

Then the man took his son to the airport and as they were approaching a plane was landing and he asked his son, "how big is this plane?"

The boy replied "Wow! Dad, it is huge."

The father told his son that the size of God depends on how close or far you are to him.

How close or how far are we intending to be from God during this Lenten season?

The reading from Easter showed us the reason why it is important to submit ourselves to God Almighty and the power of prayers and fasting especially when we are united and using our voices in one direction asking God for mercy and forgiveness. Let us pray for each other during this Lenten season.

Matthew 7: 7-8 : Ask and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For anyone who receives and he who seeks finds and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Many times, I found myself worrying about things that are out of my control and trying to solve these problems by myself. I forget to put God first and seek His Guidance.

However, what I found intriguing, and beautiful is that, every time I seek God, and place all my worries in His Hand, even in the my darkest moments, He created a path for me, that is unthinkable and unbelievable.

Matthew 7: 12 which we often referred as the Golden Rule; "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you do also to them, for this is the law, and the prophets."

This is a big task and not easy for most of us. We all have been through many obstacles and events of life in which people you trusted most, friends and those we loved have knowingly, intentionally and deliberately violated our trust and hurt us. In these situations, sometimes some of us now have created mental inventory and memory bank of these circumstances or account.

However, during this Lenten season, Our God is asking and calling us to forgive, let go and to turn our bitterness to kindness. It is a process, but a rewarding process that will bring peace to our gentle soul. By doing so, God will uphold and guide us in ways that we cannot understand.

Let us use this Lenten season to truly seek the Lord, the one who is longing to be found.

- Submitted by the Rev. Ayo Omoniyi, Deacon

Ezekiel 18:21-28

21 But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. 23 Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? 24 But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things that the wicked do, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which they are guilty and the sin they have committed, they shall die. 25 Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? 26 When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. 27 Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. 28 Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die.

Matthew 5:20-26

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

A RELATIONSHIP CHOICE: Wipe-out to Live or Die

Natural disasters such as the Texas-Oklahoma floods (2015), and the California Camp Fire (2018) caused "wipe out." Numerous families, businesses, and individuals spoke of being wiped out. They experienced wipe out of their homes, businesses, and their lives as they knew it. The disasters took their life's work, life's savings, most valuable possessions and wiped them out. What once was, was no more. What had been, ceased to be. And yet out of the disasters also came new starts, restarts, and start overs. Many were better off afterwards, than they had been before the disasters. Ironically wipe-outs work both ways in that they can bring death or new life.

Ezekiel 18:21-28 also speaks of "wipe out." Scripture details opportunities for those without God, to experience a "wipe out" of their sins, their evil deeds and their wickedness. What is required, is to attend to God's beckoning call, to turn to God in a relationship and turn from their present ways. An added benefit of the relationship is life more abundantly. God's mercy is multiplied when the relationship is accepted and a new start, is begun. Likewise, the righteous who turn away from God will also experience "wipe-out." They experience a "wipe-out" of any previous good deeds, and any previous righteousness. Additionally, their turning away will result in Death. Harsh?? Only when God's expectations are not understood as in verse-20. "For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Just as with the sinner, the past is done away with.

Personal relationships also encounter "wipe-out." Matthew 5:23-25 details that before offering gifts at the altar, one must reconcile i.e. "wipe-out" any enmity between themselves and others. Adversaries are included in reconciliation efforts, otherwise death will also be the end result. With a lack of understanding, Scripture intervenes. Isaiah 55:8 says "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways, saith the Lord."

- Submitted by the Rev. Dr. Jacquetta (Jackie) Chambers

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

16 This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

17 Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice:

18 And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments;

19 And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.

Matthew 5:43-48

43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

“What does the love of God require of me?” This is one of the most reflective questions that someone important to me, D. Wright, recently brought up when having a discussion about where we are on our spiritual journeys. This one simple question can help to guide so many of us into times of reflection if we just asked ourselves more frequently. Within Deuteronomy 26, so much can be learned and interpreted. Whether those words were written in a letter to the children of Israel, or were written in order to solely address us, we can take in these words and apply them to almost every aspect of our lives.

Currently, I am a college student at UNT studying to be an elementary school teacher. The easiest thing to compare the lessons of this chapter is my life lessons that I am learning as simply a junior in college. When I take most of my classes, my purpose is to know my place as a student, who is to listen to the professors, and use that knowledge and wisdom to create a meaningful classroom. As such, I am to behave as a child in the eyes of the Lord, practice the words of His in my busy everyday life, and listen to what He is telling me. Though it would be much easier for most of us to listen by hearing him with our neighbors, our prayers and worship to Him, as well as our testimonies. Line 17 explains this cycle that we must entertain within our spiritual lives.

Further studies of the love that we can learn to exhibit and teach within our lifetimes is in more detail in Matthews 5 where Jesus demonstrates his true leadership to mankind describing how we are to love beyond. When I say beyond, I mean beyond anyone surrounding us, as we are to keep each other accountable.

- Submitted by Rose Ackley

Daniel 9:3-10

3 Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying,

“Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

7 “Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Luke 6:27-38

27 “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.[a] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Judging Others

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

I feel God in the outdoors and see the natural order, laws and commandments as God’s own speaking to me. Feeling the disruption of the rhythm of nature also gives me, “confusion of face” that Daniel speaks of in our readings. Feeling this disruption in our society has given me “confusion of face.” There are translations that say shame, or public shame for this confusion of face. Daniel, who seems to be a holy and righteous dude, is including himself in confessing the sins of his people. He does not exclude himself and he states that Israel has no merit to claim, but seeks the Lord’s honor. We all fall short, and have not done our duty or share of the work of our God.

In Luke, Jesus has words that seem confusing and counter to the “eye for an eye” philosophy. The people he spoke to were under brutal Roman rule and any law breaking was punished violently. Yet this better way was to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,” bless those who curse you, and pray for our abusers. The judgement and condemnation we give will be delt back to ourselves. Then Jesus tells me to give to everyone who asks, and to not withhold; my cheek, my clothing, my love. If I care for only those who can give back to me in like kind, what blessing is that?? That really does hit at my heart. How can I care and love for those who are not able or willing to care or love back? I look around at my environment today, and think of how I can care and love, giving of myself and skills, and not expecting, or needing anything back to myself. Every day I am going to make an effort to give and love without expectation of return. Yours in Christ,

- Submitted by Becky Snell

Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20

2 Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth;
for the Lord has spoken:
I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.
3 The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.
4 Ah, sinful nation,
people laden with iniquity,
offspring who do evil,
children who deal corruptly,
who have forsaken the Lord,
who have despised the Holy One of
Israel,
who are utterly estranged!
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves
clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
17 learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.
18 Come now, let us argue it out,
says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
19 If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
20 but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spo-
ken.

Matthew 23:1-12

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. 6 They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. 9 And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

The Hebrew Bible verses from Isaiah offer very clear direction on how to live and what to do. Verses 16-17 tell us to make ourselves clean, "remove evil from our doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression." Powerful timeless advice to everyone. Every day as Christians each one of us strive to learn to do good and correct oppression. Just as clear from the Hebrew Bible is God's remedy for those who do not follow his instructions, "you shall be devoured by the sword."

God as is described in the Hebrew Bible in terms that are black and white, no room for gray, and I find our God in the Hebrew Bible to be harsh when his people stray. Jesus coming to walk among us changes everything.

