



Daily Reflections
for Lent
2010

By the people of
St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church,
Sudbury, Massachusetts



Introduction:

The production of a collection of daily devotional reflections for Lent is a long standing tradition of St. Elizabeth's. As a parish we are truly blessed to have so many willing writers who volunteer to share some of their faith journey. Their offering is a true act of love, for captured in these writings is the tiniest of insight into the mind of God. This gift of shared writings, given by and to the community, brings each of us who read and reflect on these words a deeper understanding of God's love for us and for that we say thank you.

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. Each day's entry lists the Scripture readings appointed for the day. A selection of psalms and Old Testament readings are on the left for the morning and on the right New Testament and Epistle for the evening. These are followed by a reflection.

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. If you want to see the Daily Office readings for the Sundays during Lent, you can find them in the Prayer Book.

We often think about Lent as a time of reflection, when we intentionally slow down to contemplate God, our lives and God's call to us, and Lent is all of that. But the odd little poem below reminds me of another aspect of Lent. Lent is also a time of preparation, a time of getting ready for something. That something is Easter morning when we burst through the time of Lent and emerge as something new, new with our understanding of God, new with the understanding of God's love for us and renewed and ready to open ourselves to God's call to us to work in the world in God's name. While I enter into Lent with the expectation of time spent in reflection, I look forward to Easter with excitement and joy emerging from that journey as someone new and hopefully better!

This is the Key

This is the Key of the Kingdom
In that Kingdom is a city;
In that city is a town;
In that town there is a street;
In that street there winds a lane;
In that lane there is a yard;
In that yard there is a house;
In that house there waits a room;

In that room an empty bed;
And on that bed a basket—
A basket of sweet flowers
Of flowers, of flowers;
A basket of sweet flowers.

Flowers in a Basket;
Basket on the bed;
Bed in the chamber;
Chamber in the house;
House in the weedy yard;
Yard in the winding lane;
Lane in the broad street;
Street in the high town;
Town in the city;
City in the Kingdom—
This is the Key to the Kingdom.
Of the Kingdom this is the Key.

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

The Poem: *This is the Key* from the book *Come Hither* edited by Walter de la Mare
The Cover: Photographed by Mandy Fleming, Christ on the Cross on St. Elizabeth's
Chapel Grounds.
The Cover design is by John Howard.
Book Assembly: Peg Scarlata

Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2010

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

Psalm 103

Lesson

Isaiah 58:1-12

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

One of the high point in my life was an opportunity to spend three weeks in the Holy Land in a program run by St. George's College in Jerusalem. As a part of that program we made a four day journey to Mt. Sinai. Of course we traveled through the desert. The desert is an awesome place, like nothing I have ever known before. The total silence, with none of the myriad sounds of civilization – not even the birds or the moving of the trees in the wind – total - absolute – silence; something which is hard to describe; you have to experience it. One of the nights we slept out in the desert under the stars. And the wonder of that sight, nothing dimmed by clouds or ambient light. It made me understand why three of the great religions of the world had their origin in this place – here people came to gripes with the meaning of the universe and their existence, with no outside activity to distract them.

This experience parallels somewhat the account of the prophet Elijah as told in I Kings 19:9-14. Elijah is discouraged; he feels a failure. Yahweh tells Elijah to go to the top of Mt. Horeb and Yahweh will met with him there. A strong wind shattered the rocks on the mountain; but God was not in the wind. Then came an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. Then came fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire. After the fire there came the sound of a gentle breeze (so quiet that if you were not careful you would miss it) – and in that moment Yahweh spoke to Elijah.

Lent is that time of the year when we should try to withdraw (if only for a few minutes) from the many distractions which surround us; to let the still small voice of God speak to us as it spoke to Elijah and our spiritual ancestors.

The Reverend Rich Ebens
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Thursday after Ash Wednesday**February 18, 2010**

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

1

Lessons

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Luke 9:18-25

I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity (Deuteronomy 30:15). The selection continues to read that those who follow God and His commandments shall have life and prosperity and that those who choose to follow another path, refusing the commandments and worshiping other gods will surely find adversity and death. Seems like an obvious choice, right? Our intentions may choose God (life and prosperity), but it is just as easy to find ourselves in situations where we deny that holy root from which we have chosen to grow. Are we doomed if we slip up (death and adversity)? No. In fact, expect to. As long as God is anchored in your heart and He is driving your motivations and intentions, you have chosen God and you keep choosing God at both the setting and the rising of the sun. Our God needs and expects nothing more than our own human commitment to try each day to live according to His commandments and to love Him and only Him.

The Holy Bible is laden with many questions and difficult requests. In Luke, Jesus implores that those who wish to follow him “take up their cross.” What does that actually mean? Is it impossible for us, as children of God, unique in our own profiles, for one meaning to fit us all? Perhaps it is more important to interpret for ourselves what that command means for us, in this time and with our own unique variables than trying to discern the root of that request. When we are able to determine what our own cross may be then we may choose to pick up our cross and follow Him thus denying our own fractured and faulty human steps as we journey through this life. After all, we live this life to enjoy eternity – not to get stuck in our own identities. Our identities are fleeting and they will cease.

In this Lenten Season, identify your cross, pick it up and *choose* to follow Jesus.

Mandy Fleming
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Friday after Ash Wednesday

February 19, 2010

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

How Do You Stand It, Lord?

The Church, that is.

How do you stand its

pretense,

shallowness,

pettiness,

meanness, cruelty,

corruption,

ineffectiveness,

junk?

What on earth (or in heaven) do you think when

you look at

empty liturgies,

the gospel of comfort only,

vying for position,

childish, irresponsible actions

by prelates, lay popes,

clerical bureaucrats,

and pompous clergy

(that's me, Lord),

don't rock-the-ship-

else-you'll-tip-her-over philosophy?

How come you permit your body--- well, that's

what it is-to

be prostituted by

me-first,

money next,

keep-us-going next,

outsiders last,

like

blacks,

smelly people,

drunks, drug addicts,

longhairs,

anybody,

anybody different?

Jesus, Lord, how do you stand it?

From: *A diary of Prayers Personal and Public*

By: Bishop John Coburn

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

February 20, 2010

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

Lenten Journey 2010

Ashes mark our passing
Like lamb's blood on ancient doors.
Into this journey through memory, commitment, and hope.
The journey itself a response to God's graciousness.
Some days gladdened by innumerable mercies
Others darkened by doubt and fear.
In all, God closer to us than we are to ourselves
Ever calling and answering
Traveling through our lives on this path
Back to everlasting and wholly love.

Sylvia Sepulveda
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Monday in the First Week of Lent

February 22, 2010

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

“My grandmother was not a highly educated woman, but she told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals. You know why? Because they breed.”

Quote from a significant elected public official seeking higher office, criticizing policies that extend welfare benefits to the poor, as printed in a mainstream national magazine

How does this quote hit you? To me, it represents a shrill reminder for more compassion and moderation in some of our public discourse. In its worst light, it reflects a justification for meanness against those neighbors who are in difficult circumstances. It is hard to square this up with the message from God, as lived by Christ. There is a better conversation available – even while balancing compassion and fiscal prudence.

My readings were simple and straightforward. But the message rings through and is unmistakable. It was interesting to see the above quote while reflecting on the meaning of these passages. I think they build a pretty good case for a different approach.

The Psalms set a foundation for clarity, purity and strength in God’s law:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul”, and
“The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart”, and
“The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether”

In the Old Testament lesson, Leviticus goes on to enumerate the statutes of the Lord, akin to the Ten Commandments of Moses. Mostly thou shalt not steal, lie, use the Lord’s name in vain, etc., and – when ye reap the harvest of thy field,

“neither shalt thou gather *every* grape of thy vineyard: thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger”, and
“thou shalt not *dis*respect the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor”, and
“thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, thou shalt *not* rebuke thy neighbor”, and finally
“thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self: I am the Lord”

Jesus, as written by Matthew, goes beyond God's Old Testament exhortations to a much more pro-active good-works teaching. Separating good sheep from bad goats, Christ applauds those that:

“when I was hungry, ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me”, and
“verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me”, and “ye shall go to everlasting life”

And for those that “gave me no meat, when I was hungry, and no clothes when I was naked, and did not take me in when I was sick”, “these shall go away unto everlasting punishment”

These passages cut to the core of Christian practice toward others. In reflecting upon the New Testament passages, my thoughts went to people I know in our congregation, and outside of it, who do so much more than I do in living the word of the Lord. It reminds me how much room for improvement I have, and how self-centered my universe is.

I believe the public servant quoted is probably a decent person; bad choice of words, perhaps, in making a point. My worst fear is that it rather betrays true feelings toward others less fortunate. For those voters who do not make an effort to “listen” to the Word of the Lord, this rhetoric serves to justify a hard-heartedness – a selfishness, that is contrary to the teachings of Christ and the Law of our God. It represents the worst, not the best that is in us. I am for fiscal prudence, however – especially during generally tough times - our leaders should use softer language of balance that reflects a generosity of spirit while at the same time evincing “tough love” prudence. I think it is the mean-spiritedness of this man's words that are most counter to what I consider the Christian way of life.

