



Daily Reflections for Lent
2011

*By the people of Saint Elizabeth's Episcopal Church
Sudbury, Massachusetts*

Introduction:

“Everything sacred moves in a circle.” - Black Elk, Lakota Medicine Man

In July of 2007, I received an amazing gift. Along with Lisa Barnes and three members of that years J2A class I went on a pilgrimage to the Black Hills of South Dakota. For two years during our weekly J2A classes we had talked about pilgrimage and prepared for the trip. As the date got closer, I realized I had no real understanding of pilgrimage. I knew the words that went with talking about Pilgrimage but I realized there was so much I didn't know. That prompted the purchase of a number of books on pilgrimage as I tried to quickly **'read up'** for our trip.

Looking back I realize that as the departure date got closer I was getting more anxious and concerned. It wasn't that I didn't know about pilgrimage, I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know what I had missed in my preparing. I didn't know if I was even ready to be a leader on a trip that was as new to me as to the kids I was leading! In the end (as I still continue to realize every day) God was in charge and I wasn't. We had a wonderful experience as we were truly led by the Holy Spirit and the Rev. Linda Kramer of Borderlands Ranch in our pilgrimage journey as we met with and learned about the Lakota peoples.

It was only after returning that I could finally understand something of what pilgrimage is about. I learned that you don't really have to go anywhere to be on pilgrimage, every day we cross the threshold of our homes and begin a new day we are starting (or continuing) our own pilgrimage. By having **'gone on a pilgrimage'** I returned understanding that each day of my life is a pilgrimage. Each person I meet and each experience I have during the day can be as exciting and interesting as my time spent in South Dakota.

As I started working on this year's Lenten Reflection book, I wondered if the experience of Lent isn't similar to that of pilgrimage? Lent is a time for reflection, to reflect on God, our relationship with God and especially ourselves and our actions. And in the end, with God's grace, to emerge with a better sense of what is important in our lives. I think for most of us we are not waiting for Lent to participate in the gift of God's grace that is celebrated on Easter morning. But rather, in Morning Prayer, throughout our day and at the end of the day we hopefully are taking time out of our busy schedules to reflect on our experience of renewal found in God's love for us through Jesus Christ. The season of Lent then can serve as a reminder of what is already made available to us every day.

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 wonders 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.

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

The Cover: by Susan Boyle photo of Eagle Lake Ontario, Canada
The Cover design: by John Howard.
Book Assembly: Peg Scarlata
Drawings: the Kimble children



Ash Wednesday

March 9, 2011

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
102

Lesson
Jon 3:1-4:11
Hebrews 12:1-14
Luke 18:9-14

Ash Wednesday is a time to reflect on our relationship with God. And that reflection may inspire us to change the direction in our lives. This change is different for everyone. Some may consider changes in behaviors, thoughts or actions. Others are inspired by God's love to change. As we contemplate the changes that might facilitate a deeper understanding of God, we might become more aware of the behaviors, thoughts and actions that get in the way of developing a deeper faith. At this point, we may find ourselves compelled to repent. We tend to think about repentance in terms of punishment. But the root of the word repentance is change. And the change that is inspired by a desire to know God is repentance.

Often, we resist repentance. But I suspect that most people resist change because most of us do not like change. All change is loss. But perhaps the way we should deal with our resistance toward change is to embrace the change and to mourn the loss.

In a happy smiley culture such as ours, where expressing bad feelings is taboo, mourning is underrated. But grief and mourning are important to processing changes in our lives. And that is what we do on Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday is where we process the change and loss that comes with repentance. Ash Wednesday is the liturgical expression of our desire to know God better. As a community we come together on this day to confess our shortcomings and to mourn our losses. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust is not just a liturgical action, it is the proclamation of

our hope that the end result of the change and loss and grief is a deeper understanding of our loving God.

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

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

March 10, 2011

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

Luke 9:18-25: "But who do you say that I am?"

At the Centering Prayer meetings here at St. Elizabeth's, we have been listening to recorded talks by the Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault. She speaks of the importance of moving beyond credal statements about the divinity of Jesus, and going more deeply in order to experience his reality in our lives and in our hearts. Bourgeault speaks of Jesus as a "recognition event", and centering prayer is one way among many to open myself up to recognizing who he is. During centering prayer's meditative silence, I am in effect trying to "say" who Jesus is – to answer not in words but with my whole being the question he poses to the disciples in Luke 9. It can't be a mental or even an emotional answer. It doesn't have to be Peter's answer – "The Messiah of God" – and indeed it shouldn't be if I am simply repeating what scripture says. The recognition event is one which happens in the present moment and in relationship between Jesus and the meditator – a moment much like one between two people in love who have become totally present to each other.

As I write this reflection, I listen to his question: *Who do you say I am?* I hear it as an invitation to become silent, to feel myself in Christ's presence. I begin to name him in ways that come from that silent place.

*You are the joy of the Egyptian people savoring their victory over oppression.
You are hope of the unemployed waiting for an opportunity to re-enter the workforce.
You are the courage of the aid workers in Haiti combating disease and hunger.
You are the love of a teacher for her students as he or she challenges them to grow.
You are the warmth of my family as we join hands in prayer before dinner.
You are the beauty of the roses on the altar of the church this morning.
You are golden light of the late afternoon as I finish this reflection.*

Reading Luke 9:21, I see Jesus holding up his index finger to his lips as if to say “Don't tell anyone who I am.” Of course not. It is for each of us to have our recognition event, either alone (“But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Mt 6:6) or in community with others seeking to be with Jesus. And I am grateful for the community at St. Elizabeth's and for the group that meets for centering prayer. The support I feel from the people in this parish for seeking Christ has been and continues to be a gift.

Jonas Barciauskas
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday after Ash Wednesday

March 11, 2011

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

Chumming with the Mafia

According to his resume, Matthew was a revenue consultant for the government. According to his neighbors, he was crook. He kept a tax booth and a hand extended at the street corner. That's where he was the day he saw Jesus. “Follow me,” the Master said, and Matthew did. And in the very next verse we find Jesus sitting at Matthew's dining room table. “Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house” (Matt. 9:10 NCV).

A curbside conversation couldn't satisfy his heart, so Matthew took Jesus home. Something happens over a dinner table that doesn't happen over an office desk. Take off the tie, heat up the grill, break out the sodas, and spend the evening with the suspender of the stars. “You know, Jesus, forgive me for asking, but I've always wanted to know “

Though the giving of the invitation is impressive, the acceptance is more so. Didn't matter to Jesus that Matthew was a thief. Didn't matter to Jesus that Matthew had built a split-level house with the proceeds of extortion. What did matter was that Matthew wanted to know Jesus.

The ratio between those who missed Jesus and those who sought him is thousands to one. But the ratio between those who sought him and those who found him was one to one. All who sought him found him.

From: **3:16 The Numbers of Hope**

Author: Max Lucado



Saturday after Ash Wednesday

March 12, 2011

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

One way to study the Bible is to look for questions and answers in the text. Sometimes a question is clearly asked. Sometimes it is implied, and we are called upon to reconstruct or imagine the question or situation which prompted the response found in the text. Sometimes a question is asked and then immediately answered. Sometimes an answer is not found in close proximity to the question but may be suggested elsewhere in the Bible. Sometimes no answer is given, perhaps because there is no satisfactory answer. Or perhaps because we are supposed to supply an answer. In all these cases we are called upon to assess the validity of the answer and explore that answer's relevance to our own situation—and especially so when there is no answer.

And sometimes the best—or only—questions are those we ask while reading and reflecting upon the text. One such question arose from my reading of Psalm 86: Why does the psalmist need to “cry to you [God] all the daylong” (v.3)? Why is the answer so long in coming? (If indeed an answer finally does come.) Is God hard of hearing? Inattentive? Distracted? Indifferent? Uncaring? Hostile?

I believe the reason is that although prayers are addressed to God they are answered by human beings. Many, if not most, of the prayers in the Bible—and perhaps in human experience—are calls for help, cries for compassion and demands for social justice. If such prayers are heard only by God and not by other human beings, they're probably not going to be answered. And sometimes—too often—it takes longer than it should for us to hear a prayer.

Today's reading from Isaiah is part of the answer to the questions asked in verses 3, 5, 6 and 7 of Isaiah 58. The entire answer redefines “fasting” (religious practice, worship) as doing social and economic justice, caring for the hungry and afflicted, and using the Sabbath as a model occasion for not looking out for number one.

As do other prophetic voices (such as Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:11-24; Hosea 6:6; and Micah 6:6-8) this passage discounts and discards institutional religion in favor of enacted righteousness. It echoes similar passages in the Torah and goes far beyond our conventional ideas of helping the poor or giving to charity. These Biblical voices envision a society—in real time, not in “heaven”—in which economic exploitation and systemic poverty are not accepted or excused or swept under the rug. They portray a society in which “you’re on your own” is replaced by “we’re in this together”.

In today’s reading from Luke, the Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus’ disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus gives an answer that appears to be unrelated to the question. He doesn’t mention eating and drinking. And couldn’t he have called sinners to repent without sitting down to dinner with them? Yes, of course, so in this story the banquet is not an occasion *for* repentance but an outgrowth *of* repentance.

