

Connected to the Cross
+
Committed to the Christ

MEDITATIONS FOR THE SEASON OF LENT AND HOLY WEEK 2010



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Beloved in the Lord:

It is our joy and delight to share with you this wonderful volume of writing: *Connected to the Cross – Committed to Christ: Meditations for the Season of Lent and Holy Week*. As a parish we are much engaged just now in considering matters of being connected to the Church and committed to her work. I believe these meditations are evidence of and invitation into both. As a priest of the Church I can tell you how exciting it is to read these meditations and celebrate the deep faith of our local authors.

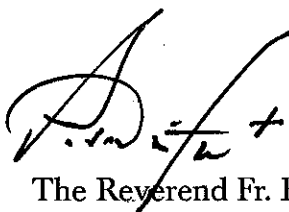
Under the loving hand and eye of the good Deacon Susie Bruno, we have gathered together this collection of prayerful writings for this holy season in the Church year. We commend it to you as a source of wonder and comfort, of surprise, consolation, and hope as we move together from the harsh winds of the Wilderness of Temptation to the gentle breeze of Easter morning.

We give thanks for the creative generosity of all who submitted meditations and for the loving labor of Deacon Bruno.

I believe you will find this booklet a genuine blessing.

May your Lent be a time of deep prayer and wonder and may your Eastertide be a time of great joy.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P.S. Winton', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

The Reverend Fr. P.S. Winton
Rector

Wednesday in the Fifth Week after the Epiphany, AD 2010

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Ash Wednesday

Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. [from Hebrews 12:1-14]

This particular scripture speaks to me about being able to set our burdens and the things we cling so eagerly to of this world aside and pursue a good and true relationship with Jesus. For many years I pursued the things I thought would bring me happiness, and I never knew until I started my Christian Journey that what I was thirsting and hungering for was a relationship with God.

My faith is like a cloak I wrap around me as my shield from troubles and worries, for I know through Him all things are possible. He wakes me in the morning, He walks with me through the day, He sends an angel to watch over me when I sleep at night, not allowing any hurt, harm, or danger to overcome me, so I know His love is everlasting. Being a caregiver, there are days when at day's end I know were it not for God's grace and mercy I could not have made it. I persevere because I know God has set my course for me even though I don't always know or understand what it may be; but through my love of God and my knowledge of His love for me, I will continue to run on and see what the end will bring.

—Janie Wooten

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, February 18, 2010

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. [from Psalm 37]

God is not on our fast-paced time schedule, and we should neither rush Him nor run ahead of His plan for our lives. We need to become a people who truly “wait upon the Lord.” If I am forced to wait, I am not in control. Someone or something else is in control, and I have to yield to that control, and that is humbling. Waiting on the Lord is a matter of prayer. Prayer empowers us to hear God. Waiting on God means praying, and praying involves listening. God has a great plan for each one of our lives and for the ministry of His Church. Prayer sometimes consists of sitting down and just being quiet and listening.

You know how people say, “Don’t just stand there, do something”? God is telling us, “Don’t just do something, stand there.” God wants us to be quiet sometimes and just meditate. In prayer we are aware that God is in action and that when the circumstances are ready, when others are in the right place, and when our hearts are prepared, He will call us into the action. Waiting in prayer is a disciplined refusal to act before God acts.

“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him.” AMEN.

– *Rick Johnson*

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, February 19, 2010

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!

[from Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32]

At the time of Ezekiel, the Israelites believed that a father's sins would be carried down to his offspring, that they would receive the same punishment as the father. However, because each man's soul is owned by our Lord, each man will be judged on his life, each soul on its own.

I believe everyone, sooner or later, realizes what is right in the eyes of God! We must all stand on our own merits.

God loves his people so much that he wants us to understand how we will be judged: he begs us to "get a new heart and a new spirit" . . . and then to follow that heart.

—Miriam Searcy

Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so we may fulfill it with inner sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, February 20, 2010

And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

[from Philippians 4:10-20]

Individually and corporately we can learn that God can and will satisfy every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Presented for baptism as an infant, I am a lifelong Episcopalian, with worship and study experiences with several other Christian denominations. I have had the privilege of living in about twenty different vital cities, states, dioceses, communities, families, and neighborhoods. I cherish a kind, loving husband and extended families. God has supplied my needs in abundance and enabled me to be a part of the privilege to help supply some of the needs of others.

A few needs to receive and to give: Love, water, food, clothing, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, forgiveness, healing, joy, worship, and prayer.

A few ways I can respond: Church worship and pledge, blood donations, UTO offering, the Lex Matthews Scholarship fund, Episcopal Relief & Development, Crisis Assistance, Loaves & Fishes, the Soup Kitchen.

God's riches in glory through Christ Jesus are abundant; we must work to make them known and shared.

– *Sarah Shaw*

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

Sunday, February 21, 2010

Lent 1

“I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness.”

[from John 12:44-50]

One day I was the very last person in the lunch line. When I got to my class’s two tables, the first table was full, and there was no one at the second table. When I sat down, I didn’t have anyone to talk to at my empty table. Then one of my friends that I had wanted to sit with got up and sat with me. I think it was a very Christian thing to do even though he does not go to church. I think God was setting this up for me. He knew that I was going to be the last one in the lunch line. He knew that I would have no one to talk to, so he made it so that my friend saw me and came to sit with me. Jesus said, “No one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” When I had no one to sit with, I was in darkness; but since I believe in Jesus and God, he put me in the light by getting my friend to come over and sit with me. So if something like this happens to you, just remember you are never alone. You have God from now to eternity.

– *Collin Hoben*
Grade 3

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Monday, February 22, 2010

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” [from Mark 1:1-13]

The voice that came from heaven is, of course, the one and only beloved Father God, speaking aloud. There are very few documented cases in the Bible where God’s voice had actually been quoted speaking aloud. He only speaks aloud in times when it is extremely necessary, he is extremely angry, or he is extremely happy. In this case, being the best of all, he is happy. He has actually said the words aloud to prove them and support them, that Jesus is his Son, and that Jesus, the Son of God, is holy and beloved, and has pleased his Father. God spoke to Jesus, the prophets, and some special others who were chosen to hear his words, but the occasions when his voice is actually heard aloud are very special. Whether or not many people heard, it was still echoed from the sky into the air, not whispered in someone’s ear. Jesus, one hundred percent man and one hundred percent God, I am sure knew his Father was pleased with him. But I am also sure it encouraged him even more to hear his Father’s voice announce it aloud, like he was **THE** prize of the world. Which he was and is, and we must think so as well.

