

ST PAUL'S MEMORIAL CHURCH
at the UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



Lenten Meditations
2024

February 14, Ash Wednesday

Psalms 103:8-14 / Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 /

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10 / Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

(Matthew 6:19-21)

The last sentence of this passage from the Sermon on the Mount—“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”—is on the one hand simply a statement that we need to treasure heavenly matters rather than fine clothes that may be eaten by moths or jewelry that may be stolen by thieves. In other words, don’t be materialistic.

But it is also a clear call to introspection.

Turn the sentence around—“For where your heart is, **that** is your treasure.” How you spend your time, or where you invest your emotional energy, is what you have made your treasure. If you spend your time focused on your children, or caring for aging parents, or charity work with Meals on Wheels or the SPCA, **that** is your treasure.

Or consider the darker side of the same turn-around—if all of your time is spent at work, you are in effect making that job your treasure. If you don’t **want** that job to be your treasure, this call to introspection may lead you to some different decisions. Or if you love your job, what can you do to make it more fulfilling, or to make it worthy to be considered your treasure? How can you use your skills to do something that you will value deep down inside?

We think of Lent as a time to give up some bad activity. Instead, consider using Lent to think about what you truly consider your treasure, and what you need to do to put your heart there.

— Lloyd Snook

February 15, Thursday

Psalm 37:1-18 / Habakkuk 3:1-18 / Philippians 3:12-21 /
John 17:1-8

Do not fret over those who are evil. Be still before the Lord and wait for him.

There is much to fret over; war, racism, inequity, the plight of the homeless, climate crisis, our own personal life issues. . . .

It is challenging to find peace, to be still and wait on God, to trust that there will be justice, to know that our needs will be met.

While we can often take specific action, there are times when we are at a loss, struggling, needing answers.

Still my anxious heart
Quiet my worried mind
Nurture trust in the Lord
Open my heart to let go of the past
Forgive and be forgiven
Allow goodness and hope to spring forth
Lead me to commit my way to the Lord
Knowing I have citizenship in heaven
May I give glory to God

— Anne Cressin

February 16, Friday

Psalm 35 / Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 / Philippians 4:1-9 /

John 17:9-19

John 17:13: “But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.”

Just before Jesus is betrayed and arrested, he utters a long (26-verse) prayer to God on behalf of the disciples. This prayer is many things—some would say, it is everything. In it, Jesus: avers that his work is finished; seeks to be glorified for the work; recapitulates his ministries; asks for his disciples to be sanctified and protected; asks finally (sweet catholicity!) that all who believe—or may ever believe—be granted glory and brought into the loving presence of God.

And at the very center of this compendious valediction is joy. Jesus wants us to have joy. even though he is moments away from the Judas kiss. From the point of view of mere human emotion, we might understand better had Jesus instead voiced the outrage of today’s appointed Psalm 35:

- 3 Let them be put to shame and dishonor
who seek after my life.
- 4 Let them be turned back and confounded
who devise evil against me.
- 5 Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the Lord driving them on.
- 6 Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the Lord pursuing them.

The wish that those who wrong us should suffer, should be shamed, confused, punished, harmed and hounded, is compelling. It can eat away at us and crowd out joy. But joy—and not just any joy, but Jesus’ own joy—remains as the reason he gives for the whole incarnate mission.

May we never lose touch with that immutable joy, even in times of sackcloth and ash.

— Matthew Carter

February 17, Saturday

Psalm 32 / Ezekiel 39:21-29 / Philippians 4:10-20 /
John 17:20-26

Three principles emerging in these passages: forgiveness, restoration, and contentment bring unity in Christ's love. These things, three graces, not to be confused with the Greek goddesses, reflect three mercies bestowed upon all, even those unaware.

The passages follow a journey to faith, unfolding to come to fullness in Christ. The psalmist, David, references the Holy Spirit working without being asked, watching over us, while also suggesting that the penitent can be strengthened. Forgiveness and lifted sorrows allow joy to be restored.