In our Matthew reading we hear Jesus talking about the Pharisees who sit in Moses' seat in the Temple. Jesus is not critical of their teachings, but he is very concerned about their behavior or actions which are not in sync with their teachings. He offers examples of how they behave, "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and tie them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." "Everything they do is done for people to see... they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues." In closing Jesus tells us that "The greatest among you will be your servant." The confusing suggestion that the first will be last. As a retired teacher helping students learn this concept was a challenge every one of my twenty years, without exception.

In both passages simple messages are revealed; actions speak louder than words and the last will come first. Every day I need to look at my actions to make sure they reflect the teaching of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit.

- Submitted by Bob Bess

The Lessons for
March 3

Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20

18 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 “Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” 3 So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 6 Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7 At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8 but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. 9 And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10 but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. 11 Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

18 Then they said, “Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him,[a] and let us not heed any of his words.”

19 Give heed to me, O Lord,
and listen to what my adversaries say!

20 Is evil a recompense for good?
Yet they have dug a pit for my life.
Remember how I stood before you
to speak good for them,
to turn away your wrath from them.

Matthew 20:17-28

17 While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, 18 “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; 19 then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.”

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. 21 And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” 22 But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”[a] They said to him, “We are able.” 23 He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

24 When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 26 It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The Reflection for
March 3

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Go down to the potter’s house and there I will give you a message.” And Jeremiah went and the Lord told him to tell the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem: “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted....,and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I planned.”

In this reading there is the Lord, who is willing and able to do both: Judge and forgive. There is Jeremiah, the messenger. And there is the potter, who like all of us, can make from very little something useful and perhaps even beautiful.

Jeremiah does what he is asked to do. But he is confronted by people who want to “follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts” and who make plans against him. Jeremiah then says to the Lord: “Hear what my accusers are saying? Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for me.”

Jeremiah goes on and on and at in the end concludes by demanding of the Lord to: “Deal with them in the time of your anger.”

Matthew tells of a different path in response to pending troubles and personal self-interest. Confronted with Jesus’ prediction of his own death and immediately following a woman’s petition for a favor on behalf of her two sons, Matthew recounts the indignation felt by the disciples in response to the woman’s request for her sons to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in his kingdom.

However, unlike the anger expressed by his disciples or the vengeful demand of Jeremiah, Jesus tells the potter in all of us to take a different path. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many.”

So, as the Lord is able to choose passing judgment or granting forgiveness, so we, the potters in this story, can choose vengeance, anger, or offering a hand in help. The choice is ours. Our guidance has been made clear.

- Submitted by DJ Mitchell

Jeremiah 17:5-10

5 Thus says the Lord:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

7 Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.

8 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

9 The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?

10 I the Lord test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.^[a] The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.^[b] ²⁴ He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 4

Luke's story brings to mind *The Great Divorce*, written by C.S. Lewis. Both authors are saying that it matters how we live in this life. Lent invites us to wonder: am I living in the way God calls me to live? Am I happy with the priorities I am choosing? Do my priorities line up with a Christian ethic of loving God and loving my neighbor?

Below are few words to ponder. Try putting these words into the order that reflects your values. Does the allocation of your time and energy align with the priority you place on these words? Is God inviting you to deeper reflection on how you are living *today*?

Sabbath	Exercise	Generosity
Sunday Morning worship	Family time	Security
Learning	Travel	Clothing
Work/Career	Retirement money	Vacation
Simplicity	Discipleship	Prayer
Growth	Play	Shopping

Moving toward the fullness in life God imagines for us (flourishing) is a process of small, incremental changes that keep moving the dial in our life toward God.

Intimate Lord, you offer us a glimpse of life transformed, creation glorified: through the vision of Moses and Elijah free us from gods of our own making and lead us to true worship of Jesus Christ, the humble Son of Earth. Amen.

- Submitted by The Rev. Paula Jefferson

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 5

Genesis 37:3-4

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.[a] 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." 14 So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem, 15 and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" 16 "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 17 The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. 18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves[a] that he wore; 24 and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

25 Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and

not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. 28 When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Matthew 21:33-43

33 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34 When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35 But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' 39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.

The parable of the Tenants

In the sense of reading this text we experience tenants who refuse to pay rent. Those who are sent collect the rent are hurt and the landlord's son is killed. We understand that this will not end well for the tenants. In fact, Jesus further develops the points that they reject the very stone that will become the cornerstone. In general, the world will reject the son of God. When writing this gospel, Matthew's original focus was an accounting of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. In fact, this parable give us this entire idea in a nut shell, "this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes."

We are the tenants in the parable. God provides us with all that we need to make our vineyard prosper. In fact, God even gives us the freedom to run the vineyard as we choose - but the vineyard is not ours. It belongs to God. We are called to protect the vineyard and we have a responsibility to the given and to the world. In many ways this is what prayer and discernment represent - coming to know the mind of God about our lives. To see a present God. However, when we choose to view God as the "absent landlord" we risk becoming like the brothers from the book of Genesis, or the tenants in this parable.

We are living in the midst of a pandemic. Our world has significantly changed from just 10 months ago. We have been given tools to help mitigate the spread of the disease wreaking havoc among us: masks, the ability (in many cases) to stay home, and the need to social distance. A vaccine is becoming more available to people. If we stand by and simply say "God will save me," but do not take advantage of those things which God has made available to us then we are, much like the tenants, we miss a God that is very present in our lives.

It is easy to fall into the trap of an "absent God" when things are not going our way, in times of extreme crisis. However, remembering that the vineyard we run is not ours and spending time in prayer can help us avoid the trap.

- Submitted by Julie Sutton

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 6

Micah 7:14-15 18-20

14 Shepherd Your people with Your staff,
The flock of Your heritage,
Who dwell solitarily in a woodland,
In the midst of Carmel;
Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead,
As in days of old.
15 "As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt,
I will show them wonders."
18 Who is a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity
And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in mercy.
19 He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.
You will cast all our sins
Into the depths of the sea.
20 You will give truth to Jacob
And mercy to Abraham,
Which You have sworn to our fathers
From days of old.

Luke 15:11-32

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.

12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

15 So he went and hired himself out to² one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.
16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."'

20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.
21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 But the father said to his servants,⁴ 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate.

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.
26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.
27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'
28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'
31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 6

A cradle Episcopalian I drifted away from the Church after graduating from high school. My lifestyle and life choices did not go with what I was hearing on Sunday mornings. Over the next several years, I made many mistakes in my life from drinking and drugging my way out of college to several brushes with the law. Each time I found myself lost; I would seek refuge in my dad's home. Each time he welcomed me back with open arms like the prodigal son always saying, "Son I may not love your actions, but I will always love you". Over the years I reached a point in my life where there was a hole in my gut that I could not fill. Sick and tired of being seek and tired I made a foxhole prayer to God for help. Shortly after I found myself shepherded to a group of people who could help me begin to walk through the demons of my life. While I had a belief in a higher power who I chose to call God, I did little to nurture a relationship with Him. Many years later when he was dying, I asked my dad if he was afraid of his impending death and he replied with a calmness and serenity that I did not know that he was not. He went on further to say he felt right with God and he had lived a long and good life. Feel lost after his death I felt that I had nowhere to turn. After a time, I found myself again in the pews of the Church of my youth, the source of my dad's serenity and strength. I did not have a burning bush experience but through the people in my Church I found or better yet remembered that God would always welcome me back into his loving arms. That while like my dad He may not love my actions, he would always loves me as I am one his children. Finally, I found the God of Micah and Luke. One who forgives me, pardons me and above all else loves me.

- Submitted by Keen Haynes

2 Kings 5:1-15

5 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.^[a] 2 Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."^[b] 4 So Naaman^[c] went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. 5 And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy."^[d] 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?"^[e] Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." 11 But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy!"^[f] 12 Are not Abana^[g] and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have

done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'" 14 So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. 15 Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant."