– *Rebecca Hunt*
Grade 9

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. [from I Corinthians 1:20-31]

All parents lose their temper, so I know this experience is not just my own. Try as I might, I let the frustrations of the day creep into my parenting. I snap at a toddler who is curious, precocious, just acting his age. Nothing shames me like that wounded look – the look of confusion, the moment before the cry, tears beginning to well, when my innocent baby looks me deep in the eye, needing no words to communicate his hurt. Oh yes, the weak of the world can shame the strong.

Just imagine if we had to look into Jesus' eyes each time we stepped off His path. Imagine the hurt God feels when we let the world distract us into sin again and again. Can you imagine the shame? In this time of Lent, it's a powerful exercise. Close your eyes and imagine the face of Jesus, pained by your indiscretions.

But, in your mind's eye, what does Jesus do next? Does he turn his back and walk away? I doubt it. No, Jesus reaches out, and when we ask, all is forgiven in an instant. What pure love. When I lose it and yell at my baby, who does he reach to for comfort? Me! It's amazing, his capacity to forgive. Pure love . . . God's love forgives again and again.

– *Sarah Morgan*

Grant to your people, Lord, grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only true God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. [from Samuel 16:1-13]

While humans only judge us by what's on the outside, God sees what's in our hearts. He doesn't just focus on how we look, he looks at how we act, what we do for ourselves, and our actions towards others. It's somewhat like when you're around those who truly know you, you can feel comfortable. You can wear sweat pants and no makeup, and they won't judge. That's how God is towards us. We can be comfortable with him too and not worry about our appearance.

Another way to look at it is not only appearance, but actions. When among friends I personally act differently than with people I just met. For instance, with my friends I know I can act spazzish but with my friend's friends, I seem to be more self-conscious. This is probably something that a lot of people have in common. God sees us in our spazzing moments with friends and in our awkward ones with others, so we don't have to put on a show for him or try to hide behind ourselves. This is something that we should all realize: God sees what's in our minds, thoughts, and hearts that others may not even bother looking for.

– *Catey Fisher*
Grade 7

Bless us, O God, in this holy season, in which our hearts seek your help and healing; and so purify us by your discipline that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, February 25, 2010

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.
[from Psalm 50]

This psalm was part of a temple liturgy in which Israel reaffirms her commitment to God's covenant. God calls his covenant people to account. The Lord comes as judge to bring his people to trial before they enter into the ritual of covenant renewal. People have developed a false faith in their sacrifices. What God requires is a grateful acknowledgment of our dependence upon him. God has given us so much, and too often we take it for granted. Yes, and sometimes we feel we deserve God's graciousness. Sacrifices that bind the worshiper to God are valid, but those which attempt to bind God to the worshiper are not. God calls us to acknowledge our dependence on him by giving thank offerings for his mercies. God also desires our obedience to his moral law.

God speaks to us in many ways: in the beauty of a sunrise . . . in the rain that sustains the earth . . . in the soothing voice of a friend in time of need . . . or in the words of a doctor telling us of the physical improvement of a loved one. Rejoice and give thanks for God's mercies.

– *Lillian Hollman*

Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, February 26, 2010

For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways.” [from Psalm 95]

In verse 10 of Psalm 95, God recalls the forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness – a time when their hearts went astray, disregarding God’s ways. They suffered, whined, blamed, even turned to idols.

Our hearts – that place within us that symbolically holds our deepest convictions and guides our actions – are capable of going astray, becoming lost from God. Such a state could lead to errors much greater than simple untoward behavior and mistakes of judgment. How do such errors look? I think of our human flaws: self-centeredness, self-importance, insensitivity. These flaws prompt us to seek reward and recognition, to turn a blind eye to issues and needs around us. Perhaps we are in conversation when we are not really listening, when we fail to see God’s child before us and lose the opportunity to connect, to empathize. Instead we wait until we can speak again, tell our story. Or perhaps misfortune descends upon us and we despair. Our praise and joy dry up, and we drift farther from God. At such times, we lose sight of the blessings around us, forget gratitude, and overlook opportunities hidden within our own dilemmas.

As we experience the reflective Lenten season, I hope we can pray for steadfast hearts, asking to be unfeignedly thankful, showing forth God’s ways, not only with our lips but in our lives.

– *Brenda Monteith*

Lord Christ, our eternal Redeemer, grant us such fellowship in your sufferings, that, filled with your Holy Spirit, we may subdue the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to you, and at the last attain to the glory of your resurrection; who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, February 27, 2010

He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart. [from Mark 2:23–3:6]

Here is yet another story of Jesus asking for clarification, engaging in self-reflection, then taking action as powerful people around him evince what I call “challenging behaviors.” In the process, Jesus notices that hardening of attitude(s) has led to hardening of the heart.

The aspect that most intrigues me here is Jesus intentionally pausing to check in with the anger that he is feeling as he confronts “the opposition.” I appreciate hearing that the stimulus for his anger is not fear – of what others will think, do, or say – but rather sadness in response to intractably stony hearts. I also appreciate seeing that having acknowledged the source and nature of his feelings, Jesus acts – by restoring life to the withered arm of a stranger.

That my Lord models checking in with his feelings strikes me as a powerful invitation to follow suit. That Jesus then proceeds to do the next right thing – without complaint, fear or delay – surely invites me to do likewise this Lenten season and beyond.

– *Toni Robinson*

O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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. [from John 5:19-24]

As I reflect upon this particular Bible passage, I think what a wonderfully inclusive and comforting message! Jesus calls us to honor Him, and in doing so, honor His Father.

Jesus says in verse 19 that “the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing”; we, like Jesus, are nothing on our own without God the Father/God the Son . . . we can do nothing on our own. We either honor God by doing what we see that Jesus has done, or we honor Satan by doing what we see him doing.

