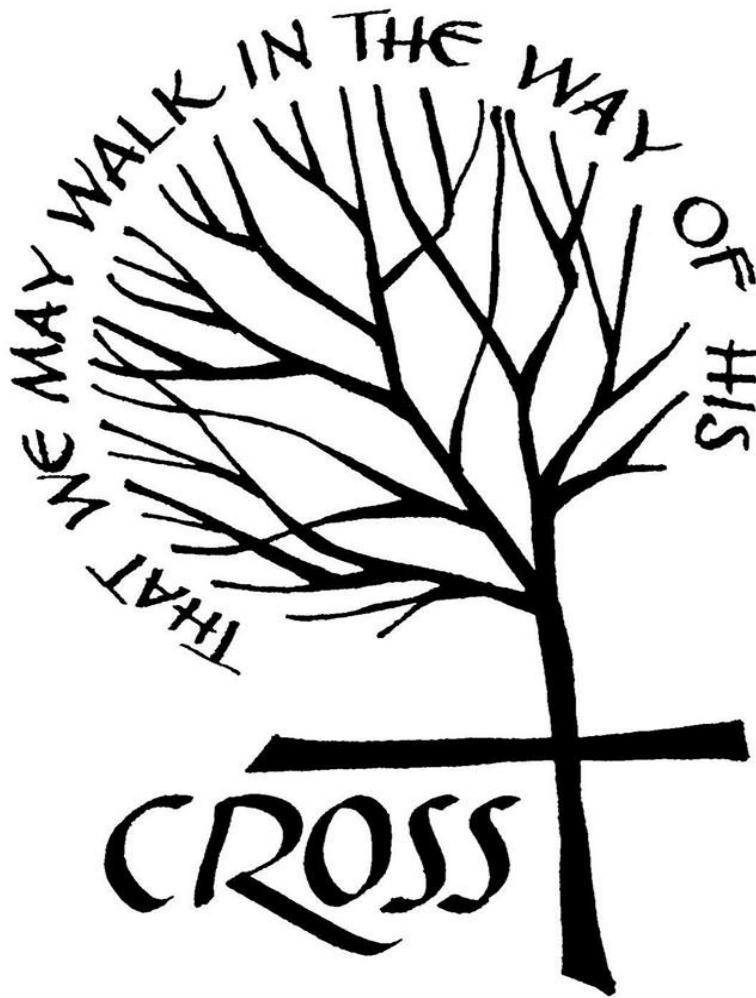


LENTEN REFLECTIONS

2014



TRINITY CHURCH, SOLEBURY, PENNSYLVANIA

Our Lenten experience becomes even richer when shared. This devotional booklet, written by the parishioners and clergy of Trinity Solebury, has an online companion piece. Inspired by our project, Julie Burd and her YASC colleagues have created a blog with a similar format. You can find their thoughts online at

<http://yasclenten.blogspot.com/>

Assembling this collection has prepared me for Lent in ways that I never expected. My sincere thanks to everyone who stepped forward, took a chance, and reminded me once again why I am so grateful to be a member of the Trinity family.

— *Lori Daukas*

March 5, 2014

Ash Wednesday

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

An Invitation to a Holy Lent

Jesus said, *"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven."*

(Matthew 6:1-6,16-21)

On this day Christians around the globe, through a variety of disciplines and practices, strive to keep a holy season of Lent. These great 40 days leading up to Easter have been a time of penitence, fasting and prayer.

I am delighted to commend this devotional booklet, composed by members of Trinity, reflecting the faith and hope of those who make up this parish church. I thank those who have given of themselves in prayer and contemplation. It is with appreciation that I acknowledge Lori Daukas, who lovingly nurtured this project and all of us who have become a part of it.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent.

The Rev. Richard L. Vinson
Rector

March 6, 2014

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

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.

Our friends and family can influence us. If we have friendships with those people who mock what God considers important, we might become indifferent to God's love. Do you build up your friend's faith? Are you a true friend? There are two paths of life. The happy life is like a healthy, fruit bearing tree with strong roots. In contrast, a meaningless life can blow away like a kernel of grain. We are very fortunate to fellowship with many strongly rooted friends at Trinity.

Christine Angulo—reflecting upon Psalm 1

March 7, 2014

Friday after Ash Wednesday

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.

While all of the first Friday readings consider falling from and returning to grace, I feel these verses offer the most ardent prayer for mercy and forgiveness, healing and redemption. One of David's most famous laments, it is both very personal and universal. Beginning with a plea to "blot out, wash and cleanse", it acknowledges sin and guilt and that God is "justified" and "blameless" when he "passes judgement." David writes, "You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." This is the desire of so many of us! The passage then returns to the language of purging, blotting and washing and concludes with that most beautiful last verse, " create in me a clean heart, O God....

Lent always brings me back to reflection, a quiet place, a personal setting of spiritual goals and more focus on an inner life; these verses remind me of that quest for renewal and a " new and right spirit."

As an Anglican note, these verses were known as the "neck verse" and considered so powerful they were used to prove clergy literacy and extend "benefit of the clergy," a practice which lasted from Beckett's murder to the 1820's!

Susan Wells—reflecting on Psalm 51:1-10; the miserere

March 8, 2014

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

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.

This passage speaks to me in a beautiful metaphor about giving and receiving; it begins with powerful giving. When we go through our daily lives, we actually encounter all kinds of people, among those we know and those we don't know, who are suffering due to some illness, poverty, loneliness or other misfortunes. Isaiah says that if we pour ourselves into acts of kindness, the rewards are great. It almost sounds, ironically, selfish! We volunteer to help people we don't even know, offering a hand or encouragement to a friend or stranger. We send peaceful, empowering thoughts to our enemies. And this can be a challenge...to wish for them what they wish for themselves. But by making them stronger, we make ourselves stronger. And the more we actually do this, consistently, every day, Isaiah says our metaphorical bones become stronger; we are like a watered garden, and we "ride upon the heights of the earth". Maybe for today, it just means sitting quietly in prayer, focusing on someone who comes to mind, thinking of what they wish for (health, a job, whatever), and then imagining them receiving that wish.

Ardith Talbott, reflecting on Isaiah 58:9b-14

March 9, 2014

Sunday in the First Week of Lent

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

After Jesus was baptized, he was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

In the beginning words of *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan writes:

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where there was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed and behold I saw a man clothed in rags standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book read therein; and as he read he wept and trembled and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with lamentable cry saying, "What shall I do?...what shall I do to be saved?"

This classic story recounts the allegorical journey to salvation of an ordinary man named Christian. In his journey, which is filled with obstacles along the way, he wants to know how he can find happiness, health, and fulfillment. His questions are some of the most important questions of human existence. His journey is ours, too. During this Lenten season, Christ invites us to journey with him during these forty days. Christ enters our lives. He lives for us. He goes with us on our wilderness experience. He will intercede for us, guide us, and sustain us.

The Rev. Dr. Virginia Sheay, reflecting on Matthew 4:1

March 10, 2014

Monday in the First Week of Lent

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.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the command of the Lord is true, and makes wise the simple. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, than the honey that drips from the comb.