Catholic confession, the Judaic Day of Atonement, some of the Twelve Steps, throwing troubles in the water or papers in the fire, all suggest acceptance and forgiveness. Acknowledgement and acceptance can increase our awareness of Christ.

Reflections on Ezekiel offer restoration, though not requested, for all. This is a parallel to the forgiveness promised in Psalm 32. The Prophet says "They will forget their shame. . . they will know that I am the Lord their God." This suggests restoration for all of God's people to be in relationship with Christ.

Through Christ, all things are possible. Paul and Timothy deliver optimism. Trusting in God's care this passage offers reassurance, regardless of circumstance, or disparate experiences. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." Philippians 4:13

In the Gospel of John, we are brought back to focus on the future and universality. It is not only for "them alone," but also "those who will believe in me. . . ." By suggesting future followers, John foretells "that they may be one as we are one." John 17: 20-23.

The greatest sign to the world of God's love is in Jesus Christ, expressed through Oneness, Unity and Love!

— Kelley Lewis

February 18, First Sunday in Lent

Psalm 25:1-9 / Genesis 9:8-17 / 1 Peter 3:18-22 /
Mark 1:9-15

Two Stories—One Love

The readings invite us to receive a new beginning founded in a covenant from God.

Noah, in one of the most familiar stories of the Old Testament (Genesis 9:8-17), receives from God something much broader, deeper and immediate than a simple promise or a contract. The flood waters are receding, a dove has returned to the ark with news of salvation and Noah has built an altar in thanksgiving to the Lord. Then God tells Noah that a new covenant is established representing God's renewed commitment to living creation. A covenant, a bond broader than a contract, was often secured in ancient times by an oath. In the Noah story, God completes the new covenant with an oath in the form of a rainbow, an ongoing and visible reminder of God's continuing love for creation.

A similar but entirely transforming covenant launches Jesus' mission to proclaim God's continuing love in Mark 1:9-15. Jesus' baptism by John at the Jordan River is sealed by water and marked by the arrival of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. This sign of a new covenant from God places love and the Holy Spirit at the center of our faith tradition. Jesus manifests a new covenant from God; a commitment of love that covers mankind and all of living creation through Jesus, the Beloved Son, with whom God is well pleased.



— Bruce Carveth

February 19, Monday

Psalm 52 / Genesis 37:1-11 / 1 Corinthians 1:1-19 /
Mark 1:1-13

Today's readings are preparing us for Jesus' time of challenge in the wilderness, where we know he is sustained by God's love. We too must trust in God's steadfast love. The psalm reminds us of this with the example of the green olive tree, continuously productive throughout its long life and highly resilient, regrowing even when chopped to the ground.

Paul gives the Corinthians a similar message. They should place their trust not in whoever brought them the gospel news, but in the news itself: God's steadfast love, the love that is with us, bearing us up, from the beginning.

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
then walks with us silently out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.

Flare up like a flame
and make big shadows I can move in.

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.

Rilke, *Book of Hours*, I 59

God says to each of us, "Give me your hand. Trust me. I love you. Go now and be the green olive tree."

— Deborah Healey

February 20, Tuesday

Psalm 47 / Genesis 37:12-24 / 1 Corinthians 1:20-31 /
Mark 1:14-28

Mark 1:14-28

“The Kingdom of God has come near: repent, and believe the good news.”

An older translation of this passage runs “The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the Gospel.” This version is a statement about what God’s kingdom *will do*: it is *at hand*: it is coming, but it is not here yet. In this light I often found the call to repent vaguely threatening. The implication seemed to be, God’s kingdom is coming soon, and you had better repent or else you might not like what happens when it gets here.

The NRSV’s translation, on the other hand, says that the Kingdom of God “has come near.” This more accurately represents the Greek: it not a statement about what the Kingdom of God *will do*, but about what it *has already done*. It has already drawn near to us. The call to repent is not a threatening precondition—repent, or you might not like what happens—but a response: act now in a way befitting the reign of God. Repent—the Greek literally means change your mind, put on a new mindset—in reaction to the fact that it *has already* come near to us.

