

*Daily Reflections
For Lent
2009*

*By the people of
Saint Elizabeth's
Sudbury, MA*

Introduction:

Welcome to this year's collection of readings and reflections for Lent. As a parish we are truly blessed to have so many willing writers who take the time to share some of their faith journey with all of us. We will never fully understand or know the mind of God; that is the mystery of our faith, but collectively, as a church and a community, we can enable each other to see God in our lives more clearly. Young or old, each writer brings a unique perspective, a thought or an insight that helps us catch a glimpse of the Holy.

Proper Collects, Lessons and Psalms in this year's reading collection are based on *The Proper for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, 4th Edition, The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York, New York, 1988, pp20-53. You will notice that there are no readings or reflections for the Sundays during Lent. This is because, in calculating the forty days of Lent, Sundays are not counted.

Some background on the evolution of our tradition of Lent can help us understand why we do what we do today. Why fasting? Why this idea of giving up something we especially like or care about such as TV, sweets, wine or favorite foods? Our Lenten tradition has evolved and changed over time. Starting in the 2nd century it was tradition to fast on Friday and/or Saturday before Easter. It was a total fast, from food and drink. This tradition points to the passage in Mark 2:20, "But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast in those days."

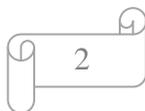
By mid 3rd century this Pascal fast had been extended and ran from the Monday before Easter to Thursday. The original fast followed. People varied as to how they participated in the fast; with some it was a total fast while others observed different degrees of abstinence. While people participated in the week of fasting differently, there was a common theme among all, of waiting in anticipation for the joy of Easter and the mystery of the resurrection. In these early traditions we can look back and see the idea of Holy Week beginning to emerge.

In the writings from the Council of Nicaea (325AD) there is a reference to the "40 day fast' before Easter. During the forty days, those who wished to become newly baptized into the church went through their final training and preparation. To be baptized on Easter morning was exciting for those who had studied and waited. By the 4th century all members of the church were encouraged to prepare for Easter, along with those seeking the sacrament of baptism, during the forty days. As we understand it today, the forty days, includes Holy Week, and calls on all of us to make ready for Easter. To prepare the way of the Lord!

This year you will note that more of our community has been asked and have offered their own contributions to this book. In addition to our adults, our youth at many levels in the parish have shared their reflection of scripture. Members of YAC, J2A, Rite 13 and Level 3 COGS have each written reflections as well as a number of moms and dads who sat with their children to talk about God in their lives and share with us what they heard. And why not, as they too have been received into the household of God through baptism!

Jay Holdman
Editor/Lenten Reflections, St. Elizabeth's Church

The Cover: Photographed by Ian Dicker, the Sudbury River at Sherman's Bridge.
The Cover design is by John Howard.



Psalm 103

Lesson

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 2

Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Here we stand on the threshold of yet another Lent. How will we step over that threshold and enter into Lent this year? Will we enter into Lent this year? Will we hug the margins, satisfy ourselves with a few pietistic palliatives and call it good? Or will we allow ourselves to enter into that terrifying, wonderful, and holy place wherein the cleansing, renewing, redemptive Spirit of God dwells? Will we allow ourselves to be drawn into the heart of God?

We greet Lent differently from one year to the next. Some years are marked by relief and hope. Some years, resentment. Some years, anxiety. Some years, boredom. Some years, disinterest. Regardless of how we each feel going into Lent, we welcome it even as we dread it. While the whole notion of discipline makes our inner adolescent bristle, we are often grateful for this traditional time to pare down, step back, open up.

Every year we are called again to this time of devotion and renewal. Launched into this penitential season by the Ash Wednesday liturgy we are called to take up a laundry list of observances: self-examination and repentance; prayer, fasting and self-denial; reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. Observances which may draw us into the heart of God. Observances which can as well serve as barriers to God. What a slippery slope this business of penitence can be.

When is self-examination seeking God's truth about oneself and not engaging in self-conscious, narcissistic naval gazing?

When is repentance turning to God and not engaging in sentimental self-flagellation?

When is prayer listening for God and not talking at God?

When is fasting sharing one's bread with the hungry and not simply delaying a meal?

When is self-denial clearing a space for God and not puffing up one's pride about doing without?

When is reading and meditating on God's holy Word an appropriation of God's love for us and not a rote exercise?

A slippery slope indeed. And even the arguments about what is and what is not truly penitential can distract us from the invitation at hand. Lent invites us to enter into the heart of God. Lent invites us to surrender ourselves to the love of God. Lent invites us to quit our ceaseless circling over the target and to land finally smack dab in the lap of God—the God who by the cross and resurrection of Christ has already done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. All we have to do is to accept the gift. All we have to do is to let go and come to God in all our empty-handedness. All we have to do is to relinquish our pride and come to God in all our spiritual ineptitude. All we have to do is to come to God, to love and be loved.

Every year we are called again to this time of repentance and renewal. Every year we discover that our prayer is not as much a duty to God as it is a gift from God. And every year at some point after Easter Day, we drift back to an overcrowded schedule, praying on the fly if we pray at all. So it is that every Ash Wednesday we return, ashamed of the lapsed discipline, ashamed of the lifestyle that neglects to acknowledge our all too human limitations and God's unimpeachable sovereignty, ashamed of the derailed journey into God's Truth that God invites us to make.

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning; rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relents from punishing (Joel 2:12-13).

So the experience of Lent is bittersweet. Mixed in with the bitter fear and the shame is sweet relief and hope; relief that again and again we can return to God and again and again God will welcome us; hope that as we return we will embrace God as fully as God embraces us; relief that we can be human, be creature, be sinner and rest assured that God is God, Creator and Redeemer; hope that we will grow to more fully trust in the love and mercy of God.

God invites us to return and allow ourselves to be loved. God invites us to surrender and allow ourselves to be drawn into the heart of God. God invites us to allow ourselves to relax into the love of God and rejoice that we are saved. May the Spirit who draws us into the heart of God, give us the courage, the will, and the grace to accept the invitation and surrender to the One who loves us more than we can ask or imagine.

The Rev. Barbara Williamson
Rector, St Elizabeth's Church

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

February 26, 2009

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.*

Psalm

Lessons

1

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Luke 9:18-25

The readings for today each describe two contrasting ways of life from which we can choose. Psalm 1 says we can delight in the law of the Lord or follow the counsel of the wicked. In Deuteronomy, we are promised long life and land for us and for our descendants if we follow in His ways, while we will certainly perish if we choose to serve other gods. In Luke's account, Jesus tell us to deny ourselves and take up our crosses each day to follow Him; if we lose our lives to him, we will save ourselves. If we save our lives, however, we will lose them.

I wonder often how to apply lessons like these to our daily lives in the 21st century. How far shall we go to “deny ourselves” and “take up our crosses” to follow Him? How do we balance the demands of our work and families with time and attention to those less fortunate than we are?

We devote time to working diligently at our jobs so that we can provide for our families – this seems like the responsible approach in life. Yet, where is the line between being responsible and going so far as to pursue wealth as if it is another god? Shall we intentionally do less than our very best at work in order to focus more on family and on community members in need? In order to “lose our lives” do we have to go so far as to forego wealth and pleasures to spend 100% of our time focused on those less fortunate than we are - until we are all living the life of Mother Theresa? Surely there is some holy value in providing for our families so that we aren’t living in the poverty ourselves.

Lord, please help us recognize what is responsible in your eyes; help us make choices in our daily lives that serve your people well; and help us to balance our work for prosperity with our kindness and love for others.

Samantha Truex
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Friday after Ash Wednesday

February 27, 2009

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.

**Psalm
51:1-10**

**Lessons
Isaiah 58:1-9a
Matthew 9:10-17**

Questions to myself in this Season of Lent...

I was trying to navigate through the commercial center of Watertown when the traffic came to a complete stop. I became irritated and annoyed after sitting idle for 2 minutes, and then angry after ten minutes of going nowhere even though I was under no time pressure to get anywhere soon.

The cause for the traffic tie-up became clear when a hearse drove pass me going in the opposite direction. Apparently a funeral procession was being given the right of way by police officers as it came off a side street; it had to cross my lane in order to turn left. As the hearse passed, I could see that the coffin was draped with an American Flag.

I waited for quite awhile behind cars that were stopped in front of me as a long procession of vehicles passed my driver’s side window in solemn pursuit of the hearse. I

felt a little sadness for the people who had lost someone dear to them and a bit guilty for being impatient and irritated with the traffic delay.

Once the funeral procession had passed the cars in front of me began to move ahead, giving me a clear view of the fifty or so fireman in crisp dress blues and the ten or so Bagpipers in traditional kilts milling around in front of the Watertown Fire Station. The hearse, apparently, was carrying one of their comrades.

As I drove passed the fire station I was flooded with the memory of another firefighter's funeral procession that I had witnessed firsthand. I was flooded also with the questions that the event had at that time inspired me to ask myself.

Some years ago I had a long-term consulting contract with a paper mill in rural New York State. I would travel there every four-to-six weeks and spend 2-3 days working with various supervisors and managers on their leadership skill and managerial practices. One fellow I worked with had started at the mill when he was 17 and by his mid-forties had worked his way up to dayshift supervisor for three 8-man machine crews. He was earnest and honorable in the way that he did his job and was well regarded by mill workers despite the prevailing climate of mistrust for those in management.

We got to know each other rather well through our many conversations and coaching sessions. In addition to being a shift supervisor at the paper mill, he was also a volunteer firefighter.

I had only just been to the mill the week before when the Mill Manager called to tell me that this fellow had perished in a fire. He had apparently responded to a fire call, entered a burning building, and died when the building unexpectedly collapsed on him.

I drove the six hours out to the mill to attend his funeral. Firefighters from as far away as Indiana and North Carolina had come to march in the procession and pay tribute to their comrade. I was intensely moved by the sense of 'family' that existed among those who were, in a social sense, strangers to each other. And while there were many firefighters attending the funeral who did not personally know this fellow, their grief, sorrow, and sense of loss were real.

I met for the first time this fellow's wife, his young adult son, and his brother as I exited the service. They knew immediately who I was. Apparently, this fellow had mentioned me to them over the course of my coaching work with him. They hugged me as if I was 'family' and asked if I would please walk in the procession behind the family with a small group of people who were "important" to this fellow during his life.

I was intensely humbled by this request and filled with an indescribable sorrow as I took my place with five 'strangers' several yards behind the family.