As a child, during Lent, I remember “holy discipline” to mean I was to “give something up”. This was usually some sort of candy, not that I ever got a lot of it, but perhaps that is what made it a more precious offering. I believed the discipline of not eating whatever my treasure was that particular year, would earn me a closer place to God in Heaven. Oh yes, and there was the belief too, that my “suffering” in not having my treats, was connected to the suffering of Jesus. My “offering it up to God,” united me with his suffering. The Lenten discipline of my childhood, also demanded additional daily devotions, fasting on certain days, and collecting small change in “mite boxes” for the poor.

We learned at an early age the requirements for making a good Lent.

Today, the basics remain the same. The Collect calls me to pray for the “gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting”. The Psalm helps me to see the why of the law of the Lord, the gifts that flow from the gifts of discipline, from caring for neighbors, praying, and fasting or denying myself small luxuries. The Spirit calls me to make donations to the local food pantry or shelters in the area, increase my daily prayer time, meditation, etc., and deny myself the sweets of life.

My offerings, my chosen discipline, are offered with a loving heart, fulfilling the command of the Psalmist, and relying on this God who is “my Lord, my strength and my redeemer that I may be acceptable in His sight.”

Lord God, be my strength, be my rock. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you. Fill me with your grace and your love that I may be an extension of You.

Amen

Anonymous, reflecting on Psalm 19:7-14

March 11, 2014

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent

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 our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

“The Lord redeems the life of his servants, none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.”

Since the birth of my son, I've reflected on all of the things I need to teach him to grow into adulthood. Faith in God was always a given but it was never so personal a belief until he arrived. I think this was because it isn't just about faith, but trust. An adult relationship with Christ means we trust him in all things. When life falls apart – flood or fire, loss of a job or a loved one, injury, harm, fear, etc. –our trust in God remains. And as the Psalmist reflects, that trust gives us eternal, everlasting HOPE.

Bruce Harris, reflecting on Psalm 34:15-22

March 12, 2014

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

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.

I digress from assigned readings and reflect on most meaningful and heart felt significance at this time of Lent. Other than the obvious consent to fast in whatever seems sincere and appropriate for an individual, I concentrate on prayer. Whether in meditation, petition, imaging, thanksgiving, it is timely for this discipline a devotion that I have had for years:

TAKE TIME TO PRAY

No matter how busy you are, take time out for prayer, even if only for a loving glance. The few seconds it requires to raise your mind to Me (says Christ) are richly repaid by deeper peace and keener mental efficiency.

DO NOT TELL ME that you are too busy to give your thoughts to Me.

GIVE ME of your time, and I will do half and more of your work.

GIVE ME your thoughts, and I will enlighten your mind.

GIVE ME your will, and I will return to you My peace.

GIVE ME your love, and I will fill your days with joy.

GIVE ME your prayers, and I will open to you the inexhaustible
treasures of Heaven.

Cathy Dafrico, reflecting on prayer

March 13, 2014

Thursday in the First Week of Lent

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.

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you...” Such a simple concept, yet imagine its power to change the world if every human being practiced this one single, simple piece of Jesus’ advice.

But then there is the evening news: Syria; Afghanistan; the Congo; the Sudan; Mexican cartels; victims like Matthew Shepard; shooters like Adam Lanza; and on and on, bombarding us every day. It’s enough to make one think that “the Golden Rule” is suffering a slow extinction.

Then, just the other day, I was in a line of 3 or 4 people waiting to get through a door while a young woman laden with kids and packages came through the other way. Her 5-year-old son stopped in the doorway and wordlessly held the door for everybody else. Everyone, including his mother, expressed happy surprise.

Christianity speaks of “original sin” (a concept with which I have had some trouble ever since confirmation class in the 8th grade), but I favor substituting “original imperfection,” to borrow from one of Rev. Rick’s recent sermons. That little boy’s action, like so many other trivial little things that come so often unbidden from small children, makes me believe that the Golden Rule is one of the inborn human attributes that God has given each person from birth. If we all, rich or poor, old world, new world or third world, black white or tan, gay or straight, always “gave good gifts to our children,” and allowed that attribute to grow and flourish, how the beauty of the earth would blossom!

Eric Muth, reflecting on Matthew 7:7-12

March 14, 2014

Friday in the First Week of Lent

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.

The readings for the first Friday in Lent including the collect all are about Penitence and right or righteous behavior.

The Collect: "Subdue the flesh to the spirit".

Psalm 130: "Cry for Mercy".

Ezekiel: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?"

Matthew: this passage concerns reconciliation with your brother or sister when you are angry.

Knowing little about Ezekiel, I decided on this passage for my reflection. Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet. He is known for his prophesies and warnings that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed because of the cumulative sins of JUDAH. In this reading, he stresses that those who sin shall die, those who repent and do what is right shall live.

While growing up, I don't remember hearing much about sin. I learned the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed, but certainly didn't break any of the Ten Commandments. Whatever my infractions of the rules was not referred to as SIN!

Penitence is easy to understand when you hear a news story about some outrageous evil deed. Certainly they should be penitent. But what if your sins are a lack of good humor, lack of generosity to the needy or gratitude for all your blessings? Aren't these also transgressions? Shouldn't we be penitent or sorry for those things we have left undone?

During Lent, we used to give up something; chocolate éclairs, meat on Fridays, smoking, going to the movies or whatever. Doesn't it make more sense to do something positive? Think about those things that you should have done. It's never too late. Are you gracious to friends and strangers, generous to those in need and grateful for your blessings? Lent is a good time to reflect on how we can actively improve our attitudes and actions to do the right or righteous thing.

Helen Montgomery, reflecting on Ezekiel 18:21-28

March 15, 2014

Saturday in the First Week of Lent

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.

I find it interesting that I picked this Saturday in the First Week of Lent given my new employer, Episcopal Community Services. Matthew speaks of a Father in Heaven who makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Sounds like a Father who treats all people the same. The command is “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” And the question, the powerful question is “for if you love (only) those who love you, what reward do you have?”

My work now with ECS is to fight every day the urban myth of poverty. That myth is that poverty is a chosen condition, that the poor are lazy, that welfare is a way of life. We find it very uncomfortable and difficult to love the poor in our own backyard. We find it comfortable to love those that love us, but what reward do you have? The reward comes with the love of a stranger, even an enemy.

Matthew 5:43-48 is a call to action. It is easy to love a loved one, people you know, the people you hang out with. Not so much a stranger, or the perceived enemy to your way of life which is the perception that many have of the poor. Yet that is what God calls us to do when he calls us to live our baptismal covenant; “will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

In this season of Lent and time of reflection may we commit to love a stranger, overcome our fear of our enemies, and do the uncomfortable, so that we may in our own way strive to be more perfect in the eyes of the Father. Amen.

Dave Griffith, reflecting on Matthew 5:43-48

March 16, 2014

Sunday in the Second Week of Lent

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

I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I can almost imagine the sons and daughters of ancient Israel reciting this phrase over and over, a mantra recalling the call of their father Abraham and reminder that God's blessing extends beyond the one called. For people of all time even unto this day, God's call is always for the benefit of others. When God blesses us, it is in order to be a blessing to others.