The Pharisees and scribes were groups of lay persons who had elite status (religious for the Pharisees, political and economic for the scribes) in the dominant and oppressive ruling order. The Pharisees sought to bring religion into everyday life, to “live out” their beliefs, by trying to live their lives in the same state of holiness (ritual purity) as that of the priests in the Jerusalem temple. (This state of holiness was set forth in the Torah.) In particular, the Pharisees worked very hard at eating their meals in that state of holiness. They would not eat with persons who were considered ritually “unclean” because of their occupation, behavior, physical condition (such as “lepers”—persons with skin diseases) or, for that matter, with anyone who didn’t attach the same importance to ritual purity that they did. The gospels portray the Pharisees as less interested in upholding the Torah’s demands for social and economic justice and as supporting the wealthy Jerusalem temple establishment, which financed itself in significant measure on the backs of the poor.

The scribes were a class of administrators and bureaucrats who served the interests of the ruling class (the rich, the powerful and the well-connected). Scribes were among the few people who could read and write. They had some expertise in civil and religious law, especially as it pertained to financial and property matters. They drew up, administered and interpreted wills, deeds, mortgages, loan agreements, leases, and foreclosures. They were among the facilitators and enablers of an oppressive political and economic system. Jesus denounced them for “devouring widows’ houses” (Luke 20:47).

The context of the Pharisees’ question is the call of the tax collector Levi to be a disciple of Jesus. As a toll collector (a more accurate description of his function), Levi was on the lowest and most visible level of an oppressive system. He might have cheated in his collections where he could, both to augment his meager wages and to increase his bosses’ wealth. Even if he didn’t cheat, he would have been a social and religious outcast. Neither the scribes nor the Pharisees would have invited him to dinner. He was an important but expendable cog in the Roman occupier’s great machine of oppression, both a servant and a victim of that machine.

I am struck by Levi's response to Jesus' call. Levi doesn't define "following Jesus" as "no more cheating on the job" or "I will work harder and more efficiently" or "I will behave a little more humanely within the system" or even "I will work to change the system from within." He walks away. He stops participating in, supporting, justifying and benefiting from an unjust and oppressive economic and social system.

Then, says Luke, Levi gives a banquet. In the ancient world, whom you ate with and under what circumstances was one of the most important signs by which members of the ruling class—the political, religious, economic and social elite—defined, displayed, solidified, protected and enhanced their power, privilege and status. The wealthy (who were also the powerful)—and only the wealthy—gave banquets. They invited those whom they thought worthy of honor or by whom they wished to be honored in return—or who might be useful allies in the class war. In some cases (see Luke 14:16-24), a host could be humiliated and disgraced if his guests accepted his invitation and then decided not to show up.

Levi turns this entire banquet-as-self-serving-social-control-mechanism upside down. Having subverted and deserted an unjust social system, he now mocks its use of banquets and redefines what a banquet is all about. His banquet was, I think, a celebration of finding an alternative to that system. It was also a symbol of the inclusive and mutually supportive community that made that alternative possible. It was given for Jesus (v. 29)—but not because Jesus could advance Levi's social standing or because Levi wanted to impress Jesus with his (Levi's) social standing. I think Levi was affirming Jesus as a teacher, as someone who practiced compassion and as someone who opposed an unjust system and proposed ways to live, as one scholar has put it, as if God was king and Caesar was not. (These are still perhaps the best reasons for honoring Jesus today.)

Levi's guests are other toll collectors. And "sinners", that is, people who did not observe the ritual purity laws set forth in the Torah, who were not "really" religious. The scribes and Pharisees are understandably curious about—and probably shocked, angry and bewildered at—the sight of Jesus dining with these social outcasts and religious slackers. Thus their question to his disciples and Jesus' response. (Luke does not record the disciples' response—if there was one. I wonder what it would have been.)

As I flesh out Jesus' seemingly ambiguous and indirect answer, it reads as follows: "You Pharisees are concerned with ritual purity as a way of obeying the Torah (the 'law'). Fine. But that's irrelevant to my work of proclaiming God's justice and trying to make it a reality. And you scribes demonize and shun the toll collectors. By focusing popular resentment on them, you deflect attention away from your own complicity in an unjust system. A toll collector has repented and repudiated the system. What about you? All of you—scribes and Pharisees alike—go re-read the law and the prophets and think some more about what it means to be righteous or sinful and who should be called healthy (righteous) and who should be called a sinner."

The questions in today's readings are also, I think, on the lips of others and on our own lips--more often than we might like to admit. What, I wonder, are our answers?

O God, help us to look mercifully upon those whom our system has made infirm and placed in mighty and lasting danger. May we understand how great a necessity it is for us to stretch forth our hand to do right, to help and defend them, as did Jesus, so that we all may live as under your reign, for as long as it takes. Amen.

Larry Ruark
Guest Contributor

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



Monday in the First Week of Lent

March 14, 2011

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

In Matthew 25: 31-46 there was a meeting of the United Nations where they talked about dividing the countries into regions-like a shepherd separates the goats from the sheep.

The King agreed because the poor people were rude to him when he came to try and take over their area. He wanted to create a division where the people on his right shall have everything laid out for them – they were to be the people of the privilege, and the others on his left were considered worthless and would be damned to the devil.

This division is going on today in many countries, and that there are always groups within countries that are fighting over either religion or land. Many of the protests we have today are for the struggle of equality and affirmative action. God does not like to see people divided because he created us all to be equal.

Jennifer Vesey
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent

March 15, 2011

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

Over and over, time and time again, all through our Christian lives, we are taught the importance and power of prayer. There is no limit to what prayer can accomplish. Our lives are not only benefited, but strengthened and nourished by prayer. Our God is always available to us; there is never a line to wait in, a secretary or receptionist to put us on Hold, or a labyrinthine menu to negotiate. All one needs to do is speak the words, either silently or aloud, and we are instantly in touch with the Lord.

Given the ease of prayer and the receptivity of God, it should rank as one of our most popular and engaging activities. The rewards of prayer are so limitless that one could partake in this activity with any level of frequency that feels comfortable to them, holding an ongoing dialogue with God. How rich would a life like that be? How often, one could ask, is this actually done? Are there really people out there in the world like this?

Truth be told, it's likely that some people may pray in this fashion, but that it is probably not the majority of the population. Of those who do pray, it is also likely that certain types of prayer are offered more often than others. As human beings, we are most likely to pray when we are in need of something. In our minds, God is often considered as a means to an end, and it doesn't occur to us to pray to God unless there is a need that we want filled. The other forms of prayer, of which there are many, are used less often or even neglected altogether.

We have a small wooden hand painted white that is often on the Prayer Table in our Level II atrium that is informally known as "The Five Fingers of Prayer". Each finger of the hand offers a different form of prayer on one side, with an example of the prayer type on the flip side. The kids use this hand to learn about the different types of prayer. There are prayers of Adoration (God is great), prayers of Expiation or Contrition (I'm Sorry), prayers of Love or Oblation (I give myself to you, God), prayers of Petition (Help me, God), and prayers of Thanksgiving (Thank You, God). These prayers can be used separately or in combinations, and examples are everywhere. The best known prayer of all, The Lord's Prayer, begins as a prayer of Adoration, where God's greatness is emphasized in the hallowed name of God and the fullness of God's Kingdom, and then moves into a prayer of Petition and Expiation, where sustenance and forgiveness are sought. It is probably not an accident that God is first praised in the prayer before God's help is requested. This could serve as a lesson to us on the proper way to pray.

In the end, although methods of prayer are readily offered in the Bible (the Matthew passage referenced above is an example), it would certainly seem more important that we

pray to God through any means possible, and worry less about how we do it. God always listens with patience and interest; no small feat, considering that God knows what we need before we ask. God never tires of hearing from us, and God is never too busy to listen. God never tells you to get to the point, cut to the chase, come back later, or go away. God makes it easy for us to begin the conversation, whenever we choose and about whatever subject we wish to speak. The action of prayer is in our hands, whenever we choose to use it. What could be simpler or more beautiful?

Kihm Sanders
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

March 16, 2011

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

A broken and contrite heart

A state of mind and spirit that we must achieve ourselves,
through our own internal, and external efforts

Effort to rid ourselves of self-thought

Effort to acknowledge our moral failures
and our self aggrandizement

Effort to tear down ego,
and realize we are nothing

Making our internal cupboard bare,
cleansing ourselves of clutter and impurity

Then we ask God to fill our void
with His Holy Spirit

If He agrees, if we really mean it,
we will be prepared to live life anew

We do this over and over,
joining our souls with those of others over the ages

Constantly refreshing our lives through contrition and God's grace

Walter Morgan
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the First Week of Lent

March 17, 2011

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

Help is there if you but ask for it. God is with us, inside us, all around us. He hears you.

Help is in His hand and in His heart and it is in your hands and in your heart.
Open your heart to the quiet places and spaces within when you are feeling need. Ask.

Send your request for yourself, for another, for many others, send it deep inside your being and far out into the world where He is and He will hear you.

Set aside your pride, set aside your worry, set aside your embarrassment, set aside your selfishness, set aside your stubbornness, set aside your mistrust, set aside your doubt, set aside your fear...open yourself humbly and with love and ask for what you need. Ask for what your loved ones need. Ask for what your friends, your neighbors need. Ask even for what your adversaries need...and ask that they no longer be adversaries.

Do not ask with greed or pride, ask with love. Ask with compassion. Ask with trust. Ask with confidence and hope.

Ask Him to help you keep going. Ask Him to help you get up when you are down.
Ask Him to help keep you up. Ask Him to do the same for those around you.

Thank Him for the help He has given. You may realize what He has given you and others.