It was a walking procession from the church to the cemetery. The casket was pulled by an antique horse-drawn fire wagon followed by a troupe of bagpipers and a brigade of firefighters in their dress blues.

The sounds of the bagpipes, the clapping of the horse hooves, and the intense emotionality of the circumstance combined to create an indelible imprint in my library of memories.

I drove the six hours home alone in silence but with a cacophony of feelings, thoughts, and emotions ringing my senses. Stripped of my capacities to avoid or control them, I spent those six hours immersed in a chaotic sadness that drew me to reflect on my own pretenses, affectations, and self-deceptions.

My six-hour sojourn into the 'desert' brought to me several questions that I choose to ask myself every now and then as if they were compass points pointing the 'way'. The readings associated with my assigned day of reflection bring them back into view. They are:

Am I gracious in the way that I handle others' disinterest, ineptitude, or misbehavior?
Am I patient when the interests or needs of others supersede my own pursuits?
Am I forgiving when others fail to live up to my wants or expectations?
Am I humble when my efforts lead to a desired outcome?
Do I allow, even encourage, interests and goals that are inconsistent with my own?
Do I properly convey respect for things that are important to others even when they are not important to me?
Do I listen and share rather than tell or direct when speaking with others?
Do I enable people in their pursuits, rather than hinder or selfishly direct them?

John Stevens
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

February 28, 2009

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm

86:1-11

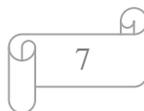
Lessons

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Luke 5:27-32

Faith and Acceptance

God accepts everyone!



The readings for today have a common theme of faith and acceptance. The Isaiah reading calls on us to stop pointing at the oppressed and start helping them. If we help them, we can have faith that God will guide us, support and nourish us. God will full us with the power to continue – like an unending stream of water. The analogy of water is good because water always wants to move. God’s love is unending and faithful.

The psalm for today equates faithfulness with trust. Have faith in God and you can trust he is always listening to you. The writer, David, asks God to answer him because he is poor and needy. In God’s eyes, we are all poor. In this writing, David systematically switches from first to third person saying how he is faithful and how he, as a servant, trusts in God. The most compelling verses are:

⁴ Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you.

⁵ You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.

⁶ Hear my prayer, LORD; listen to my cry for mercy.

⁷ When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus eats with sinners while those who think they are righteous ask ‘Why?’ Jesus seeks out those who have sinned to bring them back to the flock. His answer to the righteous is that everyone is important no matter what others think or say. We have all sinned and we need to accept that. This passage compliments the reading in Isaiah which tells us to stop pointing at the oppressed and start helping. Since we have all sinned and need Jesus’ help, Jesus invites us to turn to him for support. Isaiah tells us that we will have continued support if we help others and Luke tells us that Jesus seeks out the most needy.

Going into Lent, I encourage you to think about how you have thought about the oppressed and how you can start helping them, in any way possible. You may decide you can share your money with an organization who directly helps the oppressed. You may decide you can give to the local food pantry. You may decide to reach out to a stranger and just say Hi. You may think of other ways to help the oppressed. God will support you in your efforts. God accepts everyone, no matter what they have or will do.

Respectfully submitted by Mara Huston
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church



Monday in the First Week of Lent

March 2, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
19:7-14**

**Lessons
Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18
Matthew 25:31-46**

What is God calling us to do or to be, as a community? What is God calling me to do or to be, as an individual? These are difficult, persistent questions. Sometimes we find glimpses of insight from deep thought or meditation; other times it is the comment from someone else that sheds some light. Even the juxtaposition of unrelated thoughts, ideas, or words can combine to create deep meaning.

The scientist Louis Pasteur once said that “Chance favors the prepared mind.” Similarly, I think we best hear the call from God when we are prepared to hear it. Few of us receive the dramatic call that Paul found on the road to Damascus. Rather, the voice of God is often heard quietly in stillness, or felt as a gentle tug. The voice may be calling us to do something we think we don’t want to do, that we think isn’t right for us. It may lead somewhere entirely new. But to hear the voice at all, we must sometimes be quiet. For many of us, this is an enormous challenge---the world today is full of noise that can easily grab our attention. Being quiet and still takes effort, but that time is when we can best hear.

Of course, if you’re reading this, you are already taking some time to be still. Keep at it.

Winn Treese
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent

March 3, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
34:15-22**

**Lessons
Isaiah 55:6-11
Matthew 6:7-15**

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.”

I came home that day, and found my father, all 6 feet 2 inches of him, on his hands and knees in an alphabet-padded, penned-in play area with our 11 month old. They were sort

of barking at each other. “HA!” Grandpa would bark. “HA!” the baby gleefully barked back.

He drove away, window rolled down, arm out in a wave. My thoughts were a million places. Would the babysitter call in sick again tomorrow? Had Grandpa changed the diaper? (uh- no.) Wondering about the new life inside of me, whether it was going to be a life – or not. My main thought about my dad right then was a self-centered one. Should I have told him? No. It may not be viable, the dr. had said. And we know Dad can’t keep a secret. So I kept this news to myself. There’d be plenty of time to tell him. The next morning I was nervous as I drove to the big Boston hospital for my ultrasound. I prayed for this baby, for a heartbeat. *Please*. And then, there it was: the most beautiful thing you can see on a computer screen – the blinka-blinka-blink of a brand new life! I called my husband: “we have a heartbeat!” I was over the moon with happiness. We were having another baby!

My elation was short-lived and quickly forgotten when two hours later my brother called me on my cell phone: *Dad is dead*.

When you hear words like those, a funny thing happens. Your brain seems to step in and slow it all down, protecting you from the shock, buffering it, blocking it out, just for a moment, until you can comprehend it without keeling over. You become momentarily deaf, and it has to be repeated to you and each time you say, “what?” “WHAT!?”

Seven years later, I’m still working to accept that moment. You do accept the loss as your reality, ultimately - that this person who was part of your life just ...exists no longer. At some point, you stop expecting them to show up to the holiday dinner or call on the phone. Death comes to all, and it’s certainly not a unique experience. In fact, you begin to realize that the *I’ve-lost-a-parent* club is large and well populated. You move on.

Like everyone else.

But sometimes I get stuck on the meanness of it. The abruptness of it. On the fact that my father was only 61. On losing all that future with him, in the blink of an eye. It’s always hard to lose someone close. But the way it was, sudden like that, out of the blue, no warnings, no good-byes. It was like being kicked. Really, really hard.

My thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are not your ways.

No, sir. I guess they aren’t. My thoughts didn’t go there. I was not thinking...as I waved good-bye: HEY, this might be the last time I’ll see my father alive.

And your “ways?” A man goes to bed and doesn’t wake up? Leaves 5 children and 11 grandchildren? Did you not *see* that ten year old grandson sobbing? Did you not *see* my sister’s tears? Did you not *see* my brother, a grown man, crying as he gave the eulogy? Lord, did you not hear our cries? Did you not see our suffering? *Where were you?*

Your ways? Give me a break. *This way* was not right. It was...harsh. We deserved better.

I consider Jesus. Jesus had this moment, as well: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* I wonder about suffering, in general. There was the tsunami. There it was, on television, surreal. How many again? An unthinkable number, with relatives all living the same - no, worse - pain as I had experienced...for no reason. Random event. Here one minute, gone the next. It’s hard to fathom. *His ways are not our ways.*

Jesus died and suffered for our sins. I get that. There was...a plan, a reason, a sacrifice. I can’t quite get my head around why my father had to die in his bed alone, though. His death and my family’s suffering served no purpose. Likewise I cannot grasp the tsunami, the childhood cancers, 9-11, and other senseless wrongs in the world. Why? I spend a

lot of time in that first year or two, staring at people. It's not unkind, really, more...curious: *Why are you alive, and my father dead? Is there something that makes you special? Something you did? Or didn't do?* I study intently but of course, there is no logic. No satisfying answers appear.

We have just passed the seven year mark. With time, different reflections begin to emerge, from the dulled anguish. We do not know all the mysteries of God. How can we? Would we really want to?

Lost in the fog of grief are the words of the minister at his funeral. Did she preach on this? I don't remember. It wouldn't have mattered. But in this passage we are given some clues. We read that there is nothing He does that is without purpose: *"...my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

Those purposes – “God's will” – may be hard or even impossible for us to discern. In the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, author Rabbi Kushner puts forth a somewhat controversial view of suffering and God. He purports that there are random events, things that happen for no reason, or things that God can't control or stop. Wow. That's quite a thesis and I'm not sure I can ascribe to it. *Don't blame God! After all, it's not his fault!* Sorry, hard to buy that one. If God is omnipotent and all-knowing, it's hard to reconcile that he can't control things like car crashes, or heart attacks. But then how do we reconcile those “bad things” with our loving God? It is quite a quandary. I'm not as ready as Kushner to let God off the hook.

One place I can agree with Kushner is in his urging moving past the “why me?” stage of suffering, and on to the “how can I make the best of this bad thing” stage. Find the purpose in your suffering. Find the healing. Find the peace. Or if you can't...let it find you.

I often try and guess what my dad would have to say, about this event, or that. Sometimes I even wonder what his take would be on his own passing, and its effect on our family. I think he would make a few jokes (he had a very wry sense of humor, something I really miss), but then he would ask me: well, did you learn anything? There have been lessons, and healing, and good things. I live my life more fully now, more in the moment, with more gratitude and taking less for granted. My priorities are more sharply focused, and I avoid squandering time. It's not a bad lesson, one I probably needed to learn.

Suffering and pain can bind families together. My brothers and sisters and I lived through *that*; now, we can now face anything, together, with love. Our mettle has been tested. Our Father in heaven and our father on earth should both be proud: we did not break, in fact, we are stronger. I am grateful for this bond we share. I suspect we shall need it in the future.

The same God that let my Dad's heart stop beating also gave me that blinka-blinka baby. Indeed, it was the child kicking in my belly that months later roused me out of my grief and depression. Was this child sent, in part, to comfort me? I don't know. But comfort he did, and my six year old “blessing” give us joy, every day.

Finally – and I'll admit - this one took a while: I've learned to respect the sovereignty of God. This is a hard, hard thing. Many of us like to cruise through our lives with this illusion of control. We “manage” and we “plan” and seek to “master” all aspects of our lives. It's a lovely fantasy, but at some point it comes to a screeching halt when we come

to some life-shattering event, something that rocks us to our core and makes us tremble in fear and pain before the awesome power that is God's alone.