Times have been difficult and challenging in many aspects of my life this past year and a half both personally and professionally . . . they have been for many of us.

Verse 24 tells us: “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.” ANYONE!!! How comforting to know that, with all the calamities, trials, and tribulations life throws at us, we can pass from death to life by listening to, believing in, and thus honoring Jesus.

– *Bill Nuttall*

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Monday, March 1, 2010

For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power.

[from I Corinthians 4:8-21]

I have always loved words, not only because they connect us as human beings but because, well-used, they can have great power. Thus this passage from Paul to the Corinthians seemed strange to me because it contrasts talk and power, as though one could not be part of the other. Paul was speaking of the talk of the church people in Corinth, whom he describes as people who were “behaving according to human inclinations.” Merely human, talking and acting as we humans do. To Paul, however, these people had forgotten that they were the temple of God, and that they could have power from God. If they spoke through the Holy Spirit, their words would have great power.

For me this is a problem to wrestle with during Lent. I know how very humanly self-centered my thoughts and behavior are. My talk may be oblivious to the needs of others, uncaring or just plain unloving. As I begin the Lenten season, I find myself turning to the Ash Wednesday service in the Prayer Book, and especially the Litany of Penitence. May I, and all who read those words this season, be open to God’s power to accomplish in us the work of his salvation.

– *Judy Lane*

Let your Spirit, O Lord, come into the midst of us to wash us with the pure water of repentance, and prepare us to be always a living sacrifice to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday, March 2, 2010

Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit.

[from Jeremiah 2:1-13]

What a twist. Jeremiah confronts me with the incomprehensible – I have abandoned our true God, for worthless idols. So anxious am I to control, to snuggle up to comfortable definitions of reality, to apparent truths, to the manufactured ethics or values of our time – that I turn my back on the truth of all truths. Worshiping my false gods – it is no wonder my happiness can be so fleeting, limited, shallow. On any given day my castle, built on sand, may be high and dry above the tide, or slipping away with the waves.

I know that I am lonely, lost, without my Father. I am empty without the comforting presence and true counsel of my Lord. Depression, torpor, a sense of spiritual hollowness can shape my days. In them I mourn the lack of color, beauty, joy, and confidence that accompanies His light and truth. He is the only source of true comfort, true peace.

If only the gap between us can be bridged! I reflect on what separates us. He says “Here I am.” Yet I hang back and await His coming for my redemption. What other god so loves his people?

–Ed Locke

O God, you willed to redeem us from all iniquity by your Son: Deliver us when we are tempted to regard sin without abhorrence, and let the virtue of his passion come between us and our mortal enemy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right and that in faithfulness you have humbled me. [from Psalm 119:73-96]

“**M**argaret, you are not captain of the world!” How many times have I heard my mom say this to me in my adult life? If I had a quarter for each time, I might not be rich, but I would have a big old jar of quarters! I have a tendency, a strong tendency, to try to control circumstances to make situations turn out the way they should . . . so that everyone is happy. The problem is that I have little control and I worry, worry, worry and end up making everyone miserable!

“My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word.” The peace that I find is through picking up my Bible and reading God’s word. It’s at times when I am at my wits’ end with worry about messing up my children’s lives, family’s relationships, husband’s career, etc. by making the wrong decisions that I realize my Bible may have a little dust on it. My mother reminds me that I am not captain, but my Father comforts me by assuring me that He is.

– *Maggie Murden*

O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven: Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, March 4, 2010

And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you.”

[from Mark 4:21-34]

How easy it is to do the opposite! Sometimes we seem to let the gospel message go in one ear and out the other without much thought or reflection; sometimes we over analyze, become skeptical, cynical listeners, not focusing on the intended meaning of the words. Is this how we become Doubting Thomases?

Mark is advising us to do the best we can with the resources we have been given in order to understand and follow Christ’s example in living our lives. If we fail to make the best use of the opportunities we have to broaden our understanding of Christ’s message, our rewards will consequently be diminished. Will we do our best to use our talents and to take advantage of the opportunities we have been given in order to learn as much as possible about the Gospels?

– *Patti and Rick Glassen*

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hands pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, March 5, 2010

Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

[from Mark 4:35-41]

Faith is a very familiar thing. We all have faith in our friends and our parents. We expect them to always be there for us when things go sour, we expect them to brighten our day, and if dangerous things happen, we expect them to protect us. The same principles apply in the faith we have in the Lord, so why is it that when the disciples were in the sinking boat with Jesus, they assumed the worst? Was it fear? Lack of faith? Or was it that Jesus was asleep, and they assumed he didn't know what was happening? Many times I feel that when I pray, Jesus may be asleep and doesn't hear what I'm saying, but of course that is not true. Just because Jesus was asleep didn't mean he'd forgotten about the disciples or the storm, and just because my prayers don't always get answered the second I pray them, doesn't mean Jesus has forgotten. We should all have faith that God knows what we're dealing with. God knows if you feel like your sinking in a ship and, soon enough, he'll calm the winds and settle the storm as long as you don't doubt that he's listening. Therefore, we must take the lessons from these disciples that this Man that the wind and waves listen to will never let you sink in a storm.

– *Thurman Elkins*
Grade 10

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, March 6, 2010

Make vows to the Lord your God, and perform them; let all who are around him bring gifts to the one who is awesome. [from Psalm 76]

Our initial vows to God are made when we are baptized and confirmed. We renew these vows, as individuals on a daily basis, as we strive to live our lives according to God's laws. On Sundays we reaffirm our vows by praying together and reciting the Nicene Creed with our St. John's family.

During Lent we make special "40-day" vows to God. Depending upon what we give up or take on, it can be a struggle or a joy to perform them for 40 days. We might celebrate the completion of these vows on Easter, or we might decide to incorporate them into our daily lives.

Whether daily or Lenten, these vows are gifts we bring to God. By making them, we honor Him. By performing them, we are brought closer to Him.

– The Goodman Family

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, March 7, 2010

Lent 3

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [from Romans 8:1-10]

In 2010 we live in a world where “flesh” – in the literal sense as well as the figurative – is something we are (overly) exposed to every day, in movies, in magazines, and on TV. In this passage Paul reminds us that “There is no condemnation in those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” If we only give ourselves up to Christ Jesus, we will allow Him to renew our spirit – Christians no longer live according to the flesh, under control of their sinful nature. Instead, with the Spirit living in them and empowering them, they will live in a way pleasing to God.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who strengthens us against the temptations that surround us. May we always live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to you. In the Name of your Son Jesus we pray. Amen.