Lent is a season of repentance in preparation for Easter. Yet our Easter celebration is but a memorial of the first Easter. Christ is already risen for us. Let us repent—let us turn from the sickness that gnaws our soul towards light and health—in joyful recognition of the fact that Christ *has already* freed us.

—Erich Merkel

February 21, Wednesday

Psalm 119:49-72 / Genesis 37:25-36 / 1 Corinthians 2:1-13 /
Mark 1:29-45

“He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her and she began to serve them.”

It does not take long in the Book of Mark for Jesus to begin a central purpose of his ministry—to heal suffering people. Mark skims quickly over Jesus’ baptism by John, and the sojourn in the desert. That’s followed by a quick gathering of disciples and then to the meat of the matter. After relieving a man possessed by demons, Jesus is brought to Simon’s house, where he alleviates the suffering of Simon’s mother-in-law. The disciples then bring all they can find of the sick and lame to Jesus for healing, and when those numbers are exhausted, he goes out in search of more. He travels from village to village throughout the land, bringing relief to their physical and spiritual ailments, often offending the religious authorities with his choices of whom to embrace.

But Jesus also brings something more, something hinted at in the very beginning of Mark’s account. While no mention is made of the sick being part of the multitude who follow John, it is logical to assume that these are people who are hurting, who sense that there is more to life spiritually than what they have gotten from the pious and undoubtedly sincere religious authorities who have so much influence in their lives. Yes, there are those who come because of curiosity or boredom, but so many stay for the something more that John promises, but cannot himself deliver. And what is that? It is no less than the Good News that the most wretched of them, outcast because of disease or poverty or station, (or later, of culture or religion) is beloved. To know that God’s love is not reliant on one’s condition is to know that dignity and worth are inherent in oneself, not something conferred by others. 2,000 years have not made this notion less radical, for we keep forgetting and having to relearn this simple, fundamental truth.

We are beloved by God.

— Michele Allen

February 22, Thursday

Psalm 46 / Genesis 39:1-23 / 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:15 /
Mark 2:1-12

As I looked at my readings for this Lent, I thought: Oh good! They are all about conflict (Ps 46:6: the nations are in uproar, the kingdoms totter), false accusations and anger (Gen 39:17&19: [he] came in to insult me . . . he became enraged), jealousy and quarreling (Cor 3:3). Our world, governments, streets, schools—even social gatherings and homes—explode with all these emotions & troubles!

I opened Mark hoping to find insight to give hope for my world and tell me what to do to make things better. Alas Mark has undercurrents of all these troubles and no answers—or does it?

Jesus is at home (Mk 2:1) but he speaks with authority that holds sway over the earth (Mk 2:10). His God—my God—is in control. He sees into the hearts of the crowd; he heals the paralytic. But first the model in Jesus responds to the sudden presence of a man; and interacting directly with one individual, eases his spirit of guilt. His actions prompt others to glorify God.

I return to the Psalm. “God is . . .” The phrase resonates. “God is . . . very present; . . . in the midst . . . with us.” “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth.”

I am reminded of Helen Mallicoat’s simple poem:

I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly God was speaking. “My name is I Am” I waited. God continued. “When you live in the past, with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not ‘I was.’ When you live in the future, with its problems and fears it is hard. I am not there. My name is not ‘I will be.’ When you live in the moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is ‘I am.’”

Help me, Lord, to remain present to and responsive to the needs of those around me. I wish to stay clear of jealousies, quarrels, anger and accusations, and to show instead in my actions Awareness that your spirit resides throughout this earth in each individual with whom I come into contact, and Confidence that your loving wisdom will shine through when morning dawns.