Thank Him for the help He gives. You may realize what He gives now.

Thank Him for the help He will give. You may realize what He can give.

Be ready. Help may not come the way you may expect. It may come from within yourself. It may come from your family, your friends, your neighbors, a stranger, the world around you. Breathe deep and feel His strength, His compassion, His love build you up.

You may find yourself helping others, and in so doing, help yourself.

You may find yourself being helped by others, and in so doing, help them.

You may find yourself helping yourself when you didn't think you could.

Thank Him for this wonderful gift, this wonderful mystery of help, this wonderful mystery of love.

Open your heart to Him with faith and love, even for a moment if that is all you can do. The next time may be for longer. There is strength and power and peace in those moments.

May the Peace and Strength of Christ be with you.

Larry St. George

Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the First Week of Lent

March 18, 2011

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

Psalm

130

Lessons

Ezekiel 18:21-28

Matthew 5:20-26

A small group from the Level III Atrium read all three readings together. We reflected on each reading after we read it and when we finished 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 directly from the children in the group:

Emma: "Be good and don't turn bad."

AnnaMelora: "The wicked goes down, not up, when they die."

Emily D: "If you're bad and turn good, God will forgive you. If you're good and then turn bad, he won't." / "Be nicer to your siblings."

Emily B.: "Do not murder. Anybody who murders will be subject to judgment."

Caroline: "God will always forgive you."

Liam: "The Lord forgives all the sins in the world."

Nick: "Be nice to your friends."

Alex: "I tell you the truth."

Billy: "Wicked people will be forgiven."

In general, we found that God is forgiving, but that it is better to be good and kind; a lesson that we are never too old to be reminded of.

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

Saturday in the First Week of Lent

March 19, 2011

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

Upon reflection of these readings, I find several messages.

In Deuteronomy, it is clear that God's relationship is a two way affair. We must be completely willing to be obedient in his ways. We are called to his faithfulness and to keep his commandments. Now to me that seems like a mighty task in our everyday life. Yet, if we remind ourselves of daily pleasures versus daily grinds we can see God's work all around. If we allow ourselves to provide loving kindness and mercy, God will provide his greatest gift – the blessing of his spirit.

In Matthew, there are several difficult endeavors to incorporate into our lives. Love your enemies and do good to those who hurt you. Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Wow! The only way I could imagine this working for me, is if I take a step back, breathe, think, then begin with grace. In this world of instant communication, we find ourselves constantly being barraged with perceived negativity. We tend to treat others in a negative fashion or a way in which we feel they should be treated, during that instant of enraged emotional state. We must ask ourselves first, "is this how God would treat them?" And then act accordingly.

If we could break the power of revenge and release the power of love to do well in the face of evil, then we would find compassion in our hearts. After these readings, I was filled with positive energy, yet bad habits are hard to break. Still the best rewards are those hardest earned. So the next time my teenage son rolls his eyes at me, or my wife ignores me during a "discussion" or my daughter gives me a snide "no, dad." ; I hope to breathe, relax, and find love and care in my heart first. Although it is harder to give mercy when there is no benefit to you, what better way to show the ones you love the most, how much you care.

"So, whenever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love." Gandhi.

Lastly, in the passage at the beginning of my lesson, it states that God carries out the work of Reconciliation – by definition, a sacrament in which repentant sinners are absolved and given reconciliation with God and church; or a condition of confession of one’s sins and performing a penance.

Why in today’s world, where we are so imperfect, we are constantly chasing “absolute” perfection. We are always chasing the best deal, the highest score, the ultimate review, nicest looking, and the top grades. We are constantly being measured by yourself or others accordingly. What happened to “relative” perfection – just being happy? Fortunately, for people like me, god recognizes us as the imperfect humans he created and thankfully forgives us upon confession. We should embrace Gods ways and realize we are all perfect in our own light as imperfect as we are. Most of all, we should be grateful that God provides us an outlet for our failures through his marvelous daily work of – reconciliation.

Michael Perisho
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

March 21, 2011

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

For a number of years, I’ve been privileged to be a member of the Tuesday morning Bible study led by our priests, Barbara and occasionally Valerie. (Please note: anyone who wishes to attend is hugely welcome!) This year, our study has been The Gospel According to Matthew using as a guide GOD WITH US by Robert A. Bryant. We moved fairly quickly through the first four chapters but have spent months on Chapters 5 through 7—The Sermon On The Mount. In these chapters, Jesus gives his disciples what seem like almost impossible standards on how to live a life pleasing to God.

The Gospel According to Luke provides a parallel but much shorter sermon (often referred to as The Sermon On The Plain). At the heart of both are the teachings of Jesus on love. *But what kind of love is this?* To love those who have harmed you, who hate you, who have robbed and cheated you? Love THEM??? How can this be? In the words of Robert Bryant, “Jesus seems to raise the standard of righteousness to impossible heights. It is as though high jumpers are now expected to clear a bar set at pole-vault height—without a pole!” There is a word for this state of the spirit in several faith traditions, including our own—detachment. It is a goal that Jesus urges his followers to attain. According to Huston Smith in his book THE WORLD’S RELIGIONS, detachment is “a gradual relaxation of attachment to physical objects and stimuli,

accompanied by a progressive release from self interest.” With this detachment from wealth, from friends and family who love us back, can come a deep caring for all that God has created. Of course our family and friends are gifts to be cherished, but if our love extends only to them and all the trappings that sustain us with them, then how can we fully love and trust a God *who is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish* (Verse 35)? This is the work of a lifetime, but one which I believe Jesus is leading us to.

I’d like to conclude by going back to The Sermon on The Mount in Matthew, Chapter 6. Verses 19-21 are familiar to us all. *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Ruth Griesel
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 22, 2011

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

Psalm
50:7-15, 22-24

Lessons
Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20
Matthew 23:1-12

The phrase in this passage, “love our friends in you” immediately rings familiar. We know from the Second Commandment, and from many stories in the New Testament, that we are not fully loving God if we do not love our neighbor. Though difficult at times, hopefully most of us don’t find it too much of a burden to meet this obligation.

But, the next phrase is the one I keep coming back to and tripping over. “[Loving our] enemies for your sake.” Now that’s a tough one. Can you picture giving a hug to someone who wronged you? Maybe not even been a true enemy in the sense of someone threatening or actually doing you harm physically, but what about someone who talked about you behind your back, or cheated you in some way?

After a few readings of the passage, I began to see this directive in a different way, especially when trying to decipher “for your sake” at the end of the passage.

It seems the prayer helps us “lower the bar” to love our enemies, by reminding us that God sacrificed his “only-begotten son” to create a new covenant and restore all mankind to a loving relationship with Him. So, to me, “for your sake” seems to be saying “since that’s the least we could do,” after all You gave up *Your* son, for the forgiveness of *our* sins.

I expect that I'll continue to still struggle with the idea of loving an enemy for the rest of my days. But this prayer helped me realize that, trying forgive others for their sins against us is not just the right thing to do, but it would be an affirmative act of love for God in recognition of what He sacrificed for us.

Steve Kenney
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

March 23, 2011

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

Meditations on Dedicating One's Life to Others

Those who dedicate their lives to others in terms of health, education, spiritual life, family or social life or in any other field, gladden my heart. Every human society generates its burden of problems and suffering. To do whatever is possible to resolve such difficulties is certainly worthy of praise.

From the Buddhist point of view, it is important not to help someone simply out of duty or pleasure – in the way some people like gardening, for example. If one acts out of love and compassion, with a smile and a few friendly words, one will definitely give happiness to others. The action itself may seem the same, but its benefits will be infinitely greater.

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

By: The Dalai Lama

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

March 24, 2011

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

While the parable in Luke has given me much to think about, I find it neither clear nor comforting.

Although my faith is centered on life and how to live it, and I don't spend much time thinking about what comes after death, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus gives me pause. For certainly I am one who "during your lifetime received your good things." So should I understand this parable to mean that after death I will be in agony? And more troubling still is the question of what role God plays in this. For certainly, the fact that I was born in the USA, into a fairly comfortable life is not something I had control over. More importantly, those who, according to this parable, will be comforted after death typically "receive evil things" (which I take to mean poverty, illness, etc.) as an accident of birth.

Perhaps we are not meant to take this parable literally, and instead maybe the rich man is in Hades because he "feasted sumptuously every day" and either never noticed or ignored Lazarus, "who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table" even though Lazarus was at the rich man's gate. The implication is that the rich man had much more than plenty and yet never shared the crumbs of what he had.

If I reflect on this interpretation, I am left with a familiar question. What am I called to do? How much? And the answer I find in the teachings of Jesus is that we are called to give all of ourselves. For example, there are the fishermen that Jesus called to leave their nets and their homes and to follow him. Jesus' councils his disciples, "do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."

But I am faced with a painful truth: that I am like another rich man in the New Testament who upon hearing what was required of him to inherit eternal life – to "sell all that you have and distribute the money to the poor, and you have treasure in heaven; then come follow me" – became sad because he was very rich and the suggestion is that he is sad because he is unable to give up his riches. I am not very rich, except possibly in comparison to people who live in the two-thirds world, but I have plenty yet I am not able to stop worrying or striving for what I will eat and drink. Although my rational self thinks that's okay – I do, after all need to eat, and I'm not sure anyone else should "feed me" if I can feed myself – I do feel a sadness and the ever-present tension between the pull of the world and striving for the kingdom.