Luke 4:23-30

23 He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers^[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 8

In the first reading we meet Naaman, the commander of an army. He was a powerful man but was sick with leprosy. Naaman wanted to be healed so he sought Elijah. At first, Elijah ignored Naaman but later, impressed by Naaman's determination, Elijah told Naaman to bathe in the River Jordan seven times to be healed. Naaman argued the solution was silly, but his servants convinced him to try. He did and was healed.

In the second reading, Luke recounts Jesus' visit to Nazareth. The Nazoreans demanded miracles so Jesus could prove he really was someone special. It was his hometown, after all, and to them, he was *just* a neighbor. Jesus reminded them years ago only Naaman was healed despite there being many in need. The Nazoreans rebuked his answer and ran him out of town.

These are two stories of stubbornness with different outcomes based on different circumstances and different choices.

In the first reading, Elijah was reluctant, but his heart was softened by a man's devotion to God. Naaman thought bathing seven times was silly but did it anyway. Both yielded to a positive solution.

In the second reading, The Nazoreans demanded miracles, but Jesus would not be tempted to heal for personal glory. When selfishness was the driving force, long-term relationships ended. Jesus had to walk away from people he had known most of his life. That had to hurt.

Let us reflect on our own stubbornness. Do we hold onto positions that benefits ourselves at others' expense? When someone is hurting do we help or do we ignore? Does our stubbornness keep us from acting in the way we know to be right? Finally, does our inflexibility cause us to separate from God, family, friends, and neighbors?

Let us pray. Father help us reject stubbornness. Strengthen us with the Holy Spirit as we work to accomplish your Son's commandment to actively love you, actively love ourselves, and perhaps most crucial during these difficult times, actively love one another.

- Submitted by Christopher DeClerk

Daniel 3:25-27

25 He replied, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god." [a] 26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics [b] were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church [a] sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven [b] times.

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents [c] was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii [d] and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister [e] from your heart."

Daniel

In this third week of Lent we have a reading from Daniel even though he is not in this story. Azariah's calling out to the Lord. He has been sent with two other Jewish men to be burned alive in a fiery furnace, because they wouldn't fall down and worship a huge golden statue built by the king. An angel of the lord keeps the flames from touching the men. He calls out to God saying "For we are reduced, O Lord, beyond any other nation brought low everywhere in the world this day because of our sins. Everywhere we look especially today, people are suffering. God, we put our faith in you to help us with the challenges we face today.

Matthew

In the Gospel today Jesus is asking us to forgive those who have hurt us, not just 7 times, but seventy-seven times. He tells the story of the man, whose debt is forgiven by the King. Instead of doing the same, he goes out and collects what others owe him. After hearing about this, the King calls him back and reverses his decision. The man's inability to "pay it forward" by not forgiving the debts has made the King pity him.

Jesus says "so shall the Heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from the heart."

- Submitted by Linda Seeber

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 10

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

4 So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. 2 You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you.

5 See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. 6 You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" 7 For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? 8 And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? 9 But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—

Matthew 5:17-19

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

In the Deuteronomy passages assigned for today we are reminded the Lord our God gave us the ordinances and statutes we need to follow. The Law is not a nice thing to remember or to do, rather it is how to live in God's creation. We are to keep God's commandments. We are not to add or take away from the text of the Law. This idea is strengthened in Matthew 5:18 when Jesus said not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

During my reflection of these passages, I thought of how I may have altered the Law to suit my preferences. My actions and good attempts have altered these laws as much as if I had changed the texts. I learned from a wonderful Jewish individual the length of a mark will change a word into another word. The same is true in English. If one changes the P in Pay to a B in Bay the idea is completely changed.

A small deviation from the Law makes me as incomplete as changing a word in the text of the Law. During this time of Lent, I will review the laws God has given us and will attempt to improve myself as a child of God and continue to reflect on these things. We as people of God need to keep and teach the Law and the Commandment.

Deuteronomy 4:2 You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you.

- Submitted by Joan Thelin

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 11

Jeremiah 7:23-28

23 But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. 25 From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; 26 yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did. 27 So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.



Luke 11:14-23

14 Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. 15 But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." 16 Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. 17 But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? — for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. 19 Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists^[a] cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. 22 But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. 23 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 11

The Pharisees don't try claim that Jesus didn't heal the possessed person; they just witnessed it. So they try to explain it. "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons."

Beelzebul might have originally meant "Lord of the High Places." It was one of the names of the Philistine god Baal. In Hebrew, Beelzebul sounds like "Lord of Flies."

The Pharisees are saying that Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan. Luke records Jesus' response: "...for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

The part of this passage that would have had the attention of that crowd is Jesus' reference to the "Finger of God." The phrase appears in only two other places in Scripture. One is when God is inscribing the Ten Commandments. The other has to do with the plagues of Egypt. When Moses first goes to Pharaoh, to ask for freedom for the God's people, Pharaoh challenges Moses' claims by having his magicians try to do the same miracles. But they cannot replicate the plague of gnats. "The magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' But Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not listen to them." So God sent something even worse, swarms of flies. (cf. Exodus 8:20-24).

By saying that the demon in the voiceless person had been cast out by the Finger of God, it is as if Jesus response is, "Speaking of flies, remember the swarms of flies that plagued Pharaoh when he refused to recognize that the miracles he saw were from the Finger of God."

The Pharisees and the crowd would have connected the dots. Every Passover they recited the story of their deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh. They would have heard those words, "the Finger of God," and remembered Pharaoh, hardening his heart to God despite the evidence of divine miracles.

Where is the Finger of God in our time?

The Finger of God is in the proclamation of the Word of God, the Good News of Jesus Christ

The Finger of God is in Holy Baptism! There God is, embracing us in the Covenant, cleansing us, giving us a voice to proclaim the Kingdom, marking us as "Christ's own for ever."

The Finger of God is in the Holy Eucharist. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (John 6:54-56).

When we are touched by the Finger of God in Word and Sacrament, we are miraculously transformed just as that voiceless person was. We are forgiven, healed, empowered, to go out and be a sacrament for a world in need of the touch of God - Love Divine. And that is how the Kingdom of God enters and transforms the divided kingdoms of this world.

- Submitted by the Very Rev. Ron Pogue

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 12

Hosea 14:1-9

14 Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
2 Take words with you
and return to the Lord;
say to him,
“Take away all guilt;
accept that which is good,
and we will offer
the fruit[a] of our lips.
3 Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride upon horses;
we will say no more, ‘Our God,’
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.”
Assurance of Forgiveness
4 I will heal their disloyalty;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.
5 I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily,
he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.[b]
6 His shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.
7 They shall again live beneath my[c] shadow,
they shall flourish as a garden:[d]
they shall blossom like the vine,
their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.
8 O Ephraim, what have I[e] to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.[f]
I am like an evergreen cypress;
your faithfulness[g] comes from me.
9 Those who are wise understand these things;
those who are discerning know them.
For the ways of the Lord are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.

Mark 12:28-34

28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; 33 and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 12

As I reflect on what our world is going through, the strife in our country, and how our local communities are affected, I read in the chapters of Mark and Hosea and realize we have been fighting injustices since time began. In both stories, finding favor in God (however you name your God) should help us with our continued struggles. Part of finding favor in God, in Mark, he speaks about loving your neighbor and loving God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and strength. Who is our neighbor? I don't think of my neighbor as the people I live next to, but the people I work with, shop at the grocery store with and people that are in my community.