– *David Tipple*

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Monday, March 8, 2010

Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”

[from Mark 5:21-43]

Jesus was traveling on the sea, and the multitude was following him; he was preaching, teaching, and healing people.

Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, fell to his feet and said, “My daughter is at the point of death,” and he asked Jesus to come to his house and lay his hand on her. Jesus said, “Who touched my garment?” “Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace and you are healed.” As they continued, they went to Jairus’ house; Jesus said, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”

I had an accident on my job. I had a concussion of the brain. My rector came to administer Holy Communion to my mother and me. I prayed and meditated daily in my quiet moments, asking God to help me to return to work. My neurologist sent me for an MRI. I was given therapy for 18 months and was fully paid by my job. I was on a vestry and attended a retreat at a Catholic monastery for a week. My rector and other members of the vestry drove me there.

With a humble heart, I trust God’s love to heal and help me see my world and the people in it with eyes of love and understanding.

– *Pat Adams*

Look upon the heart-felt desires of your humble servants, Almighty God, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

And do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

[from Genesis 45:1-15]

The older brothers tried to control their destiny by eliminating the favorite son. His faith and love of God took Joseph on many adventures in his life and brought him to receive and care for his family in love. The greatest destiny of all is to love and live with God.

We often let our pride lead us until God reminds us that our destiny is with Him. It can be a loss or dire illness that brings us back to His love and grace.

Dear Lord Jesus, lead us.

– *Sara Forrest*

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom you have given a fervent desire to pray, may, by your mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

[from Psalm 119:97-120]

The writer follows the Lord's law (Torah) and is filled with joy. God communicates and seeks relationships with us and He shows us how He wants us to live. By trusting Him we have hope. By the light of God's Word we can find "The Way." Sometimes that light is like a flashlight's small circle on a moonless night. By deciding to live with hope, I believe prayer and awareness will help us find the next circle of light as God leads us.

One summer while I assisted at the Summit Camp for children, I learned the words and motions to the song "Thy Word." I have many happy memories of that special week!

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

When I feel afraid, and think I've lost my way,

Still, You're there right beside me. Nothing will I fear

As long as You are near; please be near me to the end.

I will not forget your love for me and yet,

My heart forever is wandering. Jesus be my guide,

And hold me to Your side, and I will love you to the end.

From "Thy Word" (Michael W. Smith & Amy Grant), Psalm 119:105

– Jane Williams

Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Thursday, March 11, 2010

He had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. [from Mark 6:30-46]

Imagine! A flock of sheep with no shepherd. Think of the many directions they might take, or would they stay together in the safety of their flock? Would we stay together as a flock without our Shepherd? Without the leadership at St. John's – what would we do, where would we go? It is time to Regroup, to Reconnect, and to stay within our flock and develop our spiritual being with family and friends and our everlasting connection with Christ!

As I read my passage, the 12 disciples were not eager to feed the hungry, and Jesus told them to “go out and find food.” They returned with only five loaves of bread and two fish. As Jesus gave thanks, the disciples placed the loaves and fish before the crowd of thousands. There was so much food that scraps were left over. It made me recall my childhood, when no matter how difficult times were, my “Dear Mother” always had food for us. I’ve always wondered how she did this. Now, I believe I have that answer: she PRAYED, as Jesus did when he went to the mountain after dispersing the crowd.

It is now time for us to go to our mountain, our church, in prayer. Go with thanksgiving. Rejoice, Reinvest, and Re-Engage in the offerings of St. John's. It is a new year with a new “shepherd.” We have much to be thankful for.

Our journey is over . . . or has it just begun?

– *Susan Bramlett*

Keep watch over your Church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, March 12, 2010

Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. [from I Corinthians 9:16-27]

“**A**thletes exercise self-control in all things. . . .” Paul uses the metaphor of the athlete in training for an event to describe the focus and preparation that are needed to meet the challenges we face in doing God’s work. Perhaps the best models we have in the present day are our Olympic athletes, who strive to be the best by an unrelenting regimen of training, by trying and finding better ways to achieve the prize.

We conclude our worship service each Sunday by asking for the strength and courage to love and serve the Lord.

In his letter to the Church at Corinth Paul has added a dimension by saying that the responsibility for preparation is ours. Consider how difficult it seems to improve, how like the athlete we are challenged to change in order to get better. In verses 19-23, Paul describes how he changes his approach to proclaiming the Gospel to different audiences, in order to win them over and share in the Gospel’s blessings. We, like Paul, must be open and willing to finding ways to include new people into our church, if we are to become better at doing the work we have been given to do.

– *David Cash*

Grant us, O Lord our Strength, a true love of your holy Name; so that, trusting in your grace, we may fear no earthly evil, nor fix our hearts on earthly goods, but may rejoice in your full salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, March 13, 2010

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

[from Psalm 90]

Lent is a time of introspection and repentance. Psalm 90 pertains to humanity's repeated sins of destruction despite God's wrath toward us. God is reminding us that *He sees* our iniquities and our secret sins. We must remember that only God can forgive and know us completely.

This passage suggests that we ask for help in being cognizant of each day and of how tenuous our lives are. Having lost the majority of my immediate family and numerous dear friends before "their time," I am acutely aware of the brevity of our days here.

We are directed by God to repent. We are also advised to be aware of the gift of each day and make time to apply our hearts toward God's wisdom. We should be penitent, but simultaneously *seek* and *use* the wisdom God provides us – if and when we listen – to minister, serve, and understand our fellow human beings as we pass fleetingly through this life on earth. Since we cannot, literally, count our days, we must be perceptive enough to realize that each day could be our last and apply our gifts wisely to the glory of God.

– *Annie Dickinson*

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, March 14, 2010

Lent 4

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. [from John 6:27-40]

It seems to me that “the food that endures for eternal life” (spiritual food) and “the food that perishes” (hunger food) overlap sometimes.