But what does it mean to be a blessing to others? First, it means acknowledging God's presence and power in our lives and second, sharing this with all that we encounter. As God's nature is to have mercy, our nature in Christ is to show compassion to others. In realizing that our lives are lived not only for self, but also for others, we then choose to live and love within a community of persons instead of merely existing alone in the shadows.

Lent is an invitation both to bless and be blessed. May we never come before God asking for solace only and not for strength, for pardon only and not for renewal. Discovering the nature of our blessedness, we soon discover that we are a blessing to others.

The Rev. Richard L. Vinson, reflecting on Genesis 12:1-4a

March 17, 2014

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

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.

How fortunate are we? Several weeks ago Rick's sermon talked about having faith in God and trust the path which God has chosen for us; which has brought us to this place and time. And what a place and time it is! Pastoral Bucks County, Solebury, Pa. where there are no barricades burning in the center of New Hope (or Lambertville); no bigotry or prejudice fueling conflict among disparate factions of the population. How fortunate to be in a place where strife is measured by the degree of difficulty navigating the ice and snow and potholes along the highway, or in my case, just getting out the driveway!

How fortunate are we? We are blessed to be members of this small Trinity Community where freedom to share faith, worship, conversation, education, meditation, mission, family tradition and participation fosters spiritual awareness, growth, fulfillment; and gratitude!

Thank you Lord. Your spirit is among us and we certainly must have already been washed with the pure water of repentance. Now it's up to us to go forth and by example; love you with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and all of our strength; and to love our neighbors as our self.

Thank you Lord. I am blessed that your path has brought me here to this place and this time. Please accept my humility and gratitude.

Gary Wilmore, reflecting on the Collect

March 18, 2014

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

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.

Since about 13 years old, I have seemed to have a propensity to enjoy the act of insubordinate behavior. There is something that I truly enjoy about those with a high-level of authority being challenged. Perhaps it comes from growing up as smaller than average for my age – the old Napoleonic complex maybe? But I do believe that my upbringing in the Episcopal Church has laid the moral framework to answer to the one and only Father.

When I was about 13, the leadership in my home church was uprooted after 35+ years, and I was very sad to see the Dean depart. Our next Dean came in just as the automobile company, Dodge, was going through a marketing rebrand. Their campaign was, “The Rules Have Changed”. Our new Dean ran into many road blocks when he worked at developing a more open mission at the Cathedral (local outreach, welcoming all walks of life, giving to the needy) from older members who had been there for a long time. This new Dean cut out the Dodge ad from a magazine and taped it to his door, to let everyone know “The Rules Have Changed”. From that point on, I knew I was going to always be open to change and that it always brings us closer to what is really important, God’s will.

Matthew’s Gospel here calls into question the Pharisees’ and Scribes’ power and teaches the people to answer to no one but God. I like the sound of that. There should be no one on earth who holds the sole right to our salvation. But for this to work, we must all reach within ourselves to find a way to be God’s light in the world. No one is here to do it for us. We must choose the path to bring us to that heavenly place.

*This little Light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

Matthew Summers, reflecting on Matthew 23:1-12

March 19, 2014

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

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.

*Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...
(Matthew 20:26)*

Busy, for me, is comfortable. Busy means I have done something I can point at and say “look at this thing I have done. Look at all of these boxes I have checked. Here is obvious proof that I am good.” I imagined being a missionary in Haiti would be a year of me being busy serving people.

As I sat chatting with my student and dear friend Danta a few nights ago, lamenting about how slow a project was moving forward, I quipped, “What have I really done here?” Danta responded, “Well, yesterday I was in a really bad mood when you walked into the cafeteria and started doing some stupid dance that made me laugh. That is something.”

She didn't mention my carefully planned teaching materials or the tens of thousands of dollars I have saved the hospital. She didn't mention any of the boxes that I have checked. She mentioned that time I looked up from what I was so busy with to make her laugh. She didn't need me to hang myself on a cross to serve her. She needed me to serve her with my time and attention as a friend.

Sometimes, I get so caught up in my to-do list of benevolent actions I forget who I am actually serving. Here is to celebrating a season based on the ministry of presence.

Julie Burd reflecting on Matthew 20:17-28

March 20, 2014

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of Hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hand 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.

I watched my grandson's final hockey game of the year and saw the frustration of some of the players turn into penalties and one team's loss. Today's Collect and Reading came to mind.

There is skill, strength, and joy in an ice hockey game played within the game's rule book and for the love of the sport. The coach tries to teach and remind the players of those rules...the do's and don'ts...the game skills. There are penalties for cross-checking, boarding, slashing, and other rule infringements that often cause pain, injury, and loss of the team's goal to win the trophy.

There is effort, strength, and joy in living life by God's rule book, the "Ten Commandments." God is our coach. Sins beget penalties. Success, when following His rules, does not come with a trophy or medal, but peace of mind and life everlasting.

Diane Ash, reflecting on Jeremiah 17:5-10

March 21, 2014

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

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.

As I am preparing my hot cereal in the morning I usually listen to the weather and the news. The season of snow and ice has brought beautiful scenery but has also made it difficult to get in and out of the driveway! As for the news, it is not unusual to hear stories of corruption, violence, and destruction. While the cereal is cooking I head outside to feed the birds and my cat, Jack. Jack meows, purrs and rubs against my hand and legs. I smile and my heart is filled with love. The birds flap their wings and rush to the feeder, but quickly it is apparent that there is a so-called "pecking order". Little Juncos, Titmice, and Cardinals wait for the Woodpeckers and Blue Jays to depart so they may come to the feeder. Just watching the flapping wings and the swooping glides of these birds brings feelings of joy and gratefulness. I say, "Thank you God"!

These thoughts of joy and thankfulness wipe away the horrors of the news and hurtful daily happenings.

In the readings of Psalm 105, Genesis 37 and Matthew 21, we look back at the history of the people of God. Psalm 105 reveals the hidden hand of God in the story of Joseph. Joseph was the favored son in his large family. His father favored him more than his brothers. He gave Joseph a coat of many colors to distinguish him. His brothers conspired to sell their younger brother into slavery in Egypt. God did not rescue him from this injustice immediately. Joseph went through a period of training and development. Eventually, God used the situation to save **all** of Joseph's family.

How seldom we make place for others. Instead of trying to understand someone else's perspective, we tend to approach other people from the fixed position of our own thoughts, feelings and prejudices. Our jealousies often get in the way. Each one of us is unique and our differences are significant. Like Joseph, let us trust in God and seek to come to a place of compassion.

The walk of faith and the relationship with Christ develop over the course of a lifetime. Patience, endurance and other qualities of gratitude and humility are learned through experience and practice. Like Joseph, let us have the grace to forgive those who wrongfully use us, that we may be able to receive God's forgiveness.

Carol Church, reflecting on Genesis 37:3-4,12-28, Psalm 105:16-22, Matthew 21:33-43

March 22, 2014

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent

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.

This reading I always struggle with because... As the oldest child of three, my perception is: how could a parent not acknowledge the exemplary son, who did not take his inheritance, stayed home, worked hard and helped his father every day, with little acknowledgement, while his younger brother went off to blow his entire inheritance on a degenerate and lascivious life. If my brother and sister did that to me, I would be upset too. Shouldn't hard work and sacrifice be rewarded and appreciated? Doing the right thing should count for something?