In my community, living in an urban area, my neighbors are struggling. They are homeless and hungry and in need of more services, whether they accept them or not. Loving my neighbor is helping people that need food at the end of the month when money has run out, or the lady that needs heaters for her house when the winter nights get cold. Loving my neighbor is not judging them because they don't work or because they sit on the corner and ask for help. Loving my neighbor is knowing I'm privileged and I'm able to help others. I see so many people doing so many things to change the injustices in the world, starting in our local community, and I know they love their neighbors and their God with all their hearts. Loving God with all my heart is being the person to help by supporting people of color and people that practice different religions. If all of us loved God with all of our hearts, souls, mind and strength, what would our world look like?

I think it would look like a world that a child sees through their innocent eyes. A world before they are marred by the teachings and indoctrinations from the adults in this world. Children love everyone and they don't see color, or care if you are different than they are. My hope is that children in this world will do a better job than we've done and be the change we need. Loving their neighbors of all colors, accepting people for who they are, not who we expect them to be, and know that they are doing the best they can do with the different stories they all have. Our stories explain our personal relationship with God and where we are with loving our neighbors.

My hope is that they will find favor in God as he will allow the richest blessing to all. Mark and Hosea wrote about this very long ago and where are we now??

- Submitted by Mary Anderson

Hosea 6:1-6

“Come, let us return to the LORD;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.

After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.

Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;

he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.”

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes away early.

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
I have killed them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgement goes forth as the light.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

As I was growing up church was something that was routine. I grew up in several different denominations; Baptist, Mormon, non-denominational... but there were always routines, it was always just going through the motions. There were a couple of big events later in life that had a major impact on who I am now and how I pray now.

When I was in college in my early 20s, we found out that my mom had cancer. When I was 24 the cancer took her and in that moment, I was angry at God, so angry that I stopped going to church altogether. A few years later, I moved back to the town that I went to high school in and ran into an old friend, who invited me to go to church with them. I resisted but my friend kept asking and asking and finally I gave in. It was a church much like St Martin's, just a different denomination but that sense of hospitality that friendliness still shown through. I started to find God again in that place and was even baptized in that church. And then another tragic event happened, my younger brother was killed in a car accident but this time instead of turning from God, I turned to God with humility, and just let him take over everything and I got through that time.

When we humble ourselves before God and give in to Him, and don't just get caught up in following routines, He can be a powerful force in our lives. He can heal us when we're grieving, He can guide us through dark times, He can pick us up when we're down, and He can give us hope. We just have to give in to Him.

- Submitted by Chuck Ambrose

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 15

Isaiah 65:17-25

I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a
youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered
accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD--
and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent-- its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

John 4:43-54

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

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 15

Our passage today involves an official who asks Jesus to go to his dying son. The story occurs in the text just after the encounter Jesus had with a woman at a well in Samaria. The setting of the story is Canaan, where Jesus had previously turned water into wine. Though this a “lesser” story than those two to John, it is still significant enough to merit inclusion. Some of the most important themes contained in the fourth gospel are present in this passage.

Jesus states that the official will not “believe” unless he is provided a sign; however, we learn that the man was transformed by his encounter with Jesus. Jesus did not go to the son, but promised the official his son would live. We are informed that he “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him.” (Remember that in John’s Gospel we learn that Jesus *is* the Word and that the Word *is* Life.) Likewise, we know that that the son was transformed because we are told that the official’s encounter with Jesus brought “Life” to the entire household.

John also includes the detail that this encounter happened at 1:00 in the afternoon, which was also the same time the son’s fever broke. Jesus met the woman at the well at noon. Light and darkness are important to John. The woman, the official, and the official’s son all came to Jesus in the light.

Light is, of course, not about a time of day. It is also not about circumstances. Here we are in a season of Lent, engulfed in a global Pandemic, and living in a time of great civil and social unrest. Dark times, for sure. Yet John invites, encourages, *urges* us to live and to live life abundantly - not conditioned upon a hopeful sign of better things ahead, but right now. John wants to experience the Light not after the Darkness of the Pandemic or of violence and chaos, but right now.

- Submitted by the Rev. Ken Ramsey

Ezekiel 47:1–9,12

The LORD brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side.

Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, “Mortal, have you seen this?”

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

John 5:1–18

There was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 16

In my first review of this scripture, I got stuck on Jesus' words: "Do not sin any more, so that nothing more happens to you." I have learned to listen to the things in scripture that I get stuck on, and to consider them more deeply.

At first, I didn't like these words of Jesus. It sounded as if he were saying that the man had been disabled (for 38 years!) because of something he had done. And I have a very big problem with that idea of God. I don't believe God sends illnesses to punish people who do wrong. As the wife of a cancer survivor, I've heard all the terrible theology on that... 'God doesn't give you anything you can't handle,' for instance. All sorts of unbearable things happen all the time. If that platitude were true, a lot of different people would be terribly sick, and a lot of the good folks we know would be in perfect health. I don't think God *gives* anyone cancer, or dementia, or 38 years of disability.

As I re-read the passage aloud, and pictured what was happening, I realized that Jesus encounters this man two separate times. The first time is at the pool called Beth-zatha, where the man is healed. Then, later, Jesus finds the man in the temple and talks to him. Not only has he healed the man, but he has later purposely *gone looking for him* to provide spiritual aftercare. He tells him not to sin again, which is good advice for the newly healed man and for us all.

Imagine it! Jesus heals us, AND Jesus comes back to check on us. He's always available for a tune-up or just a conversation. Don't miss the opportunity today to listen to what the Divine is saying to your life.

- Submitted by Mary Beth Butler

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 17

Isaiah 49:8–15

Thus says the LORD:

In a time of favor I have answered you,
on a day of salvation I have helped you;
I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate heritages;
saying to the prisoners, “Come out,”
to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.”
They shall feed along the ways,
on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;
they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.
And I will turn all my mountains into a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.
Lo, these shall come from far away,
and lo, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
my LORD has forgotten me.”
Can a woman forget her nursing-child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.

John 5:19–29

Jesus said to the Jews, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 17

The scripture from Isaiah and John during Lent are intense reminders of God's everlasting love for us and challenges us to live by its true meaning. The passages from Isaiah 49 denotes the people's joyful return from their exile in Babylon. Their lives are filled with hardship and bitterness, yet are assured by the prophet that better times are ahead. The people also question Jesus' authority in John 5: 19-20, challenging us to discover where God is working in our daily lives. "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

The realization that God is with us always, and has an amazing plan for us ALL, is humbling. Perhaps the pandemic comes to mind when contemplating this scripture- similar feelings of doubt of God's presence, difficulty with planning an unforeseeable future without an end in sight, skepticism. Words of comfort from God's promise in Isaiah, as God is with all the people: "He who pities them will lead them, will guide them to springs of water." The way will be made clear for their return: "I shall turn all my mountains into a road and my highways will be raised aloft." Restoration and justice is returned to all. Yet the people of Zion are still sceptical: "Yahweh has abandoned me, the Lord has forgotten me." How many times have we questioned God's promise of his love for us?

God does not forget his people and expresses his voice with gentleness and compassion of that of a woman: "Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you." During this Lent, let us not forget the unchanging compassion of God's everlasting love for us, and to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you where he is at work in every aspect of our lives.

- Submitted by Liza Goodner

Exodus 32:7-14

The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation."

But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

John 5:30-47

Jesus said, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

"You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 18

Moses is presented to us as one who spoke for God and to God. Speaking for God, he announced God's covenant with Israel and speaking to God, Moses pleaded with Him when the conditions of that covenant were broken.