Susan Berry
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Friday in the Second Week of Lent**March 25, 2011**

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

LUKE 19:26 Text: I tell you that to everyone who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

¹We don't know what the other investors knew or didn't know; we do know what our investor thought that he knew. He tells us: "For I was afraid of you because you are a severe man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow." The Master does not deny this description of himself.

Our hapless investor, the third man, so, for fear of losing what he had been given, he hid it, which today would be like putting it in a coffee can and burying it in the garden. For him it was not, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained"; it was, rather, "Nothing ventured, nothing lost." He discovered to his peril, however, that it was lost and that what he had was lost also. The master is what he said he was, a man of great expectations, with those who ventured much for him being rewarded and those who risked nothing at all losing everything.

I don't think that we are talking about money, however. I think that this is a parable not about investment but about something much more important, a parable about imagination, of seeing what isn't there and multiplying it. That is what the other two investors had that the first one lacked. They saw not only what they had, but what they might further have if they acted prudently and creatively—if, indeed, they dared to take a risk. The third man, our friend, saw only what he had, and he was afraid to lose that. He therefore keeps what he is given; he does not risk either it or himself. Growth is not possible for him. His "sin" is that he cannot see further than the security of the moment, and he trusts neither himself nor the master, and thus by fear, or by caution, he is driven to inaction. Here, not to act is to act, but in an unimaginative, uncreative, ungraceful way, and he is thus not fit to be trusted because he does not trust in himself. Think of it: those who have imagination, who are gifted to see and to risk beyond the security and fears of the moment, often gain the benefits of their vision. They are seers and visionaries—not just shrewd investors, but valiant dreamers moved by insight as well as by sight. They see things that are not, and act upon them, and thus bring them into being.

Matthew's version of this parable also makes the point that each one of us is given talents to invest according to his ability. That is a good and useful point. God has wasted nothing on us: all that we have is useful. Remember that. We may not have the same skills or opportunities or graces as our neighbors, but we have what we need to do what we must. To fail to do what we can because we cannot do as much as our neighbors is not modesty,

¹ This is an excerpt from Peter Gomes book of sermons, *Strength for the Journey*

it is cowardice; it is lack of trust, and it is irresponsible. What good would our latent powers be if we didn't use them? What good will our spiritual reticence do if we fail to do what we can? Where will that leave us?

No one is without talent. The world is simply divided into two groups: those who know what their talents are and use them, and those who do not. Now may well be the time, today may well be the day, when you begin to look not at your losses but at your graces, and decide for the sake of the Master how best to use them.

If you want a cliché with which to remember the terrible parable of the talents, it is simply this: "If you don't use it, you will surely lose it."

MJ Ebens
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent

March 26, 2011

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

"Here, smell it" my best friend urged.

She was holding up the foot of her 9 month old daughter. "Isn't it cute? She has a constantly stinky left foot!" I really didn't want to smell anyone's foot, even a baby's, but I didn't want to offend. So I pretended to be busy in the kitchen. A little late to the parenthood party, most of our friends had babies before we did. Observing new parents up close, I was sometimes perplexed. Let's face it, babies can be disgusting. But you can't tell a new parent that; they're too infatuated.

Once, in the middle of a nice restaurant meal, a newly minted dad friend spoke in glowing detail about how he learned the hard way not to do lift the baby up and down overhead – the giggling baby spit up – splat, right onto dad's face. "You'll see" he warned us. "In the first six months, you'll get every possible bodily fluid dumped on you." My husband and I tried to keep our appetites but in the car we agreed: our friend had gone off the deep end.

When I became a mom, I went in for a follow up doctor appointment. My two week old son was with me. That was fine, the nurse said, except for one thing: "if you change a diaper in here, please remove it from the room, do not leave it here." She went on to explain. "Breastfeeding moms think their babies' dirty diapers don't stink. Trust me, they do." I started to correct her, but she stopped me. "Hormones. You are hardwired to love that child. You can't smell it, but the rest of us can." Hardwired to love. What an interesting concept.

It is humbling, to say the least, to write anything about the Parable of the Lost Son. What hasn't been said? And yet, the story is timeless, and still captivates. In the prodigal son story, we have a father, not a mother. And the returning child – no longer a child but now probably a middle-aged man – is covered in dirt and probably stinks to high heaven. His father has forgiven him long ago. More, he has hoped and watched for his return. Imagine the first sight of him, though. The son who left was young, strong, good looking (we imagine), cocky as anything. The one who returns? Older, dirty, starving, stinking of pigs, this is a man beaten down by the world. This is *not* the energetic boy the father reared and loved. Nor is it the young man who left with a defiant spring in his step. The son, at the end of his physical and emotional rope, is not only dirty but probably stooped and weathered, perhaps almost unrecognizable. The father, peering down the road, sees him at a distance and does manage to recognize him. Imagine his absolute shock, not only at the fact of the son's return but at his changed (for the worse) appearance. And yet, the father is neither reviled, nor disappointed. He is happy. Indeed, the father *runs* to his son. A (presumably) old man...is so happy to see his child again – in any condition – that he bursts into a run.

Like the mothers and fathers mentioned above, this father does not care about the stench or the stink. It's simple: he adores his son! He sees through the dirt and the pig-stench and the sins of his son and sees something wonderful. He sees the innocent, pure child, with a heart and a life untarnished by the world and by sin. Maybe, like my friend with the stinky-footed baby, he notes all the "stinky" aspects of his son, and finds them not flaws, but rather endearing characteristics, part of the whole person he loves and accepts. It strikes me that the two brothers in this story are not the almost one-dimensional caricatures they seem to be. Perhaps they are both sides of the same person. The older "good" brother – presenting the right package to the world, doing the "right" things, yet rotting inside with jealousy, envy, arrogance and resentment. The younger brother's sins are more apparent, more public. Are they really two separate personalities? Or maybe two sides of the same coin? Aren't we all both of these characters, throughout our lives? Can't we all, by a certain age, point to some spectacular failings, regrets and mistakes in our lives? Yet, isn't it also true that we also harbor invisible sins, perhaps more of the heart and mind, similar to the older brother? The seething resentments, envy, vanity, arrogance and entitlement? Haven't we all been the older brother, as well?

One of my favorite contemporary Christian songs is *The Real Me*, by Amy Grant. The singer is doing all the right things and to an outsider, all looks perfect. It's not, we learn. She struggles with some horrible, unnamed secret sins, and also with her own expert camouflage of them. But even in her despair, she is comforted and is humbled and awed by a God who knows and sees it all, loves her and actually sees beyond her flaws to the wonder and greatness within.

*You see...the real me.
Hiding in my skin, broken from within.
Unveil me, completely.
I'm loosening my grasp, there's no need to mask
...my frailty*

*'cause You see...the real me.
"Wonderful" ... "Beautiful" ...is what You see
When You look at me.*

The God in *The Real Me*, the father in the parable, and the mom of the stinky-footed baby have something in common. They love their children with an open-eyed adoration. It is not blindness, exactly. It's not like my friend didn't notice the stinky foot – she adored it! The father in the parable could not have missed the marked changes in his son; he ran anyway! Amy Grant's God sees the sins in her life and on her heart, and yet sees the good and wonderful parts He created.

The characters in these stories are all imperfect; all have their "stinky" and sinful parts. Even an innocent baby is not born a perfect person and every one of us sins, inevitably, whether in public or in secret, or simply in our hearts. We are rich beyond measure if we can know not only that redemption and forgiveness are ours for the asking, but also that they come from such great love.

When we are at our very worst – from our stinky toes to our sinful hearts -- God sees our very best. He will look for us, down whatever long and dusty road we happen to be on. He will recognize us – no matter what shape we're in – he will run to welcome us and restore the greatness and wonder He created in us.

Respectfully submitted,
Darlene Murphy
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Third Week of Lent

March 28, 2011

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

We have a book of Bible stories for children, "The Beginner's Bible," that we'd read from to each of our kids when they were very little. This was great experience for me for a couple of reasons:

- 1) I got a chance to read some stories from the Old Testament that I'd either never read or completely forgotten, and
- 2) The meaning and impact is even stronger when you translate the bible into words a three-year-old can understand

The story of Naaman, for example. In the NIV translation I read first, when Elisha's instructions don't meet Naaman's expectations for a glorious miracle, his angry speech sounds like the grandiose declaration of an exalted warrior. But here's how The Beginner's Bible tells it:

Elisha told him, "Go to the Jordan River.
Wash yourself seven times there.
Then you will be well."
This sounded silly to Naaman. He was angry.
"I could wash in my own rivers at home! They are better!"

This way, Naaman sounds like a petulant child. In a way, aren't we all like that sometimes when God doesn't meet our expectations? And isn't it ridiculous of us to let our expectations limit what we could hope for from God in our lives? In the reading from Luke, those who saw Jesus only as a carpenter's son couldn't see him fulfilling the words of Isaiah's prophecy, words that Jesus had just read at the synagogue in Nazareth. They were so hostile to his message that Jesus had to walk away.

We have a choice: we can let our expectations put barriers between us and God's love. Or, like Naaman, we can turn with humility to God's vision for us, and live deeply in God's healing presence.

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

John McNeill
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

March 29, 2011

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

"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me; for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long."

Humility is the central theme of today's readings. We recognize we have failed in the past; we are sinners and have been brought low because of our sins. We have no great offerings to make up for our deficits, even though we owe much to many. *But there is hope as long as we remain humble and open to God's ways and teachings.* It is humility

that gives us hope, that opens our hearts, that shows God that we are willing to subject ourselves to him and his ways.