In an odd sort of way the quote from the politician made me feel better that, imperfect though I am, listening to God has put me on the right path of compassion. His remarks reinforce the meaning of God's law to me by way of distinction. They help crystallize an aspect of my faith.

Walter Morgan
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Tuesday in the First Week of Lent

February 23, 2010

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

At first blush, the psalm for today may seem comforting if you think you are one of the righteous, but as I spend some time with it, I find it unsettling. Although I don't think of myself as an evildoer, neither do I think of myself as one of the righteous. And in light of recent events and the suggestion that what has befallen Haiti is caused by the Haitians having made a pact with the devil, I am even more uncomfortable with this passage.

There is a part of me that wishes that quite literally "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles." And that "Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned." However, that doesn't square with my experience. Unless I just take on faith that all those who suffer are wicked even if they seem quite the opposite to me (and I can't build a faith on denial of my reality), I must conclude that the "righteous" or at least those who are not evil often suffer.

In one of the reports I heard in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, there was a piece on a service being held outside a church that had been destroyed and some of those interviewed in the piece talked about their sense that the Holy was with them in their time of trial. However, there were also those who no longer believed because of the death and destruction caused by the earthquake. These were folks who could not imagine an all-powerful God letting this pain and suffering happen – hadn't the psalmist promised in psalms like the 34th that God would protect the righteous? And I have to agree, if my faith had to be based on God's keeping harm from those who are righteous or, as in the passage from Isaiah, those who "seek the Lord," then the events that I have witnessed in my life would have convinced me that my faith was sorely misplaced.

For some time now, I have been unable to believe that the Holy One protects me from the quirks of nature or the violence of humans. I find the simplicity of Lord's Prayer in the Matthew passage more relevant. It makes no promises but recognizes my hope and prayer to be spared the time of trial and protected from evil, and it reminds me that if I am to be faithful, then I must work for the coming of the kingdom, that my needs are met only by grace (I can work hard but still lose my job, become disabled, etc.), that I can experience the gift of forgiveness but that I also need to forgive.

However, this does not answer a fundamental question – if I cannot believe in an all-powerful God who would let things like the earthquake in Haiti happen, who is the God of my belief? Probably closer to the Holy experienced by Haitians who talked of a comforting presence, but truthfully, I usually avoid thinking about this – it is hard to

imagine a Holy One who cannot or will not intercede in the tragedies we see. But this is not the first Lenten reflection that has placed this dilemma squarely before me, and I think perhaps I need to spend this Lent pondering this question.

Susan Berry
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

February 24, 2010

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

Sense images evoked by the Jonah reading:

- Hot sun
- Dust
- A huge, white city
- Sandstone buildings
- The sounds and smell of many animals, dogs barking
- Rough texture of sackcloth
- Blood, sweat, feces
- Jonah's voice
- God's voice

Reflections on the Jonah reading:

- Everyone makes mistakes, forgive and forget.
- God is always watching.
- Sometimes you need to give stuff up to learn.
- You cannot enjoy the sunshine until you experience the rain.
- People felt guilty and were dreading what was going to happen.
- For unity, even the animals wore sackcloth.
- Under God, the king was no different than the people.
- When God saw how many people were sorry, he decided not to destroy their city.
- Jonah felt betrayed by God.
- It's never too late to change your ways.

The J2A Class
Members of St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the First Week of Lent

February 25, 2010

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

138

Lessons

Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14
Matthew 7:7-12

Red morning sky

God's symphony

Rainbow of tranquility

Harbor God's beautiful Gifts

Joy DiMaggio
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the First Week of Lent

February 26, 2010

Strengthen us, Oh 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

138

Lessons

Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14
Matthew 7:7-12

“O my Lord, help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee”. Queen Esther prayed for help for herself and her people.

Haman (a favorite of the King) was planning to kill all the Jews in Babylon. Esther risks her life by going to King Artaxerxes, uninvited (an act punishable by death), to plead for her people. The King was so moved by her that he granted her and her people freedom.

We have all perhaps at sometime felt the utterly lost feeling of being alone and without help. Often our response is to ask God for help (even if we have ignored him for a long time). As Matthew 7:1-12 says, “A father gives good gifts to his children... knock and he will open to you... and everyone who asks receives”. This may seem like ‘foxhole religion’ to cry out in desperation, but God hears our cry and answers us.

Finally as Psalm 138 says, “We give thanks then to the Lord with our whole hearts...

for his steadfast love and faithfulness”.

Find God's peace and love during this lent.

Mary Ainsworth
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Saturday in the First Week of Lent

February 27, 2010

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

We've heard it so often, it's almost trite. Have we ever fully considered what it means when Jesus commands us to "love our enemies?" "*Do good for those who hurt you.*" "*Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*" Do so, Jesus tells us, and you will then be as perfect as God.

A common first reaction might be: "Impossible!" Have you ever tried, in the heat of anger or argument, to muster a prayer for someone who is totally ticking you off? It's not only hard, we just don't *want* to do it! Why try, when anger is so much more...fun...so much more high-energy and distracting? We not only find it hard to forgive, but there can also be something exhilarating about anger, at least for a while.

Look closely and you will find an apparent loophole in Jesus's command: *if you do this, you will then be perfect, like God.* Well, right up front I can tell you this doesn't apply to ME because I am human! Flawed. *Not* perfect. And God knows this (and loves me anyway, phew!) and surely doesn't expect me to be "perfect." Right? Clearly this rule applies to others, maybe just to Jesus or his apostles. Or maybe it's something to be accomplished in the afterlife.

Every day we are victims of slights and remarks, nasty things someone says or does, fails to say or fails to do...that offend us. On occasion, we or someone in our family may be on the receiving end of something a little worse: a nasty lawsuit, a cheating spouse, a stolen purse or smashed mailbox. Okay, maybe I can forgive and love and pray for the person who wrongfully sued me, for my cousin's philandering husband, for the drug addict who stole my purse or for the drunken teens who smashed my friend's mailbox. These offenses hurt, sometimes very deeply, but usually we find the path to forgiveness, if only for our own sanity. Eventually, we forget and decide to "let bygones be bygones." After all, these people aren't really our "enemies" and the harm they have brought to us is often transitory.

But what about more serious transgressions?

Can one expect a Jew to forgive and have compassion for, the Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust? Can a faithful Catholic ever understand the Priest who abused trust and authority and stole a child's innocence? Can the family of a murder victim love the shooter?

These are vexing questions. It is hard to imagine forgiveness, love, and compassion entering into the above situations. And yet, Jesus says we must *love our enemies.*

I am blessed to know someone, whom I will just call Bob. Bob is about as "regular" a guy as you get. He did his stint in the military, raised a family, and in all respects has had a remarkable but "normal" life. I am not certain of Bob's religious practices, if any, but it doesn't matter. God's love shines through him, and you really don't have to look very hard to see it.

Several years ago, Bob got one of those dreaded, life-altering phone calls. Mary, his wife of 40 years, mother of his five children, had been killed by a drunk driver a mile or so from her home. In an instant, the lives of Bob and his family were irrevocably and horribly changed. It was an unspeakable tragedy, the kind that leaves deep scars.

The 36-year old female driver was an “exotic dancer” with a reputation for drinking and drugging. She didn’t get very far from the bar, when she crossed the lane and plowed into Mary’s car without so much as tapping the brakes. Mary, was pronounced dead at the scene. The driver was injured, but survived, and was arrested for DUI and manslaughter.

It is a lot to ask of a family to grieve such a loss, pick up the pieces and move on. When the deceased is a victim of a senseless crime, it is even more challenging. It’s so random, so meaningless, and so very very hard to accept. Just when you begin to get back to normal, there is a perpetrator to contend with. Two years later, the driver pled guilty.

At the sentencing hearing, Bob had an opportunity to make a victim’s statement. What he said shocked his family, the courtroom, and made the evening news. He asked the judge to be lenient on this woman. He felt there was evidence that she was trying to turn her life around. She had stopped drinking and gotten off the drugs. She was taking classes in jail. She was trying to reconcile with her own estranged family. “Everyone deserves another chance” he said in court. In making these statements so publicly, he risked the anger of some of his own children and grandchildren, who felt he was being disloyal to the memory of their mother and grandmother.

If you ask Bob about it, he will look you in the eye and ask you: have you ever made a mistake, a really big mistake? And then he will ask you what you would want if you were really, truly sorry and wanted to start over -- wouldn’t you be grateful for a second chance? He would tell you that this woman has to live with what she did for the rest of her life, and that he believes she deeply regrets what she did. He believes no punishment could be greater than that, and that his wife, Mary, would not have wanted him to carry hatred and anger on his heart.

I know this man, and I have pondered this a great deal. Is my friend Bob “perfect” as the Bible passage says? Well, no. Bob has flaws, as we all do.