But...as a child who wanted to travel, experience as much of the world as possible, try to go down as many of the roads less taken that could be found, I can understand how the younger brother would want to leave home, see the world and experience everything he could. Because of his youth and inexperience he did not make the best decisions. You do not have to look too far, even today, to see how no parental supervision, youth, money and freedom give you Justin Bieber / Lindsay Lohan size mistakes.

This child had to lose everything, struggle to the point of feeding pigs to survive. Sinking so low as to envy the pig's food, before he could truly appreciate what he had, and what he had to do to redeem himself. Travel can be very enlightening.

And now as a parent of two completely different children, although raised in the same household with the same, rules, values and responsibilities...you parents know you cannot treat your children the same as they grow, because they each need different things from you to flourish. God gives rocks and balloons. We are always trying to decide when to push and when to pull. To lose a child is the worst devastation a parent can imagine. It is not consolable and I doubt time is able to heal that loss. When you think that the father, knowing all the perils of the world, not ever having contact with his son, no cell phone, email, snail mail...nothing for years, had thought his son DEAD, then sees him walking down the driveway, you understand why he needs to give his all in thanks and celebrate. This reading means something different to us all, as God often does.

In the collect it talks about "granting peace and serving with a quiet mind." I feel it means that despite all the turmoil this story brings: jealousy, the need to wander, making mistakes, forgiveness, pain, acceptance. It is easy to forget that you need to find your own peace, not judge others. It is not up to you to decide what path others

take and how they should learn, but to take some quiet time to reflect on your own life, find peace with yourself and your life.

As a responsible, attentive, “does the right thing” person you have to reserve judgment on those who can’t find that peace, as you did. Some people need to go off and learn life’s lessons through living, no matter how much harder a teacher life is. Your peace may come from within your own integrity.

As a risk taker and grasper of life, you may realize you will fail at times, maybe even spectacularly. The grass may not always be greener on the other side, but you must try. When you learn enough to be able to admit, you may not have it ALL figured out, that the world just keeps getting bigger. Your peace may come with the discovery of appreciation for what you have and have learned.

As a parent sometimes you have to let your children fail. Search for that balance between push and pull. Despite your best efforts, you will suffer with them, for them. Your peace may come in knowing it is not always in your hands, your children learn through both failures as well as successes.

Don’t judge, be kind, do your best, learn.

Chris Glidden—reflecting upon Luke 15:11-32 and the Collect

March 23, 2014

Sunday in the Third Week of Lent

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

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give...will never thirst; the water that I shall give...will become...a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

We surely know people who are searching for living water, though they may call it something else. They are thirsty and experience a spiritual drought. In the midst of feelings of loneliness and emptiness, they fill up the void in their busy calendars with constant and sometimes meaningless activities. They want a relationship with God. Yet life remains empty for them. They seek meaning in all the wrong places to have their thirst quenched. We may only have to look in the mirror to see that person.

Many of us spend a good portion of our lives wishing that God would bless us in some extraordinary way. We look for miracles, but miss the fact that within each one of us there is a reservoir of spiritual energy that comes from Christ. All we need to do is to tap into that living water that is already present. All we need to remember is that Christ is as near to us as is our breathing.

Drawing upon the living water brings wholeness and healing. It is offered to each one of us. It is ours. Always was. Always will be.

The Rev. Dr. Virginia Sheay, reflecting on John 4:5-26, 39-42

March 24, 2014

Monday in the Third Week of Lent

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.

To me this is speaking to not having to "pay" for someone of God or God to help you. When Naaman's king sent a letter and treasures to the king of Israel on Naaman's behalf, in return for him to be cured by the king, the king became angry.

It was not the king who could cure Naaman of his leprosy. Rather it was a simple man of God who was able to guide Naaman to his cure. God does not require you to go through and pay a "king" to help you, rather just ask simply yourself. All are equal in the eyes of the Lord.

Charlotte de Jesus, reflecting on 2 Kings 5:1-15b

March 25, 2014

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

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.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. (Psalm 25:3-10)

Both the collect and the Psalm for today speak to us of the importance of prayer. Over the many events of life and in the daily routines we find ourselves speaking to God and trying our best to listen. At times we ask for help or healing for ones we love. We utter small quiet prayers of thanksgiving as we realize the beauty with which God has surrounded us. We give praise and gratitude for joys of life and desperate silent pleas for help when times of trouble surround us.

Isn't it interesting that just as types of prayers differ, so too, the way we pray varies. It may be a few of us in the Chapel doing Morning Prayer, TYG's closing prayer circle that gives voice to many young people or a solitary morning devotion in our home. When we pray, we are affirming God's power in our lives. It is our relevant and ever changing relationship with Him. It is how we know how to love one and other. Let's take time to listen to God through our prayers.

Stephen & Barbara Wilson, reflecting on Psalm 25:3-10

March 26, 2014

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

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.

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children (Deuteronomy 4:9)

This immediately brings to mind memories of my mother's journals. My mother was a teacher with a strong sense of faith. She kept detailed daily journals about her children and her gardens. As the years went by, news of her grandchildren became intermingled with reports about her vegetables. I have often wished I kept such a log of my adventures, living on a farm in Bucks County and raising four children. When we cleaned out my mother's house, we discovered her journals. Reading them was like having her with us again. How wonderful to see her touch future generations even after her death. May we always remember the importance of passing on a part of ourselves to our children and our children's children, and may God grant us the means to do so.

Charlotte C. van Ingen, reflecting on Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

March 27, 2014

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

Keep watch over you 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 our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

When I was asked to contribute to this collection of Lenten reflections, this Collect chose me.

Flashback to Monday morning May 11, 1998:

David Andersen asked me to read to a shivering group of distraught parishioners, brave first responders, and bedraggled neighbors huddling near the burning embers of our beloved church. Doubts and fears engulfed our minds, and tears spilled from our heartsick eyes. Nothing remained of the sanctuary except a sepulchre-like wall, interrupted only by stained glass windows. Young voices wailed their hymns of loss, and toys were melted to the windows of the day school. Ominous gasoline fumes haunted our lungs. Where was God? Where was our church? What had brought us to this moment?

As the years unfolded, we found out. Human weakness likely brought us to that moment, and God's unfailing love likely brought us out. Like the brave firefighters, God came to our aid and protected us from danger. Even when we are destroyed, flooded with forsaken dreams and robbed of all that we hold dear, we are still called to believe. Through Christ, God is calling to us now, here in our beloved church on the hill in Solebury, Pennsylvania.

Amen

Sally Drayer, reflecting on the Collect

March 28, 2014

Friday in the Third Week of Lent

Grant us, O Lord our Strength, to have 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.

“...The first is ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one; You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

I, like most churchgoers, have read and heard this passage many times. OK. Sure. We know we are supposed to “love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind...” It has a nice lyrical ring to it. But wait. What does that really mean? How can I possibly do that? I struggle to even fathom the Divine Being, the Great I Am, Yahweh (the Hebrews knew they could not even say the full name of God). I can barely imagine God – how could I possibly muster such complete devotion?

But thankfully, Jesus came. Jesus, who knew very well the great creed of Judaism – the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5) that the faithful are to recite daily and which epitomizes Mosaic law. Jesus, who understands our weakness and dilemma, paired it with the other great commandment (Leviticus 19:18) – “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” That will not always be easy either, but maybe – just maybe – if I start there....