I'd still like to have that day back, that final good-bye. I miss my dad, every day. But in the end – and now I know exactly what my dad would say – “*it is what it is.*” My path. As God has laid it out for me. Every joy-filled and tear-stained moment of it. Written especially for me, with thought and yes, with great love. I respect it. I accept it. Humbly, I seek it. Even as I know that I will never, ever fully comprehend it.

Dedicated to the memory of John J. Murphy, Jr. 1940-2002
Darlene Murphy
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

March 4, 2009

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.

Psalm

51:11-18

Lessons

Jonah 3:1-10

Luke 11:29-32

Thoughts about the story of Jonah, by brothers, Karl and Derek V., and their Mom
From Karl, (almost) age 8:

This story is about when this guy named Jonah disobeys God, and gets punished with a storm. But then God forgives him, and gives him another try. But later, Jonah gets angry because the Ninevites get forgiven by God. This makes him angry because he hates the Ninevites, and he thinks they don't deserve God's forgiveness.

Then, he goes and sits and waits, and he is feeling angry at God. And maybe he is feeling jealous. God gives him a tree for shade and then takes it away. Jonah gets even more angry. God gets angry with Jonah.

It wasn't right for Jonah to be angry, because he got forgiven, too. But I can understand why Jonah might be angry because he thought the Ninevites got more than he did, and he also hated them, and he felt that they were getting something that he didn't get.

God put the vine there, to see if Jonah would be grateful or if his anger would make him not be grateful. Jonah didn't care for or grow the vine, so why should Jonah think it's his to keep?

From Derek, age 6:

Mom asks: Why was Jonah angry?

Because the other people didn't get punished and Jonah did get punished.

Mom: Can you imagine how Jonah felt?

Inside the whale, Jonah was praying. He felt bad and sorry and asked God to help him.

When God decides not to punish the other guys, Jonah feels angry. He doesn't think it's right and it's not fair! The other day when Karl got candy and I didn't, or when I sat in

the snow and he just played in the snow and the babysitter said Karl can get candy but not me, and I don't know why. That made me feel angry and like it wasn't fair. It felt a little like Jonah.

Mom: What does this tell us about God?

God is only kind-of fair. God will forgive you if you say sorry.

Mom's thoughts:

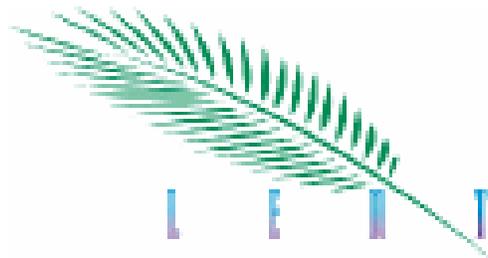
The story of Jonah, as we read it in three different children's bibles, hits home. My sons are only 19 months apart – they best pals, but are also in a constant state of sibling rivalry, endlessly comparing the rewards and punishments of the other brother against the merits or bad acts that precipitated them. They rail at the slightest whiff of inequity. They related quite easily to Jonah's anger.

It drives me nuts, and as a parent, you get sucked into that business of always trying to be "fair." If fair means do X, and Y will happen, no matter who you are or what the circumstances are, that would seem an easy rubric to follow. Rules, actions, consequences. Crime, punishment. It all makes sense, and sounds good on paper. But any loving parent knows that it doesn't always work that way. And likewise, only God, our loving parent, can decide what's truly best for us. Maybe we need a big "time-out" like Jonah did. Or perhaps our contrition is so deep that we need most is simple love and forgiveness.

As a parent to more than one child, it is a tightrope to be walked each day. What earns the reward? What merits punishment? Who has been admonished enough lately and needs praise instead? Who needs some structure? And who needs a hug?

Like a parent, God, too, must know and decide what is best for us. He decides when we need a kick in the pants, or when we need to get a little break. He may not always seem fair – definitely not – but there is something better: he is loving, forgiving and not necessarily fair, but just. Like our kids, we may not always feel we get what we deserve. That's because we are applying the very human yardstick of "fairness." Faith sometimes means accepting that we – and others – are getting not what we deserve, but what God knows we need.

Karl, Derek, and their Mom Darlene Murphy
Members, St. Elizabeth's Church



Thursday in the First Week of Lent

March 5, 2009

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.*

Psalm

Lessons

138

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

Matthew 7:7-12

Our gospel reading today is the one that begins:

Ask, and it will be given to you;
Search, and you will find;
Knock, and the door will be opened for you.

Ask

T. S. Elliot in “Little Gidding from Four Quartets” wrote:

“You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel.”

We are here to kneel and ask.

We ask

because we don't know.

And not knowing is uncomfortable, or worse.

I was struck when I read in a recent issue of “Weavings” of the (no longer) private searching that Mother Teresa did much of her life. Outwardly she was one of the clearest beacons of God's light. All the while, inwardly she struggled to experience God's presence. She apparently asked continuously until she died.

Esther, in a time of dire need, throws off her queenly trappings, and begs God to help her. ‘Help me, a desolate woman, I have no helper but thee.’

We too may be swamped
with pain, or desperation, or fear,
or distracted with the things in daily life we pretend to control.

There is another very similar gospel, Luke 11:13, that says “how much more will your Father in heaven give the *Holy Spirit* to those who seek him!”

And in this especially beautiful Psalm, the Psalmist wrote
“On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my *strength of soul.*”
We should ask for the Spirit.

Open

Openness seems to be a thread here too. When we truly ask, we are open to new ideas. When we search, we are open to finding something new. And when we knock, we hope that a door will open.

Can the Holy Spirit help to open our eyes and hearts?

In Charles Foster's book on teen parent breakthroughs, the main premise is "All your words and actions must serve only to build your relationship. Everything else (all that we worry about as parents) follows."

But there's another step, isn't there? What if we don't like what we get? Foster's technique works, but it hinges on *accepting* your teen as a person with his own life path, his choices. We have to learn to let go.

Accept

Could it be the same with God?

Should we focus on our relationship with the Lord, and let everything else flow from that?

Is it possible to let go of the way we want it to be?

Can the Holy Spirit help us to accept?

And finally, at the end of the gospel is the Golden Rule:

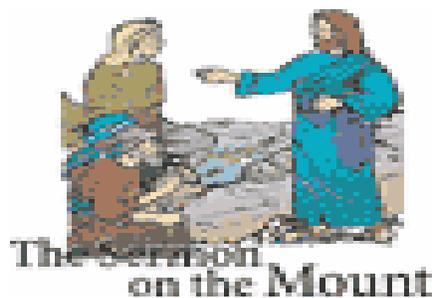
"In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you."

A similar teaching is found in every religion. Sounds simple, but even this is challenging for me.

Maybe asking for the Spirit can open our hearts, our eyes, and our hands, so we can accept God's plan and our role as the delivery system for the universal God's desire.

Lord, open my eyes and heart to you. Help me to accept and mirror your love in all its surprising forms.

With thanks, Kris Wile
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Friday in the First Week of Lent

March 6, 2009

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.

Psalm

Lessons

130

Ezekiel 18:21-28

Matthew 5:20-26

“Forgive and Forget”

I have always been fascinated by memory. How and why does memory work the way it does? Why can I remember a trivial popular song lyric from 1979, while forgetting where I parked the car this morning? Sometimes I will wake from a dream that seemed so real, the memory left behind is more vivid than reality - how do the emotions and memories from these dreams shape our identities? Are those the kinds of dreams in which God spoke to people in the Bible? Is God still speaking in our dreams today? What struck me about these readings - which describe turning from sin, and reconciliation, and forgiveness - was the role of both remembering and forgetting. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us (as he so often does!) that we need to re-examine our priorities: If we remember that someone has something against us, even if we are at the altar, we should drop everything and go and be reconciled with our brother. Note that there is no instruction to determine who is at fault in the relationship - the top priority is to begin NOW to start healing. And we are instructed not just to be open to reconciliation in a passive sense, but rather to GO and actively seek out the other. Now it is true that remembering has its place; however, often forgetting is necessary to heal a relationship. In the passage from Ezekiel, we hear how pleased God can be with one who turns from evil and does what is just and right: “None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered ...”

God chooses to forget. God, who created all and sees all, and has the power to remember our sins forever, does not - out of joy over anyone who chooses to embrace God's ways. God is always willing to give us another chance, to forget the past and make a new start. In the words of Psalm 130

“... with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption.”

Thanks be to God!

John McNeill
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Saturday in the First Week of Lent

March 7, 2009

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.

Psalm

119:1-8

Lessons

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Matthew 5:43-48

Love of Enemies

Today I read about loving my enemies.

When I think about who my enemies are, they are usually people who have harmed me or someone I love, and who I have not forgiven.

I don't think of them very often – usually something random occurs that triggers a memory.

I prefer to keep my 'enemies' tucked away in my mind, out of sight, like broken furniture stored away. I save this furniture because I fully intend to fix the pieces one day. But the pieces remain, looking worse over the years, despite my best intentions.

When God calls upon me to love my enemies, my immediate reaction is dread. Why should I love those who have caused me harm? What will I get out of it? What will they get out of it? I think that these un-reconciled relationships aren't hurting me anymore, so why dredge it up?

Then I read Chapter 5 from Matthew entitled, "Love of Enemies" and the sentence that jumps out is, "This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and the good..." I am reminded that although my enemies are not in the forefront of my mind, they remain in the background, a constant reminder of unfinished business. If I am to continue growing spiritually, I need to clear away the things that stand in the way of a closer relationship with God.

Reconciling with my enemies is something I need help with. I cannot do it without God's grace.

So how do I start down this path? Matthew responds by saying, "...pray for your persecutors." I cannot honestly say that I love my enemies, but I can say that I will start praying for them. And I know that if I continue with an open heart, the love will come.

Ildi Morris

Ildi Morris
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

March 9, 2009

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.

Psalm

79:1-9

Lessons

Daniel 9:3-10

Luke 6:27-38

Dialogue

(Luke 6:27-38)

Love your enemies.

I shall wish them no harm.

No! Listen! Love!

Many are the shades of love's meaning.

Don't parse my Word.

But my faith seeks understanding.

Give to anyone who begs from you.

I do. Sometimes.

Don't withhold even your shirt.

But all will laugh at an idiot.

Your reward will be great.