Volunteers from St. John’s staff the Loaves and Fishes pantry at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church every fourth Thursday and fifth Wednesday. People who have been referred come by to pick up a week’s groceries to help them during hard times. Not long ago I was volunteering at the pantry. Packing those groceries and restocking the shelves using large heavy plastic containers provided me with a good physical workout. But being amongst those volunteers and those clients provided me with a good helping of spiritual food.

I believe that this is God’s work, and as we do it, God feeds us spiritually. As I look at the faces of the recipients, especially the children, and think of them having seven days of good meals for a change, this feeds me too. God feeds those receiving as well, both the food for eternal life and the food to satisfy their hunger.

At Loaves and Fishes we have both spiritual food and nurturing food. . . . I am grateful for the chance to partake.

– *Bob Hubbard*

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Monday, March 15, 2010

. . . And this is what their father said to them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing. [from Genesis 49:1-28]

Another translation of the passage above closes with the words: “giving each the blessing appropriate to him.”

What harsh blessings Jacob’s sons received – exactly what they deserved. Aren’t we glad that we don’t get blessings like this? What does this mean to us in Lent? Jacob is preparing for his death by blessing his sons, and giving each an honest opinion of his life and works. As we prepare for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, let us remember this blessing. Let us each take a personal look at our selves. How would we stack up in a “blessing appropriate to ourselves?”

Look at the difference between what we have and what we deserve. Thank the Risen Christ for what he did for us; thank him for bearing our sins, so that we can be blessed according to his love.

–John Patrick

O Lord our God, in your holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell for ever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!

[from Psalm 99]

God has done miracles and many great and awesome things, and we should praise His name and everything that the Lord does. The name of the Lord symbolizes His might and what He can do.

I praise the Lord in church, when I sing and pray, and just about anywhere. When you praise the Lord's name, you sometimes get something back or feel good inside. For example, when I go down to Kiawah Island, I feel God's presence when we fish in the saltwater lakes and river where there are big fish all around. When it is time to go, I take my final casts and pray before each one, and I usually get a really big fish!

God rejoices when you praise Him; it is what He wants. I think this verse talks about what we should do each day.

– *Spencer Youngblood*
Grade 7

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

And he cautioned them, saying, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.”
[from Mark 8:11-26]

The NIV translation says, “*Watch out* for the yeast . . . ,” which makes me think Jesus was imploring the disciples to pay attention, to not be blind to what was going to happen. When making bread, we put a very small amount of yeast into the mixture. The yeast creates change in the dough, and the bread grows. Put another way, the yeast influences the bread.

Jesus used the word “yeast” as a metaphor for the influence the Pharisees and Herod had on the people. Each had made wrong assumptions about Him earlier in Mark and He didn’t want the disciples to be falsely influenced by them. He was concerned that their rhetoric would fill the disciples’ heads and take them in a wrong direction.

This passage from Mark deals with sight – spiritual and physical. It’s sometimes easy to get caught up in someone’s excitement and passion only to find that the direction you’re being taken isn’t where you want to go; it isn’t where God wants you to go. You ask yourself, “Why didn’t I *see* this coming?” That act of “seeing” is both spiritual and physical. Did you see the signs along the way? Were you aware of the feelings of discomfort or doubt? Seeing with our eyes is the first stage of knowing Christ; seeing with our hearts continues the journey. Keeping our hearts and minds open to Him allows us to *see* Him, spiritually and physically.

– *Cathy Harrison*

O Lord our God, you sustained your ancient people in the wilderness with bread from heaven: Feed now your pilgrim flock with the food that endures to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, March 18, 2010

. . . . And made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They (the Egyptians) were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. [from Exodus 1:6-22]

The Israelites had faith and trusted God to keep his covenant to multiply their numbers and deliver them to the Promised Land despite all the hardships the Egyptians put them through. The Egyptians feared the Israelites and resorted to horrible means to crush their spirit and growth, even to the extent of killing the male babies.

My faith is not unlike that of the Israelites. I too have had hardships and loss, especially the loss of my husband, Fred. But, I have faith and trust that God is guiding my life and someday I will be in his kingdom in Heaven.

There are still fearful “Egyptians” persecuting Christians today. I pray that someday they may know Jesus and experience his love.

I almost always wear a cross, for two reasons. First, I am proud to be a Christian and I profess my faith openly. Secondly, it is an antidepressant. It reminds me that God so loved me that he sent his Son to be crucified for my sins: I am loved and forgiven. WOW! What a powerful love. I am truly blessed. My faith will continue to give me peace through any trials and tribulations just as it did the Israelites all those thousands of years ago.

– Judie Ratcliffe

Almighty and most merciful God, drive from us all weakness of body, mind, and spirit; that, being restored to wholeness, we may with free hearts become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, March 19, 2010

O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant in steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart. . . . [from 2 Chronicles 6:12-17]

Before our family sits down for a meal at home, we offer thanks to God and ask for His blessing for the food we are about to receive. Likewise when we are out to dinner, we also bow our heads and say the blessing before we eat. It is important for us to be mindful of God no matter where we are or what we are doing.

Being mindful of God can be a simple thing. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture like that of King Solomon. Solomon built a bronze platform and bowed down to worship and honor God in front of all of Israel. He prayed, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant in steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart. . . ." We can serve God in our daily lives by showing kindness to a stranger, helping someone in need, or even offering to pray with a friend. God will keep His promise to us when we are faithful to Him and only Him.

Solomon reminds us that if we love and subject ourselves to the Lord with all our hearts, God will reward our commitment, enrich our lives, and never forsake us. How amazing is our Lord!

– Rhett and Patrick Leake

O God, you have given us the Good News of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, March 20, 2010

For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

[from Psalm 33]

In previous verses of Psalm 33, God, having created the universe by his word, now admonishes us, the members of the universe, to praise Him.

I used to praise him by making things for St. John's, by helping to build homes for Habitat, by rehabilitating apartments for Jackson Park Ministries, and by making ramps for the handicapped. But now, with my impaired vision, I can no longer do these things. I have had to find another avenue for praise.