And yet, how was he able to experience the ultimate offense – a murder, essentially -- of the person who he loved most in the world – and meet that crisis with such forgiveness, love and compassion? Not only is he “loving his enemy,” he also demonstrates an inner peace and comfort about those feelings. One can see: it was not a struggle to get there. In the years since Mary’s death, I have reflected on this, and observed closely. I may have figured out Bob’s “secret.” It’s simple: Bob has had years of practice! If you spend time with him, you’ll note he is an exceptionally kind and compassionate man. *Always*. Always thinking of others, always putting himself in the shoes of another, whether it’s a family member or the waitress in the restaurant, or the fellow at the tolls. In little ways, mostly, but doing it, really practicing compassion, *every single day*.

Bob embodies compassion, and I believe his lifetime of practicing smaller acts of kindness prepared him for the ultimate act of forgiveness. He looked at that woman and saw, not a monster, but another human being, with the same rights and desires for love and forgiveness and redemption as anyone else.

Jesus is not the only spiritual source to speak to us of compassion. The Dalai Lama and all of Buddhism urge compassion as a path to enlightenment. Gandhi and Martin Luther

King urged non-violence along with a compassionate attempt at understanding the other side, as a means to diffuse conflict. And every week in church, we collectively ask God to “forgive us our trespasses, *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*”

God, forgive us...and then we will turn around and forgive others.

Here is an old Jewish story:

An old Rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun.

"Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?"

"No," answered the Rabbi.

Another asked, "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree?"

"No," answered the Rabbi.

"Then what is it?" the pupils demanded.

"It is when you can look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."

May God grant us all daily opportunities to transcend anger and practice compassion, with friends and enemies alike. Perhaps, over time, we can accomplish a small fraction of His perfection, to help us see each other more clearly, in His light.

Darlene Murphy
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

March 1, 2010

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

Do Unto Others as You Would Have them Do to You

Ahhh, perhaps Jesus' greatest commandment is included in today's gospel reading. "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

It sounds so easy. So simple. So straightforward. Then what makes it soooooo hard?

Today's readings from Psalms and Daniel remind us of the difficulty in adhering to Jesus' commandment. It is so easy to be ungrateful and "ungraceful." We defile, mock, deride, act wickedly, rebel, ignore. We sin. And we sin, often.

But Luke reminds us that we must love our enemies, turn the other cheek, not judge, not condemn. Even when we give, we should expect no reward. For if we can live our lives

in that way, God will forgive our sins, will return our gifts in spades. And the “measure we give will be the measure we get back.”

But it all starts with a confession. With an admission of our wrongdoings. With a supplication. Only after we admit our sins can we begin to walk in the way of the Lord. And when we do, the Lord’s compassion will come speedily and righteousness will be on our side.

So do unto others as you would have them do to you. So easy to say, but so hard to do. Let’s try it; we may like it. Because our reward will be great.

Psalm 79

Plea for Mercy for Jerusalem

A Psalm of Asaph. O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire? Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name’s sake.

Daniel 9:3-10

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

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

‘Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord

our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Luke 6:27-38

Love for Enemies

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

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

Judging Others

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

Eric Kimble
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 2, 2010

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

Attitudes Towards Others

There is a difference between doing God's will and rejecting it.

We are not called to accept what people do
which is against God's will.
At times we are called to reject their actions.
This does not mean we reject them,
as they are still God's children and
therefore our brothers and sisters.

Let us meditate on those groups of people
in the world
whom we consider to be acting against God's will.
Let us affirm each of them as still God's children.
Let us think of any way by which we can warn
them.

Let us meditate on any individuals
whom we consider are rejecting God's will.
Let us affirm each of them as still a child of God.
Let us think of any way by which we can
warn them as a brother or sister.

Let us meditate on any groups
in our district or country
whom we think are rejecting God's way.
Let us affirm them as still God's children.
Let us think of some way
by which we can warn them.

From: *Meditations from the Iona Community*
By: Ian Reid

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 3, 2010

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

On the face of it, loving our friends seems easy, and loving our enemies seems hard. (And we'll assume that we are called to love those who are in between being friends and enemies, since it would be a bit odd to love friends and enemies, but not the others.) Maybe, if we think about it, we can find ways to love our enemies that are not quite so hard. After all, what does it mean to love an enemy? We may not wish the enemy success in their endeavors to hurt us. It doesn't mean that we surrender in a conflict. But we can

still wish that our enemy may have a good life, the blessings of good friends and family, and a good relationship with God. Those things are not fundamentally in conflict with us.

Even with friends and family, we may have conflicts, and we do not resolve them by stopping our love. Rather, it is out of love that we work to find resolution, to find solutions to our problems that benefit both. This is not always easy, but we do it precisely because we love each other. Likewise, we can approach an enemy with the same love, with a goal to resolve the conflict with causing injury.

Who are your enemies today? Can you find ways to love them? Can you imagine resolutions to the conflicts that are good for both sides? What is stopping you from that resolution?

Win Treese
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

March 4, 2010

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

1

Lessons

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Luke 16:19-31

In the Level III Atrium we read all three readings. We reflected on each reading after we read it and when we finished Luke 16:19-31 we noticed a common thread between the three. As a group we discussed what the readings meant to us and what we learned from them, below are reflections from directly from the children in the group:

“Don’t be bad.” - Liam

“Don’t be greedy; share and give.” - Emily

“Help people in need.” - Devin

“If you have something that others need you should share with them.” - Caroline

“Treat others the way you want to be treated.” - Annie

“You lose what you win.” – Liam

“Equality; if you are rich you should level it out.” –Devin

“If you are greedy it doesn’t get you far in life.” - Christopher

“If you are rich it doesn’t really mean you can do anything you want.” -Nick

“You get what you deserve. If you don’t give you won’t get.” – Devin

Reflections from the Level III Atrium
Members of St, Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Second Week of Lent**March 5, 2010**

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

Love I

Immortal Love, author of this great frame,
 Sprung from that beauty which can never fade;
 How hath a man parcel'd out thy glorious name,
 And thrown it on that dust which thou hast made,

While mortal love doth all the title gain!
 Which siding with invention, they together
 Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
 (Thy workmanship) and give thee share in neither.

Wit fancies beauty, beauty raiseth wit:
 The world is theirs, they two play out the game,
 Thou standing by: and though thy glorious name
 Wrought our deliverance from th' infernal pit,

Who sings thy praise? Only a scarf or glove
 Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love.

From: *The Country Parson, The Temple*

By: George Herbert

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent**March 6, 2010**

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

Luke 15:11-32 tells the story of The Lost Son. As the story goes, a young son asks for and receives from his father his share of the father's property which he promptly sells for the money. The young son then travels to a far away land where he lives a life of wasteful self-indulgence. Soon penniless and near starvation, the young son finds work as a tender

of pigs on a nearby farm. However, the harsh work, low wages, and poor treatment by the farm owner push the young son further into despair. Reflecting on his situation, the young son decides to return home. Upon greeting his father, the young son says, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Let me return here to work as one of your hired workers." The father, hearing this, orders that a feast be prepared in his son's honor saying, "For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he has been found".

In reflecting upon this story and the verses from Micah 7 and Psalm 103, several thoughts come to mind.

I am struck first by the young son's willingness to acknowledge and accept his own culpability for the dire situation that he found himself in. Rather than blame others for his despair, he holds himself accountable for the choices, judgments and actions he made that led him to near-ruin.

Secondly, I am struck by the young son's willingness to reveal his missteps to his father. Rather than mislead his father with a false story of misfortune, the young son lays bare the truth and, with that, his vulnerability. For me this act speaks to the foundational love and trust that must have existed between the father and son prior to the young son taking off for his misadventure.

And thirdly, I am struck by the young son's acceptance of the consequences. When he returned to his father the young son did not assume any entitlement or privilege, i.e., he did not expect absolution, forgiveness, or a return to his previous stature or status. He willingly accepted the 'cost' of his dalliances and self-indulgences, wanting only to return home and work as one of his father's hired workers. No guaranteed privilege or status was expected; only the *chance* to earn what his work was worth.

While there are other lessons and ideas for thoughtful reflection contained in this story, it was these three that rose first to my mind. For as the young son's self-indulgent pursuits caused him to be 'lost', the experience enabled his foundational character to be 'found'. And this is what, I believe, his father celebrates upon his young son's return. We all at one time or another make choices or take actions that in retrospect we wish we hadn't. In that event, do we hold ourselves responsible or do we blame others; do we rationalize our mistake, creating a false story of our misfortune, or do we reveal its 'truth' and become vulnerable to the judgment of others; do we accept the consequences of our actions or do we expect to be 'bailed out' and returned to our former rank or standing.

What we do in that event, I believe, reveals our foundational character.

John Stevens
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Third Week of Lent

March 8, 2010

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

I have always been somewhat confused regarding the prophets Elijah and Elisha. After a bit of reading I understand a little more on the significance of the anointment of Elisha, the prophet God commissioned Elijah to mentor.