My heart yearns for such comfort.

Be merciful, as God is merciful.

But the verse says Father, not God.

You will be children of the most high.

My thoughts of God are not like a child's.

But I say to you that listen . . .

Yet my heart is listening with open wonder.

* * * *

I close this book which, by turns,

has warmed and chilled me

through the years.

Hard sayings, but somehow a hardness

Softening me into prayer:

Let me be merciful

as the Mystery is merciful.

Jonas Barciauskas
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 10, 2009

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.

Psalm

50:7-15, 22-24

Lessons

Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20

Matthew 23:1-12

The lessons both speak of eschewing evil and doing good works. Mathew brings it home with Christ's instruction to serve others rather than focus on one's own status and glory:

“He that is greatest among you shall be your servant”

“Whosoever exalts himself will be abased”

“He that shall humble himself shall be exalted”

This is a typically Christian message with practical truths for everyday living. It is as true now, if not more so, than it was over 2,000 years ago. It seems that a primary difficulty of our human condition is to see beyond the immediate impulse to build ourselves up with status: prestige: delegating hard work to others: talking the talk, not walking the walk.

The deeper truth of the matter is that authority and power really rests outside of us, and is dependent on us performing the basics, willing to do our share, serving others. The best of the human condition – is to serve, not be served. Not thinking we are better than others nor excused from caring for others because of our position – this is humility. Humility is a gift from God that helps us maintain perspective. Christ does not mince words; practice it, or you will lose your position.

The condition that God worries about in the Psalms was that his chosen people had turned away from him, in Isaiah God exhorts people to cease doing evil, and relieve the oppressed, service the widows and the fatherless. This theme continues with Christ calling out the Pharisees and Scribes as claiming the mantle of “moral authority” while using their position to puff themselves up while exhorting others to do the good works in accordance with the teachings of the bible. They should be serving others, the others are not there to serve them. They've lost touch. Hiding behind the law. Not doing the hard work of serving others. This is part of Christ's revolution. God's trust in them is precisely the opposite of what they are doing. It is hard for us not to lose focus in our human condition and it takes reminding. It is easy to let our winnings go to our heads – and we forget what it was that got us there. Society rewards those with position, power, wealth. When we forget our true calling to serve others and get caught up in serving ourselves we are building a house of cards – which in Christ tells us will catch up with us eventually, even if it is later rather than sooner.

In a more practical, non-religious, sense, there is a message that we all do well to pay attention to: the boss who tramples on the “little people” in an organization, the priest who forgets what he is really there for and instead strives for self aggrandizement, the

coach chasing his own glory at the expense of his players, the rich citizens in our own society that become incapable of helping others: that frequently lose their way – and eventually their positions. Isn't the boss who values everyone's contribution, concerned about everyone's well-being, a more successful boss over the long term? Isn't the priest who truly cares about each individual's spiritual needs vastly more successful than one whose goal is to simply have the position? It works that way for all of us, too. It requires humility. Regardless of one's position, humility helps maintain the focus of what we are all supposed to be about. Who knows, this may have been the idea behind the priests' vows of piety and poverty way back: focus less on themselves and more on service to others. Most successfully powerful people are also humble people.

This is easy to forget... we need reminders. In our everyday affairs as well as when we contemplate our spiritual health and God's wishes, it is good advice.

Walter Morgan
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 11, 2009

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.

Psalm

31:9-16

Lessons

Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20

Matthew 20:17-28

Many of the Lenten psalms and readings center on the sacrifice made by *Jesus* through his persecution and death to absolve mankind of its sins and restore us to oneness with God. This prayer reminds us that *God's* sacrifice of a son born of his spirit and love was primary to the sacrifice of *Jesus*.

Jesus's suffering and death at the cross surely was an awesome sacrifice made out of a depth of love for God and mankind that we struggle to comprehend. Lent is a time for us to recall that sacrifice in remembrance of *Jesus's* love for us.

But as I reflect on "gave your only-begotten Son," it gives this reminder almost a physical dimension as your throat tightens over the thought, as a parent, aunt, uncle, or grandparent, of giving up a life, born of you or your family, to be given up so that others, not known to you, could live? As difficult as it is to try to comprehend *Jesus's* love through the sacrifice of his life, I completely fail at even beginning to know *God's* sacrifice and therefore his love for us.

The readings for the week emphasize the primacy of *God's* sacrifice and supremacy. As one example, *Jesus* responds to the mother of the sons of Zebedee, on whose behalf she asks *Jesus* to place them at his side in his Kingdom in heaven.

Jesus responds:

"My chalice you will indeed drink,
but to sit at my right and at my left,
this is not mine to give
but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

Matthew 20:17-28

Steve Kenney
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

March 12, 2009

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.*

Psalm

Lessons

1

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Luke 16:19-31

Such great imagery of contrasts: the stunted shrub in the dry hot desert versus a fruit laden tree by a stream of fresh water in Psalm 1, more tree-water imagery in Jeremiah, And then in Luke we see poor Lazarus starving versus the rich man with a full table, and later Lazarus is fulfilled in Abraham's bosom versus the rich man in torment and anguishing in flames of Hades.

In Psalm 1 "Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord. He is like a tree, planted by a stream of water that yields fruit in its season."

In Jeremiah, "Cursed, like a shrub in the desert, is the man who trusts in man and turns away from the Lord, but blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, like a tree planted by the water does not cease to bear fruit. The Lord gives according to the fruit of his doing".

Then Luke tells us of the fruits of our actions. Lazarus desired to be fed, but was denied by the rich man. Lazarus was carried to heaven by angels to Abraham's bosom, but the rich man died and went to Hades. He saw Lazarus in heaven and begged him to give him some water, but Abraham says "no". The rich man then asks Abraham to go warn his living brothers, but Abraham says "If they didn't hear Moses and the prophets they will not listen even if someone should rise from the dead to tell them". Abraham obviously did not anticipate God's "YES" through Jesus. The disciples did hear Jesus. Jesus' return from the dead opens our ears! We are blessed with "good fruits" as we listen and tell our "brothers" about the "fresh waters" of God's way.

Mary Ainsworth
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

March 13, 2009

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.

**Psalm
105:16-22**

**Lessons
Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28
Matthew 21:33-43**

Forgiveness: An Acquired Skill

The daily prayer and the readings allude to: (1) the various degrees of hurt and response to the hurt taken up by a wronged party and (2) the ultimate healing that comes from giving up the hurt by appealing to God for the grace to truly forgive. To me, the daily prayer and the readings point out that God is the ultimate source of forgiveness, for through his grace, we can free our hearts of the burdens of being wronged. The readings pointed out the following examples of forgiveness:

The daily prayer focuses on Jesus and us as having the potential to pray for wrong-doers whilst experiencing extreme personal pain
Joseph, the favored son of Jacob/Israel/God, after being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, ultimately through God's grace achieves a position from which he is able to forgive, and
Jerusalem (the vineyard), the focal point for wave-after-wave of suppression of Christ's teachings, ultimately through God's grace becomes the cornerstone of Christianity.

The readings, being typically abstract, beg the question: how do we evolve our own process/ability for forgiveness? First, I think we should acknowledge that God gives us the capacity for forgiveness but making use of this capacity is an acquired skill. Secondly, we must recognize that, as with Jesus, Joseph, and Jerusalem, the world is a place where unavoidable sources of special interests, favoritisms, and yes, even simple social blunders, conspire to potentially cause us to be wronged (or at least perceived to be wronged) regardless of what we personally were doing. For example:

Parents showing favoritism that you interpret as a lack of love
Being by-passed for a position of prominence
Having your opinions suppressed by others
Truly being jilted/turn-upon by a confidant
Being personally physically and/or emotionally abused
...etc.

Third, we must recognize that we may not be able to directly address an actual or perceived wrong-doer in our attempt at forgiveness and there is no guarantee, just

because we might be able to say “I forgive you”, that our hurt will go away. Lastly, we must recognize that Jesus loves us no matter what and that we, through prayer, can give our heart’s hurt to Jesus and release the power that the wrong-doer has over our hearts and souls, thereby enabling us to truly say to God, “Forgive Them for They Know Not What They Do”.

Through practice, discipline, loving coaches, and prayer, your personal forgiveness process will become an acquired skill.

Larry Jobson
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent

March 14, 2009

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.

Psalm

103:1-4(5-8)9-12

Lessons

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Luke 15:11-32

Thanksgiving for God’s Goodness

That is the title on the Internet NSRV version of Psalm 103 that I found. My printed Oxford NSRV calls this Psalm *Praise of the Savior God*. This Psalm is a wonderful and constant reminder that, no matter how much we transgress or move away from God’s love, he is always compassionate and ready to welcome us back into reconciliation. I need this so often – whenever I get disgusted with myself for not acting in the most graceful manner towards something or someone. In a world of tension and stress, it is so easy to stray from God’s grace. This Psalm helps me remember that I can so easily come back

And this Psalm is so needed in order to understand the parable of the prodigal son [reading from Luke]. How many times have I heard this story and wondered how the father could be so open and gracious to his run-away, spendthrift son. But the son asked forgiveness. That, to me, is the important part of the story. The son recognized he had erred, and asked for only a lowly place back in the fold of his father’s household. He was rewarded with much more! And I feel sorry for the son who worked at home, and then alienated himself from the celebration because of his jealousy. Both sons erred at one time or another; I trust that both sons will seek forgiveness and grace.

Recognizing when I have strayed, taking responsibility for my mistakes, and then asking forgiveness. ... *You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.* [Micah]. How wonderful to have a God that loves us so much! What a wondrous feeling is the grace of God.

Bless the Lord, oh my soul. . . [he] who forgives all your iniquity and heals all your diseases . . .

Susan Newlin
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Third Week of Lent

March 16, 2009

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.

Psalm

42:1-7

Lessons

2 Kings 5:1-15b

Luke 4:23-30

The reading of Psalm 42:1-7 is a great blessing, as much poetry as inspiration. It evokes beautiful imagery of nature and a yearning for God:

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”

I can imagine a hot day in summer – drought is in full force, most of the streams have drawn to a trickle, and plants have that drooping look as they wait for the next rain. A deer cautiously makes its appearance from the woods and approaches a flowing mountain stream, dipping its head to draw deeply from the water. Rejuvenated, it bounds away.