Therefore I have turned to prayer and meditation and have found how wonderful it is to talk with God and to praise Him, not through crafting with wood, but with words and thoughts. As the Psalm says, God is in command and He has a plan for each of us. I thank God that He accepts this new way of praising Him. Halleluia! Amen.

– *Fletcher Green*

Mercifully hear our prayers, O Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that those whose consciences are accused by sin may by your merciful pardon be absolved; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[from Romans 12:1-21]

A boy at summer camp received a box of cookies from his mother. He ate a few, then placed the box under his bed. The next day the cookies were gone. Later, a counselor who had been told of the theft saw a boy sitting behind a tree, eating the stolen cookies. He found the victim and said, “Bill, I know who stole your cookies. Will you help me teach him a lesson?” He replied, “Well, I guess, but aren’t you going to punish him?”

The counselor said, “Not directly, then he would hate you. I have a better idea; but you need to ask your mother to send more cookies.” The boy did so, and few days later, more cookies arrived. The counselor then said, “The boy who stole your cookies is by the lake. I suggest you go and share your cookies with him.” The boy protested, “But he stole the first ones from me!” “I know,” said the counselor. “See what happens.”

Later the boys came up the hill, the thief earnestly trying to get his new friend to accept his compass for the stolen cookies, the victim just as adamantly refusing, saying that a few cookies didn’t matter that much!

– *Morgan Stafford*
Grade 9

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, March 22, 2010

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.

[from Mark 9:30-41]

Throughout this passage Jesus continually preaches to his disciples about the importance of being humble and serving others. He sees that even when he describes the subsequent betrayal of the Son of Man, his being killed, and rising from the dead, they are more worried about their egos and who is the most powerful among themselves. Jesus then tells them that through him we are all children of God. He emphasizes the importance of loving and serving children and by doing so we are welcoming him and also honoring the Father who sent him. Jesus tells us, through his teachings in verse 41, that if you follow his word and commit to living your life through him, serving those who need love and guidance and those who truly are less fortunate, you will not lose the reward.

My wife Maria and I were actively searching for the meaning of all this back in 2003-04 (our Journey). Through a rash of deaths and funerals of family and friends, we had the opportunity to hear various clergy talk often about death and eternal life. It started making sense about the rewards Christ puts in front of us by serving him both in this world and in heaven. My wife was driving through the mountains when she was touched by the Holy Spirit, and I was attending St. John's with two of my gifts from God, McCallie and Davis. Praise to you, Lord Christ, and let the grace of God be with us forever.

– *Brooke Jones*

Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us. . . .

[from Psalm 123]

My life's journey has been full of trials and tribulations. The latest one, with my new blended family of five years, has been extremely trying. I have a wonderful husband and children, but blending families is full of challenges. This past year was extremely difficult; and right when I felt like things were getting better, BOOM!!!, here comes another challenge. When my mother was diagnosed with cancer this past fall, the juggling of my plates tipped over, and I knew I had to "let go and let God" do his work. I prayed and still pray for "Mercy on us."

To me, life will go on and keep throwing curve balls at me, but *God is there to wrap his arms around me and take the fear and pain away*. Every step of every day, every thought I think, I ask God, "Is this the right thing to do?" The proud and the arrogant, well . . . it is an everyday thing in a blended family. I teach my children and try to live my life with kindness, respect, and not be judgmental.

– *Donna Johnston*

Almighty God, through the incarnate Word you have caused us to be born anew of an imperishable and eternal seed: Look with compassion upon those who are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant that they may be built as living stones into a spiritual temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

[from Romans 5:12-21]

This passage tells us how we are all able to receive the grace of God through Jesus' death on the cross.

I suffer from an inherited disease that took control of my life as a young man. I was married and had a family, which was nearly destroyed by my actions. I had no control over anything in my life. There came a time when things were so bad, I had reached my "bottom." I was powerless and asked God to help me get my life back. Through his grace I was able to do that. Each and every day for well over thirty years I have gone to God to ask for his guidance and continued grace in my life. Through that grace I am the person I am today.

– *Bo Rochester*

Almighty God our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people. . . .

[from Psalm 85]

*H*ear, *God*, and *Peace* are the words that stand out to me in this Psalm. I think this Psalm is saying that it is through *hearing* God that you truly experience peace. And, in order to hear, you have to listen.

My story of hearing and listening to God comes from the day my daughter was placed in my arms. I had been in the adoption process for two long, emotional years. By the time I finally made it to the baby home in Siberia, I was beyond exhausted. I remember thinking, God's going to need to just kick in here and give me some sort of "sign" to let me know that everything is OK. (I guess I was too tired to listen or hear. I needed a thunderbolt or something.) When my daughter was placed in my arms, I got my "sign." It was this total warmth and calm that God's love brings. It was peace.

All I had to do was "let go and let God" and I was finally able to hear him speaking to me. And through hearing God came love and peace all wrapped up in a little pink blanket.

– Allison Frantz

O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, March 26, 2010

So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

[from Exodus 9:13-35]

“**S**o the heart . . . was hardened . . . [and he failed to do as he should], just as the Lord had spoken. . . .” is this day’s account of mankind’s plague. Even now, we willfully fail to act as we should as followers of Jesus Christ. As a result our judgmental acts injure friends, family, even fellow Christians.

Our best course is often to abandon the commands of the “self” within us. We have a marvelous ability to collect facts that can and should affect the living of our lives. However, our great shortcoming is to interpret the meaning of these facts by giving our own “spin” to the understanding of those facts – a spin that is generously leavened by our own jealousies, envy, spite, and other sins too numerous to count.

But our Lord has given us a map to find Home. He enjoined us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, body, and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The word “love” with all its beauty and symmetry, and laden with the meanings of a thousand songs, a million words of tribute, historic acts of self-sacrifice and denial, and finally a crucifixion and a rising, have writ large our chance, our possibilities for finishing the trip Home. It is none other than the love of Jesus Christ.

– *Jim Monteith*

O Lord, you relieve our necessity out of the abundance of your great riches: Grant that we may accept with joy the salvation you bestow, and manifest it to all the world by the quality of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Saturday, March 27, 2010

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

[from Mark 10:46-52]

Bartimaeus begged outside the city gates of Jericho. For what else is a blind man to do? He sat all day begging alms from the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. He had heard of Jesus the Nazarene and the miracles that he had been performing throughout the land. Some said that he was the long-awaited Messiah!