Thank you Jesus – Our Lord and Brother.

Betty Stagg, reflecting on Mark 12:28-34

March 29, 2014

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

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.

All three of these readings seem to harbor an anti-liturgical bias. Rather than honor the venerable practices of the temple—“sacrifices” and “burnt offerings”—Hosea and the Psalmist insist that God takes no delight in them. And as if to make things worse, Jesus tells a short story about two men going to pray in the temple in Jerusalem. One, a Pharisee, is respectable and very devout. The other, a tax collector, is an outcast of society with a shady reputation. The Pharisee follows the prayer book with pious precision, ever glad that he is not like the other fellow. The tax collector has no beautiful words to offer but bemoans his sins, asking God for forgiveness. Jesus then announces that the tax collector went home righteous. How startling is that?

Jesus has tossed out the rule book. No longer is there a list of those who are in the kingdom of God and those who are not. Those who were once marginalized—women, children, the sick, the mentally ill, lepers (the AIDS of the first century), and tax collectors—are now part of God’s family.

Liturgy is not an end in itself. The life of love and justice that it inspires beyond the beloved sanctuary, that is what pleases God.

Andy Scrimgeour, reflecting on Hosea 6:1-6, Psalm 51:15-20, Luke 18:9-14

March 30, 2014

Sunday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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

“You prepare a table before me...”

When we sit at the Lord’s Table and feel our foreheads anointed, we get a holy kiss that heals our places of hurt. We see the darkness around us lose its power in the midst of the Lord’s presence, and we are restored.

The gift of presence is especially meaningful for modern people who find authentic presence with one another an increasingly scarce commodity. It seems that our busy lives are pulling us away from family meals, leisurely conversations, long walks and time with friends. We find that human interactions of all sorts are being increasingly facilitated by electronics. All the while, the ability to listen is being corroded, and the experience of being truly heard has become more significant than ever. If we learn from our walk with the shepherd just how healing it is to receive such presence, perhaps we will in turn offer it to others.

Let your prayer today be the reciting of this familiar psalm.

The Rev. Richard L. Vinson, reflecting on Psalm 23

March 31, 2014

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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 forever 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.

...and the wolf and the lamb will feed together...

The winter was an unusually severe one. Repeated snowstorms, sleet and temperatures below freezing had made survival difficult for all living creatures on the farm. The farmer fed and watered his six horses in the paddock, which assured their survival. But life for a band of five young deer who lived in the pasture and surrounding woodland was more precarious. Born the previous spring, the deer were still very small; they were also starving.

One large broodmare who ruled the other horses was especially aggressive at feeding time. The farmer had to put her in a separate fenced off area to keep her from eating the other horses' food. She also eyed the deer huddled in the pasture and made sure they did not enter her territory. Every day after eating she blocked the open paddock gate into the pasture with her large body preventing entry of the deer to forage among the leftover hay and oats.

As cold continued, the mare and the deer maintained their standoff, the mare guarding against their entry into the paddock, the deer not backing away, persistent in their huddled stance. One morning, however, the mare appeared to have a change of heart. She tossed her head, backed away from the open gate, and allowed the small deer to enter. Soon the unaccustomed companions were eating together, surviving together at a time of stress and suffering.

To witness the standoff between the mare and the deer reminds me of times I've averted my eyes and walked past a homeless person whose hand is held towards me for help, or times when I choose to attend a concert rather than serve meals in a soup kitchen, thus blocking my heart from extending compassion. Here Isaiah expresses hope that, like the wolf and lamb, people will one day make peace with one another, even unnatural friends will eat together. Written in the post-exilic era when the Jews struggled against discouragement to reestablish life in the Promised Land, the prophet expresses the creativity of God's presence in a new heaven, in a new earth, and the unexpected grace that follows. And if we listen patiently and watch hopefully, we might also recognize in that grace a call to prayer

Mary Miller, reflecting on Isaiah 65:17-25

April 1, 2014

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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.

Rules can be interpreted many different ways and thus, can be manipulated for different and differing agendas. But, there is only one truth-one love.

Give thanks and praise to that! Nothing else matters. Only then, all is good and right in this world, which prepares us for the next world.

Paul Angulo, reflecting on John 5:1-18

April 2, 2014

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love

The above verse ends with the word love. Love, the noun, has so many meanings. In theology, love means God's benevolent concern for mankind. For human beings, it also means our benevolence and brotherhood for each other. Since we don't know who wrote the Psalms, the author of Psalm 145 must have had a close spiritual relationship with God. He ends by saying he will praise the Lord, and everyone will bless His holy name forever!

So, who or what is this God that we worship? In monotheistic religions, God is conceived as supernatural, immortal (living forever), the creator of the universe, all-powerful and all-knowing. God is also believed as having special powers over the lives of people and the course of nature.

The bottom line is that we are to love the Lord (God) with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves. As Albert Einstein aptly said, "Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile."

In this season of Lent, we see God revealed in the human form of Jesus, who showed us the love of God by the life he lived here on earth.

Dave Benner, reflecting on Psalm 145:8-19

April 3, 2014

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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.

Becoming whole in mind, body and spirit. A perfect trinity. A wonderful, elusive goal. How exactly do we even begin to attempt this?

We are bombarded with ways to exercise our minds. We are told to do puzzles and sit at different places at the family table. In changing where we sit at dinner, we somehow walk in another's shoes, and our minds become stronger. Yet, it seems so complicated to always keep track of these things...

Strengthening the body has become a national pastime. We sign up for the gym with great aspirations, and then try to find the time and the initiative to show up. We're just too tired to get moving today...

Strengthening the spirit seems pretty straightforward. We pray at times, meditate, and sit in church once in a while. If only we had the time to do it more often...

What is the magic formula that we can tap into that will somehow help us to achieve this perfect trinity? The answer came to me as I was sitting in spin class. I looked up at the wall and saw five posters, each with a single word. Integrity. Endurance. Dedication. Journey. Possibilities. I felt inspired, but something was missing. As the class ended, we all staggered off our bikes, offering words of encouragement to each other. And then it hit me. The missing word. Community.

We can play lots of solitary mind games, but sooner or later we all need to interact with others on some level. We yearn to feel connected. A few of us are able to consistently exercise all by ourselves, but most of us do better if we have others supporting our efforts. And spiritually? We can have all sorts of private prayer sessions or sit alone on a pew, but the fact is, God calls us to come together in community. As we engage in different ministries and work together for a common goal, God speaks *to* us and *through* us. The journey is not always easy, and we are often changed in unexpected ways. But in doing so, we become what God intends us to be and accomplish what God wants us to do.

Integrity. Endurance. Dedication. Journey. Possibilities. Community. Words to remember when life is complicated and I'm just too tired and making an effort seems overwhelmingly hard. As I read back over the list, I realize that it all adds up to the most meaningful word of all.

Faith.

Lori Daukas, reflecting on the Collect

April 4, 2014

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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.

As we contemplate the good news embodied in today's collect and our thankful, prayerful response to it, it is appropriate to ponder the meaning and forms of prayer and thanksgiving.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, after marching for Civil Rights in Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is quoted as saying, "My feet were praying." This of course brings to mind our own Dave Griffith urging us to "wear muddy boots" in our lives, work, and service.