This image led me through my reflection. What was it that made the water more refreshing on that day? The substance was still the same: hydrogen and oxygen atoms bound together into water, with elements of the earth and rocks they flow over. The thing that made the water better, in fact glorious, was the drought and the absence of water before hand. It is as if the sun and weather had abandoned the land, just as it sometimes appears that we turn away from God or sometimes feel that God has turned away from us. Just as deer or people take water for granted when it is plentiful, sometimes we also take God for granted when life is going well.

In Second Kings we learn about Naaman, a commander of the army of the king of Aram who is afflicted with leprosy (the Hebrew word can refer to various skin diseases not necessarily leprosy). His wife's servant is an Israeli girl captured during one Aram's raids into Israel who says “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” Naaman travels to Israel to meet with Elisha who tells him to wash in the Jordan seven times, and he is quickly cured.

In Luke 4:23-30 the people of Nazareth are amazed at Jesus' transformation from an unsure child to a prophet. They doubt him, saying “Isn't this Joseph's son?” Jesus tells

them that prophets are not accepted in their own home town, saying “there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha, yet not one of them was cleansed-only Namaan the Syrian.”. This angers them greatly and they take him to a cliff to throw him over, but he walks right through the crowd and goes on his way.

In the same way that Jesus does great works throughout Israel but is not believed in his hometown, things closest to us often seem ordinary and out of focus. We are plugged in and turned on to TV and the internet so that events around the world seem closer to us than ever. Things we read about seem larger than life – people doing great (or terrible things) – causes and movements around the world seem exciting and powerful. Truly, these are important, but great things go on all around us, too. Local activities like Saint Elizabeth’s, Micah, Habitat, ASP have great importance in the world as well, and heroes are all around us if we only look.

On this Lent, I hope to keep my thirst for God active and alive always, not just during spiritual drought, famine or distress. Living life firmly grounded in the present, I determine to see God’s gifts around me daily, to appreciate the wonderful people in my daily life and to realize that great things happen not just in the world, but right here in Massachusetts and in our church. Suffering, redemption, hope and healing are right around us in those we know, love, and encounter in our daily lives.

Amen.

Art Huston
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

March 17, 2009

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.

Psalm

25:3-10

Lessons

Song of the Three Young Men 2-4, 11-20a*

Matthew 18:21-35

Humility

I saw the Virtues sitting hand in hand
In sev’ral ranks upon an azure throne,
Where all the beasts and fowls* by their command
Presented tokens of submission.
Humility, who sat the lowest there
To execute their call,
When by the beasts the presents trend’red were,
Gave them about to all.

The angry Lion did present his paw,
Which by consent was giv'n to Mansuetude*.
The fearful Hare her ears, which by their law
Humility did reach to Fortitude.
The jealous Turkey brought his coral chain*,
That went to Temperance.
On Justice was bestow'd the Fox's brain,
Kill'd in the way by chance.

At length the Crow bringing the Peacock's plume,
(For he would not) as they beheld the grace
Of that brave gift, each one began to fume,
And challenge it, as proper to his place,
Till they fell out: which when the beasts espied,
They leapt upon the throne;
And if the Fox had liv'd to rule their side,
They had depos'd each one.

Humility, who held the plume, at this
Did weep so fast, that the tears trickling down
Spoil'd all the train: then saying, *Here it is*
For which ye wrangle, made them turn their frown
Against the beasts: so jointly bandying*,
They drive them soon away;
And then amerc'd* them, double gifts to bring
At the next Session-day.

From: *The Temple*
By George Herbert

*beasts and fowls. The natural passions.
Mansuetude. Gentleness.
coral chain. The turkey's red wattle, suggesting fleshliness.
Brandyng. Banding together.
Amerc'd. Fined.



Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

March 18, 2009

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.

**Psalm
78:1-6**

**Lessons
Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9
Matthew 5:17-19**

O God you have taught me since I was young, and to this day I tell of your wonderful works. You are very wise and understanding.

God, you have made me strong in many aspects of my life. You have helped me through tough times.

And I thank you for giving me my family and friends that love and care for me. I thank Him for always being in my heart and giving me strength and hope in my life.

Please forgive my sins and thanks for my faith. Don't let me die a hurtful way thank God.

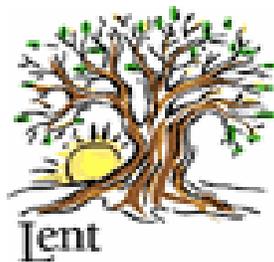
For you are my guidance through my darkest days. You lead my way through this maze called life.

You are the sun on a rainy day breaking the clouds to reveal the beauty of nature. You are the creator of heaven and earth.

You have taught me everything and have shown me much. Guide me towards victory and show me the path to heaven.

You not only guide me, but you also give me the ability to reach for myself. You of all beings understand how I and my friends feel and what our actions are caused by.

Written by the 2007/2009 J2A Class



Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

March 19, 2009

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.*

Psalm

95:6-11

Lessons

Jeremiah 7:23-28

Luke 11:14-2

“Change”. Such a strong word. Now more than ever god is present in our world guiding all of nature through some of the toughest times earth has seen. All of mankind has been praying for change. Praying for some figure to appear out of the abyss and take the world by the hand. Everywhere you look you can see small acts of our lord, helpfully pushing us in the correct direction, showing us the way out of the darkness. This past month an angel appeared for our nation. An angel sent down to protect, and lead the United States of America. Barack Obama is the first black president. That figure that has come to ultimately pick not just the nation, but the entire world out of the darkness and into the light. He is that change. And The United States Of America needs to stand behind this man regardless the color of his skin. He is a direct message from our lord that WE CAN DO IT. From now on the world needs to trust this man, because he has the lord within him. He has a purpose on this earth. To CHANGE the world.

PRAY FOR BARACK AND FAMILY

Tom Small
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Friday in the Third Week of Lent

March 20, 2009

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.*

Psalm

81:8-14

Lessons

Hosea 14:1-9

Mark 12:28-34

Then said Almitra, Speak to us of Love.

And he raised his head and looked upon the people, and there fell a stillness upon them. And with a great voice he said:

When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.

And when his wings enfold you yield to
him,

Though the sword hidden among his
pinions may wound you.

And when he speaks to you believe in
him,

Though his voice may shatter your dreams
as the north wind lays waste the garden.

For even as love crowns you so shall he
crucify you. Even as he is for your growth
so is he for your pruning.

Even as he ascends to your height and
caresses your tenderest branches that quiver
in the sun,

So shall he descend to your roots and
shake them in their clinging to the earth.

Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto
himself.

He threshes you to make you naked.

He sifts you to free you from your husks.

He grinds you to witness.

He kneads you until you are pliant;

And then he assigns you to his sacred
fire, that you may become sacred bread for
God's sacred feast.

All these things shall love do unto you
that you may know the secrets of your
heart, and in that knowledge become a
fragment of Life's heart.

But if in your fear you would seek only
love's peace and love's pleasure,

Then it is better for you that you cover
your nakedness and pass out of love's
threshing –floor,

Into the seasonless world where you
shall laugh, but not all of your laughter,
and weep, but not all of your tears.

Love gives naught but itself and takes
naught but from itself.

Love possesses not nor would it be
possessed;

For love is sufficient unto love.

When you love you should not say,
“God is in my heart,” but rather, “I am in the heart of God.”

And think not you can direct the course
of love, for love, if it finds you worthy,
directs your course.

Love has no other desire but to fulfil
itself.

But if you love and must needs have
desires, let these be your desires;

To melt and be like a running brook
that sings its melody to the night.

To know the pain of too much tenderness.

To be wounded by your own under-
standing of love;

And to bleed willingly and joyfully.

To wake at dawn with a winged heart
and give thanks for another day of loving;

To rest at the noon hour and meditate
love’s ecstasy;

To return home at eventide with grati-
tude;

And then to sleep with a prayer for the
beloved in your heart and a song of praise
upon your lips.

From: *The Prophet*
By: Kahlil Gibran



Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

March 21, 2009

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.

**Psalm
51:15-20**

**Lessons
Hosea 6:1-6
Luke 18:9-14**

I love Psalm 145. Through awesome poetry, the Psalmist extols the majesty, splendor, and goodness of God and his providential care for his creation. This is not a God who delights in suffering. Rather, *the LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.*

While verses 1-13 describe in general terms the “glorious splendor” of God’s Kingdom, Verses 14-19 bring us from the general to the particular. Not only are we valued as a people, but we are valued as individuals. *The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.* In pondering this passage, I was reminded of one extraordinary Sunday morning in 1984 while driving Brian Bostwick, a member of the SSJE community in Cambridge, to St. Elizabeth’s, where he had been invited to officiate at the 8 and 10 a.m. services. At this point, I must explain that for much of my life, I had harbored a belief in God—but also a feeling that God did not like me. Even though I felt completely deserving of God’s disapproval and my resulting deep despair, I yearned for a happier connection. And so it was that at 7 a.m. on Route 20, I quite unexpectedly poured out my heart to Brian. At his command, we pulled over (we were in Wayland by then). Taking my hand, he quietly explained that this was Satan’s work, that God yearned for a closer relationship with me, and finished this brief but unforgettable exchange with a prayer. Afterward, Brian declared with great authority that my deep sadness was over—done—at an end. Soon thereafter, my life began to change. New opportunities miraculously opened up, and my life improved dramatically. But looking back, I also realize that it was my attitude that had changed more than anything else.

Fast forward almost 25 years to a recent event. While attending a SOUL COLLAGE workshop at Adelynrood, I found a magazine featuring a lovely painting of a little girl gazing out into the heavens. The painting only reveals her from the back. For me, it was one of those heart-stopping moments when a very deep truth is suddenly revealed. In that instant, I saw that every good thing that had ever happened to me had not been the result of my own efforts but rather direct gifts from God. A flood of memories—long forgotten—came tumbling back. And in that moment I knew—truly knew—that God was the best friend I have ever had. Yes indeed, *the LORD is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.* AMEN.

Ruth Griesel
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 23, 2009

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.*

Psalm

30:1-6, 11-13

Lessons

Isaiah 65:17-25

John 4:43-54

Beginning with the Psalm, each of the readings is about thanksgiving. Mourning has been turned to dancing and others are called to join the psalmist in his joy. There is a suggestion of illness that has been turned to healing. There is rejoicing and a new day, a new earth and the promise that comes from being reborn. There is encouragement and optimism in these words. There is a promise of fulfillment and hope. God and Jesus are inspiring this promise and I am reminded that their presence is in our world, our lives and in everything around us.