Jesus and his followers journeyed through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem and the Cross. When Bartimaeus heard Jesus passing by, he called to him, and even though the crowd tried to quiet him, he persisted. Jesus heard him, called Bartimaeus to him and asked,

“What do you want me to do for you?” Did Jesus know what Bartimaeus wanted and needed? Of course He did. But Bartimaeus had to ask.

“Rabbi, I want to see again.” Because of his faith, Jesus restored his sight, and he followed Jesus along the road.

What does Bartimaeus teach us? First, when we have the opportunity to encounter Jesus, we must not let anything stand in the way. Secondly, we must know what we want Jesus to do for us in our lives. Finally, and most important, we must follow Jesus on the road

– *John Rodgers*

O Lord, in your goodness you bestow abundant graces on your elect: Look with favor, we entreat you, upon those who in these Lenten days are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, March 28, 2010

Sunday of the Passion

Return to your stronghold, O prisoner of hope.

[from Zechariah 9:9-12]

Funny word, the word “Hope.” We are told as children to make wishes – to Hope for things. So Hoping comes naturally to most. When you think about it, people use the word “Hope” a lot. We use it directed at other people: “I hope someone helps them.” “I hope he feels the same way I do.” We use hope with ourselves: “I hope I get a raise.” “I hope they don’t find out about that.”

Often we use the word Hope because of want or fear. Both motivations are logical – we are human – we want things, we fear outcomes and consequences. But invoking the word Hope is a passive act, one that releases us in our minds from action or responsibility, as if we are powerless except for the ability to Hope. We build prisons for ourselves and others by simply Hoping things away.

As Christians we do not Hope for Christ’s coming again. We were not instructed to Hope, we were told to prepare!

That is the difference between a Promise and a Hope. If you made the choice to open the door to your prison of Hope, how would you see the world? If all your Hopes and Dreams stopped swirling around your head, would you see the Promise the Lord has made to you?

– *Eric Baldwin*

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Monday, March 29, 2010

Monday of Holy Week

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone.

[from Mark 11:12-25]

God's grace can transform a life into something beautiful. His workings within a soul are an overflowing display of love for each of His children. We ask continually for Him to work these changes because sanctification is a progressive process, but perhaps we never realize the task on our end that must be accepted, initiated, and finished. The task is forgiveness. Letting go of past feelings is one of the hardest human chores we must cope with, yet progression means forward movement. In essence, moving forward with God requires each of us to first forgive and then to give those feelings to God. In complete forgiveness, a sweet surrender to the Almighty is experienced. As our holy surrender is reaching throughout our lives, we learn to take comfort in God's control.

Being an empty and willing vessel for God is never an easy task. Giving God what He requires is our option, yet God has made us His priority. Such love from our Heavenly Father is freely given if we but ask, seek, and forgive. A lack of forgiveness in our spiritual lives is but a short walk to bitterness and a withered soul. A grave is simply a rut with both ends kicked out. Look to God, seek His will, and forgive without discretion.

— *Justin Rhymer*

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: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes."

[from 2 Corinthians 1:8-22]

In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul refers to the dependability of the promises of God. He tells of the great pressures under which he is living that are far beyond his ability to endure, and concludes that only in relying upon God may he be delivered from his perils. He observes that in Jesus Christ "every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' "

This passage certainly resonates with us today. Although we may not face the same deadly perils that threatened Paul, we do find ourselves living in a time of great distress – we suffer the devastating effects of natural disasters, of world-wide economic recession, and of living in a country that is deeply divided in its political and moral thoughts and beliefs. Who are we to rely upon but God?

But, may God rely on us? Paul contrasts the dependability of the promises of God with the fickle nature of humanity, who says both "Yes" and "No" in the same breath. Are we guilty of this? How often do we find ourselves saying "Yes" to God on Sunday, only to turn away and say "No" on Monday morning? During this Holy Week, let us commit ourselves to strive to be more dependable in our response to God. Let us strive to always say "Yes" to Him whose promises are always a "Yes" in Christ.

– *Mike and Amanda Simpson*

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Evening and morning and at noon, I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice. [from Psalm 55]

The words of Psalm 55:17, “Hear my crying, O God,” highlight human-kind’s general depravity, those harmful consequences from the contentious, perverse, and destructive forces in and around us as we live, work, and worship. Destructive forces are like those obscure forces of a once trusted, but now revealed as treacherous, friend who has betrayed us. Sometimes it’s with malice and forethought, sometimes it’s not. But it’s the gossip, the chastisement, back-stabbing, lies, cheating, theft, etc. that negatively trouble us. I could go on, but let’s just say, it’s *no-good* behavior. Nothing, “no-thing,” good is accomplished in that world. Those situations happen too often in our lives and they *really* hurt us! We get angry, hold resentments, get depressed, sad, sick, and death results, in some cases. BUT, there is hope and a way out . . . It’s our God! “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . .*” and “But I will call upon God, and the Lord will deliver me,” from Psalm 55, remind and direct us. He will hear our supplications *and* answer us. God renews our lives, offering love, peace, happiness, and fulfillment. Live in hope, love each other, and pray to God. He wants us to be happy and to succeed. *Everybody matters!*

–Nancy Armstrong

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday, April 1, 2010

Maundy Thursday

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

[from 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32]

Today we remember our Lord's last supper and His institution of the blessed Eucharist. For me, as for many, the Eucharist is a linchpin of our faith, where we are reminded of Christ's sacrifice for us, as well as His promise of new and unending life in Him. In today's passage, Saint Paul reminds us that to fully partake of the Sacrament, we must examine ourselves rightly; or like the loving Father He is, God will discipline us to set us back on a proper course. I don't think Saint Paul is suggesting that every time we are sick, it is because God is disciplining us. Rather, we have God's promise that despite our fallibility and humanity, He will not abandon us. He challenges us to ask ourselves at every Eucharist, "Are we truly loving our God with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our minds? Are we truly loving our neighbors as ourselves?" While I try to be open to hear God, I know God is trying to guide me more than I am willing to listen. I pray that we have open hearts, open minds, and open ears to respond to God's guiding hand.