The New Covenant which Jesus' life, death and resurrection announces has no conditions upon it. It is a covenant without any "if" clauses, such as "if you love me" or "if you obey me" or "if you worship me" or if you brush your teeth or help gray haired folks across the street, and if you please me then I will be good to you! No - the covenant that Jesus reveals is an unconditional covenant. It is a covenant of love where God promises to remember us even if we forget him. That is what God's love is like. He remembers us even when we forget him, loves us even when we are "unlovable". Despite our sinfulness, despite all that we do to hurt each other and to hurt ourselves, God has promised to not abandon us, to not forget us, to not seek our destruction, but rather to remember us even if we act as wayward children.

Like a parent yearns for the best for their child, so God calls us to turn away from our hurtful, sinful and foolish ways. God simply wants us to be the person that we were born to be, safe from the heartbreak that we set ourselves up for when we reject his loving guiding hand. God wants to help us, not destroy us.

The image of God that Jesus' incarnation reveals is that of a God who stretches out His arms in a saving embrace that encompasses all of humanity. Through Jesus, we come to experience the Father's life-giving touch, His unconditional acceptance, and a forgiveness that even precedes our repentance, an unqualified love.

God sent his Love, not his wrath, to deal with our sin. And his Son died for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, to show us the heart of Love, to empower us to live new lives both now and evermore. The Cross has shown us once and for all what God is really like... that God is, and has been, eternally loving, gracious and merciful.

- Submitted by The Rev. Frank B. Reeves

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 19

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24

2 For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves,
"Short and sorrowful is our life,
and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end,
and no one has been known to return from Hades.

"Let us lie in wait for the righteous man,
because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions;
he reproaches us for sins against the law,
and accuses us of sins against our training.

13 He professes to have knowledge of God,
and calls himself a child[a] of the Lord.

14 He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;
15 the very sight of him is a burden to us,
because his manner of life is unlike that of others,
and his ways are strange.

16 We are considered by him as something base,
and he avoids our ways as unclean;
he calls the last end of the righteous happy,
and boasts that God is his father.

17 Let us see if his words are true,
and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;
18 for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him,
and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.

19 Let us test him with insult and torture,
so that we may find out how gentle he is,
and make trial of his forbearance.

20 Let us condemn him to a shameful death,
for, according to what he says, he will be protected."

21 Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,
for their wickedness blinded them,
22 and they did not know the secret purposes of God,
nor hoped for the wages of holiness,
nor discerned the prize for blameless souls;
23 for God created us for incorruption,
and made us in the image of his own eternity,
24 but through the devil's envy death entered the world,
and those who belong to his company experience it.

John 7:1-2,10,25-30

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. 2 Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near.

10 But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret.

25 Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? 26 And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? 27 Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." 28 Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. 29 I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." 30 Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 19

The small bit of Wisdom found in the bible is a unique book. It may have been one of the last books of the Old Testament to be produced and believed to be the only one written in Greek. Written in honor of King Solomon, it focuses on the idea that true wisdom comes from God.

The second chapter of Wisdom seems to be a prophecy of the death of Jesus. The writer describes a godless group of people becoming the enemies of a righteous man. On one level, we can read this text and hear the words pointing to the "torture and shameful death" of Christ and on another level, we might also consider how righteous people in general can be and are mistreated.

Do we sometimes feel used or imposed upon when doing "good works" for God and the church? How can our hearts be cleansed of such during this Lenten season?

Moving on to the reading from John... we can all see ourselves in this one. The people did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah because they knew where he was from! Really. Have we judged others based on where they were from or how they differ from us such that we did not believe what they were saying? I know I have. And, have we known what it feels like to have people refuse to listen to us or to be rejected for what we are saying?

Could Lent be calling us to know Jesus better—perhaps through knowing God's people better? No matter how much I think I may know about someone, there is always more—more that may be known only to God. My prayer today is to seek a deeper reverence for those around me—those well known to me and those yet-to-be-known.

- Submitted by Phyllis Bess

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 20

Jeremiah 11:18–20

It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.
But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.
And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,
"Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,
so that his name will no longer be remembered!"
But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.



John 7:37–52

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed." Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 20

We have learned through enduring this past year that humans cannot abide total doom and gloom.

Even when we know hideous tidings to be patently false, constant bombardment with these messages can drag our souls into despair - no matter how well grounded our faith. But sadly for Jeremiah, God doesn't smite our enemies on our behalf no matter how kindly we ask.

John, though-

Timing of this story falls at the end of the Festival of Tabernacles celebrating Israel's release from Egypt. Jerusalem is crowded with almost as many pilgrims as will visit during Passover a few weeks later.

Pharisees are basically the Bible Police. In addition, Rome tasks them with keeping the Jews under control at all times. The Pharisees' collective word is Law.

There is no Google. There are no TMZ reports explaining that Jesus is indeed of David's line, born in Bethlehem, with His family only moving to Galilee when He was a toddler to save Him from Herod's death squads.

Regardless, the Pharisees don't want facts. They ignore Pharisee Nicodemus' input because their decision is already made. Jesus, His teachings and the following He gathered scares them to death.

Now, back to the beauty in verses 37 and 38 - with Jesus shouting "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

Jesus is teaching from Holy Scripture. Isaiah and others speak frequently and eloquently of water in the desert. There is nothing here to violate Jewish laws. Besides, anyone living in the desert witnesses the miracle of life nurtured by water.

In these simple verses God grants Christians pure Grace through the life of Jesus, in order to help us truly love every other human being as God loves us. By our hearts pouring out rivers of Christ's healing waters to others we multiply those waters in ourselves.

Loving our neighbors can sometimes be a difficult task, though. Permission to damn our enemies with God's smiting would come be a handy shortcut sometimes, right?

Don't go there, Jeremiah.

May Christ's Water of Life guide your heart and soul this day.

- Submitted by Tina Morehead

Daniel 13:41-62

41 but she would not tell us. These things we testify.” Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.

42 Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, “O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; 43 you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!”

44 The Lord heard her cry. 45 Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, 46 and he shouted with a loud voice, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!”

Daniel Rescues Susanna

47 All the people turned to him and asked, “What is this you are saying?” 48 Taking his stand among them he said, “Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? 49 Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her.”

50 So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the[a] elders said to him, “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.” 51 Daniel said to them, “Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them.”

52 When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, “You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, 53 pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, ‘You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death.’ 54 Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under a mastic tree.”[b] 55 And Daniel said, “Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut[c] you in two.”

56 Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart. 57 This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness. 58 Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under an evergreen oak.”[d] 59 Daniel said to him, “Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split[e] you in two, so as to destroy you both.”

60 Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him. 61 And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor. 62 Acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day.

John 8:12-20

Jesus spoke to the people, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 22

For Jesus has told us, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." May I follow your path of Light day by day and spurn the darkness.

Oh Gracious God, I humbly beseech you to instill in me the wisdom of Daniel. .. May I always be brave enough to stand up for what is just and right in your sight. Whenever I hear or see hatred of any form, be it in a racial slur, an offensive joke or the bullying of anyone, please give me the courage to never remain silent. Words matter and so do actions in the spreading of justice.

I pray all this in the knowledge of all that we ask is heard and given.

Amen.



- Submitted by Kathy Wilkinson

Numbers 21:4-9

From Mount Hor the Israelites set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Jews, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Numbers 21:4-9

According to this scripture, after the Israelites defeated the Canaanites, Moses was leading them to the Red Sea. During their journey, the Israelites became *impatient* with Moses and spoke against God and Moses, complaining about being in the desert and the lack of bread, water, and the miserable food. The Lord sent venomous snakes among them, prompting Moses to make a bronze snake to cure anyone who had been bitten.