—Jarrett Millard

February 23, Friday

Psalm 51 / Genesis 40:1-23 / 1 Corinthians 3:16-23 /
Mark 2:13-22

Psalm 51: 10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.* **1 Corinthians: 3:16** *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?* **Mark 2:22** *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins.*

When they noticed the burning bush
For the 80 unvigintillionth* time,
Long ago in the past,
Or long into the future,
And they rued the past and removed their sandals in awe
And asked, for the 80 unvigintillionth time,
“What shall I say is your name?”
God was in a playful mood, and said,
“I am Jahweh, I am ‘I am’, I am ‘Becoming.’
I am Yes, I am Elohim, All Gods, One God.
I am the question you ask.
And when the question sleeps
I cease to exist to you, we cease to exist,
And the whole of creation holds its breath,
And holds its breath,
Until . . .
Until . . .
Until . . .
The ALL exhales, gasping to be.
And my spirit moves over the waters
For the 80 unvigintillionth time,
And you are reborn, we are reborn.
And love pours out, again, the vessel brand spanking new.”

**80 unvigintillion is approx. 52 factorial, the # of possible orders of a deck of playing cards (a very big, awesome number!)*

— Tony Potter

February 24, Saturday, Feast of St Matthias

Psalm 15 / Genesis 41:1-13 / 1 Corinthians 4:1-7 /

Mark 2:23–3:6

John 2:13-22

“He drove them all out of the Temple . . . [saying], Stop making my Father’s house into a marketplace.”

We are used to the idea of prophecy being spoken or written. But in the Hebrew Bible prophecy was often enacted: the prophet would often act out God’s message, with gestures and ostentatiously visible actions, to make it more vivid and more memorable (I imagine that the crowds who saw Ezekiel lying down in the road day after day long remembered it, even if they were not sure what it meant).

Many in the early Church likewise saw this action by Jesus as a prophetic enactment. If Jesus meant it to be memorable, it worked: it is included in every Gospel. What, then, was the message from God that he was enacting? What does God say to us through it today?

Since we are in Lent, I want to suggest an allegorical interpretation fitting the season. St Paul says that our hearts are the temple of the Holy Spirit. In our hearts Christ intends to make his home. Yet we make them into a shopping mall or a stock exchange: we are so full of buying and selling, of wanting this and craving that, of business and busyness, that there is no room left. But now Christ has come to see what the hold-up is. Now is the time to look over everything our hearts say is ‘important’ and judge if it really is important. If not, we must drive it out—or allow him to drive it out. We’ve made our hearts into a shopping mall when God intends it to be a palace. Let us prepare him room.

— Erich Merkel

February 25, Second Sunday in Lent

Psalm 22:22-30 / Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 / Romans 4:13-25 /
Mark 8:31-38

Today's readings are full of promise, opportunity, and invitation.

In the reading from Genesis, God invites Abram/Abraham to "walk before me and be blameless," tells Abram that he and his wife, Sarai/Sarah, will be ancestors to "a multitude of nations," and promises to establish God's "covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your offspring after you."

In the reading from Romans, Paul speaks of God's promise to Abraham as depending on faith and righteousness, "in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants," and recommends faith, hope and righteousness to his readers as well. Paul's description of God as "the father of all of us . . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" highlights the breadth of God's promise as subsuming everyone, including those who have gone before and those who will come after. This reading ends with a reference to Jesus' resurrection, after having been "handed over to death and . . . raised for our justification."

In the reading from Mark, Jesus also speaks of crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus offers listeners and readers opportunity, invitation and promise: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

Which takes us full circle to the poetry of Psalm 22, the psalm that we are told Jesus prayed on the cross, a psalm that progresses over its 30 verses from dejection and abandonment to faith, trust, praise, and promise, as in the last five verses:

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations bow before him.

For kingship belongs to the LORD; he rules over the nations.

To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;
all who go down to the dust fall before him.

My soul shall live for him;

my descendants shall serve him;

they shall be known as the LORD's forever.

They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn the saving
deeds that he has done.