When I hear the song, sung by Louis Armstrong, What a Wonderful World, I get the same feeling. The words and rhymes in the song make me thankful for my world and remind me of spring, a rebirth of life and the things that make heaven on earth.

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

(George Weiss / Bob Thiele)

I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world
I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world
The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shakin' hands, sayin' "How do you do?"
They're really saying "I love you"
I hear babies cryin', I watch them grow
They'll learn much more than I'll ever know
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world
Yes, I think to myself, what a wonderful world

Oh yeah

Peter Gonze
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 24, 2009

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.

Psalm

46:1-8

Lessons

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

John 5:1-18

I find the passage from John both unsettling and empowering. Stories of healing always make me uneasy because they elicit unsettling questions. If Jesus and God can heal, why is there so much suffering in the world? Why do babies and children die? Why do young people suffer crippling diseases? And on and on... I don't find the typical answers very satisfying. For example, although I believe the one we call holy is a mystery and beyond our knowing, a God that mysteriously withholds healing that is in God's power, is not a God I can love. So I am led to the belief that God cannot heal all physical ailments, and perhaps God alone cannot heal the broken places in our spirit. What then to make of this story?

Perhaps the John passage points to another way for me to think about the healing power of the Holy One – healing those things that bind us rather than healing physical illness or, in some cases, a healing of the spirit that is a necessary step to physical healing. First Jesus asks the man in the passage if he wants to be made well. Perhaps we need to be willing to be made whole for healing of the psyche or soul to take place. Do we need to let go of the familiar but crippling ways we have learned to protect ourselves? Do we need to let go of familiar but crippling ways we have learned to make us feel powerful or in control or more/most beloved?

Secondly, Jesus instructs the man to take up his mat and walk, and the man follows these instructions! A man who had been an invalid for 38 years! Perhaps, we need to listen for the voice of authority, to hear what the spirit is calling us to do that will set us free, to loose the chains of “illness” that bind us and keep us from reaching out to one another in love and compassion. Who do I listen to? Who do you?

Then we get to the part of the passage that I am more comfortable with: Jesus heals on the Sabbath – breaking the rules. This is the Jesus that compels me. There is work of healing/loving to be done every day, any day. This is the work Jesus is about, and it is more important than protecting the rules or the doctrine or the stature of the church and its leaders. Jesus' preaching and his behavior are radical – he invites those considered unclean to the “table” and extends them a “healing” hand! If that is so, we must all be welcome!

Susan Berry
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 25, 2009

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.

Psalm

145:8-19

Lessons

Isaiah 49:8-15

John 5:19-29

Psalm 145: 8-19

The Psalms were probably written 1500-500 BC; by the Hebrew people to teach God's people how to worship God.

This psalm is an acrostic poem, the verses of which begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Hebrew poetry repeats ideas instead of sounds.

After reading through the psalm each of us chose a verse that was meaningful to us.

Verse 8: The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. That line made us feel like God is always available and there for us.

Verse 14: The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up those who are bowed down. This reminds us that when you are in a bad situation listening to God can help you out.

Verse 16: You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. God is helpful. God doesn't always give you what you want or even what you think you need, but he always gives us love and teaches us how to love. God wants what is best for us. God loves us.

Verse 18: The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. God is there for all people who believe in Him, God gives comfort to those who believe in Him.

Verse 19: He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; At first we thought that this sounded like a bribe, like God would only love us if we fear God. Then we read the next line of the Psalm which says

...he hears their cry and saves them.

That made us think that maybe God forgives and is there for people who are afraid of Him because they have done something wrong or really bad. God is a forgiving God and we should not be afraid. God can save us.

Submitted by: the Sixth Graders in Level III Atrium- Tim Howard, Andrew Kenney, Kristin Kimble, Ben Lepordo, William Vesey, Chris Wilkins
Members, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 26, 2009

**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.***

**Psalm
106:6-7, 19-23**

**Lessons
Exodus 32:7-14
John 5:30-47**

The reading today spoke to me about listening. Do we really listen to God? The Psalmist points to Exodus 32, how, after having been delivered from Egypt and having seen the amazing powers of God, does Israel then make a golden calf and worship it? Were they listening, were they paying attention? Do I listen? Am I listening to who God is in Christ Jesus? Do I see the amazing power of God present in my life and then start building my own golden calves? I was reminded of the prayer below:

How Do I Hear You, Lord?

I hear you when

I accept *everything* about me-
My sins, my failures and
the things I don't like
about myself.
My gifts, my graces and
what I've been able to
do well.
The circumstances of my life, the people
around me (just as they are),
and my past with no regrets.

I hear you when

I go within
quietly, honestly, with no
pretense, no fear.
Holding up, looking at
all I see there,
Not blocking these,
trying to reject what I see,
trying to redeem what I see,
trying to repress what I see,
Just holding, looking, waiting.

It's then that you come

as your spirit or something

I sense, I know, is from you.

Whatever it is,
it cleanses, accepts, touches
me – just as I am –
says you are you,
don't pretend, don't fake it,
don't screw it up.
Just be.

Then it (you)
pulls me gently,
tugs, teases, calls me
to something more,
says
“Come on now,
there is a lot more,
infinitely more.
Come on.”

And it (you)
frightens me.
I have to have what I know,
what I control, where I 'm boss.

That's scary.
But since it *is* you,
then it's right.
Which means
you don't call me to what
is wrong, morally wrong.

You don't call me
to sin,
to selfishness,
to unfaithfulness,
to irresponsibility,
to power.

But to
rightness,
wholeness (or more wholeness),
excitement,
expansiveness (more me)
being carried (not trying to hard)
Toward *you*.
But you are not so much the goal
as the way toward the goal.

So I wait for you. Patiently.
Then you keep me going
because I am in you.

Prayer taken from: *A Diary of Prayer* Bishop John B. Coburn

Reflection by: Jay Holdman
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

February 27, 2009

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.*

Psalm

34:15 22

Lessons

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24

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

Reflection:

“It makes no difference as to the name of God, since love is the real God of all the world.” Apache

“The Great Spirit is always angry with men who shed innocent blood.” Iowa

These readings were not the easiest for me to think about. Although embedded in them are words of tremendous comfort, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit,” and also words that hold fundamental truths such as when Jesus says “I did not come on my own,” there is a recognition of evil and of meanness in the human spirit that is woven into all of these passages. The psalm says that “the face of the LORD is against evildoers, and points out that evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.” Without getting into the debate of what is evil and what is not, I do know and recognize that evil exists. In my eyes it is clear that the acts of Hitler were evil. The acts of the 9/11 terrorists were evil.

The second reading brings us into contact with mean spirited people who say “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” and who say “let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is.” This recognition of the mean spirit that is part of human nature – perhaps even within us from time to time – is not a comfortable feeling or remembrance. For me it primarily brings back some of the teasing and ugliness from my childhood. Perhaps this is because in childhood the ugliness in human nature is not as disguised as it is within adult interactions. But I also think of the recent Senate debates over the stimulus plan, and the meanness and pettiness that seemed to dominate both sides. I think that one of the reasons that I feel so uncomfortable about the pettiness and

meanness revealed here is the recognition that some of these traits are within me. They are a part of me that occasionally rears its ugly head, that I am not proud of, and try to watch out for and correct, but always they are there.

The last reading is more removed as the people are watching Jesus preach and questioning if he is the Messiah because if he was the Messiah they would not know where he is from. Jesus says to them, “You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” Here Jesus is saying to them, preaching to them, that he – not them – knows truth, knows God. And that his words, which are not his words, but God’s words, reveal the truth. And because we know what is to come, we know this truth is not the truth of outside signs and intervention, but rather an inner truth, a way of life, a way of relating to others, and to God.

Anthea Coster
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 28, 2009

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.

Psalm

Lessons

7:6-11

Jeremiah 11:18-20

John 7:37-52

In the Psalm, David is once again looking for refuge and for protection. He is asking God for justice. “Stop the wickedness of evil men and reward those who are good.”

The last few months our papers have been flooded with people looking for justice. What has happened to the financial world? What does the future hold for me and for my children. How can this type of greed be judged....Will there be justice?

Every day as I drive to work I listen to National Public Radio. The other day NPR interviewed several churches in the Metro West area who have opened their doors to people who have lost their jobs. One church has set up a room with computers so that people can work on their resumes. Another church is providing counseling and networking groups for people to share their journey. I was struck by an interview with the pastor of one of the churches who said “We are not here to convert, we are here to listen and to provide hospitality.” Perhaps this is a place of refuge for many; just like David was seeking

With all that has taken place this year, our Nation is looking for healing and solace. This past Sunday Barbara's message on healing hit home. All of us are broken in one way or another but it is through Christ we find healing and protection. Our altar and pews are filled with people seeking refuge like David. We are looking for justice and praying for God to protect us from evil.

It was through a song that I sang with other choir members that my heart was reminded in whom I put my trust.

"Surely it is God who saves me, trusting him, I shall not fear, for the Lord defends and shields me and his saving help is near."

Nancy Morgan
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 30, 2009

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.*

Psalm

23

Lessons

Susanna* 1-9, 15-29, 34-62 *or* verses 41-62

John 8:1-11 *or* John 8:12-20

I am Benjamin's father. Benjamin is two years old, and bedtime may be his least favorite time of day. There are nights when he cries as if he is about to be delivered to terrors beyond endurance.

So we sing. If I forget this part of the ritual, Ben will remind me by poking his finger at my mouth and then at his ear. Lullabies were never a big part of my repertoire, so the first time he commanded a performance, something inside said "sing something low, children are comforted by low rumbling sounds." I sang the Tennessee Ernie Ford classic "Sixteen Tons." I still don't know why. Sometime later though, we added to the repertoire. Again, for no apparent reason, the next song was the beautiful setting of Isaac Watts' version of the 23rd Psalm.

My Shepherd will supply my need
Jehovah is His name
In pastures fresh He makes me feed
beside the living stream
He brings my wandering spirit back
when I forsake His way

And leads me for His mercy's sake
in paths of truth and grace

And then another night, we added "Brother James' Air," another setting of the 23rd Psalm.

Of all the Psalms, the twenty-third is perhaps the best known. It is a comfort to all who contemplate the terrors of the night. It even reassures us that our Shepherd will treat us well in the presence of our foes. (And it is worth noting that the Psalm does not visit God's wrath on our foes: he shows mercy to us all.)