Trinity parishioners practice praying with our feet when we serve in Haiti, Africa, Philadelphia, the food pantry, Peacemeal, Aid to Friends, and other forms of Outreach. ECS gets their boots muddy in other areas of service such as the St. Barnabas Mission, Out of School Time, their Youth Programs, etc.

Francis of Assisi provided a wonderful spiritual tone for these forms of Christian living when he said, "Preach the Gospel, sometimes use words." In one of his blogs, Dave Griffith rephrased this as: "We are called to service; words are nice, but deeds are so much better."

Today while there are so many of our brothers and sisters with great needs, and public programs to support them are being reduced, we as Christians should ponder how we can best support and serve those in need. Jesus himself issued the challenge to each of us: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

There is no greater way to proclaim the good tidings we have received than to live out our baptismal covenant through answering the call to serve and touch the lives of others. After all, we have the examples of such muddy boots leaders as Jesus and Francis of Assisi to preach the good news of the Gospel through our actions rather than merely using words.

Sue and Pat Houston, reflecting on the Collect

April 5, 2014

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent

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

When I offered to write for this fascinating exercise of Lenten reflection, I just chose the first assignment lying on the top of the stack. The result? It's what I love referring to as a "God Wink".

Three of the readings speak directly to a 'truth' in my active Christian journey. They speak to what for me is the most sacred moment of my day. Every night I pray, and those prayers have evolved with my own maturity and understanding (or what I think I understand) as God's Word.

"Mercifully hear our prayers, Oh Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins . . ." (Collect)

"For you look deep within the mind and heart, O righteous God. " (Psalm 7:9)

"O LORD Almighty, you are just, and you examine the deepest thoughts of hearts and minds." (Jeremiah 11:20)

The 3 passages above speak directly to that point –

Is my prayer pure at heart?

Do I have the courage to pray not for what I want, but that "Thy will be done".

5 years ago, I couldn't figure out how to pray for my aging mother. That she would go peacefully in her sleep? That we would never get the dreaded call of a bad fall? That she would never suffer?

Of all the things that frightened her, having to go into the nursing unit (of the senior residence where she lived) was the worst. My Dad died in that unit.

One day, it became clear – my daily prayer for her? That my Mom would never go to Willow Brook Court.

For 4 years, I knew that my prayer was in fact 'pure' in my heart.

In August, we got the call we dreaded – a fractured hip in four places. Given her age (91) my brother and I knew it was bad. Post-surgery she had a major heart attack leading to what would be her last heart-breaking few days. When hospice came in, we expected them to move her back to the dreaded nursing facility for her final days on this earth. We were surprised (pleasantly so) when they told us they were doing 'in hospital' hospice (she was too sick to move).

On that last, tear filled day, I was able to tell my Mother that that the Lord was granting her one wish – she would never again see Willow Brook Court. She went to be with Him that night.

There it was – so clear in front of me.

My prayer was answered – not in the way I wished, but in the way he deemed it to be so. His Will was done.

Carol Ferguson, reflecting on the Collect, Psalm 7:6-11, Jeremiah 11:18-20

April 6, 2014

Sunday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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

God asks Ezekiel, *Can these bones live?*

Make no bones about it. Ezekiel was a bizarre but faithful prophet who lived during Jerusalem's fall and the Babylonian captivity. How else can you describe a man who once slept 390 days on his left side, who shaved with a sword, and who let God tie him up with ropes? And then in a vision that would send the best of us scurrying for cover, God shows Ezekiel a valley piled up with parched bones and skulls. He commands Ezekiel to preach over them, saying that He, their Lord God, will breathe life into their nostrils and put his Spirit within them. After that, new life fills up the dried-up bones and they will return to their homeland of Jerusalem. They will never again forget this wonderful God who dwells within them, to whom, despite all hopelessness new life is given to them, a life that only God can give.

Certainly hopelessness and despair were a communal experience for the people of Israel at the time of Ezekiel's vision of dry bones. What can we learn from the dry periods in our lives when we feel *dried up*? Maybe God's question to us during Lent is, "What can your spiritual dry bones teach you? What can you learn about yourself and your relationship with me?" How do we open ourselves to that living breath of the Spirit? Can we work with the Spirit to prepare ourselves for the resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection?

"Can these bones live?" Yes, they can. And God knows they will. Perhaps the question to Ezekiel is not only, "Can these bones live," but, "Do you trust me?" "Do you trust that I can bring new life in you? I *will* breathe my life into you and you shall live." In T. S. Eliot's poem, *Ash Wednesday*, the bones will even sing!

The Rev. Dr. Virginia Sheay, reflecting on Ezekiel 37:11-14

April 7, 2014

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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.

Septuagint Bible of 1808. Translation from Greek documents used by early Christians

THE Lord is my shepherd, I shall want nothing. In a verdant pasture He hath fixed my abode. He hath fed me by gently flowing water and restored my soul. He hath led me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. For though I walk amidst the shades of death: I will fear no ills, because Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff have been my comfort. Thou hast spread a table before me; in the presence of them who afflict me. With oil Thou hast anointed my head; and Thine exhilarating cup is the very best. Thy mercy will surely follow me all the days of my life; and my dwelling shall be in the house of the Lord to length of days.

Rheims-Douay Bible Translated 1582, Published 1609-1610 Literalistic translation from Latin (First English Translation)

The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture. He hath brought me up, on the water of refreshment: he hath converted my soul.

He hath led me on paths of justice, for his own name's sake. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me. Thou hast prepared a table before me, against them that afflict me. Thou hast anointed my head with oil; and my chalice which inebriateth me, how goodly is it! And thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days.

I have read over 31 different translations of the 23rd Psalm prior to sitting down to write this. In doing so, I am amazed at how the spirit guided the differences and similarities in the translations. The minor changes in the terminology that we see will occasionally give new insight for one such as me who cannot read either Greek or Aramaic. While we typically know the words of the King James Bible, the earlier translations have a power and a rhythm all their own. As I reflect on the differences, I can almost feel the raw passion felt by the early Christians as the

literal translation is made, and yet the spirituality of the first English also grabs me and shakes me, demanding to be understood through the eyes of the translator.

During this period of Lent, let us remember the wide and diverse nature of our fellow Christians, of the ideals, goals, and yes, sacrifices made for our Savior. And remember those that have gone before us in the name of Christ the Lord.

John Daukas, reflecting on Psalm 23

April 8, 2014

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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.

When we leave the comfort of what is familiar and secure, without the promise of plenty, our faith is tested most greatly. But straying from faith only results in consequence and causes us to perish, bitten with sin. On the other hand, when we embrace our faith and believe, looking to the Son lifted up on the cross, we are saved, just as those bitten by the fiery serpents lived upon looking to the bronze serpent on the pole.