— Karen Mawyer

February 26, Monday

Psalms 57 / Genesis 41:46-57 / 1 Corinthians 4:8-21 /
Mark 3:7-19a

Steadfast

For longer than I like to admit, I basically avoided thinking about the Psalms. All those references to wickedness and enemies felt like assaults, assaults with which I did not resonate.

“Be merciful” is a welcome beginning to Psalm 57, and it is followed by emphasizing God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. Though a brief recognition of troubling down times is included in verse 4, a welcome shift to describing the psalmist’s heart as faithful follows. Could that be my heart, too? The response of a person with a steadfast heart is described. Singing and making melody with musical instruments is encouraged. The importance of being awake to possibilities, praising the Lord and giving thanks are all included.

Joy abounds and in verse 10, God’s “steadfast love is great to the heavens”—think big—God’s “faithfulness extends to the clouds”—beyond comprehension.

After dwelling with this Psalm for some days, I was in a weekly virtual contemplation group, a gift of the pandemic that continues to this day, when the first stanza of a hymn floated into my awareness. I had memorized this hymn as a child and there it was. The hymn adds to the images of steadfast responses to God with a reminder to build on a rock that naught can move. I am thankful for that rock and rejoice in continuing to grow in openness to God’s faithfulness.

If thou but trust in God to guide thee,
and hope in him through all thy ways,
he’ll give thee strength what-e’er betide thee,
and bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God’s unchanging love
builds on a rock that naught can move.

The Hymnal 1982, #635

— Doris Greiner

February 27, Tuesday

Psalm 61 / Genesis 42:1-17 / 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 /
Mark 3:19b-35

Psalm 61: *Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings.*

Today's readings include the Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers, buying grain in Egypt because of the famine in Canaan but being imprisoned as a test of their fidelity to family honor. In Corinthians I, Paul names sexual immorality that needs destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus offers a seemingly harsh parable, naming "family" as "whoever does the will of God." I can't parse these readings into a coherent—or kind—message. Instead, I turn to the refuge offered by the psalmist.

Our modern, media-driven world assaults us all with so many messages. How can I untangle the complex and conflicting information to guide my day-to-day decisions or plans for my future?

And then there are all those harpies within: *I should. What if?* And, that task master, *I must!* All these inner and outer voices clamoring for attention, for action, for results that promise . . . well, what? Shelter? Refuge? Rest? Protection against "the enemy"?

Let me abide in your tent forever. Let me recognize that there *is* a tent in which I might abide. A capacious, generous tent woven in the fabric of friendship, community, and care, and from these gifts, a restful place that is greater than anything I could build on my own.

Let me *find refuge under the shelter of your wings.* Let me rest in the warmth of these sheltering feathers. And let me be lifted by these wings, helping me aloft, to a wider view, where inspiration and opportunity and God's will may guide me.

— Leslie Middleton

February 28, Wednesday

Psalm 72 / Genesis 42:18-28 / 1 Corinthians 5:9–6:8 /
Mark 4:1-20

Mark 4:1-20

I chose this day because I was scanning for open options that included a passage from the Book of Mark. I did that because Louise Sinclair had led a bible study for a group of women where we studied Mark, and I wanted an excuse to talk about Louise in my reflection.

As it turns out, I don't remember our discussion about the Parable of the Sower, but I can imagine it. Louise was expert at meeting us where we were and most times, we were not all situated in the same spot on the arc of faith. We've been doubters and believers, disillusioned and seeking, hopeful and tired. But we all had a spiritual compass—Louise. She never judged, she just pointed us toward an openness of heart and mind where it would be possible for the “seeds” that come to us in many ways daily, to be received. She also pointed us toward each other, as a way to cultivate “good soil.”

Louise's bible study group visited with her in the courtyard at Westminster Canterbury this past October and Rowena Zimmerman shared a beautiful prayer. Here is an excerpt:

“I hope she will know always what she meant to us, what she still means to us, that she has been instrumental in our lives as adult women. Thank you, Lord, for her and for our time together, it's been transformative. And may Louise, and all of us, always be in your love and know that we will always have each other and always have everything that Louise has given us and know that she is always with us.”