On this day we read in John and in Susanna of injustice visited on victims who are then protected through the intervention of God's grace. The Psalm tells us that "everything will be all right in the end" while the other readings tell us of people who "walked through the valley of death." I'm struck however by the fact that in John and Susanna justice and mercy come through a human agent, not from a bolt of lightning. It is Daniel who saves Susanna from the treachery of the unjust justices. It is Jesus who saves the woman from the crowd. If the Psalm tells us that God will provide, protect, and guide, the readings remind us that sometimes supply, protection, and guidance comes from people around us. None of us may have the greatness of Daniel, and none of us is "the word made flesh." But all of us are instruments of the Shepherd's comfort.

It may be a while before Benjamin embraces sleep with any enthusiasm, but I'll cherish the moments when I can hold him and remind him that everything will be all right.

... and that he should stay out of coal mines.

Matt Reilly
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 31, 2009

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.

Psalm

102:15-22

Lessons

Numbers 21:4-9

John 8:21-30

Which God Do You Like?

My favorite God is the nurturing, soothing, hopeful God. The all-caring, all-welcoming God.

Today's readings, however, are less about that aspect of God.

Instead, today's readings represent the "Bow-down-and-pay-me-homage" God, the Omnipotent God, the Omniscient God, the all-important God. Even the God on High with the hard-edge acting as master puppeteer pulling all the strings (even Jesus' strings!).

Although I prefer the more tender side, the God described in these readings is very visceral, very emotional, very present, very human. We taste God's wrath in the poisonous snakes; we feel the weight of God's disdain because we have much to condemn; we sense God's pity because we do not understand God's greatness. This is a very touchable, tangible God.

As a contrast, today's God feels more distant. There's little direct feedback. We need to work hard to find even the subtlest of signs. It's hard to figure out where we stand with today's God. There's little give-and-take.

Ahh, yes, but then again, today's God is less wrathful, less vengeful, less spirited. There are no poisonous stakes sent to punish us for our transgressions or lamentations.

So which God do you like? The God of today's readings or the God of today?

Eric Kimble
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 1, 2009

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.

Psalm

Lessons

Canticle 2 or 13

Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28

John 8:31-42

The verses in Daniel are the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego: the three men who refused King Nebuchadnezzar's order to worship his god or golden image. Their faith in God and their belief that it was wrong to worship any other god or image were so strong that they were willing to lose their lives if they were wrong. This was exactly what King Nebuchadnezzar thought would happen when he had them tied up and thrown into the furnace. But instead the King saw four men walking around in the fire of the furnace – the fourth being, of course, the miraculous God who kept them from being touched by the flames. King Nebuchadnezzar praised God's glory for saving the men who put their faith in him. We, luckily, don't have to be thrown into a furnace to test our faith. But tests or challenges to our faith comes in many forms.

In these verses of John, Jesus is debating/arguing with Jews, trying to convince them that his words will set them free because his words come from God. They take his words at a literal meaning, and don't see that the freedom he is offering is not from physical slavery but the slavery of sin. He tells them that God sent him, and that he is the "source of [his] being". In fact, he is sent to try to convince them by God, not because he wanted to but because God sent him for that purpose. It is a confusing passage that I had to re-read several times, and I am sure that there is more to it that I don't understand. The message I take from it is that we have to be willing to believe even when it runs counter to what we think is true or right. So that even when life seems to be taking turns we're not meant to follow, we should have the faith of the three men in the furnace, and listen to God's words in our hearts.

Janice Darias
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 2, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
105:4-11**

**Lessons
Genesis 17:1-8
John 8:51-59**

Reflection

Jesus was a kind man.
Son of God.
Jesus cared.
One day he risked his life for us and died.
But he came back to life.
Jesus was a kind man.
Son of God.
I give them both a nod.

Anna Cass, age 10
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 3, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
18:1-7**

**Lessons
Jeremiah 20:7-13
John 10:31-42**

From: Nicole Mitchell Age 7

Dear God-
I am thankful for:
My house
My family
My pets
My friends
My school
My toys

Love, Nicole

From: Kyle Mitchell Age 4

Dear God –
I am thankful for:
My toys
My Daddy
My Mommy
My sister
My classroom
My class
My teacher

Love, Kristine Mitchell
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 4, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
85:1-7**

**Lessons
Ezekiel 37:21-28
John 11:45-53**

Steadfast Love

Steadfast love is promised in the psalm,
Ezekiel prophesies God's oneness with His people,
and John speaks of bringing the dead back to life.

And we must choose
to believe in miracles, or
to turn our backs on Him,
to let the Romans break us at our knees,
or to trust in high priests to protect us,
to unbind our hands, our face, our heart,
or to arrest one who causes our unease.

In our world, it is not an easy choice:
the secular road of the safe and the known,
or the stark uncharted path to
what the psalm has voiced,
the prophet foretold,

and the Gospel proclaimed,
a sanctuary of salvation
a dwelling place where we are His people and
He is our God.

Ann Hargrave Loos
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in Holy Week

April 6, 2009

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.

**Psalm
36:5-10**

**Lessons
Isaiah 42:1-9
Hebrews 11:39—12:3
John 12:1-11
or Mark 14:3-9**

We reflected on these readings as a class. First we read each one and said the words or ideas that they made us think of. When we finished all of them, we decided to focus on the ideas faith and what God calls us to do that we found in Isaiah and Hebrews.

In Isaiah we learn what we, the faithful, should do. Because we are chosen we are asked to lead our lives in a way that helps bring justice to all. God is telling us to “be a light to all peoples”.

In Hebrews we are reminded of the example of Jesus, who lived his life bringing justice to all, and who endured the cross to save us. The author reminds us to think of Jesus when times are tough so that we won't “lose heart and grow faint.” When life is challenging, faith in Jesus and remembering how he lived and died for us, give us strength to keep going.

And if you need reminders of God's love for us, Psalm 36 tells us to look at nature: that God's righteousness is like “the strong mountains” and his just like the ocean. There you see daily evidence of God's love. If you live in God you “see light” – like the light to all peoples that we are asked to be.

Submitted by the YAC class:
Emily, Vanessa, Katy, Tom, Graham and Janice
Members, St. Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in Holy Week

April 7, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
71:1-12**

**Lessons
Isaiah 49:1-6
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
John 12:37-38, 42-50
or Mark 11:15-19**

Reflection

Lately, given the demise of our savings, I've been worried about having enough money to retire. This has become a preoccupation, even though we won't retire for some time. Then, one day I thought, what's the worst thing that can happen? We become poor and lose the safety of our house and community? Why not trust God? What if God had this in mind for us? After further reflection on this idea I concluded that there would be lot of humility and learning from this predicament, so I should be brave enough to accept it if it happens.

Noteworthy: When I opened my Bible to do the readings for this reflection, a picture of Mother Theresa fell out. On the back is a quote from her: "The fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, and the fruit of service is peace."

Linda Cass
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in Holy Week

April 8, 2009

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.*

**Psalm
69:7-15, 22-23**

**Lessons
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-28
John 13:21-35
or Matthew 26:1-5, 14-25**

This is a difficult collect, a hard thing to pray for. The pain and anguish waiting for Jesus at the end of this week, so soon after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, are difficult enough to contemplate happening to someone else; how can we ask to accept joyfully our own suffering, when it is human nature to want to avoid this kind of suffering? We can grit our teeth and endure, set our faces like flints as Isaiah puts it, but how do we embrace

suffering? Early Christian martyrs did it, rejecting attempts to make them recant their belief in Christ, and accepting (even embracing) often terrible punishments as a result. But such a martyrdom doesn't seem a likely fate for me or for anyone reading this.

Most of us, if persecuted and abused, would sound more like the psalmist, praying that our abusers be snared, trapped, blinded, even where they most expected to be safe. Surely, we think, God punishes the unrighteous, taking our revenge for us. The God of the Psalms often seems to be meting out judgment, particularly against the enemies of the Israelites. This is credited as a psalm of David, and who would know better the aid God gives in bringing down enemies than the slayer of Goliath?

Today's New Testament lessons lead us further toward the terror and suffering of Good Friday. The letter to the Hebrews explains the sacrifice Christ made of himself for us all, as a substitute for the sacrificial animals of traditional ritual. Christ's redemption of all our sins is spelled out in legalistic terms, punning on a single Greek word meaning both "covenant" and "will" (as in last will and testament)—the New Covenant of Christ requires his death, since a will is only executed after its author dies.

In both Gospel readings, Jesus knows he will be betrayed and who will betray him; in Matthew, he even names the coming punishment: crucifixion. This is not the God of vengeance and victory in battle: this is the God of suffering for humanity. His final commandment to his disciples, that we love one another as he loved us, can be as difficult as joyfully accepting suffering—and may sometimes even be the same thing.

Anne Reilly
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2009

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.

Psalm

78:14-20, 23-25

Lessons

Exodus 12:1-14a

1 Corinthians 11:23-26(27-32)

John 13:1-15

or Luke 22:14-30

Today's readings have some common themes that connect them, especially when they are read (as in this reflection) in what is probably the reverse order in which they were written: John (the most recent), Luke, 1 Corinthians, the Psalm and Exodus (the earliest). Each of them contains conflicting or contrasting voices. In this reflection I have in effect lengthened some of the readings by referring to omitted verses or verses that occur before or after the passages for today.

In the passage from John, Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his crucifixion is not an occasion for instituting the Eucharist but—by washing the disciples' feet—an occasion for teaching them a lesson in humility, service and love (vv. 1, 15-17). Jesus is here (as elsewhere in John's gospel) subverting the religious, economic and social systems of his day. Because foot-washing involves equality and reciprocity (v. 14)—members of the community wash and are washed in turn—slaves (softened to “servants” in many English translations) are not greater (or lesser) than their masters nor are messengers greater (or lesser) than those who send them. In the community (John's, ours and—someday—everyone's) there need be and should be no exploited labor (slaves), no class privilege (masters), no propagandistic spokespersons justifying the establishment's self-serving behavior (messengers), no elite—religious or otherwise—defining truth, morality and righteousness in marginalizing, exclusive and oppressive terms (those who send).

As a countervoice to Jesus' words and actions we hear in vv. 11 and 21-30 the notes of betrayal by one who, ironically, has just had his feet washed, has shared in the community's hospitality (supper) and may have been included in those whom Jesus loved “to the end”. (What, I wonder, is “the end”? Can love endure or be found beyond it?)