Elijah was a man of great extremes a man with a similar style to John the Baptist. Elisha was a gentle man, a farmer, gracious diplomat, a man who left his family to carry on the work of Elijah. Both men performed miracles, divided waters – work we can't even relate to.

Why would God have Elijah mentor a man so different than himself to carry on the work God ask him to do? I can't help but think of how parallel Elijah and Elisha's relationship was to that of John the Baptist and Jesus. It's interesting to me that God used these prophets with very different styles – and they were effective.

In the reading of **2Kings:5:1-15b** we begin to understand a bit more of Elisha's journey in the healing of Naaman.

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian Army. He was highly respected and esteemed by the King of Syria, especially since, through his leadership, the Lord gave deliverance to Syria. Naaman was also a man afflicted with leprosy

During the raids against Israel the Syrians had captured a young Israeli girl who became the servant of Naaman's wife. She told Naaman's wife about the healing works of the Prophet Elisha. When Naaman found out about Elisha's ability to heal the sick, he asks the King of Syria to arrange for him to meet with Elisha.

I am sure the King of Syria (out of great admiration for Naaman) felt obligation to fulfill this wish so he sent Naaman with a bag of silver and gold and a letter of recommendation to the King of Israel. Unfortunately the King of Israel was appalled by this request and felt the King of Syria was trying to start another argument.

When Elisha, the peacemaker heard about this, he questioned the King of Israel. *‘Why are you so upset? I will show you there is a prophet in Israel’*

Naaman went to Elisha's home seeking a miracle but Elisha would not talk with him directly. Instead, Elisha sent one of his servants to deliver the message. His message was for Naaman to wash in the Jordan River 3 times and he would be healed.

Naaman was insulted that a servant was giving him instructions. He expected a healing directly from Elisha. Naaman questioned why he should wash in the Jordan River. After all – what was wrong with the beautiful, clear rivers of Damascus? It was the servant who humbled Naaman with the words “If it had been Elisha who had told you to do this would you not have done so?”

The words of the servant caused Naaman to reconsider his position and the opportunity to be healed. So he did just that – Washed in the Jordan River and was completely healed. He then returned to see Elisha and said “*I know there is no God but the God of Israel.*”

Years later in the Gospel reading **Luke 4:23-30** Jesus is in the synagogue telling the story of Naaman and Elisha. His words “*A prophet is never welcomed in his home town*” put the synagogue in an uproar. Elisha’s healing and prophesy foreshadowed the work of Christ. For Elisha, the King of Israel doubted the capability of Elisha. For Christ, it was his own nation.

The story of Elisha the healer and Naaman the afflicted are important lesson for us to learn. We have a better understanding of the Syrian/Israel conflict in ancient times. However I think an overlooked aspect if this story is the significant roles of the servant girl of Naaman and the servant of Elisha. These two servants represent the important roles each of us play in the effort of healing. Had it not been for the servant girl from Israel who knew of Elisha’s gifts, Naaman would never have found healing. He took a risk and crossed the border to be healed. The servant of Elisha was persistent. He/she had the gift of persuasion and encouraged Naaman to think twice about taking the steps to heal.

God used these two unknown servants to carry the message of healing. I suspect God can use us in more ways than we realize, encouraging one another in significant ways. It is only through the grace of God we can heal our differences, heal one another and most of all, heal ourselves.

Nancy Morgan
Member, St, Elizabeth’s Church

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

March 9, 2010

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

I wonder if the ground has anything to say? I wonder
if the ground is listening to what is said? I wonder if the ground

would come alive and what is on it? Though I hear what the ground says. The ground says, It is the Great Spirit that placed me here... The ground, water and grass say, The Great Spirit has given us our names. We have these names and hold these names. The ground says, The Great Spirit has placed me here to produce all that grows on me, trees and fruit. The same way the ground says, It was from me man was made. The Great Spirit, in placing men on earth, desired them to take good care of the ground and to do each other no harm.

From: *Every Part of this Earth is Sacred*

By: Young Chief/Cayuse

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

March 10, 2010

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, forever and ever. *Amen.*

Psalm

78:1-6

Lessons

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

Matthew 5:17-19

Flo Griswold and the Prayer Chain

Back in the mid sixties, when we were new members of St. Elizabeth's church, there was a lovely older woman who was usually standing in the foyer of the church Sunday mornings as sort of an unofficial greeter, Flo Griswold. She was a woman of high principal, yet very tolerant of others, especially me, with my four small kids and many questions. She liked to explain things and give out history to new people, without any negative gossip or criticism. Quite a gift! I felt she was a person like my mother would have been, if only she'd had a better life.

One day, when we were touring the church at Sturbridge Village with our family, we saw a box of enclosed seats near the front. Kathy, then three, asked if it was for the choir. Our guide explained that the elders sat there. "Do you mean the old folks"? Kathy asked. The older kids were shushing her, but our guide was happy to explain. "Not really. It would be the people who had been there a while and knew how everything should be done." "Oh, you mean like Mrs. Griswold"? Kathy said.

Flo was teaching Kathy's class of three-year-olds, and decided to teach them about the sacraments. They were going to give a skit in church and explain the sacraments to everybody. "I get to be in the skit about Bapsitism!" Kathy declared. "Great," I said, "But that's Baptism". She persisted in saying "Bapsitism", and when I corrected her again, she insisted, "Mrs. Griswold always says 'Bapsitism', she says 'Bapsitism' all the time!" "I see," I said. "And I get to be the Fairy God-Mother!" The skit was a big success, though I was a little worried when they "bapsitised" a doll.

About that time, a couple in the choir had split up, and the man took to visiting the Griswolds where he got comfort and help with the kids. While he was there, he made

friends with the Griswolds' daughter, a single lady of maybe 35. Before long they were an item, and are still happily married all these years. When I heard the news, I told my family at supper, "I know what Mrs. Griswold will say. 'God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform'." When I saw her on Sunday, I said, "I just heard about Bruce and Anne, you must be so pleased!" "I am pleased," she said. "You know, God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform!" My children were very impressed!

Flash forward to 1990. I was going in for cancer surgery, and very anxious. Flo had recently set up a Prayer Chain, she would call and tell one of the members who to pray for that week, and that one would call the next, and so on. "Tell me when your surgery is scheduled," she said, "and I'll get the Prayer Chain to pray for you." I was pleased, but not sure, I wanted the attention. "My surgery is Tuesday", I said. "What time on Tuesday?" she asked. "Twelve o'clock," I answered. "I'll tell them to pray at twelve, or wait. Let's make it ten to twelve," she said. "That's very kind of you," I said, but I had to stifle a nervous giggle. I just had a vision of God pulling a big pocket watch out of a fold in his robe. "Who speaketh for this woman?" he would thunder.

On Tuesday, I had gone through all the prep, and the time was at hand. They had given me a little something to prevent me from jumping off the gurney and running down the hall in my Johnny, but what I felt can only be described as terror. Rolling along the hall, I watched the ceiling tiles flash by. Turning my head a little, I saw a wall clock. It was ten minutes to twelve. "The Prayer Chain" I thought, and at once, I felt such peace! There was no logic or reason for the change, just a wonderful sense of peace! So now I'm a believer in the power of prayer.

Gin Bell
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

March 11, 2010

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

When I read this reflection, I interpreted the phrase "your church" as our community of St. Elizabeth's. And I found myself asking, how is St. Elizabeth's getting God's aid? How do we know we are on the path to salvation? It's a question I have asked about my individual faith, but I believe the readings are asking these questions about our church community.

As I've become increasingly engaged in St. Elizabeth's over the years, I'm just starting to understand the depth and breadth of the individual contributions that make our church run as smoothly as it does. There are several volunteers whose service creates the community of worship we all enjoy: welcoming newcomers, singing in the choir, and

serving coffee after the service, to name just a few. I am so accustomed to our worship experience, that I believe I often take it for granted.

This passage reminds me that God is at work in our lives, through our church community, and the answers to my questions about God's aid and salvation lie right in front of me.

Psalm 95, 6-11 says,

“Come let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord who made us.
For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.”

I may not always feel it, or may be too distracted with daily life to appreciate it, but today I am gently reminded of God's grace in my life, and being a grateful and protected member of this community.

Ildi Morris
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Third Week of Lent

March 12, 2010

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

All of the readings for today speak to the first and greatest commandment – to honor our Lord, God above all. As I was growing up and heard these passages, I thought, of course, I love our God. Of course, I do not worship idols. How pagan that would be, to have idols other than the God we know. I was so comfortable in the belief that our society does not think of other gods. We do not have golden calves, or fertility goddesses, or gods like Zeus or Jupiter, or others of mythology.