As I read scripture, I often look for modern-day parallels. The *impatience* of Moses's followers brings the world's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to mind. People all over the world, especially in the United States, have demonstrated *extraordinary impatience* with lockdowns, mask-wearing requirements, travel restrictions, and vaccine distribution. I pray for the Lord's guidance for our nation and the world as we seek solutions to the spread of this deadly pandemic.

John 8:21-30

In this reading from John's Gospel, Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are from below and that he is from above; they are of this world, but he is not of this world. Jesus also states that he does nothing on his own but speaks just what the Father has taught him.

What I take away from John's Gospel is that Jesus is saying that the Father is known through the Son and that to know the one is to know the other. The Pharisees found this concept difficult to understand, as I suppose many people today find this concept difficult. I ask for God's help in understanding this passage of John's Gospel.

- Submitted by Ed McGlaston

Daniel 3:14–20,24–28

Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors, “Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?” They answered the king, “True, O king.” He replied, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.” Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.

Nebuchadnezzar said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king’s command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

John 8:31–42

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.”

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 24

When Oscar Romero y Galdámez was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador in 1977, he thought he knew how to faithfully pastor his flock and obediently serve those in authority over him as well as God. In the next year, however, he was forced to reexamine those assumptions after learning of the murder of a friend and fellow priest who was killed for bringing the hope of God's love and regard to the poorest people of El Salvador. The majority of the Salvadoran populace were experiencing intense suffering and brutal oppression at the hands of the government and military, who were supported in their efforts by the U.S. government (any protest against the government or the official Church stance in support of the regime was labeled as Marxism or Communism).

Though he was already approaching his sixth decade, Romero followed the example of his martyred friend and sought to learn the truth of the civil strife which pitted civil and Church authority against the people. One of the few bishops or archbishops of the Church with humble origins, he entered the fiery furnace of the suffering of his colleagues and the humblest of his flock, and there he encountered God in a way he had never experienced before. He had previously been considered a staunch conservative, but he learned that the poorest and most oppressed of the people were also capable of reading and learning and being moved by Scripture and were living examples of the promises taught in the Gospel, which they deserved to experience during their lifetime, not just as a heavenly reward. Moved by their suffering, he taught love and peace in contrast to the violence surrounding him. He even preached compassion for the common soldiers forced to carry out their brutal and immoral orders of brutality. Labeled as a Communist rebel by both the government and his fellow bishops in El Salvador, it became clear to Romero that to continue to preach the message of love, peace, and the rights of all God's children to food, education, and security without oppression was to offer his life in sacrifice for his God and his flock. He was assassinated by a death squad (later identified as US-government sanctioned) while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980. He was beatified by the pope in 2015 and canonized in 2018, and is one of the ten martyrs of the

20th century depicted at Westminster Abbey. He is also considered a saint (a faithful example of Christian witness) in Anglican, Episcopal, and Lutheran denominations.

Questions for reflection: What fiery furnace do you dwell in? What fiery furnace is God asking you to enter? How are you strengthened by God in the furnace with you? How can you help reveal that presence to others?

- Submitted by the Rev. Cindy Ruiz

Reflexión

Cuando Oscar Romero y Galdámez fue designado como arzobispo de San Salvador, El Salvador, pensaba que sabía como servir como pastor a su rebaño y obedecer a Dios y las autoridades en la iglesia. Aun así, durante el próximo año fue empujado a reexaminar esas creencias después de haber informado del asesinato de un sacerdote y amigo matador por traer la esperanza del amor y estimación Divino a los salvadoreños más pobres. La mayoría de la población salvadoreña estaban experimentando un sufrimiento intenso y opresión brutal por el gobierno y el ejército, quienes estaban apoyado por el gobierno estadounidense (cualquier persona quien protestaba las acciones del gobierno o la iglesia fue nombrado como “Marxista” o “Comunista”).

Aunque iba para su sexta década de vida, Romero seguía el ejemplo de su amigo martirizado y la verdad de la lucha entre las autoridades temporales y eclesiales y el pueblo salvadoreño. Era uno de los pocos obispos o arzobispos de orígenes más o menos humildes y entraba al horno ardiente de sus colegas y los más humildes de sus feligreses. Allí encontraba a Dios en una manera que jamás había experimentada. Antes presentaba una teología muy conservadora, pero descubrió la capacidad de los más pobres para leer y aprender y estar transformados por las escrituras. Fueron ejemplos vivos de las promesas enseñado en el Evangelio que merecían recibir durante sus vidas y no solamente como recompensa celestial. Conmovido por su sufrimiento, Romero predicaba del amor y la paz para enfrentar la violencia a su alrededor, hasta predicar la compasión por los soldados pobres obligados a cumplir con sus órdenes brutales e inmorales. Llamado un “rebelde comunista” tanto por el gobierno como por los otros obispos del país, a Romero se hizo obvio que seguir predicar el mensaje del amor y la paz y los derechos de los hijos de Dios para comer, aprender y vivir en seguridad fue ofrecer su vida como sacrificio a Dios y por su rebaño. Fue asesinado (por un equipo guiado por un hombre apoyado por el gobierno estadounidense) en 24 de marzo de 1980. Fue beatificado por el papa en 2015 y canonizado en 2018 y es uno de los diez mártires del siglo veinte representado en Westminster

Abey. Es designado como santo (un fiel ejemplar de la vida cristiana) por los anglicanos, episcopales, luteranos y otros protestantes.

Preguntas para contemplar: ¿En cuál horno ardiente vives? ¿En cuál horno ardiente te está pidiendo entrar Dios? ¿Cómo te está fortaleciendo la presencia de Dios en el horno ardiente contigo? ¿Cómo puedes ayudar a revelar esa presencia divina a los demás?

- Submitted by the Rev. Cindy Ruiz

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 25

Genesis 17:1-8

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God."

John 8:51-59

51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' 52 The Jews said to him, 'Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never taste death." 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?' 54 Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, "He is our God", 55 though you do not know him. But I know him; if I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.' 57 Then the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' 58 Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.' 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

My reflection of the books John 8:51-59 and Genesis 17:1-8 is, Their problem was that of belief and not complete faith.

"Is Jesus the promised Messiah?"

"Is Jesus sent by the Father!"

"Is Jesus seeking to honor the Father?"

"Is Jesus preexistent?"

Their questions are also ours today. How we answer is a matter of belief by our personal faith. Belief by faith is how we can be confident in our eternal life. Genesis, I think of open doors & blessings but you must have faith, you must believe. In my daily journey so many things are out of my control, so many things I want better for others and myself. I can't worry about things I can't control. I am a sheep, working and believing Jesus will provide all our needs and protect us from harm. During this pandemic is the perfect time to trust and step out on faith. So many uncertainties, not knowing who to trust or what to believe. The one thing we can put our trust in is our God, our Savior. He will provide.

- Submitted by Constance Smith

Jeremiah 20:7-13

O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.
For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"
For the word of the Lord has become for me
a reproach and derision all day long.
If I say, "I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,"
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.
For I hear many whispering:
"Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.
"Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him,
and take our revenge on him."
But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.
O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous,
you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.
Sing to the Lord;
praise the Lord!
For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers.

John 10:31-42

The Jews took up stones again to stone Jesus. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 26

These readings were written from times that were centuries apart yet there is a common theme. In Jeremiah you hear how speaking the word of God can be difficult and lead to persecution. You are also shown that trying to hold the words in, bottle them up, is futile. In John we see the same thing except that the prophet is Jesus, the Son of God. There is a lot to unpack from these two readings. In both cases the word of God was stronger than the will of prophet or those seeking to silence them.