In the same way that *God* forgives those who are humble, he expects *us* to forgive as well. The *Parable of the Unforgiving Servant* reminds us of the importance of forgiving our fellow man and the cost of not doing so. As the Master in the story says, we must forgive our brother and sister with all of our heart. Failing to do so is failing in God's eyes.

The Prayer of Azariah completes today's readings and serves as a beautiful reminder of how we should feel throughout the forty days of Lent: "Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and worthy of praise; and glorious is your name forever! For you are just in all you have done; all your works are true and your ways right, and all your judgments are true."

Eric W. Kimble
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

March 30, 2011

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

Psalm

78:1-6

Lessons

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

Matthew 5:17-19

At the ER in New London, after my ski accident in 1994, I got into a discussion with a boy of about 10. I had met him earlier at the First Aid station at Sunapee. He had taken a sudden turn skiing, and caused his Dad to fall and break his leg. The boy felt terrible and was very worried about his Dad. His Mom was off to check on her husband, and was glad I was there to keep him company. Someone had said that they'd have to knock his Dad out, and I was able to explain to the boy what that meant.

We were looking for something to read, and he picked up the Good News Bible. Why do they call it that he wondered? Do you go to Sunday School I asked? Hebrew School he answered. I did not say Christ died for our sins. First of all, he was Jewish, and anyway, wouldn't that be part of the bad news? I said something about good cheer

for those who were worried or sick or injured. I explained that the good news is that God loves us, and that most things happen for the good. Of course, we were having some bad luck that day, but on the whole, we're very lucky. I really believe that's true.

Ginny Bell
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

March 31, 2011

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

“For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.”

Of all the readings, this is the verse that stood out to me. Yes, I'm typing this at 11:30 p.m. on Feb. 20, the day that the reflections are due. Hopefully, I'll get it in by the deadline. Meanwhile, as I'm typing, the girls are upstairs protesting about being asleep...let me correct that, they are protesting about being in their cribs asleep. They definitely want to be asleep, just in the warm coziness of their parents' bed. Anyway, I digress before I even get started, but my digression is probably appropriate and perfectly in sync with my feelings and thoughts of the past year plus since the Varner life has turned upside down. It has been stressful, sleep-depriving, exhausting and sometimes driven me to wonder “why has the good Lord decided to give us this familial situation?” There are times of disbelief, times of shock, but also times of amazing love, feelings of elation and pure wonderment of the family that God has provided us in the short, but long, few years we have been living in Massachusetts. (Babies are still crying, by the way.) Whenever, I am discouraged or wonder why oh why have I been placed in this situation, I should not lose sight of the amazing fact that yes, I am one of the people of God's pasture. I am one of his sheep....break in writing to go tend to babies, will be right back...okay, I'm back (still screaming, though)...Anyway, as I was reflecting a minute ago, the points of encouragement come from deep down knowing that everything will be okay in the end, knowing that God has given us this amazing, awe-inspiring challenge because he is there with us each and every step of the way. He is shepherding us through the trials and tribulations, the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows, the sleepless nights, the stinky diapers, the tantrums of the 3 year old who probably is just seeking the attention that he once had before the girls came into his world, the beauty of a baby bonking her twin sister on the forehead to say hello, the craziness and peacefulness of it all. God is with us, each and every step of the way, guiding us through the pasture of life, whatever pasture that may be. He is shepherding us in the right direction...we just have

to be willing to be led and trust...Babies stopped crying (at least for a minute). Thanks be to God!

David Varner
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Third Week of Lent

April 1, 2011

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

The attached drawing was submitted by, Kristen, Sara and Kathryn Kimble, and is there response to Hosea 14: 5
Members, St. Elizabeth's Church



"I will be like the dew to Israel;
he will blossom like a lily.
Like a cedar of Lebanon
he will send down his roots."

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

April 2, 2011

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

Where do the opportunities for humility exist in our society? We have become a culture of Pharisees: our culture expects us to go to work, make money, raise families; we perform our modern Christian duties, give to charity, and maybe give up something for Lent. But our world demands we never sacrifice.

Meanwhile, our social values have suffocated humility. Everyone now stars in their own life's show. An explosion of media only exposes us to more of what we want to hear and see. We live louder and brighter. To find work, experts tell us to build a *personal brand*. And while technology connects us more than ever, our social tools largely facilitate *statements*, not communication.

And certainly not humility. "Beating [one's] breast" like the tax collector now symbolizes the antithesis of humility. Apologizing, admitting fault, or recognizing one's weaknesses now serves as *strategic communication*. "God, be merciful to me, I am a sinner," in the 21st Century would likely be heard in a press conference – as a last tactical resort – by someone who probably does not believe it and whom we certainly will not judge sincere.

How to live humbly in this environment? We find solace in our church and can celebrate humbly together in shared faith. But does this alone allow us to "go home justified" in a world that exalts the exalters?

I have burned considerable calories struggling with these issues in recent months, pondering my professional future. How can I do something meaningful while simultaneously meeting my responsibilities to my family, my ambition, and today's tax collector? "I am a sinner" does not test well as a personal brand in focus groups. Nor does "I don't have all the answers" fulfill much of a value proposition. Can you be humble *and* ambitious, without being called a hypocrite? In this marketplace, what about humble *and* successful?

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Dave Kartunen

Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

April 4, 2011

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

The readings for today, it seems to me, are centered around the theme of Faith and the individual. Faith is something that each person must find and use for him or herself. In exercising that faith in God our faith grows stronger, and we can draw others in to that faith as well. As I reflect on these concepts, it seems that perhaps these passages were chosen specifically for me, as I have had quite a journey of faith this year.

As many people know, this year I have been writing a column in the Mantle called “Did You Know?” This was the result of discussions among the newcomer’s committee about aspects of St. E’s that may require explanations to those that join our church. Members have submitted questions, and over the year I have had discussions with Barbara, consulted my Prayer Book, Wikipedia and other sources to find answers.

At the same time, I have been attending the Level 1 training for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program. Through my participation in this program, I am discovering much about the liturgy and the theology of the Episcopal Church. This has been an unintended consequence of the training; I didn’t know how much I didn’t know until I started this training. In many ways I am experiencing the program as a child does, learning to love and have faith in Jesus all over again.

Between these two aspects of my work as a *minister* at St. E’s (see February Mantle), I have experienced a shift in my thinking about my spiritual and religious life, and an expansion of my faith. Jesus’ teachings have become very personal to me. The irony is that when I started my ministry I thought I’d be reaching out to others and trying to draw them in, when in fact it is me that has been drawn into a deeper relationship with God. In the parable of the Found Sheep, which is a presentation in the Level 1 atrium, we learn that “Jesus’ redemption is no mass salvation, but one by one, person-by-person, and name-by-name.” I feel this is happening to me; He knows my name. The lesson from the reading for today is “Faith is a gift that grows as we use it.” The way we experience this growth is an individual as we are. My reflections and prayers this Lenten season will be focused on thanksgiving for what I have learned this year, on ways I can further develop my faith, and in the words of COGS, fall more deeply in love with God.

Humbly submitted,
Suzie Kornblum
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

April 5, 2011

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

It is great that all of the readings that were assigned to me are about healing and water albeit a river or a pool. There is something quite calming to me about water. Let me explain...

My grandfather Joe Lucas was from Manhattan. If anyone knows New York State, they would remember that there was no New York Thruway in the 1930's. The New York Thruway is like the Mass Pike in that it traverses New York State as the Pike does for MA . It does so from NYC to Canada and Buffalo, the two furthest points from "The City".

My grandfather had a calling that a small lake in Ontario, Canada would be a good place to fish, so whatever his calling was to visit this lake he did. Every summer he brought his family; my grandmother, my dad, my aunt and my uncle as well as my great aunt and uncle to visit this small lake. It took them many, many, hours to get there as the NY Thruway was not yet made- perhaps as long as 19-20 hours one way to visit this lake and it was for only a small period of time as his vacation time from his work at the New York Times was limited. Yet he felt called to do this. The town where the lake was located had a population of about 200 and consisted of a general store, funeral home, laundromat, small school, farms and some homes. The cottage he rented on the lake was accessed by boat only and had no electricity. An ice house was used for refrigeration and a back house was used for facilities. Every summer my dad's family travelled to this lake to fish and relax and I suppose to have a very different experience than the one they had in busy Manhattan. My grandfather ended up loving this small lake in southern Ontario so much that he purchased some land in the hope that he or a member of his family would build a cottage of their own there.

My father as a teacher in the NYC school system was able to have 8 weeks vacation in the summer and shortly after his marriage to my mother in 1957, they built a small cottage on a plot of land that my grandfather had purchased. I was 6 weeks old the first summer I went to Eagle Lake and have never missed a summer since, even if it was only for a few days.

My parents named our cottage “Lucas Landing”. It is currently accessible only by boat and had no electricity or indoor facilities until I was a teenager. What a change from our busy life in Queens, NY! Even today the aforementioned town of Parham, Ontario has changed little from the 1930’s.

Why do I give this background and story of my parent’s summer home? Perhaps this lake has some healing properties for me both spiritually and emotionally, as the river did for the man mentioned in Ezekiel or the sick man mentioned in John or as is mentioned in Psalms “the river that that brings joy to the city of God”.