But as I have grown older, I wonder. The TV show, *American Idol*, has the word *Idol* in its name. Why is that? Do we not idolize talent and beauty? Do we not idolize success, however we define it? As I watch the Super Bowl tonight while writing this, I think about rock stars (the halftime activity), the quarterbacks, and other players and coaches we idolize. And I watch commercials pushing products we are supposed to crave and buy (idolize?). Do we not idolize fashion, and nice cars, and the best toys for our kids, and other things that take our money and our attention away from our God?

Yes, we Americans have idols. We need to pay more attention to these readings and look at our own loyalties.

Susan Newlin
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

March 13, 2010

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

As a child, I loved the parable described in the Luke passage. I remember the words vividly. It is not the money but the feeling. I see a simple truth being expressed in the passages of psalm 51:15-20, Hosea 6:1-6, Luke 18:9-14. When I try to phrase this in my own words, I don't seem to catch it, but I will try. God is not looking for someone to come into his temple and offer money, wealth, (burnt offerings); a person who plays the role from the outside, but does not speak from what is within. God is looking for the person who admits their frailty, their weakness (a broken and contrite heart), or as in the parable, the publican who smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart” For me, these three readings lead to

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.*

“O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers” feels so relevant to my here and now. A sense of unease has settled around me involving my concern for my world, my country, my government, the people whom we elect to run our country, and my own sense of the future. Financially, I recently went through the process of selling and buying houses, and I am still climbing out of the debt I incurred from the two mortgages that I held for 5 months. I am watching my elderly mother go bankrupt paying her doctor bills even though she has Shell's medical insurance and Medicare. As a scientist, I am totally alarmed at the receding glaciers I have seen in Alaska, the melting ice caps, and the rising seas. I think back to ten years ago, pre-9/11, when my world seemed so much more closed and defined. And yes, it wasn't totally secure back then. I think I put more things in closets and closed more doors. (Ten years ago I literally had more closets and doors.) In the last ten years, I was diagnosed with insulin-dependent diabetes, my marriage fell apart, my two children grew up, one with ease and grace, and one who pushed, and shoved, and stumbled, and humbled me, far beyond anything I could ever have imagined in the year 2000. So the words,

“ 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” carry far more weight and meaning for me now than before.

But I don't want to end this on a negative note. I have a beautiful new house, my two children are now both prospering, each in their own way, and I am blessed with a great job and wonderful friends. I exercise religiously and I am now a vegan (seriously). But most of all, I know that I am not alone. And though I know that the meaning of these following words are still for me obscure and not necessarily clear, "...through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever." I do know – and perhaps more importantly feel – that they mean that I am not alone. And there is strength in not being alone.

Anthea Coster
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 15, 2010

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

As a general rule, caring for others is the best thing we can do. If it so happens that in your own home or nearby, there is someone who is completely vulnerable, defenseless and prisoner of an incurable disability, then reflect on the unique opportunity this provides you and serve that person joyfully. That is an excellent thing to do.

On the other hand, if you take it as an obligation and a nuisance, your activity will be incomplete, and you will create difficulties unnecessarily.

From: *365 Dalai Lama: Daily Advice from the Heart*
By: The Dalai Lama



Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 16, 2010

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

A man was paralyzed. He could not achieve what he wanted. Through the support of four friends he was enabled to hear Jesus saying to him, 'Your sins are forgiven, my friend' and "Get up and go home".

Let us think of times in the past when we have been paralyzed, and unable to do what we wanted. Let us remember those who in different ways brought us to Jesus so that we could hear him saying to us, 'Your sins are forgiven my friend'; And 'Get up and walk'. Let us give thanks for those friends.

If we feel in any way paralyzed, now or in the future, let us remember that there are many both known and unknown who are bringing us to Jesus in prayer. Let us also listen again to the words spoken to the paralyzed man. 'Your sins are forgiven my friend'; and 'Get up and walk'.

Let us think of others unable to walk in the ways of Jesus. Let us in our prayers carry them to Jesus so that they too may hear spoken to them the words of Jesus to the man who could not walk.

'Your sins are forgiven, my friend'; and 'Get up and walk'.

From: *Meditations from the Iona Community*
By, Ian Reid

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 17, 2010

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

For me, today's readings point toward our goal. A few of the lessons in the Level II and III COGS program explore this vision. It's called Parousia – the time when God will be all in all. It is presented first to the children in the Plan of God. I offer it to you because it has become a frequent and uplifting subject of my reflection lately.

The Plan of God is anchored in our understanding of time, and three important "moments"

Creation (In the beginning) until →

Redemption (Jesus came) until →

Parousia (Re-creation)

The reading from the Gospel of John alludes to the time when Jesus will judge men. Judgment is part of Parousia. I have sometimes found the passages about God's judgment to be disconcerting, but in COGS we learn there is more.

The passages from Isaiah and the Psalms remind us of the covenant, the promise of salvation, and of re-creation, available sometimes even in the midst of waiting. We also explore these facets with the children using COGS' materials.

Below are synopses of the readings we use to build an impressionistic picture of this Christian vision. I like to read them slowly, envisioning what it will be like. Imagine ...

The Holy Spirit will be given to all people – to all humankind. Joel 3: 1-2

There will be no more sickness – just fullness of life. Isaiah 35: 5-6

Animals will all get along, there will be total peace in creation. Isaiah 11: 6-7

Eternal life will belong to those alive or dead, who believe in Jesus
John 11: 25-26

There will be no more death or mourning. All things will be made new.
Revelations 21: 4-5

No more day or night, only the Light of the Lord. Time will be different.
Isaiah 60: 19-20

There will be celebration and praise of God forever. Revelations 5:13

All will be alive in Christ. Through Jesus all will come alive, resurrection of the body. I Corinthians 15: 20-22

No more war, only peace. No more weapons. Isaiah 2:4-5

There is judgment for all, and justice in the Kingdom of God. Not everything will be a part of the Kingdom. Matthew 25: 31-46

Christ will come again and we will see him. Matthew 24: 30-31

A new heaven and a new earth will be created. There will be no memory of what was before. The new will be so much better than the old. Isaiah 65:17

I wonder how this will feel?

Do we have a role to play in bringing this about? What will we write on our blank page?

Have you ever had small glimpses of this?

Lord, help me to experience your intention in everyday moments. Help us to be co-creators of your vision. May we treasure this vision, carry it steadfastly in our hearts, and bring it lovingly into a world that needs your light.

In His love,

Kris Wile
Member, St, Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 18, 2010

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

.Karl's (age almost 9) and Derek's (age 7) thoughts on the story of Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, when Moses fails to return, and they violate the commandments and make a golden idol:

Karl: *God is angry with the Israelites. He seems to have a bad temper and is angry because they are making another god. But he has a good reason to be angry. They are making another god that doesn't do anything, doesn't move, doesn't do anything for them. When he is the **real** God.*

Derek: *God is angry that they are not obeying the commandments. But Moses argues with God.*

Karl: *When Moses says to God, "what will the Egyptians think?", he is not really thinking of God. Because God isn't like us and doesn't care what people think. He is thinking of himself, and trying to save his people.*

Derek: *"God was angry with them. They deserved his anger. But Moses asked for them to be forgiven and God did forgive them."*

Question: What do you think of the Israelites in this story?

Derek: *They were kind of crazy because they thought Moses and God might be fakes, even though he opened up the ocean for them.*

Karl: *It's bad that they broke the commandments. It's like when the teacher leaves the room at school. The longer the teacher is gone, the more kids break the rules. If they know she is coming right back, they behave a little better.*

Question: What is the real message of this story?

Karl: *"The real message is about faith."*

"There was no faith when Moses left for 40 days. And I think there is faith in the part where the ocean split in two, and they had to have faith in God then. Moses helped them by building altars to remind them, and kept delivering messages. Then he left, and was gone too long, and they forgot. 40 days is long enough to forget a math problem, but not long enough to forget something like the sea splitting in two. So, the Israelites were forgetful, stubborn, and kind of idiotic. They forgot the most amazing thing they've ever seen in their life in only 40 days."

Derek: *"The Israelites were forgetful. They did not have faith. If they had faith, they would have waited. They stopped believing in God. They gave up pretty easily."*

Question: Talk to me about faith and how you keep your faith and what it means to you

Derek: *"I am not forgetful about God. I don't want to be like the Israelites. God is a very special person, and I believe in him, because he rules the world. Even if something goes wrong, I know God has always been there forever, and is still there. The Israelites forgot God very easily because they didn't have faith. I feel lucky to have faith, because the Israelites didn't have it. I feel extra lucky, like in the book at school, I Will Tell You How Lucky You Are."*

Question: What if you didn't have faith? Would it be scary? Tell me about your faith and how you keep it.

Derek: *"I don't know, because I do have faith."*

Karl: *"How I keep my faith? Church. If I was never introduced to the whole thing in church, and someone just told me there was a guy named God, I wouldn't believe it. I think people should try to not get all angry and scared and lose their faith. Faith is not easy. Technically it is, because it's only in your mind, but when things go wrong it is easy to lose faith and hard to keep it.*

If I didn't have any faith, then I guess I wouldn't go to church. If I found out there was no God, I would feel like I was wrong and I think I shouldn't have believed that, but also I still think something would tell me there really is a God, even if someone said they had proof that there wasn't."