– *Phillip Asby*

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Friday, April 2, 2010

Good Friday

Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward."
[from John 13:36-38]

One sense that we both have had, and probably every Christian has had, has been that sense of being totally alone on Good Friday, because our Lord has been taken from us. It is our personal grief that we are experiencing. Rather than thinking that he has been taken from us, we could think that it is a gift to us, freely given only through his death.

When we looked at what Jesus said to Peter, it spoke to us in different ways. First, Jesus might be saying to us, "I will be going to heaven to be with my Father, and eventually you will be there too." We also considered interpreting Jesus' words to mean, "I will be martyred now and you too shall follow me in that martyrdom," this being said specifically to Peter. However, perhaps Jesus is actually saying to Peter, and to us, "You can't go now, because there is still work for you to do here."

Part of our Lenten journey might be to reflect and determine what that work might be for each of us. And for each of us it will be different.

– *Kathy and Chip Carter*

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, April 3, 2010

Holy Saturday

Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

[from Hebrews 4:1-16]

In this passage the author of Hebrews calls us to enter God's rest through faith in his Son Jesus, the Christ. The Old Testament references *rest* from work and *rest* from enemies (after the Israelites entered the Promised Land); but this passage speaks of a new kind of rest: salvation rest that comes only to believers. Salvation rest is available to us not only in the hereafter, but today – as relief from the weight of sin and the stresses of anxiety.

God calls us to hear his voice – today – and to open our hearts to him, to believe. If we harden our hearts to God's voice, we are sinners and will surely risk forfeiting God's rest. We find God's rest by giving ourselves over to God's resources and giving up our own; we enter God's rest by living in faith.

We are called to hear and believe God's voice today and receive everlasting rest that begins today and is perfected in eternity.

– Nancy and Reid Joyner

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, April 4, 2010

Easter Day

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?
[from Luke 24:13-35]

The answer is that they do not know. The freshly resurrected Savior of the world is walking the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus – a walk of about seven miles. Along the way He strikes up conversation with people who have been in Jerusalem but who do not know about the events surrounding His arrest, execution, and resurrection. One is struck by the observation that clearly not everybody in Jerusalem was caught up in the events that would eventually reshape the world. Just as then, today the great plan of God is unfolding, and sadly, many in the world neither see nor participate in it.

There is no belief without the sharing of the story. The activity in which Jesus engaged for that seven-mile journey was to tell His life story. It seems to be, given the extraordinary events of the last few days, a rather matter-of-fact account of His life – although he tells it in the third person. One supposes Jesus did this because to simply tell of the events of the past three days is to begin in the middle of the story. A great deal came before and there is more yet to come.

The answer to the rhetorical question Jesus poses about Himself is: Yes, Jesus *did* have to suffer and die. He did have to have that human experience; for to experience less of the human condition is to be less human. To observe the life and ministry of Christ is to observe both the energy with which He experienced human pain and suffering and His divine impulse to respond to it.

Jesus suffers as humans do so that no human will ever have to suffer alone again. Jesus is risen from the dead so that we all, in Him, might also rise.

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

– *The Reverend Father Paul Winton*

Lenten Services and Activities

*We invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church,
to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance;
by prayer, fasting, and self-denial;
and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.*

As we move with Christ toward the cross and on to the resurrection, every parishioner, newcomer, and visitor to St. John's is invited to live into a Holy Lent, nourished by the sacraments of the Church, meditation on God's Holy Word, and self-examination.

All services are in the church nave or side chapel unless otherwise noted. Services marked with an asterisk * have child care for four-year-olds and under available in the Crib Room on the first floor.

Tuesday, February 16 – Shrove Tuesday

Pancake Supper 5:00 – 6:30 PM *Parish Hall*

Wednesday, February 17 – Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday Liturgy, Imposition of Ashes and Holy Eucharist
7:00 AM • 12:00 noon • 6:00 PM *

A light supper in the Parish Hall will follow the 6 o'clock service

Weekday Holy Eucharist Services, February 22 – March 26

Monday 6:40 AM
Tuesday 12:00 noon
Wednesday 6:00 AM • 10:30 AM • 6:00 PM
Thursday 4:45 PM
Friday 6:40 AM

Thursday afternoons, February 25 – March 25

Clergy Drop-By Office Hours 5:00 – 7:30 PM *Church offices*

Holy Week Services and Activities

Palm Sunday, March 28 – Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday Liturgy	7:30 AM	
Palm Sunday Liturgy, Traditional	8:45 AM *	
Palm Sunday Liturgy, Contemporary	8:45 AM *	<i>Parish Hall</i>
Palm Sunday Liturgy	11:15 AM *	

Monday, March 29, Holy Eucharist 7:00 AM • 6:00 PM

Tuesday, March 30, Holy Eucharist 7:00 AM • 6:00 PM

Wednesday, March 31, Holy Eucharist 7:00 AM • 6:00 PM

Maundy Thursday, April 1

Maundy Thursday Eucharist	7:00 AM	
Agape Meal & Foot-Washing	6:30 PM	<i>Parish Hall</i>
Maundy Thursday Liturgy, Stripping, Cleansing of Altar	7:30 PM *	
Prayers and Watching through the night	9:00 PM – 7:00 AM	<i>Chapel</i>

Good Friday, April 2

Good Friday Liturgy	7:00 AM
Stations of the Cross and Holy Eucharist	12:00 noon
7 Meditations by the Rector	1:00 – 3:00 PM
Good Friday Liturgy	7:30 PM *

Holy Saturday, April 3

Holy Saturday Liturgy	10:00 AM *	
<i>Especially for families with small children</i>		
Lunch, Easter Story, Egg Hunt	11:00 AM	<i>Parish Hall</i>
The Great Vigil & Holy Baptism	8:00 PM *	
Champagne Reception		<i>Parish Hall</i>

Easter Day, April 4

Sunrise Service	6:30 AM	<i>Memorial Garden</i>
Easter Day Service, Rite I	7:30 AM	
Easter Day Service, Rite II	8:45 AM *	
Easter Day Service, Contemporary	8:45 AM *	<i>Parish Hall</i>
Easter Day Service, Rite II	11:15 AM *	