Karin Corbett Ianucci, reflecting on Numbers 21:4-9, John 8:21-30

April 9, 2014

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”. (John 8:31-32)

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were compelling words for me as immigrant 50 years ago. We hold liberty and freedom very close to our hearts. We believe intuitively that ours is a Free Society, and when our freedom is restricted we demonstrate. The Jews were very upset when He described them as slaves surrendering freedom as a result of their sin. Probably we would be too. Likewise, I also surrender my freedom through the wrong that I do. But I seek comfort in the fact that I can regain it by seeking forgiveness from a loving God and by doing my best to live out Jesus' example recorded in Scripture. Jesus' reminder that we have surrendered our freedom, if not shocking, is certainly uncomfortable. But what is shocking, (it was for the Jews), was when Jesus says *“I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence”* John 8:38. Jesus is always in the presence of God. The Jews had difficulty with this. Do I? As CS Lewis puts it, you cannot say Jesus was just a great moral teacher. Either he was insane or he was who he said he was – the Son of God. The choice between the two is mine to make. Jesus left me no other option. But He has left the compelling words *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light”*. As I think about these things, for me, it is a matter of faith. Being of a scientific mind, I tend to think of the evidence for this and that. But then I become aware of mystery and how, even in science, much is now being said about how, through an awareness of mystery, science and faith are being drawn together. And this strengthens my own faith.

Jesus, help me to a practice of faith following your example to love God and my neighbor as myself, asking your forgiveness when I make choices in which I give up my freedom, and seeking your truth which will set me free. Amen

Patrick Summers, reflecting on John 8:31-42

April 10, 2014

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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.

When we read the beginning lines of this psalm, we are reminded to:

Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His presence continually.

At times, we look for and find our experience of the presence of God externally, in a brilliant sunrise, a soothing piece of music, an awe-inspiring poem. We are also often blessed to experience God in those around us: a stranger's random act of kindness or a dear friend's faithful encouragement during our darkest hours. I'm reminded of the Quaker teaching to "Mind the Light", to attend to the light of God within others.

Upon further reflection, I see that we are also being asked to more deeply seek the presence of God within ourselves as well. Even if we are reasonably adept at 'minding the light' within others, we may find it more challenging to seek, listen for, recognize understand, and then to remember the vital presence of God within us. When we "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His presence continually" within ourselves as well, we are able to draw upon God's strength as we share with others our unique set of gifts, ensuring that we are not keeping this sacred light 'under a bushel'.

Nancy Harrison, reflecting on Psalm 105: 4-11

April 11, 2014

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

The largest monolithic rock in the world, Uluru, 5.8 miles in circumference, sits in the middle of the Australian desert. It is one of the most inhospitable places on earth; yet, it is considered a sacred place for the aboriginals. Why? Rocks are more than symbols of protection, intractability, and immutability in both literature and the Sacred Word. They are real places of refuge, gaining vision, and strength. So it is for David in this hymn of praise in which David glorifies God, asks for help, and receives God's answers.

When David needed help, God led David to a rock. I believe that God often leads us to spiritual rocks to get what we need against the prevailing storm. But, if you're like me, we act like Charlie Brown opening up the gift bag and complaining about the gift of the rock in your bag when what I wanted was an Almond Joy. This passage reminds me of God's character, promises, and long view of eternity. Because I'm human and too often lean on my own understanding, I don't see the rock in front of me. It isn't a wall, it's the place our Deliverer has set before me as an answer to my pleas for help.

Paper/Scissors/ Rock. I believe I'll go for the rock next time.

Trey Wilson, reflecting on Psalm 18:1-7

April 12, 2014

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

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 you Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

As a long term Missioner for the Episcopal Church in Haiti, I resonated with today's passage from Ezekiel. I long for the day when all peoples of the world can be one, when race, culture, religion, social class, political leanings, sexual orientation become non issues and we truly love one another with all of our hearts and minds and souls. This was, after all, The Great Commandment. God forged this beautiful pledge-²⁶*"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless* them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. ²⁷My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* Yet, humanity repeatedly violates this covenant. On the day before Palm Sunday, the threshold of Holy Week, I invite all of us to reflect on the sacrifice that God and his beloved son, Jesus, made for all humankind. Let us remember The Great Commandment and our call to love even the least among us. As our Baptismal Covenant mandates, let us "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as ourselves" and "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being."

These unifying acts of love and compassion can be offered in the simplest of ways. I recently attended a worship service at one of the Diocese of Haiti's mission churches in the Great North. Toward the end of the service, a woman knelt down next to me and began fixing my sandal that was improperly buckled. I was so incredibly moved by her humility. She rose after fixing my sandal and I gave her a hug and kiss on the cheek (a common practice here) and said "Grand Merci" (Great thanks). Of course, this did not begin to express the power and tenderness of that moment for me. As today's collect says, God has bestowed "abundant graces" on us. The Haitian people have not lost their profound faith and loving care for one another, even toward the strangers among them. Let those of us who have been given so much remember what is truly important and, once again, become one nation, a nation of God's people.

O Great Creator, your love for us is unconditional and without boundaries. Continue to guide us in your path of love, peace and unity, so that we might, once again, be one nation. Amen.

Kyle Evans, reflecting on Ezekiel 37:21-28

April 13, 2014

The Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday

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

Folk are fickle, don't you think? One minute they are all for you, and the next, well, not so much. "Hosanna," they shouted as Jesus entered into the holy city and within no time their voices resounded, "crucify him." Yep, folks are fickle. We so easily follow the trend, or the crowd or just wander without a compass of any sort to indicate our true course and so we will follow just about anyone, anywhere until it gets tough. The tough get going that is true, but often it is in the other direction.

This day we turn a corner in our Lenten journey and make our way to the end. The liturgies of palm and passion occupy the same stage, their drama unfolding so close in proximity that we can scarcely make the shift. Celebration and praise converge with loss and grief; strength and vulnerability share the same moment.

So the heart of God is revealed. The divinity of our Lord is somehow linked with his willingness to empty himself. How is the heart of God revealed to you in this tale of best and worst times?

Dear God, as our Lenten journey draws to a close, help us remember how the spiritual work we have done can become a way of life. Amen.

The Rev. Richard L. Vinson, reflecting on Philippians 2:5-11

April 14, 2014

Monday in Holy Week

Almighty God, whose 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.

As part of reflecting on John 12:1-11 I shared the passage with my seven year old daughter. I wasn't sure what, if anything, she would take from this passage. Her response was something along the lines of "Jesus loves us and watches out for us". Initially, I thought her response was just rhetoric and she did not really have any reflection on the reading. Although, as I thought more about the passage, it is a true summation to emphasize again Jesus' love and our job is to keep our faith and trust in his love.

While we may not always understand Jesus' actions, much like when he told Lazarus to leave Mary alone after Lazarus questioned the perfume Mary had kept to wash Jesus' feet, we need to be sure our faith is strong enough that, when we do not understand things, we still need to be strong in our faith and know that Jesus understands. In this reading Jesus knew that Mary was helping to prepare him for his burial by washing his feet. So when you have one of those days when you're running late, but regardless, you dutifully follow the speed limit and then watch while all the other cars whizz by you without getting speeding tickets, keep the faith that there is a reason for everything. We never know the reason another driver is speeding or what they may be driving towards. We don't have to try and control life's action but instead remember Jesus is in control and knowingly has a plan.