There are sowers in our midst each day. There are seeds being offered each day. And there are people like Louise who inspire others to hear the word, to be open minded, to build community—to let the seeds be planted in good soil. Amen and thanks be to God.

— Erika Viccellio

February 29, Thursday

Psalm 71 / Genesis 42:29-38 / 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 /
Mark 4:21-34

God, you are with me, you are in me.

You created me to be your seed.

A seed that grows because of your love for me,
because of your steadfastness,
because of your care.

You created me to be a temple for you.

A temple that my actions and choices yet but destroy.
A temple you would choose to dwell in.

You created me to be a light.

A light that cannot and will not be stifled.
A light that burns because of your love.

God, you are with me, you are in me.

Let my life reflect what you have created me to be.

— **Megan Bower**

March 1, Friday

Psalm 95 / Genesis 43:1-15 / 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 /
Mark 4:35-41

The lesson from Mark's gospel, usually labeled "Jesus Calms a Storm," is familiar. Jesus got into a boat with the disciples, and "a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped." I have been in a boat that became swamped and overturned, on the Black River in New York. We lost a paddle but held on to the canoe, and our lives. In a word that many translations use to describe the disciples in this story, we were terrified.

But the disciples were not terrified because of the storm—they were terrified because Jesus calmed the storm. They were terrified, or "filled with awe," because they were only gradually embracing the notion that there was something very special about Jesus. They don't realize this immediately. For the disciples, and for us, as Peter says in John's gospel, "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

"Have you no faith?" Jesus asks the disciples. We might say, we have faith, but maybe not enough. Not enough to believe that Jesus could calm the storm. Not enough to believe that Jesus was, somehow, the son of God.

It took a while for the disciples to realize these things. It took a while for us to realize that we weren't going to drown in the Black River. That's why we hear the same stories every year: about a woman visited by an angel and a boy born in a stable. About a life spent healing and helping and teaching. About storms being calmed and crowds being fed. About death on a cross and a glorious resurrection. And about an ascension to fill all things, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with us always.

— William Joyner

March 2, Saturday

Psalm 27 / Genesis 43:16-34 / 1 Corinthians 7:10-24 /

Mark 5:1-20

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be
strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for
the Lord!*

These closing verses of Psalm 27 are the core of today's readings. The other passages can be seen to relate to and explicate them. Joseph waits, with some difficulty, to reveal himself to his brothers. The people of the Gerasenes see God's goodness right in front of them but are afraid. Paul admonishes Christians in Corinth who, while waiting for Jesus to return any minute, have formed some odd ideas about how they should live in the meantime.

More important than these connections, however, is the realization that these verses are the center of our faith. The steadfast belief that we *shall* see the goodness of the Lord in this world gives us the strength and the courage required to wait.

It's probably safe to say that most of us don't like to wait. The very idea of waiting conjures foot-tapping, thumb-twiddling impatience. On the other hand, when I was a weary doctor-in-training (pre-cellphone days), I learned to treasure the time I spent waiting for the elevator. Enforced passivity can be a gift. To quote one of my mentors, "Don't just do something; stand there."

Waiting is not empty time. The clue to its gift lies in the word "passivity." To be passive is to be patient (the words are the same): to undergo or experience something, to allow something to happen to us. Theologian Richard Foster says that to pray—to put oneself into the presence of God—is to change. The same is true of waiting for God. To be passive in God's presence is to be open and receptive to God's love shaping, strengthening, preparing, changing us. Don't just do something; stand there—and watch, listen, receive, become.