Karl and Derek Murphy
Members of St, Elizabeth's Church

**Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent
2010**

March 19,

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

God, What Have You Done For Me Lately?

How irreverent of me. Then again, it was 2000 years ago when a few people were witness to the “Good News” of God’s abounding love thru the life and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Since those 2000-year-old first-hand accounts and learned interpretations of God’s love thru his Son Jesus Christ, billions of people’s faith has been propagating The Word without having actually seen The Works or for that matter the promise of “His Coming in Glory”. Most, if not all, of these billions of people (myself included) have found a way to gain more evidence of God’s love than just thru periodic review of biblical passages to keep their faith truly alive. Today’s readings collectively discuss the hope for and revelation of God’s love thru His Son Jesus Christ.

What evidence do I have of God’s love for me other than thru the life and resurrection of His Son? Well, my evidence is mostly thru answered prayers. So, when I’m thinking poorly of myself, feel an absence of God, or declare my roll in life to be miniscule, I often pray for God to open my eyes a little wider and quite often I suddenly seem to see a more glorious world that is interacting with me and my soul seems to get restored. For me, this seems to be evidence that I need of God’s love for me. This evidence is all that I need to sense that Jesus, not only will but does, “Come in Glory” and “His Kingdom” does, almost by definition, “Have No End”. For without God’s restorative powers, I cannot imagine feeling anything but hopelessly alone in my most trying times.

Larry Jobson
Member, St, Elizabeth’s Church

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 20, 2010

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

7:6-11

Lessons

Jeremiah 11:18-20

John 7:37-52

Tu sei sorgente viva, tu sei fuoco, sei carita Veni Spirito Santo, veni Spirito Santo

– *from a Taize Song*

Just on the other side of Easter is the start of baseball season (April 5, day after Easter). And as I often do at this time of year, I start to wonder about many mysteries of baseball such as, who will win the World Series this year and why is the baseball hall of fame in Cooperstown, New York. I don't know for sure, but I wonder if the baseball powers that be chose Cooperstown because of its unique role as the location of the headwaters of the Susquehanna River.

The Susquehanna is one of the most sacred rivers in Pennsylvania. The river flows from Cooperstown through New York, Pennsylvania and parts of Maryland. It is one of the largest of the 150 rivers that empty into the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources describes the river as the state's lifeblood that sustains agriculture and other industries for more than half of Pennsylvania. No wonder people often mention the Susquehanna with a sense of awe and wonder.

I have had the honor and the privilege of living and working on the banks of the Susquehanna River. In Central Pennsylvania, the back porch of my first apartment overlooked the gentle brook that is the Susquehanna at a quiet bend on this 444-mile river. A few years later, I moved north to upstate New York where my offices were in a building on the banks of the Susquehanna River. At this point, the river was wide and deep enough to support boating and fishing. A wide, four-lane bridge crosses the river into the town where I had worked as a newspaper reporter. This town was the site of a meeting hosted by representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for upstate New York community leaders. The Pennsylvanians came with a simple message to the New Yorkers: take care of your river! The meeting was a reminder to New Yorkers about how their part of the Susquehanna, being so close to the headwaters, impacted the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay. The meeting was an awakening for me. After this challenge, I took the headwaters much more seriously than just the beginning of a river for boating, fishing and recreation.

As I learned to focus on the headwaters and not just the river, I found that I looked differently at Jesus' teachings on the living water. At first, when I read Jesus' description of himself as the source of living water, I usually stopped listening, for at this point, I would be so relieved to hear what seems to be an offer from Christ for comfort and fulfillment. The crowd in John's passage may have had a similar reaction to Jesus' words, widely recognized as a messianic proclamation. But instead of experiencing a sense of peace, a subset of this crowd became outraged and demanded Jesus' arrest.

The anger from these listeners made me look again at the text. Why were they so upset? At second glance, I saw that the text is not saying Jesus is the living water; it is saying that the living water flows out of those who believe in Jesus. But the source of that living water is Jesus. They may have been angry at Jesus' claim to be the Source, for only God can be the Source. The angry listeners may have seen Jesus' words as blasphemy. But for us, Jesus as the source is good news. But it is also a challenge; for while we will not thirst anymore, we will become that from which the living water springs forth. We become the river and Christ is the headwaters. So, to carry the metaphor back to the Susquehanna,

we, the believers in Jesus Christ, are the Susquehanna River; we are the meandering creeks, the rivers full of fish, the rushing waters through the mountains, all which come from one source, the headwaters in Cooperstown. And to extend the metaphor, Jesus is the headwaters, the Source.

I am quick to celebrate the living water, but the headwaters of the Susquehanna remind me to be thankful for Christ as the source of this living water that flows from Christ and through our hearts. A translation of an Italian Taize song helps me celebrate this sentiment:

You are living source
You are fire
You are love
Come Holy Spirit, Come Holy Spirit

So, each year, at the beginning of baseball season, and the mention of Cooperstown; in addition to a quick prayer for the Phillies, I remember with gratitude my time on the Susquehanna and the importance of the head waters of that river. But I am also reminded that the living water that flows from us is from The Source, that is Jesus Christ.

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

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 22, 2010

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

Today's lessons are difficult ones, reminders of the desperation and loneliness that can result when fingers are pointing at us. The falsely accused Susanna appears powerless when the judges charge her with adultery. Although she is blameless, there is no one to stand up for her. But the lesson makes clear that even in our darkest hour, we are never alone. Susanna's "heart trusted in the Lord" (Susanna, 35) and when she calls out to Him, He answers her prayer by sending an advocate in the form of Daniel. Daniel proves her innocence and saves Susanna's life.

A similar situation is presented in John, chapter 8. This time the woman brought before Jesus has indeed sinned. There is no question of her guilt and she does not try to defend herself against the accusation of adultery. However, when the scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus whether or not the ancient punishment of stoning is appropriate, again we see the mercy of God at work. Jesus says, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin

be the first to throw a stone at her.’ (John 8:8) After all the accusers quietly walk away, Jesus assures the woman that he does not “condemn” her either. The lesson is quite familiar to us, but it bears repeating. It’s all too easy to form an opinion with little information, to make quick judgments and even condemn others. But Jesus, in his compassion, demonstrates an alternate path – one of mercy and forgiveness. Some wise person once observed that when you point a finger at someone, there are always three more pointing back at yourself. But what would happen if we stretched those three fingers out? Instead of pointing a finger, we would be reaching out a hand. Not causing division but creating community instead.

Nancy Kimble
Member, St, Elizabeth’s Church

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 23, 2010

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

The people of Israel rely on Moses as their intercessor with God. It’s interesting that God doesn’t grant exactly what the people asked for: they asked that God take away the serpents, but instead Moses is given a way the people can avoid dying, once bitten by a serpent. Just as Moses serves as the people’s intermediary in their praying, the bronze serpent serves as God’s intermediary in His answer to their prayers.

The Psalmist looks forward to the time when “the Lord will build up Zion ... he will regard the prayer of the destitute.” Already the Lord has “looked down from his holy height ... to hear the groans of the prisoners.” This section of the Psalm comes in the middle of some terrible complaints, just short of despair, but the Psalmist rests his faith on the Lord’s long, direct relationship with the earth and its people. God is with us always, hears us always, whether our prayers are eloquent or mere groans. The wretched Psalmist feels no need of an intermediary.

Jesus challenges the Pharisees’ understanding of themselves as intermediaries between the people and God, authoritative interpreters of Biblical law. Although they repeatedly misunderstand his words, they recognize this challenge to their authority. Jesus rests his own authority on the word of the Father, and directly makes claim to know “what is pleasing to him.” He offers his listeners the chance to believe in him and be released from their sins, to listen to his good news and give up the rigid literalism their belief has been reduced to.

Do we need an intermediary between our human selves and the divine presence? Is Jesus himself an intermediary, an intercessor, or is he God present with us, not looking down from his holy height but instead among us?

Anne Reilly
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 24, 2010

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

Canticle 2 *or* 13

Lessons

Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28

John 8:31-42

We start out as children of Abraham, a people who do not like to be told what we believe. As children we are told what to do and believe. Then as adults we are told by our bosses what to do at the workplace and how to behave. There is always an element of selfishness in all of us which is the influence of the Devil.

Jesus tells us he was sent by God to try and help forgive our sins. He too was sent by his Father. He came to try and resist the Devil that is in all of us.

The Jewish slaves felt that because they were children of Abraham that their spirit belonged to no one but themselves. Jesus tried to tell them that like any other slave that they could be freed from their master Abraham and their sins would be forgiven once they followed Jesus.