Jennifer Lynch Stark, reflecting on John 12:1-11

April 15, 2014

Tuesday in Holy Week

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.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem has passed, Jesus is about to be betrayed by those closest to him, and the time of His death is fast approaching; in short, there is a lot to be sad about. Indeed, the whole Lenten season is a time of wide-ranging feelings of remorse, shame, and sadness, culminating with Friday's crucifixion. So it's not without a sense of irony that the one word that struck us immediately when reading the Collect was the lone adverb in the passage, "GLADLY." What do we possibly have to be happy about now?!?!

Adverbs are buttresses that prop up mediocre writing – they can be omitted, often without altering the content or underlying meaning of a passage. True enough, the Collect reads the same with or without "gladly." Or does it?

Jesus is making the ultimate sacrifice for us, laying down his own life so that our sins may be forgiven. It is difficult to fathom, and it's appropriate to feel ashamed. When confronted with the enormity of the sacrifice, it becomes easy to get caught up in shame and despair of that moment, but it's important to remember that the sacrifice is one performed as an act of love – God's love of his people.

So don't just suffer shame this week...suffer gladly. Do so with the knowledge that God loves us. He gave us this ultimate gift, so that we may live a life full of love.

Scott Christie

April 16, 2014

Wednesday in Holy Week

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.

When reading this passage a few words come to mind: Sacrifice, Discipline, Integrity, and Ultimate Reward.

Recently we were reminded of a perfect example of these traits by the death of Nelson Mandela. He sacrificed 30 years of his life imprisoned for standing up for his beliefs in what was eventually widely regarded as justice. Then he proceeded to forgive those who were responsible for his incarceration. The ultimate reward was not only his rise to the presidency, but more importantly, the example he set for the world.

These same stories could be told about Mother Theresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others.

But these are grand examples. There are examples that occur in our daily lives; our comparatively small, quiet lives. I try to teach my children the rewards of discipline and hard work. I say to my daughter, Lauren, "Practice your instruments! You will have more fun playing when you are more accomplished AND you will find that you can learn other songs more easily". To Lauren, time spent practicing is an obstacle to her extremely busy social schedule, but it is well worth the sacrifice. When she becomes more proficient at playing her instruments, she will impress her friends. And then we notice a circle of reward.

Tim Silberg spoke last Sunday about his experiences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He said that once people do well by others, they feel the power of goodness. The good deeds become addictive, so they feel compelled to continue be helpful. And then we notice a circle of reward.

Susan B. Ash, reflecting on the Collect

April 17, 2014

Maundy Thursday

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.

To me, Maundy Thursday is the most Holy and meaningful day in the Episcopal Church, when Jesus instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.

On this night, after supper, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me".

He then took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me".

For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

At every Eucharist we prayerfully Eat this Bread and Drink the Cup.

I wonder how many times we receive these gifts and don't think of that night when our Lord instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood and gave us a pledge of eternal life.

As a good Christian, I have to learn to take time and be more mindful of the sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ made for us. And be ever thankful for the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.

Bill Wolf, reflecting on 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

April 18, 2014

Good Friday

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.

Jesus willingly let himself be sacrificed and knew that God would help all who trust in him. When Jesus was on the cross, he was scared and in horrible pain and did not feel God with him. Jesus called out to God, and understood that after he suffered brutally, God would be with him.

Good Friday was a dark and terrible day. Jesus suffered for us, and for this we are so thankful.

Amy Schmidt, reflecting on Psalm 22:1-21

April 19, 2014

Holy Saturday

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.

It is said that the living spirit of any religion shines through most clearly in the hymns that its followers sing before their God. The Psalms are Israel's ancient collection of songs of praise.

When reading Psalm 130, I could feel the raw emotion of the writer as he prays for God to hear his petition, and the recognition that his God is not only forgiving, but redeems as well. He also begs Israel to trust in God and understand that He is truly a merciful God.

I enjoyed reading this psalm over and over because the more I read it, the more I wanted to pray it. Lent, for me, has always been a time of looking inward and so, as I prayed this Psalm, I also began to explore my relationship with my God and my Savior. I started asking myself, do I recognize His unconditional love and compassion for me and then pass it on? Do I humble myself enough to seek forgiveness and remain humble when others need forgiveness? Do I truly allow His redemptive power to transform me and then share this joy with others?

This Psalm reminds me that we must not only look inward to have a deep relationship with Him, but we must also stretch ourselves outward to others. The living spirit of our faith should shine through in our prayers, our presence, and our actions.

Priscilla Forbus, reflecting on Psalm 130

Closing Reflection

I interpret this reading as a renewal of spirit. Constantly, we are tried by our own actions, and by those surrounding us. If we hold strong to our faith, we need not worry each day that we may be swayed off a guided path of the Lord. When we are filled with the commandments, the best version of ourselves as Christians is effortlessly fulfilled.

I stand by the previous testament because of an incident I saw occur one day working in the DR-Congo. One day, a soldier, coincidentally nicknamed Pastor, was training his neighboring civilians, free of charge, on how to grow cowpeas. And it wasn't only him, but also many of his fellow comrades. At that time, I was a site coordinator for a non-profit. I trained soldiers to farm. This wasn't in the institute's manifest. It wasn't ordered by the soldiers' superiors. They simply did it because they wanted to. As one Lieutenant put it to me, *C'est comme une maladie. It's like a sickness.* Sort of a strange analogy, but his explanation was simple. When a spirit is filled with goodness, it spreads like a disease to others. And that act of spreading is compassion. It's easy to do good when you do it every day. It becomes second nature. Pastor never told me God that day had commanded him to help his neighbor. He did it because he said he was full of God.

I only hope we as Christians do not conduct charity because it is commanded of us, but because we are filled by God and a spirit that guides us to do it.

Blessings.

Timothy R. Silberg, reflecting on John 8:12-20

A final note of gratitude.....

To Rev Rick, without whom this project would neither have gotten off the ground, nor been completed

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And finally....

To John for always being the best backup any neurotic spouse could wish for

(And yes, I ended that with a preposition!)

Lenten Schedule

Shrove Tuesday – March 4th, 6 p.m. – McArthur Hall

Ash Wednesday – March 5th
8:00 a.m. – Holy Eucharist, Chapel
12 noon – Holy Eucharist, Chapel
7:30 p.m. – Holy Eucharist, Church

Lenten Quite Day – March 8th, 9 a.m., Chapel

Simple Suppers – March 12th-April 9th
6:00 p.m., McArthur Hall

Palm Sunday – April 13th, 8 and 9:45 a.m., Church

Holy Monday – April 14th, 7:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist, Chapel

Holy Tuesday – April 15th, 7:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist, Chapel

Holy Wednesday – April 16th
7:00 p.m. – Stations of the Cross, Chapel
7:30 p.m. – Holy Eucharist, Church

Maundy Thursday – April 17th
6:30 p.m. - Agape Supper, McArthur Hall
7:30 p.m. - Holy Eucharist, Washing of Feet and Stripping of the Altar,
Church
9:00 p.m. - Night Watch, Chapel

Good Friday – April 18th
12 noon – Good Friday Service, Church
3:00 p.m. – Tenebrae, Chapel
7:30 p.m. – Good Friday Evening Service

Easter Vigil – April 19th, 7:30 p.m., Church

Easter Day – April 20th, 8:00 & 9:45 a.m., Church
Easter Egg Hunt follows for children; bring you own baskets.