The peace and joy I feel each summer as we drive down the dirt road that leads to that lake cannot be explained. The call of the loons at night, the beauty of the sunsets, the smell of the fire in that woodstove, all bring back the childhood memories of camping on tiny islands on the lake with friends, the catching of frogs, huddling by the woodstove on a windy and cool Canadian night, the lighting of the propane lights with a match, and yes, even that “walk up the hill” to the backhouse. My memories of the lack of telephone and television, the need to write actual paper letters because there was no email, walking on that dirt road to the small town of Parham for ice cream and candy after a boat ride to get to that road are such wonderful memories that I now share and even experience some of them with my children. Even though now there is currently electricity, a television, a washing machine, a phone and yes- even wifi; the general feeling of slowness and wellness that exists there bring me closer to nature and to God and myself than I can get anywhere else...

When we are faced with life's challenges we often feel frustrated, angry, lost and a need to shout out "why me?" We may have lost our memories for the past decade or more, we may face current challenges with cognitive losses and continuing seizures, we may have lost our careers that we so desperately loved and we may also feel lonely, afraid for the future and so often depressed. We may not understand why it had to be us that were chosen to experience this challenge. But perhaps the question should not be "why ME" but instead "why NOT me?"

In our busy lives we often miss the importance of what seeing and experiencing what is right in front of us and we so often miss the feeling of actually being in the present moment rather than always thinking and planning for tomorrow. Although we may not remember when our children were babies and toddlers, or the feeling of pride and joy that we experienced when we were able to heal a patient, or the kiss of our husband when we said "I do", but we now can really *feel* the love of our husband and children, friends and family like we never did before. We may not be able to heal others any longer but we ourselves can be healed; by the expertise of our physicians, by the medicines we take daily and by the touch of our husband and our children's hugs and the sound of their laughter. We can really feel the closeness we have to our parents, siblings and friends like we couldn't before "the event". We can now really experience the importance of our Church and we can now open our minds to living life like we never could before.....

As I drive down that dirt road this summer and see that lake, I know I will feel that inner peace that I mentioned above. Those loon calls will help me to accept more and more of my deficits and to see that life has changed for me for the better in so many ways. I don't know the path that my future will take but I have faith that it will be meaningful and full of love and acceptance.

This summer I will look up to Heaven on a warm summer night and say "Thank you Grandpa for this lake and thank you God for these challenges that I now am dealing with".

“Please God give me the grace and strength that I need to go forward as so many others do who face much bigger challenges than I.”

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Boyle (Aka Susan H. Lucas MD)

Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church



Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

April 6, 2011

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

Psalm

145:8-19

Lessons

Isaiah 49:8-15

John 5:19-29

Psalm 145 is also known as David’s Psalm of Praise – it’s about praising the glory of God.

As I read this psalm, I can almost envision the God that David is describing: like a wise and benevolent King who never raises his voice, and leads his people with equanimity. He is someone capable of non-judgmental, unconditional love.

And the psalm continues to describe that everyone praises this King – and his Kingdom will endure forever.

The next part speaks of faith – how this King will be there for all who follow him. And it seems he favors those who are fallen, for those are the ones in the best position to look up to a deity. He is a forgiving King.

But the last part speaks to me of faith – that God will be there when you need him, and can be trusted to take care of you.

Reading this psalm reinforces many values that I believe in and aspire to as a parent, a wife, a friend, and daughter. To be ‘gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich

in love' on a consistent basis is a daily struggle, and to forgive these shortcomings an even greater challenge.

This psalm reminds me how far I am from God's perfection, but how close I am to his help, if I will only be open to his help. It challenges me to praise God's gifts, and to have faith in his strength.

Ildi Morris
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

April 7, 2011

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

What is my golden calf? It's the big question I am asking after reading multiple times my assigned scriptures. I don't know about you but when I started working on my Lenten assignment, I was challenged with what God was trying to communicate.

- Was it the message that we like the Israelites, fail to trust God after he rescues us time and time again from our own shortcomings?
- Do we need to be a bit more like Moses and John and intercede where necessary? Isn't that a bit radical? Both men had a love and compassion for their people and constantly worked on their behalf.
- Is God asking for us to follow the example of John to be "A Lamp, burning and shining?"
- Are we like the Israelites, ready to accept a path through the Red Sea however, once we have crossed over to dry land and a safe place, forget who rescued us?
- Are we a community who trusts the intangible and exhibit a bit of blind faith?

After pondering these questions I began to think of the expansive heart of God and his servants Moses and John. The situations they were challenged with were beyond my daily challenges. Oh sure, I have trials but believing and trusting I could get a group of people through the Red Sea is not one of them! I believe Moses and John trusted God often out of blind faith along with the promise they would be saved.

It is hard to know when and where God is speaking to us and what our future brings. I personally pray that through this Lenten season I will stop, listen and discern what My Golden Calf is that is keeping me from totally trusting God's vision for my life. The Good News is God is always there to teach me over and over, even when I don't listen. If He saved the Israelites from their Golden Calf; can he not spare me from mine?

Nancy Morgan
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

April 8, 2011

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

Today's readings lead me to think about good and evil and how that impacts our relationship with God. In the Psalm lays the groundwork for me for both readings. For in the Psalm it talks about how evil is condemned and the righteous are comforted and cared for and seen in a good light by God.

John shares with us Jesus is here doing good works, he was aware that the Jews wanted to kill him. The question is why would the Jews want to kill him if they fully understood who he was?

This lack of understanding of who Jesus is was the basis for Jesus to proclaim "You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know."

A proclamation like that in light of the Psalm, would make you wonder what the actions that were about to occur and how God would view the righteous and the evil among us.

Cecilia and David Small
Members, St. Elizabeth's Church

As I visited with my father in Virginia he offered this Lenten reflection:

"Guide us walking, O Lord
and guard us sleeping;
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep we may rest in peace"

The Antiphon from Compline (BCP page 134)

As we live through Lent, Holy Week, and Easter and as we enjoy the signs of spring - sometimes all we can do is to watch and wait, to rest and sleep-
But like all times in our lives, this is a season for growth-
It is a time for us to trust in the Lord and to do the best we can to respond to the opportunity of service given to us.

The Reverend Francis C. Tatem

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent

April 9, 2011

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

As I read today's selection, my first thought was that this is straightforward. Of course, God will mercifully hear our prayers. Of course those who confess their sins to God will be absolved by God's merciful pardon. Isn't this inherently obvious? I wondered what more I was going to be able to say.

Then I read today's lessons.

Jeremiah lived about 600 years before the birth of Jesus and is one of the major Old Testament prophets. The early chapters of Jeremiah's book tell us that he was from a family of priests, but that he was initially reluctant to accept the calling to follow God. The ministry of Jeremiah was not well received by all, especially after he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem by foreign invaders because Israel had been unfaithful to the laws of God. In the short lesson for today, Jeremiah talks of being an innocent, and would not have known that others – including those from his own town – were plotting against him, even plotting to kill him, except that God “had given me knowledge of it.” Perhaps those who followed Jeremiah in his time did not find that praying and confessing to God and receiving God's merciful pardon were quite so inherently obvious as I had been thinking.

The lesson from John tells a strikingly similar story. Jesus has just proclaimed that “if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” Many who heard Jesus said he was a prophet or even the Messiah. But his ministry was also drawing increasing scrutiny from those who felt threatened by him, most especially the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked the guards why they had not yet brought Jesus to face them. As with Jeremiah before him, perhaps those who followed Jesus in his time also did not find that praying and confessing to God and receiving God's merciful pardon were quite so inherently obvious as I had been thinking.

At St. Elizabeth's, however, we do not have to live in fear that our mere act of worship might lead to persecution, exile or death. Jeremiah and his followers were not so blessed some 2,600 years ago. Jesus and his followers were not so blessed some 2,000 years ago.

Even today, many who would wish to pray and confess to God freely do not live in places where they can do so without fear of reprisal. We are extraordinarily blessed to live in a time and place where it is inherently obvious that God will mercifully hear our prayers and that we can freely pray and confess our sins to God and receive God's merciful pardon.

Stuart Hamilton
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 11, 2011

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

The Gospel reading from John 8: 12-20 is when Jesus says,

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Jesus is then challenged by the Pharisees, and responds with a verbal shell game.

The Susanna reading and John 8: 1-11 are both lessons that use adultery as the example to illustrate the just and merciful judgment of the Lord.

But what feels most fruitful I draw from nine children who reflected on the first part of Psalm 23 in the Level I atrium with me last week. I share some of the questions, their comments, and my *silent reflections*. Try reading slowly – they taught me.

“The Lord is my shepherd,

Q - Who is this shepherd?

A - The Good Shepherd!

Q - Did David know the good shepherd?

A -Yes!

Will I follow? Following is counter-cultural.

What does following look like?

“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.”

I shall not want.

Q - Have you ever had a time when you didn't need anything more? Maybe when you were warm and close to someone who loves you? Maybe you had something to eat?

A - At breakfast this morning!

It's the simple things.

It's right now.

Beyond the consumer-driven wanting is that peace.

He makes me lie down in green pastures

Q - Did you ever lie down in the grass? When?

A - One time I was lying in the grass and rolling down the hill! You can watch the clouds!

The shepherd leads us to relax. Relaxing can be holy, can't it?

He leads me beside still waters

Q - Are still waters good?

A - They aren't dangerous! They take away your thirst!

This water gives Life.

Is this the great water of creation, the compassionate water of baptism?

He restores my soul

Q - What is a soul?

A - The part inside me that makes me alive. The part that loves.