Jennifer Vesey
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 25, 2010

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

To me, a common theme in these readings is the clarity and certainty of God's presence. In Genesis, God speaks directly to Abraham and names the promises of His covenant,

which the psalmist tells us will be kept to the thousandth generation. In the reading from John's gospel, Jesus declares openly, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

Yet immediately after this bold proclamation, Jesus slips away from the temple and hides himself. What's with that? Sure, He had a good reason – the crowd was picking up stones, after all – but sometimes I find frustration in passages of Scripture where Jesus isn't so clear about his identity or mission. In chapter 9 of Luke, for example, Jesus orders the disciples not to tell anyone he is the Messiah! And in chapter 13 of Matthew, the disciples have to ask Jesus the meaning of the parables. If the disciples, who followed Jesus in person every day for months and years, didn't understand what He was saying, how am I supposed to apply His teachings to my life?

I unexpectedly had an insight into this situation when I was asked to participate in a discussion group about the "sacred texts" of various professions. In many fields, there seems to be broad, if informal, agreement on authoritative texts; for example, Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style" for writers, or in my field, Gray and Meyer's "Analog Integrated Circuit Design." Inevitably some reviewer will refer to this or that book as "the Bible" of the field, which has always irritated me. The importance of The Bible transcends that of any profession and I've never liked hearing "Bible" used for any other book.

But, seeing the lists people put together of the "sacred texts" in their fields, something occurred to me. Relating to: Why did Jesus made the parables so, well, hard to understand, sometimes!?! Why didn't he just come out and say things more clearly? Well, what do those books have in common? What every good reference book has in common: when you need an answer for some pressing question, the book is an authority that you KNOW is RIGHT!

Certainty is a great comfort, and some people can't function without it, even though it is ultimately an illusion. People want the Bible to be a reference book for life, with answers that are positively certain to be true. That's the appeal of literal Biblical truth and fundamentalism. In Jesus' time it was the scribes and Pharisees who were the ones who were so sure of themselves and oppressed anyone who didn't see the truth of the book their way. I think Jesus taught the way he did to guide us toward truth, but to always leave enough room for uncertainty so that we would be humble, continue searching, and never put our own understanding above someone else's.

John McNeill

Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

March 26, 2010

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

Am I Crazy, God?

I have this deep sense that you are calling me deeper and deeper into you, God, and sometimes I wonder if I'm crazy? If I am crazy and I am in you, then what's so wrong about being crazy?

You say I'm special. I don't say it. You say it. Love says it. And I assent to it.

It doesn't mean I'm better. You know that!! Or brighter, or holier. It just means that you have had from the beginning of my life (before, even?) a special way with me, a special touch, a special calling for me to be myself in you.

So that when I was most myself I was most in you. I was being what I was meant to be. And who could have been doing the "meaning" but you? So you meant me to be something special in you, in relation to you.

So I go deeper into you, I go deeper into myself, I become special. I become more and more myself, I become even a little bit you-what you have in your mind for me. (And have had from eternity?)

But I'm no more special than anybody else. I'm just special in the special way you made me.

Everybody else is just as special-but each in his own special way.

That's not crazy, God. Is it?

If it is, I'm content to be out of my mind and in yours.

It's kind of crazy, isn't it, God?

And I guess that's why you're God

And we're not

Crazy.

Alleluia!

From: *A Diary of Prayers Personal and Public*

By: Bishop John Coburn

**Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent
2010**

March 27,

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

“Do the right thing.” “Don’t be evil.” “Go with God.” “What would Jesus do?” We don’t need to look very far to find a slogan or motto that fits any situation. But it is probably too much to ask of just a few words to carry the weight of a complete moral code.

Scripture, however, has created some traps for us. And if the traps hadn’t been created in scripture, we would have manufactured them anyway. God is on our side. Isn’t that what we’re told in the Psalms and in Ezekiel? Actually, we’re told that God is on the side of the children of Israel. But Christians have traditionally assumed all the privileges and prerogatives that God bestowed upon the Jews of the Old Testament, and so God is on *our* side, right?

Perhaps, but that doesn’t make us morally correct. John 11 describes the conspiracy among the priests and the Pharisees to put Jesus to death. *They* were God’s chosen people. Was not God on their side? Of course He was. Caiaphas believed he was protecting his own position as a chosen among the chosen. What would happen to the people of Israel if Jesus the upstart, Jesus the miracle worker, Jesus the beloved were to disrupt the political order? One could imagine a Caiaphas who truly believed that God was on his side.

And we have no reason to doubt that God was on Caiaphas’ side. Just as a parent loves a child who has done wrong, God does not abandon us when we fail to follow faithfully, or act selfishly, or do the wrong thing.

God may be on our side, but the Gospel shows us that God’s love isn’t a license, it is a pardon.

Matt Reilly
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church



Monday in Holy Week**March 29, 2010**

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

Be praised, my God, by butterfly and dragonfly wings exercising
for their first flight.

Be praised by lightning and thunder causing spring showers.

Be praised by silent voice of grass growing and trees budding.

Be praised by all the colorful flower trumpets of spring.

Be praised by downy feathers freshly dried on newly hatched
ducklings and chicks.

Be praised by the songs of birds, crickets and frogs.

Be praised, my God, by all your creation which tells of new life.

From: *Earth Prayers from Around the World*

BY: Mary Goergen, O.S.F.

Tuesday in Holy Week**March 30, 2010**

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

In Mark's gospel, Jesus doesn't go to the temple in Jerusalem until shortly before his death. He does not go there to worship or to offer sacrifice or even to pray. In today's story from Mark, when he finally does "go to church" he "cleanses" the temple and teaches in it. The "cleansing" symbolically abolishes a religious system and re-creates it in a different form so that it can do what it should have been doing all along. The

teaching proclaims what it is that should have been done all along. (This is not a story about Jesus replacing Judaism with Christianity or a story about the superiority of New Testament “grace” to Old Testament “law”.)

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling...in the temple. The temple-centered religious establishment participated in, benefited from and legitimized an oppressive political and economic system. “Those who were selling” is, I believe, a metaphor for those in the religious establishment (personified as “the chief priest and scribes”) who perpetuated and justified that system, especially with religious language.

And those who were buying. (An often overlooked phrase.) “Those who were buying” is, I think, a metaphor for those worshipers who also exploited the poor and whose acts of social injustice were overlooked or condoned by the “chief priests and scribes”. “Those who were buying” reappear as the “you” in verse 17. The sellers and buyers are, in short, partners in an oppressive system.

And he overturned the tables of the moneychangers. The temple authorities levied an annual tax on every Jewish male, whether living in Palestine or abroad. The tax was an amount equivalent to two days’ wages for an unskilled laborer. Because the use of “unclean” coins (which might, for example, have the “graven image” of a deified Roman emperor on them) was forbidden in the temple, the moneychangers converted them into temple-approved currency. Jesus protests both the tax and the moneychangers because: 1) the moneychangers charged interest, a practice which was prohibited in the Torah but justified by the temple’s spin doctors; 2) the tax was regressive and punitive, since for a day laborer to pay it essentially meant going without food for two days; 3) he is challenging a “temple theology” which said the temple was God’s exclusive dwelling place, the only place where devout Jews could worship and offer sacrifices. No temple, no access to God. No sacrifices, no path to forgiveness. This theology justified the tax as a way of maintaining a God-ordained system.

And the seats of those who sold doves. Doves, like any sacrificial animal, had to be purchased at the temple to ensure the animal’s ritual “cleanness”. By here symbolically abolishing the sacrificial system, Jesus follows in the footsteps of several Old Testament prophets who preached that God desires justice and mercy rather than sacrifice. (See, for example, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-24; and Isaiah 1:10-17.)

And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. Here Jesus symbolically shuts down the entire temple complex. The message is that the system needs not reform but a radical refounding, re-orienting, and re-creating, needs an entirely different (but not previously unknown) reason for being. His teaching (Mark 11:17) reveals why he shut it down and what he hoped it would become. The gospel writer chooses two quotations from the prophets to summarize this teaching. (See Isaiah 56:1-8 and Jeremiah 7:1-11.)

My house shall be called a house of prayer. Not a support for oppressive political, economic and social systems. Not an institution that defines and controls our access to God or God's access to us. But a house of prayer. Most prayers in the Bible—and perhaps in real life—are cries for help, justice and compassion. In a house of prayer, those who hear those cries respond with help, justice and compassion.

For all people. The temple authorities had created a long list of the kinds of people who had to be excluded from full participation in the religious life of the community (such as illegitimate children and persons with certain physical disabilities), In contrast, Jesus' message to the religious and social outcast and the politically and economically oppressed was one of liberation, equality and inclusion..

But you have made it a den of robbers. The “you” includes not only the exploiting and oppressive “chief priests and scribes” but the people whom Jesus is teaching. They commit acts of social injustice and then seek refuge in the temple (as robbers flee to their cave in the hills after committing a crime.) And nobody in the temple calls them to account. To put it another way, think of all the evil things we've done while claiming to be a Christian nation and asking God to bless America.