What can we, millennia removed from those times, learn from these readings? To me, this says that I must listen to what God is saying to me. I must be open to discerning God's will and through God's strength seek what is right. Speaking the truth, showing compassion to all, providing aid to those in need, seeking justice for the oppressed, seeing God in ALL people no matter how adept they are at hiding that part of God within them is what I feel called to do.

I have been guilty of not speaking up, not helping when I could, judging others. My silence, my labeling of others, avoiding the eyes of those seeking justice are examples of how I, like Jeremiah, try to "...not mention him or speak any more in his name." Also, like Jeremiah, when I fail to heed God's call, I feel the burning fire shut up in my bones and am weary from holding it in.

What to do? Jesus trusted God for He was God. He knew what to do and did it. Jeremiah had a harder road and I feel more like him. I must trust in God, trust that God will be with me and give me the strength to do what is right despite any repercussion or persecution that might result. I know I will stumble but I must not ignore God's call.

- Submitted by Gil Kleinwechter

Ezekiel 37:21–28

Say, Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore.

John 11:45–53

Many of the Jews who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

Thanks, Ezekiel, for the stuff of Game of Thrones or a modern political drama: tribes, scattered people, division in two, exile, lawlessness, homeland longings, covenant, being on God's side, one nation under God.

Through Ezekiel, God calls divided, tribe-oriented people, exiled in foreign places, to direct them to a future of hope and to the restoration of their nation. Think about God's call through Ezekiel by examining ourselves as tribal members and as exiles.

Tribes shape us. Define your tribe (yes, really). Social, cultural, political, ideological contexts are bundled into identity and allegiance. What tribal elements must you let go of to shift your allegiance to a community with only God at the center?

Geographic displacement was the exile of Ezekiel's people. How are you an exile? Are you estranged, uprooted, grief-filled? We've endured forced change during this COVID-19 pandemic. Exile holds challenge and alienation. Exiles chafe at forced intercultural exchange, rankle at acculturation, and may see their worlds as shattered.

Part of God's call through Ezekiel is "onward to our new future together." Tribal exiles would come, be cleansed, then live united in God's covenant in a historic place. In John 11:45–53, Caiaphas, too prophesied the future Jesus would bring: Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, also for all the scattered children of God, and bring them together and make them one.

And so God calls us out of our exile, too, into a new future. Did Ezekiel's people think restoration would include "getting it all back just like it was before?" Do we? Just as exile is uncertain, so is the future. Exile has changed us, and the world beyond exile has changed, too. Church, too, has and will change. Where's the stability that we value in this future? It's in covenant with God. It's in unity with God's people around us.

We can live this prophesied future today, beyond tribalism and exile. We can live and manifest Jesus' way of love. Living this radical love transforms each of us, and the whole of us, and multiplies outward beyond measure.

- Submitted by Susan Kleinwechter

THE LESSONS FOR
MARCH 29

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the Lord, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 29

The Collect we pray on Monday in Holy Week begins like this: “Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified... .”

This is the week that Jesus will suffer and die as a vulnerable human being.

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul writes that Christ Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”

As Paul tells it, Jesus chooses to live as a limited human being, even to the point of death. Jesus puts himself in our position, choosing to “feel with” and suffer with us. I would suggest it’s one of the most important passages in all the scriptures.

The novelist Graham Greene conveys why this passage is so important in his novel entitled “Monsignor Quixote.” The character Monsignor Quixote has a dream, a nightmare. It goes like this:

“He dreamed that Christ had been saved from the Cross by the legion of angels to which on an earlier occasion the Devil had told Him that he could appeal.” (Remember one of the three temptations from the pinnacle of the temple, the Devil says throw yourself down, the angels will catch you? He dreamed that Christ had been saved from the Cross by that legion of angels.)

“So [in the dream] there was no final agony, no heavy stone which had to be rolled away, no discovery of an empty tomb. Father Quixote stood there watching on Golgotha as Christ stepped down from the Cross triumphant and acclaimed.”

“The Roman soldiers, even the centurion, knelt in His honor, and the people of Jerusalem poured up the hill to worship Him. The disciples clustered happily around. His mother smiled through her

tears of joy. There was no ambiguity, no room for doubt and no room for faith at all. The whole world knew with certainty that Christ was the Son of God.”

Greene continues: “It was only a dream ... but nonetheless Father Quixote had felt on waking the chill of despair felt by a man who realizes suddenly that he has taken up a profession which is of use to no one, who must continue to live in a kind of Saharan desert with doubt or faith, where everyone is certain that the same belief is true. He found himself whispering: God save me from such a belief.”

God save us from such a story: a successful triumphant lord, unscathed by the world, distanced from us and unable to relate.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul proclaims the Gospel, the Good News, that Jesus chooses to live in day-by-day dependency upon God. He chooses a life of vulnerability – even to the point of death on the Cross. He chooses solidarity with ordinary human beings. Jesus chooses US.

At his baptism, the One who has no reason to repent steps into the waters with the crowd, choosing solidarity with us. When driven into the wilderness and tempted to take for himself superhuman powers, Jesus refuses the Devil’s offer, choosing rather, to be at one with God’s children. Jesus chooses us. This week Jesus will suffer and die as a vulnerable human being. Jesus chooses US.

- Submitted by Bishop +J Scott Mayer

Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands,
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The Lord called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
But I said, "I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the Lord,
and my reward with my God."
And now the Lord says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
and my God has become my strength--
he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
Thus says the Lord,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
"Kings shall see and stand up,
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

John 12:20-36

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say-- `Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 30

Loss.

So many of us have lost so much over the course of this past year.

We've lost loved ones to COVID-19. Some of us have lost jobs or have been displaced from our homes. We've lost many of the regular rhythms of life. We've lost opportunities to spend time with friends and family. We've lost a lot.

And in the midst of all that loss, what is Jesus talking to his disciples about in today's Gospel lesson? Loss. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies . . ." "Those who love their life lose it."

In saying these things, Jesus is not glorifying loss. He is not making light of loss. Indeed, as Jesus anticipates the loss of his own life, Jesus is *not* saying, 'I'm going to be resurrected anyway, so this is no big deal'. No, Jesus says that his "soul is troubled." In the face of loss, the Son of God is rocked to the core.

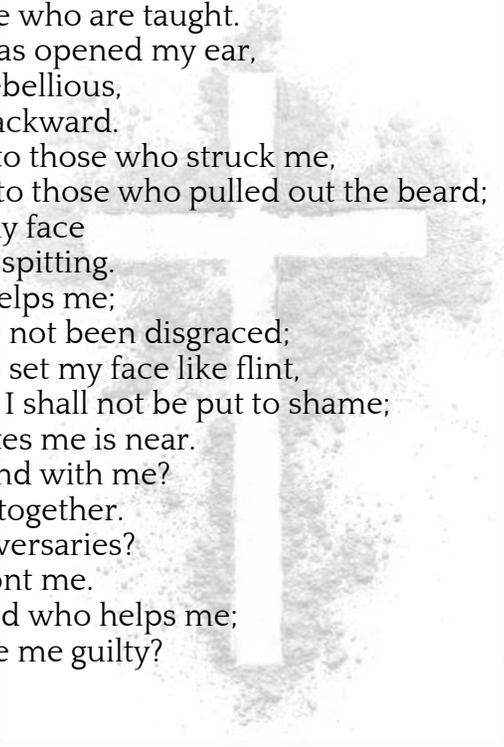
And the crowd's response to Jesus's announcement that he will lose his life? They deny that it's possible for Jesus to die. They say, "the Messiah remains forever." The crowd uses their 'knowledge' as a bulwark against the possibility that their world will be turned upside down. They shy away from any emotional engagement with the prospect of agonizing loss.