Q - What does restore mean?

A - To replace. To heal.

Q - Does your love ever feel broken?

A - Yes, sometimes with my brother. The good shepherd heals our love!

Wow, that's right.

He heals our love.

He leads me in right paths, for his name's sake.

There is that following again, on the right path.

Reminds me of a song, Psalm 119 "Thy word is a light unto my path".

Ah. His word will lead me.

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and staff – they comfort me.**

*For our bruising times, the dark hours.
Mine are yet to come,
I pray for my friends' comfort and peace.*

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell
in the house of the Lord forever.**

*Thank you for the blessings of family and friends, and the loving compassion that
surrounds us on every side. Thank you for the challenges and failures that lead us to
acknowledge our dependence on you alone. (adapted from BCP p. 836)*

*Thank you, good people of St. E's. I invite you to visit the atria for some wow moments.
Warm regards,*

Kris Wile
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 12, 2011

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

Jesus tells his disciples of his oneness with God. Jesus' obedience, even to the cross, is the final proof of his oneness with God.

Jesus wants us all to be obedient to God. We know this is not easy. Often it is difficult to discern exactly what God is asking of us. If we carefully read the scriptures, and pray earnestly to know, then hopefully we will learn his will for us and resolve to obey (with God's help!)

Obedience takes work and prayer and love. The more we believe that Jesus' teachings are the true will of God for us, his children, the more we realize that God sent his Son to show the true Way. How can we help but love him and seek to obey?

Mary Ainsworth
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 13, 2011

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

LOCKED BEHIND BARS

Think of it this way. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind bars of guilt and shame and deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackled you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time; he satisfied the penalty and set you free. Christ died, and when you cast your lot with him, your old self died too.

The old way to be set free from the prison of sin is to serve its penalty. In this case the penalty is death. Someone has to die, either you or a heaven-sent substitute. You cannot leave prison unless there is a death. But that death has occurred at Calvary. And when Jesus died, you died to sin’s claim on your life. You are free.

From: *Let the Journey Begin*

Author: Max Lucado

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 14, 2011

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

The land was given to the nation of Israel, and “won” by Joshua as he brought the tribes together into the land. I sometimes wonder what this has to do with me, since I am not a Jew (well, maybe, my great-great grandmother was a Jew). But then I remember, out of this “inheritance” we have the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. So, without that devout cauldron of faith and practice, we would not have such a gift if the Jews had not had the opportunity to organize and live as a people under God.

In Genesis, we see that the land was not just for the Jews, because God said, “you shall be the father of a multitude of nations...” and, “and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.” In this, we are reminded that we are all daughters and sons of Abram or Abraham. (And so are the Muslims, through Ishmael and Mohammed!)

But then, in the reading from John, we see that the Jews did not believe what was given to them. They could not understand the divine nature of Jesus; they rejected that he had “seen” Abraham. By throwing stones and casting Him out of their presence, we are reminded of the dual nature of Jesus – He was human as well. But Jesus says, “... if any one keeps my word, he will never see death.” Jesus, in his human side, did see death; but he overcame death in his Resurrection, and is with us as we live today.

But then the question: Why is it that some of us have accepted the gift of God’s redemption through Jesus, and some of us in the world have not? Is it that I was “indoctrinated” by my childhood teachers? If so, then why did I return to Jesus as an adult, after forsaking my Church for so many years? Is it because it feels right? Yes! It feels like that is where I belong. That is a comfort, a joy, and something I would never want to be without. How cold, dark, and alienating our world would be if I didn’t have that Faith that Jesus is with me as I take each step! How wonderful it is! I want to tell everyone I know... But then, many will not “hear” me. And I probably would not have heard them if they told me about God’s Grace when I was not open to hearing it. It took a group of teenagers in the mountains of Appalachia to prepare me for truly bearing God’s Grace. Thank you guys! And thank you fellow St. E’s parishioners, and fellow EfM (Education for Ministry) students and mentors, and Fellowship Team and Outreach Team members for reinforcing this wonderful state of being! Our community is truly a blessed cauldron out of which wonderful things can grow.

Susan Newlin
Member, St. Elizabeth’s Church

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 15, 2011

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

FACEBOOK...seems to have the paradoxical power to connect as well as isolate people. I consider myself a ‘marginal’ FB user but do have 77 FB ‘friends’. I mostly read and follow the comments and messages that my FB connections post and share with their FB network, and occasionally share a quip, note, or comment in reply. All-in-all I find the FB ‘friendships’ not all that satisfying since my ‘exchange’ with any particular FB friend feels rather stilted and incomplete. For me, exchanging comments and messages on FB feels a bit like trying to listen to a piece of music where you only get to hear the first three or four notes before a totally new and different song starts up, only to be supplanted by another new and different song after three or four notes, and so on. The result is that I rarely feel that I heard enough to be ‘moved’ by the music. Thus I’m ‘connected’ but ‘not

connected' to the experiences, feelings, and lives of my FB friends....with one relevant exception.

Sometime ago I received a 'friend request' from M who included a note saying that we shared several mutual FB friends and had graduated from the same high school, albeit two years apart. I didn't recall her name and asked for her help to jog my memory. She told me that she had been very active in school clubs and sports, that we had occasionally crossed paths at after-school parties, and that I had even signed her yearbook. But I still could not clearly recall her. Nonetheless, I accepted her 'friend request' and she added me to her FB network. It turns out that she is a very active FB-er, sharing her thoughts and musings at least once if not 2 or 3 times a day.

At first I found it curious that she could devote so much time to 'journaling' on FB. Her morning post would almost always begin with a comment about how beautiful the morning was and her general plans for the day, which often included going to the gym, walking her dog, and putting some time into her art projects. As the day went on she would often post an additional comment or two for her FB network to read which I often found uplifting and inspiring. I began to find her 'feel good' messages something that I looked forward to and consciously made an effort to check my FB page more frequently in order to read what she might have posted.

In recognition of the 'inclusive and public nature' of FB posts, I chose not to ask her any questions that would require disclosing personal information. I have, however, posted my own comment on several occasions in reply to something she wrote, including telling her how much I appreciated the positive perspective and outlook she conveyed via her FB posts, and that I looked forward to reading her daily 'feel good' messages.

Recently, I ended my comment in reply to one of her FB posts with, "Again, I am moved by your outlook and optimism. Keep up the good word". In reply she wrote that she would 'keep up the good word' as long as she could, and went on to explain that she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis nearly nine years ago and has since oriented her life style toward forestalling the physical progression of the disease. She also wrote that she has likewise been combating the co-occurring deleterious effect that her medical diagnosis can have on one's emotional attitude and mental outlook. Her 'journaling' on Facebook has been one way for her to "exercise" her positive thinking.

The fact many of her FB 'connections', like myself, have found her musings and messages motivating and inspiring has further elevated her capacity to move ahead and live her life to its fullest limits. She further revealed that it has only been within the last year that she has returned to her painting, for at one time she was a professional artist, and has posted photos of her latest 'work-in-progress'. She is indeed a remarkable talent, and a remarkable person...and I almost missed 'knowing' her.

So, it was of her that I found myself thinking after reading through the passages assigned to me for this Lenten Reflection. And while there are surely other 'lessons' and

'messages' reflected in the verses of these three readings, I was (apparently) drawn to the 'reflection' most readily represented by verse 6 from Psalm 18:1-7:

In my trouble I called to the Lord;
I called to my god for help.
In his temple he heard my voice;
He listened to my cry for help.

John Stevens
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

April 16, 2011

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

“ARE WE THERE YET?”

Please join me this new day as we sit, relaxing with a cuppa, and catch up on the news.

JERUSALEM POST

Saturday, the 5th day of Nisan 5771 / the 9th day of April 2011 CE

Jerusalem: Today, in this Holy City and throughout the world, neighbors, Jews and Christians, prepare to remember our experiences of Pesach / Passover i.e. The Feast of Unleavened Bread.

-- OUT OF BONDAGE TO FREEDOM-- Formerly, in an awesome demonstration of Our LORD's grace, mercy, and love, we gathered around our wooden table, hastily consuming unleavened bread with the roasted meat of the sacrificed lamb, its protective blood having already been applied around the door of our home that the Angel of Death that night passed over us enabling us in the new day to escape from our captors after 400 years of bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt and safely delivering us, now cleansed through the waters of the Red Sea, ready to approach Mt Sinai.

--OUT OF DEATH TO LIFE—On a latter day, in an awesome demonstration of Our LORD's grace, mercy, and love, we gathered around a wooden cross to witness the body of Our LORD as the shed blood of our sacrificed Lamb of God was poured out enabling us to escape death thro' the victorious risen Lamb of God who safely delivering us, now cleansed through the waters of our Holy Baptism, ready to approach His Altar.

JERUSALEM POST

Saturday, a day prior to The Feast of Unleavened Bread 33 CE

Jerusalem: Just yesterday in an awesome demonstration of Our LORD's grace, mercy, and love, Jesus, bar Joseph of Nazareth, bar David of Bethlehem, was seen arriving in Bethany at the home of His friends having been summoned by Mary and Martha for a last ditch effort to heal their dying brother, Lazarus. Arriving too late and finding Lazarus already dead and entombed for 4 days now, Jesus was overheard saying to the grieving sisters as they stood together now before his tomb, "Take away the stone." After listening to a few recriminations from the distraught sisters about His tardy arrival as well as the smell of the rotting body that would overwhelm all present, they choose to obey their Friend. To every one's amazement Jesus then called Lazarus to come forth out of his tomb. Then, immediately the dead man came out into the light of day fully alive and restored! Well, let me tell you, the buzz in this city today after the reports of yesterday's happenings just a few miles south of here reached the ears of the Holy Temple's High Priest, Caiaphas, and all the hastily gathered late last night chief priests of the Sanhedrin Council, to deal with the problem itinerant carpenter, rabbi, healer, Jesus of Nazareth was something to listen to as, according to this reporter's reliable sources.