The political, religious and economic values, practices and justifications that Jesus opposed that day in Jerusalem are, I suspect, still alive and well in our day. I offer three examples: 1) the movement within the Anglican Communion to make homophobia a Christian virtue and a required belief; 2) the “prosperity gospel”, which deifies consumerism, misdirects scarce resources and ignores the real economic injustices in our society; 3) fundamentalist Christianity's crusade against religious pluralism.

In summary, I offer another reading of today's collect: O God, by the passion of your blessed Son for justice, you showed us that a shameful death cannot destroy the meaning of a life. Grant that our glory may be to make glad those whom society condemns to suffer shame and loss. For their sake, our sake and your sake, may we live in the reign exemplified by your Son now and for ever. Amen.

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.



Wednesday in Holy Week

March 31, 2010

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

Isaiah 50:4-9a (the third Servant Song in Isaiah)

In the early morning light I sit and try to listen
for what the Word may say to my inner heart.

Am I still enough to hear the patient silence of a teacher
whose only wish is that I learn to receive and not to fear?

Is my faith deep enough to let my ear be opened
by the light wind now moving around me like a song?

And if I truly hear its message, will my faith
be strong enough to bear witness to love's truth

despite the world's frequent deafness to the music
of hope amidst the wreckage of war and angry politics?

My morning's time of quiet comes to a close.
I rise to begin a workday full of meetings and decisions.

But as the hours pass, a melody keeps coming to me,
like a laugh I can't suppress. And I am grateful

for I know its source is the silent teacher
whose patience knows no bounds.

Jonas Barciauskas
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Maundy Thursday

April 1, 2010

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

The commemoration of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples is a critical part of our liturgy each week. As I looked further into these readings and the background of Maundy Thursday, I realized that this important day of Holy Week, coming the evening before Good Friday, had more significance than I realized.

The word "Maundy" is derived from the Latin word for "command." So, rather than share his last meal with his closest disciples and humble himself through the washing of feet merely as acts of love, Maundy Thursday is commemorated also to remind us of the two commands that Jesus gave his disciples on the night he was betrayed.

During the Passover feast, as Jesus breaks and shares the bread and shares the wine, he instructs (*commands*) his disciples to "Do this for the remembrance of me." So, rather than merely sharing the food and drink as one more act of selflessness and kindness, Jesus firmly commands that the disciples (and we) take of his body and blood specifically so they (we) can remember the sacrifice he made for in the forgiveness of sins.

In fact, reading further in the apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he retells the story of the Passover feast, Jesus warns his disciples to "examine himself" so as to be worthy to receive the body and blood of Christ, by recalling the sacrifice made by Jesus, and not merely eating and drinking to satisfy him- or herself.

After the Passover meal, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. This was not merely a humble act of love. Instead, Jesus used this opportunity to command that the disciples (and we) should love and serve one another.

According to John, Jesus said:

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

John 13:14-17

These lessons helped me to understand more about our Maundy Thursday tradition as Christians, but also reminded me to use each week's Eucharist as the opportunity to actively re-examine how to better live up to Jesus' commands.

Steve Kenney
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Good Friday

April 2, 2010

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

There is a particularly vicious looking crucifixion by an artist named Matthias Grünewald. Everything about it is horrifying: Jesus' gaunt body is tinged grayish blue as if he is asphyxiating; his fingers are splayed at unnatural angles from the nails that twisted his tendons; his skin is stretched and covered with pustules; his flesh is emaciated and every muscle seems to be rigid with pain and death.

This is the kind of crucifixion scene we dread; it is too real. It calls up and haunts us with all those guilty memories, thoughts and emotions that so many preachers have grabbed and shook in our face: "Jesus died for you! Your sins have put him on that cross!" However, when Grünewald created this painful painting, that shame-ridden understanding of Christ's death was the farthest thing from his mind. His intention was not to condemn people for their sins, but to help them as they died horrible, lingering deaths from a particularly awful disease.

It was around 1512 that Grünewald was hired to paint the final panels for the unfinished high altar of the Isenheim monastery church. This monastery was also a hospital that cared for sick and dying people, especially those suffering from St Anthony's Fire or what we today more prosaically call ergotism. This disease was caused by eating bread made from rye flour contaminated by a fungus or ergot that's common in grains harvested under damp or wet conditions.

In 857 AD a writer described an outbreak of it: "A Great plague of swollen blisters consumed the people by a loathsome rot, so that their limbs were loosened and fell off before death." Besides the gangrene this describes, patients also suffered terrifying LSD-like hallucinations. They became emaciated from incessant diarrhea and vomiting. As the disease destroyed their nerves, they felt as if their limbs were on fire. Their bodies were racked with spasms and convulsions. As many as 60% of its victims would die; those that lived could have permanent brain damage.

The monks of Isenheim specialized in caring for these people both physically and spiritually. Physical care comprised herbal medicines, soothing compresses and, when necessary, amputation of gangrenous limbs (sans anesthetics). The spiritual program of care involved a daily round of prayers, devotions and mass. Grünewald's painting was a part of this program: Being nearly 10 feet tall, it was a looming, unavoidable presence in the church where patients went to mass and said their daily Hail Mary's and Our Father's.

Why did Grünewald create such a gruesome portrait of death for people who were dying of an illness no one could cure? Because Grünewald wanted, along with the monks, to provide hope. The Christ on Grünewald's cross was not dying a death of 1500 years before, but one that the patients themselves were suffering. Grünewald gave his crucified Christ many of the symptoms of St Anthony's Fire: the pustules, the spasming fingers, the emaciation, the muscles rigid from exhausting convulsions; the gangrenous feet that portended amputation and worse. Even the exaggerated crown of thorns piercing not only Christ's head, but his neck and shoulders, demonstrated the pain these patients felt.

The Christ that Grünewald painted was not a Christ whose tortuous death would drench these patients with guilt and sorrow and shame on top of their misery, pain and agony. Rather he painted a Christ whose own death took into himself the pain, anguish and despair of people who were gripped by a mysterious and dreadful disease. This was a Christ who understood their pain, who suffered their despair, who had died as gruesomely as they would. He was not a Christ who wanted to weigh them down with their sins, but one who wanted to lift their misery into himself, to relieve them of the meaninglessness of their agony and to bring them the hope that, with him, their God, they would rise to new life.

That “Jesus died for you” isn't all about what sinners we are. It is also about the tragedy of sin: of how it robs us of life and love, how it destroys our happiness and joy, how it rips apart our health and well-being. The “for you” part isn't only about erasing or ransoming our sins. The “for you” is also about a gift from God. A gift that says no matter what happens to you: rape or earthquakes, cancer or fire, addiction or foreclosure, God is always there for you. God will be in the midst of it for you. No matter what calamity or disaster befalls you, God will go through it with you. Your despair will be Christ's despair. Your anguish will be God's anguish. Your path through disaster will be there because God went there first. We know this because God has given us a guarantee: his death upon a cross. Christ has gone before us, so we know with certainty that “nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, not our fears for today or our worries about tomorrow; nothing in creation above the earth or below the ocean, nothing thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus has embraced us.” (Romans 8.38-9)

The Reverend Chris Visminas
Guest Contributor

A picture of Grunewald's painting is available at:

<http://www.wga.hu/html/g/grunewal/2isenhei/1view/1view1c.html>

or at:

<http://www.artrenewal.org/pages/artwork.php?artworkid=2518&size=large>

Holy Saturday

April 3, 2010

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

1 Peter 4:1-8

Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42

And on the seventh day God rested from all that God had done in creation. This verse in the Book of Genesis (2:3) is our first clue to what God has in mind for us on the Sabbath. The day of rest became codified in the Ten Commandments. “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8) On Holy Saturday we acknowledge that even Jesus rested from all that he had done and from all that God had done through him in the crucifixion to redeem creation.

As God observed the Sabbath and Jesus observed the Sabbath, so are we to observe the Sabbath, every Sabbath, but especially Holy Saturday, this Sabbath of all Sabbaths which the Gospel of John describes as a day of great solemnity (John 19:31).

Many of us have a hard time remembering or observing the Sabbath. We always have something we should be doing or could be doing. The notion of resting as God rested and as Jesus rested can seem like a waste of time. Who has time to rest when there is so much to do. Remembering to rest is antithetical to American culture.

And yet we know that rest is essential and woven into our natural rhythms. Our hearts wouldn't last long if they didn't rest between beats. Our speech would be unintelligible if we didn't pause between words, clauses, and thoughts. Serious sleep deprivation results in mental illness and obesity.

But Sabbath rest is more than sleep. It is taking time to praise God. It is taking time to read, or meditate, or pray. It is taking time to *play* and enjoy one's own company and that of loved ones. It is taking time to observe natural beauty, to appreciate all the gifts we enjoy, and to relish life. Wendell Berry puts it this way in his volume of poetry *Sabbaths*:

Sit and be still
until in the time
of no rain you hear
beneath the dry wind's
commotion in the trees
the sound of flowing
water among the rocks,
a stream unheard before,
and you are where
breathing is prayer.

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