The reading from Luke, by having Jesus rebuke the quarreling disciples, also emphasizes equality, humility, service and the subversion of the existing domination system (vv. 24-27). As in John, Jesus is “among you as one who serves.” He refers to a new covenant—perhaps, in reality, not something completely “new” but an “old” (earlier) covenant reaffirmed, reinterpreted, renewed. “Covenant” in the Hebrew Bible (“the Old Testament”) resonates with memories and promises by and for both God and humanity: blessing, faithfulness, service and liberation.

But again, amid those covenantal echoes and hopes we hear the contrasting voices of betrayal (vv. 21-23), ambition (v. 24) and unreflective overconfidence leading to denial (vv. 31-34). Ironically, again, the closest association with the divine cannot protect one from evil.

Like Luke, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 depicts Jesus as referring to a new covenant. Paul criticizes the Corinthian church for importing into its midst some of the current system's evils: neglect of the hungry, humiliation of the poor, self-indulgence, striving for power (vv.17-22). His criticism stems from his understanding of the Eucharist as a covenant-affirming meal; in vv 22-23 he says, “I do not commend you, because (my interpretation of ‘for’) I received from the Lord...”). In other words, the Eucharist is a symbolic proclamation of the radical real-life difference between God's realm and the established way of doing things.

We hear a somber countervoice in vv. 29-30. Those who eat and drink (that is, those who take care of themselves) without discerning (and thus doing something about) the needs of the body (the community, society) are damaging themselves, perhaps beyond repair. Psalm 78 is a retelling of ancient Israel's “covenant history” and the passage for today, like the three already considered, tells of eating and drinking, of God providing for God's people. The psalm recounts God's glorious deeds and wonders, from delivery out of

slavery to the choosing of David as king—all part of God’s attempt to create a new community that lives by religious, economic and social norms far different from and much less exploitive than those of other peoples. Again, however, closeness to the divine does not prevent complaint, doubt and rebellion and we hear those countervoices throughout the psalm.

We also hear a countervoice about God, a countervoice of divine over-reaction. In vv. 19-20 of the psalm the Israelites ask an understandable and sensible question about a God they don’t yet know much about, a question to which God reacts in vv. 21-22 with punishments that seem all out of proportion to the people’s “sin”. One of the themes of what we call the Old Testament is that God and God’s people are, like Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, “making this up as [we] go along” and that, like today’s financial markets, past experience is not a guarantee of future performance. Another theme is that God learns compassion and restraint, becomes less concerned with displays of power and being “the greatest” and pays attention to the people’s (and God’s) need for love and justice. The word “yet” in vv. 23 and 38 indicates this theme, shows God’s unwillingness simply to be satisfied with punishment and reprisal, expresses God’s discomfort at always having to be proved right. Even in this psalm, God is experimenting with being among us as one who serves.

The reading from Exodus is, of course, the story of the origin of the Passover meal, a meal which became a symbol of the covenant and a remembrance of liberation and God’s faithfulness. The theme of caring and service is echoed here also; the Passover meal is shared (v. 4), in contrast to the behavior of the Corinthian Christians who ignored the hungry and would not wait for others. Here again the domination system is overthrown (v. 12, “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments”) but the terrifying countervoice reminds us of the apparently necessary and acceptable collateral damage: the slaying of the innocent firstborn.

Two final thoughts: First, the collect that introduces this reflection is intended for use at the service of Holy Communion, as are the readings for today. The Eucharist means different things to different people and probably has no one “true” meaning, but I wonder how our individual lives and the lives of churches would change if we viewed it as a renewal of the covenants between God and humankind and between other humans and ourselves and if we thought long and hard about what those covenants involve—both on our part and on God’s.

Second, Exodus 12:14 says, “This day shall be a day of remembrance (which I read ‘remembering’) for you.” What would like to remember on this Maundy Thursday? What would you like God to remember?

Larry Ruark
Guest Contributor

Larry Ruark, a former member of St. Elizabeth’s, now lives in North Attleboro, Massachusetts and is a member of Grace Episcopal Church in that town.

Good Friday

April 10, 2009

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.*

Psalm

22:1-21

Lessons

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

or 22:1-11 or Genesis 22:1-18

or 40:1-14 or Wisdom 2:1,12-24

or 69:1-23 Hebrews 10:1-25

John (18:1-40) 19:1-37

The Wisdom of Solomon is a book we don't often read. It's tucked away in a section of the Bible called the Apocrypha which Protestants don't recognize as "official." I find it a lovely book, full of stunning images about God, about Wisdom, and about us. It says of us that God "made us in the image of his own eternity" and describes the cause of our end: "through the devil's envy death entered into the world." (2.23-4) What was that envy? and how did it bring death? What is it like to be the image of God's own eternity? The passage doesn't say, but earlier on, it does describe what it is like for those who see death as the *only* end of life:

For we were born by mere chance,
and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been,
for the breath of our nostrils is smoke,
and reason a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts;
when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes,
and the spirit will dissolve like empty air. (2.2-3).

I find it interesting that the author sees one's attitude toward life being defined by one's attitude toward death. Those for whom "there is no remedy when life comes to an end" are seen as having "covenanted with death" (1.16-2.1). Life for them is only about enjoyment, "let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither," and power, "let our might be our law of right" (2.8, 11) They also have a particular attitude toward those they call the righteous—the ones who don't see death as their only end—they consider them inconvenient, a reproof, a burden and their "ways are strange." (2.12-15) Those who see their last end as death want to see if the last end of the righteous really is happy, if God really is their father, if God really will deliver them (2.16-18), so they insult, torture and condemn the righteous to a shameful death. (2.19-20)

There is no hint in any passage in Wisdom that the righteous don't suffer and don't die. That is a given. What makes the righteous different from others is that they see their end, their final outcome, their consummation, "in the hand of God." (3.1) Only those who belong to death's company experience death as final, only they will pass away like the traces of a cloud,
and be scattered like mist
that is chased by the rays of the sun
and overcome by its heat. (2.4)

When Jesus dies on the cross, it is at the hand of those whose lives are defined by death. They can't conceive of stopping Jesus in any other way except by killing him, whether it is the chief priests who arrange his death or Pilate who, to placate a crowd, ratifies his death. Even the apostles and disciples see Jesus' death as the finality of their hopes, because they know nothing else. Like those who killed him, those who followed Jesus felt it's come to the end. All has died. But they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls. (2.22)

Indeed, in three days, the disciples will find what the prize is for blameless souls; they will be able to hope for the wages of holiness; they will know the secret purposes of God. But for now, it is only insult, torture and a shameful death. For now the lovers of death seem to have won.

The Rev. Christine Visminas
Guest Contributor

Holy Saturday

April 11, 2009

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.*

Psalm

130

Lessons

Job 14:1-14

or 31:1-5 1 Peter 4:1-8

Matthew 27:57-66

or John 19:38-42

In my limited experience with death, I have noticed that the period preceding and following the death of a loved one is strangely similar to the time preceding and following the birth of a child. Most people don't visit this time and space too often. But when they do, they may find that birth and death have an amazing way of transporting us into a space far from our everyday, ordinary material world into a zone where the things unseen seem both ambiguous, but almost tangible. Bereaved people may find themselves simultaneously experiencing the loss of the loved one's material presence, while still sensing their spiritual presence. And for those awaiting a birth, may find themselves with a name, clothing and a baby room, while at the same time, that child's spirit and essence is still an unknown. Perhaps this period around birth and death is what poets and sages and the Celts have described as the place when the veil between life and eternity is at its thinnest.

This place of the thin veil is often used in Celtic spirituality to describe the days before, during and after All Saints Day (which, by the way, is Halloween and All Soul's Day). In Celtic spirituality, it is believed that communication between the living and the death is most possible when this veil is thin.

Holy Saturday has always reminded me of a day where the veil between life and eternity is at its thinnest. This feeling is evoked from the liturgical commemoration of Good Friday. Sometimes,

after a Good Friday service, where in community I have been reflecting on the crucifixion and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ, I feel like I've been to a funeral of a dear friend. However, knowing that this commemoration of Christ's death is but a precursor to the joyful celebration of Christ's resurrection, I move quickly through Holy Saturday and long for the celebration of Easter. However, on the other hand, after Easter services, I have often felt as if I had just been to a birthday party, where the anniversary of someone's entry into life is celebrated with loud noise, singing and celebration.

With a funeral behind us and a birthday party ahead, Holy Saturday feel like a strange, in-between world, between life and death, crucifixion and resurrection, a place enveloped in a veil of mystery, grief and joy. However, I have learned to sit in that strange space between Good Friday and Easter, as a place where I can quietly and contemplatively bask in the mysteries of our faith.

The thinning veil is a mystery that is part of Celtic spirituality where some believe that this veil is a place where communication may occur between the living and the dead. I cannot speak to this in Celtic tradition. However, I can say that on Holy Saturday, I can better connect with the aspect of how our Easter tradition is full of mystery. No wonder we cannot explain parts of our faith, like the crucifixion and the resurrection, we can barely explain life and death; two things that are common to being human. Holy Saturday is a time when I don't have to explain the mysteries. Instead, Holy Saturday allows me to celebrate that which I cannot explain but come to accept by faith.

Holy Saturday also reminds me that life on this side of the brief is short. Today's readings echo this awareness of the brevity of life. In Job, we read how few days we mortals live, we live like flowers that bloom, then wither, like fleeting shadows that breeze through and disappear. And while these images of brevity may cause a new kind of grief, I find that I take comfort that God knows the number of my days and I do not need to worry about that number. And so, I come to celebrate the mystery of my own life and the number of my days. Instead of bemoaning the brevity of life, I try to embrace the mystery of the number of my days. By attempting to let go of the anxiety of my own days, I am now free to enjoy being in the presence of the mystery of this thin veil. In my reflection on this place of the thin veil, instead of focusing on what's on the other side of the veil, I try to focus on the mysteries that this veil represents, including the mystery of how Jesus cross that veil life and death on Easter.

But before I celebrate Easter, I will strive to be content to sit on Holy Saturday in that place of the thin veil, reflecting on how close we are to the unseen world that follows life and eternity.

Rev. Valerie Bailey Fisher
Assistant Rector, St Elizabeth's Church





*Saint Elizabeth's Episcopal Church
1 Morse Road
Sudbury, MA 01776*