"What's to be done with this Jesus now?!"

'He has to die...Rather, One be sacrificed to save the whole nation, than for all of us, our place of power and the nation of Israel, to perish here and now under the rule of our Roman conquerors!"

This was reportedly Caiaphas' final solution though not ever realizing these prophetic words echoed a fulfillment of Our LORD's promise again providing an awesome demonstration of His grace, mercy, and love in His sacrifice on the cross. Be sure to check out the future happenings in this awesome experience. In the **JERUSALEM POST**, of course!

I want to read more but my cuppa needs filling up again, so I'll just add this final remark. I am so thankful to be living with you, my neighbors, in post-resurrection time and enjoying the peaceful confidence that our long awaited Messiah/Christ has come and will come again!

Anyone remember this song?

"Let's think of something to do while we're waiting."

--Fred Rodgers

Together, Baptized in Christ, Still waiting,

Barbara Bell

Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Monday in Holy Week

April 18, 2011

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

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

This story is enigmatic, extravagant and poignant.

The enigma of the story rests in Mary's action. Anointing a guest's feet with the perfume was an ordinary act for the kind of dinner that Lazarus was hosting. When a guest's feet were anointed, it was usually done by slaves, not women (except for the questionable kind) and certainly not by the sister of the host. That alone would have been unusual, but when Mary wipes his feet with her hair, this is an extraordinary, highly intimate act. What she was doing was shameful not only because Mary was acting the part of a slave, but also she was doing so in an almost sexual way to a man to whom she was neither married nor related. Why didn't Lazarus or Martha or anybody else object to it?

The only objection to Mary's act is from Judas Iscariot. But his objection is about the incredible cost of the perfume, which was made from the roots of the spikenard plant that grows in Nepal. As Judas points out, the perfume was worth 300 denarii which was a workman's annual salary in Jesus' time. It was not just the cost of the perfume, but also the amount she uses: enough to perfume the entire house. Judas' objection made sense:

why waste this huge amount of money on perfume to anoint someone's feet, when people are starving?

The poignancy of the story comes with Jesus' reply to Judas. Jesus is not concerned with whether Judas is a thief or not, nor with the moral issue of whether one can spend so much money on perfume. Rather he says that the perfume was bought for his burial, and that, basically, the poor can be helped at anytime, but he himself will not always be there. With this Jesus intimates that he will soon die. Mary seems to know this because she is using his burial perfume on him while he is still alive. Within a week he will be dead.

We, with all our social justice issues, can see Judas' politically correct viewpoint, even if he is a thief. We would probably object to Mary's extravagance, using such costly perfume is morally wrong. But Jesus, as he often does, puts the brakes on morality. He points out, in an almost harsh way, that there will always be poor people to take care of. Right now, right here, I'm the one who's important, and this woman with her perfume, she is doing the right thing.

Jesus, like her family and their guests, does not object to her wiping his feet with her hair. He accepts it. Even though all at the table may have been embarrassed by it, he doesn't stop it. He accepts her physical devotion, her caressing of his feet, her infusing her own hair with the perfume that would adorn his dead body.

As embarrassing and as morally objectionable as this devotion is, God accepts it for what it is, an act of love.

The Reverend Chris Visminas
Guest Contributor

Tuesday in Holy Week

April 19, 2011

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

Are you doing what you are called to do? If not, why not?

Be still and listen. What call do you hear in the silence?

What is your passion? What gives your life meaning?

If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you try?

What is it that only you can do?

Why are you here?

What gift can you share with the world?

What must you give up to share that gift?

Are you willing to make that sacrifice? Why not?
Are you doing what you are called to do? If not, why not?

Win Treese
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church

Wednesday in Holy Week

April 20, 2011

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

The readings tell us to "Go-The-Distance" in keeping our faith and our rewards will be great. So I offer us a little prayer to "Go-The-Distance".

Lord, help us to find peace and fortitude from our faith.
Grant us the fortitude that helps us to weather the Nay-Sayers.
Grant us the peace that gives us inner calm in the face of adversity.
Grant us the fortitude to overcome our self doubt in our faith.
Grant us the peace to outwardly show the true face-of-faith to all who feel the need to push our demonstrations of faith away from the public eye.
Lastly, Lord, Grant us the grace to not wish ill will on those who would debunk or deface our faithful expression.

AMEM

Larry Jobson
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Maundy Thursday

April 21, 2011

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

GOD WOULD KNEEL DOWN

I think God might be a little prejudiced.
For once He asked me to join Him in a walk
through this world,

and we gazed into every heart on this earth,
and I noticed He lingered a bit longer
before any face that was
weeping,

and before any eyes that were
laughing.

And sometimes when we passed
a soul in worship

God too would kneel
down.

I have come to learn: God
adores His
creation.

From: *Love Poems from God*

By: Francis Bernardone (St. Francis of Assisi - 1182-1226) as translated by Daniel Ladinsky



Good Friday

April 22, 2011

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

Psalm

22:1-21

Lessons

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

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

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

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

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

The Rev. Martin Smith, formerly of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge, and now living in Washington, D.C. and serving at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, said in his book *A Season for the Spirit* that trying to wrap our minds around the passion of our Lord is like standing next to Niagara Falls and trying to catch the cataract in a thimble. When meditating on the enormity of the crucified Christ, the best we can hope for is to hold a small cup alongside a trickle from a side stream and try to capture a few drops. We simply do not have the capacity to take it all in. So here on Good Friday each year I focus on one hopefully more manageable aspect. This year, I am focusing on the part of the story just after Jesus breathes his last.

In dying Jesus surrenders his spirit. In the gathering gloom of dusk, the Jews are anxious to dispose of the corpse before the onset of the Sabbath, particularly since this Sabbath is the first Seder of the Passover. One of the soldiers stabs Jesus in the side to verify that he is indeed really dead. Blood and water gush out.

As we wonder what significance this might have for you and for me we realize that the life, the living water, that Jesus declared himself to be earlier in the Gospel of John, pours forth. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well, "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (4:14). Three chapters later Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let anyone who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (7:37-39) From the wound in the side of the crucified Christ, the inner life that Jesus shared with the Father is now opened up for us, has come to us, and is available to us.

So here in the midst of the passion, in the throes of wretched death, is new life symbolized in the living water pouring from the side of Jesus, the living water of baptism, that sacrament by which we are reborn by the Spirit and the person of Christ becomes one with you and with me.

What of the blood that flows with the water from the side of Christ? Here is the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. Jesus had stunned his listeners earlier in the Gospel of John when he said, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." (6:54) By offering his body as food and his blood as drink Jesus is telling us we are to take him into ourselves sacramentally. We take him in, and in that taking, abide with him as he abides with us. And in that abiding, we join him in his union with God.

In the Book of Common Prayer, in the service of Holy Eucharist Rite I, this notion of taking Christ's body and blood into ourselves that we may abide in him and he in us, is captured in the Eucharistic Prayer:

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee that we, and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him. (BCP p. 335)

From this perspective, our life becomes a life lived out of communion with Christ and with God. So in this gut wrenching wound in Christ's side we come to see Christ opened to us as we are opened to Christ. We see Christ living in us as we live in Christ. We see God dwelling in us as we dwell in God. Out of the death of Jesus comes living water springing up unto eternal life and the lifeblood of Christ, the cup of salvation.

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

Holy Saturday

April 23, 2011

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

Psalm

130

Lessons

Job 14:1-14

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

Matthew 27:57-66

or John 19:38-42

Holy Saturday is a major transition point. What has come before was the revelation of God of himself through inspired men and women. Tomorrow marks the beginning of risen Christ living and moving among us. So today is a transitional moment. I would like to share part of a Meditation on the Holy Cross by St. Anselm, from "Prayers and Meditation of St. Anselm", printed by Mowbrays and Co. St. Anselm looks to what was done in the past, and how God transform it for the future.

For we must take thee, holy Cross,
As more than just the weapon forged
By cruel men's insensate wickedness
To slay the Gentle One.
We must receive thee after the intent
Of His most loving wisdom, Who Himself
Freely accepted thee.
For they could have done nothing, had not He
In wisdom suffered it;

Neither endured He anything
Except, in mercy, of His own free will.
They chose thee, but to perpetrate through thee
Their infamous intent;
He chose thee, by thy means to consummate
His Work of tender love.
They chose thee, that through thee they might betray
The Righteous unto death;
He chose thee, as the instrument whereby
To rescue sinners from the jaws of death.
They used thee to kill life; and He to destroy death.
By thee, they slew the Source of Life; and He
Also by thee, restored life to the dead.
They acted foolishly and cruelly;
He wisely and in mercy.
Therefore, O wondrous Cross,
It is not by their cruel senseless purpose,
Effected by they means, that we must rate thy worth;
But by the Work his mercy and wisdom wrought.

Richard Ebens
Member, St. Elizabeth's Church



Crucified Christ
Austria (Salzburg) about 1050-1100
Wood, with polychromy
MFA Boston



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