Holy Week is a sacred time of pilgrimage through suffering. It is a time when we can risk feeling the devastation of loss and grieving the losses we have suffered. Grieving is frightening; we plunge in knowing neither how deep the pool is nor how we will make it to the other side. But grieving is also freeing, releasing us from the bonds of sadness and making room for the peace and hope that Resurrection will bring.

- Submitted by The Rev. Canon Janet Waggoner

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The Lord God has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens--
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.
The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?



John 13:21-32

At supper with his friends, Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples-- the one whom Jesus loved-- was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once."

THE REFLECTION FOR
MARCH 31

And it was night.

At St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the Sanctuary Lamp dangles from the ceiling. When I served on the Altar Guild, it was often my responsibility to lower the lamp, climb a ladder, and replace the candle with a new one. We transferred the fire of the old candle to the new one using 10" sticks. It was a precarious operation 4 feet above ground, but it enabled our sanctuary light to be a continuous flame from Easter to the following Maundy Thursday.

During Sunday worship, the Sanctuary Lamp is barely visible. Our altar lights are so bright, the flicker of the candle seems lost. But at night, when the electric lights are turned off, the flame becomes visible, its glow softly illumines the pulpit, the Table, and the cross.

Judas goes into the night, setting in motion the events of Jesus' Passion. Soon, we will darken the Light of Christ in our sanctuary. This act is one of remembrance, to share some small stake in the chaos and horror of crucifixion. As we snuff out the flame, the Light of Christ in each of us is made evermore bright.

Strengthen and embolden us, loving God, to be a light unto others.



Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. [Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.] This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

THE REFLECTION FOR
APRIL 1

Let us pray: Teach us Lord, how to follow your commands and open our hearts to follow your will in Jesus Christ Name we pray. Amen

A fire broke out at a farm house and all the animals were able to escape the fire by running over to a higher ground of the farm house with the exception of a chicken with her twelve baby chicks.

When the fire started the chicken was trying to guide the baby chicks up to the higher ground but they were too little to move fast and she gathered them under her and covered them with her body. The heat of the fire overpowered the chicken.

The owner of the farm house came to inspect the destruction of his property by the fire and saw the dead chicken; he picked it up and found the 12 baby chicks saved by the chicken. The chicken knew of the danger, but decided to protect and save her baby chicks because she loved them.

Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin word “mandatum” which means “command”. The last Thursday of Jesus Christ’s final week, before Good Friday and Easter.

The Last Supper Jesus Christ had with his disciples was identified as the Passover meal in the gospel, and it is a traditional meal in which the Hebrew people were told to sprinkle blood on their front doors so the angel of death would pass over them. In so doing they would escape from Egypt.

The Passover meal is not just a traditional meal, but an affirmation of faith.

John 13: 14 -15

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.

“For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you”.

John 13: 34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Jesus Christ commanded us to do two things from this reading:

To demonstrate humility towards one another, and

To love one another.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew what was ahead of him, knew it was His Last Supper, and knew He was going to be betrayed. He demonstrated to us how love overcomes evil.

Let us use this Lenten season to show humility to others in our community and love one another as Jesus Christ has commanded us to do.

- Submitted by the Rev. Ayo Omoniyi

THE LESSONS FOR
APRIL 2

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.

Just as there were many who were astonished at him
--so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals--
so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

John 18:1-19:42

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom

are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."
And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

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

THE REFLECTION FOR
APRIL 2

I am not.

On a chilly desert night, Peter huddles with others in the glow of the fire. As the flames dance and spark, Peter's face becomes more visible. Look closely...what do you see in Peter's eyes? What is he feeling?

Just a few days earlier, there was a triumphal welcome as Jesus and the disciples returned to Jerusalem. Heady excitement for Galilean country folk. Peter has been with Jesus for three years, now. He has seen, first-hand, the signs of Jesus' divinity. Yet, his friend has been arrested. He is being questioned by the high priest, in the middle of the night. Why doesn't Jesus perform a sign and walk away from this danger? There is so much work yet to do. Hurry Jesus.

Suspicion and fear are in the air. It is risky for Peter to be here, in the high priest's courtyard. He accepts the risk to be near Jesus. Asked if he is one of Jesus' disciples, Peter responds, "I am not". It is the response Jesus knew he would make.

Exodus 3:14—God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Moses presses God for a name. And God says, "I AM." Inside the chief priest's home, I AM is questioned by humans—people protecting their status in the Temple from this Teacher. He outwits them; he performs signs that engender fear in them. He has walked of his own volition into their trap. But, of course, they imagine they have set the perfect snare. How to silence this Voice?

Peter says, "I am not." It is interesting that his statement is both untruthful (to the humans that inquire about his relationship to Jesus), and truthful. We are all Peter in this sense--we are not God.

Sit with Peter today. He will be changed by today's experience. This man, this rock, will discover strength within him that he does not yet know exists. It is the response that Jesus knew he would make.

- Submitted by the Rev. Paula Jefferson

Job 14:1-14

Job said, "A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble,
comes up like a flower and withers,
flees like a shadow and does not last.

Do you fix your eyes on such a one?

Do you bring me into judgment with you?

Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?

No one can.

Since their days are determined,
and the number of their months is known to you,
and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass,
look away from them, and desist,
that they may enjoy, like laborers, their days.

"For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that its shoots will not cease.
Though its root grows old in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a young plant.

But mortals die, and are laid low;
humans expire, and where are they?

As waters fail from a lake,
and a river wastes away and dries up,
so mortals lie down and do not rise again;
until the heavens are no more, they will not awake
or be roused out of their sleep.

Oh that you would hide me in Sheol,
that you would conceal me until your wrath is past,
that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!
If mortals die, will they live again?
All the days of my service I would wait
until my release should come."

John 19:38-42

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

Holy Saturday
John 19:38-42

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

On that first Good Friday, the story ends with “...the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” Then we jump to the Resurrection two days later when the women and the disciples find the tomb empty. Have you ever wondered what happens in between?

There is a passing reference in the Apostles’ Creed, in which we profess the belief that “He descended to the dead.” (In earlier versions, “He descended into Hell”) But what does it mean?

St. Peter tells us that when Christ died he went and preached to the spirits in prison “who in former times did not obey ... For this is the reason the Gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that ... they might live in the spirit as God does” (I Peter 3:15b- 4:8).

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, wrote “When it says, ‘He ascended’, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:9-10).

The Early Church taught that after his death Christ descended into Hell and rescued all the souls, starting with Adam and Eve, who had died under the Fall. This event, known as The Harrowing of

Hell is bound up with the Resurrection, for as Christ is raised from the dead he also goes into the depths to raise up those who have died, no matter where that may be in time and space. The Harrowing of Hell carries us into the chasm between Christ’s death and resurrection.

The Harrowing of Hell tells us that there are no limits to God’s ability to search us out and to know us. Where are the darkest depths of my heart and my soul, where it seems even Christ can find no welcome? Those depths I am so afraid to face may be beyond my reach. I cannot accomplish my own salvation from that deep, interior hell, hidden from others, and often from myself.

Christ smashes down the gates of Hell. He draws all of sinful humanity from the clutches of death. He descends into the depths of our sin and alienation from God. Harrowing the depths of Hell, he fills all that is lost and sinful with the radiance of divine goodness, joy, and light.

On Holy Saturday, we are mindful of the entombed Christ, and ask him to take away whatever denies life in us, whether it is a hell of our own making, a hell that has been forced upon us, or a hell that surrounds us. Christ reaches down, breaks down barriers, and lifts us up in his Risen Glory.

- Submitted by the Very Rev. Ron Pogue