—Margaret Mohrmann

March 3, Third Sunday in Lent

Psalm 19 / Exodus 20:1-17 / 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 /

John 2:13-22

The Creation Story, Psalm 19:1-4

The Presence of the Holy is the mystery, the creative essence of God. No specific identifying words exist for the essence of Creator God. The Psalmist knew no words and wrote with a metaphorical hand. The Presence of the Holy is symbolically visible. We know now that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

I often express myself in metaphor. What is the essence of me? I could be the essence of a Mother tree.* I do not have her physical being. Part of my essence comes from her. When she dies and falls to the ground, she becomes a Mother tree. She nurtures and shelters all living beings in this forest of her origin. As she decays she comeslingles with the rich, nurturing soil where some of her own offspring will grow.

The essence of heaven metaphorically tells “of the glory of God.” The essence of the “firmament proclaims God’s handiwork.” The essence of the “day pours forth speech,” and the essence of the “night declares knowledge.”

And, yet “There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

References and information about how trees communicate.

Simard, Suzanne, *Finding the Mother Tree, Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.

Mother Trees Connect the Forest, Video Documentary,
<https://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=2764>.

— Betsy Daniel

March 4, Monday

Psalm 80 / Genesis 44:18-34 / 1 Corinthians 7:25-31 /
Mark 5:21-43

A Cry Goes Out

Save us! Restore us!
The psalmist's cry goes out
to the Shepherd of Israel.
"Let me take his place as your slave."
Judah's cry becomes a plea
on behalf of his brother Benjamin,
uttered in front of his unrecognizable
rainbow-cloaked brother Joseph.
A woman twelve years afflicted
cries out with a faith-filled gesture.
Touching Jesus' cloak she feels herself healed.
The taboo of her infirmity lifted,
this Daughter of Abraham and Sarah
moves from the sidelines
back to the center of her community.
Restore my little girl,
another child, the subject of
a father's fervent prayer.
Twelve years old
on the cusp of womanhood,
she lies breathless on the bed inert
until healing hands quicken
within her feeble frame slowly rising—Life!
Save us! Restore us!
A cry erupts from the indwelling Spirit
and from the lives of the war-torn,
the famished, the immigrants
facing barbed wire at the border,
all who suffer and cry out for justice.
In solidarity with them we cry out,
clutch the hem of his garment,
clasp the hand of the Life-giver calling us forth
from all those daily deaths,
wielding his Shepherd's staff of steadfast loving kindness.

— The Rev. Dr. Elly Sparks Brown

March 5, Tuesday

Psalm 78:40-72 / Genesis 45:1-15 / 1 Corinthians 7:32-40 /
Mark 6:1-13

It's easy to read today's Epistle, and so many of Paul's other letters, as a condemnation of sexuality, a rejection of the human desire for intimacy and connection. Looking deeper, however, Paul is addressing the question of our responsibility to society. Marriage was an ingrained cultural expectation in the Mediterranean world of the first century, an important sign of being a full adult and a responsible member of society. Paul, however, tells his audience that they have the freedom to reject the status quo, to decide that society's priorities don't have to be theirs. Just as Jesus defied society's expectations that he would follow in his father's footsteps to become a carpenter, and as James and John left their father's fishing business to join Jesus' mission, we have the freedom to dedicate ourselves to the mission God is calling us to, rather than the mission society would like us to pursue. While the church's job is not to force society to change to accommodate us, Paul reminds us to refuse to change ourselves in order to accommodate society.

— Beth Molmen

March 6, Wednesday

Psalm 82 / Genesis 45:16-28 / 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 /
Mark 6:13-29

I Corinthians 8:1-13

In Elizabeth Goudge's novel *The Dean's Watch*, Miss Montague, an invalid lady in a Victorian household, thinks about devoting her life to love. "Could mere loving be a life's work? Could it be a career like marriage or nursing the sick or going on the stage? Could it be adventure? . . . But what was love. . . .Until now she had only read her Bible as a pious exercise, but now she read it as an engineer reads a blueprint and a traveler a map."

St. Paul provides a well-known map of the ways of love in I Corinthians 13 ("Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful. . . . Love never ends.") Less well-known but beautifully detailed is his treatment of love in today's chapter. After a brilliant theological statement: ". . . yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist," he reminds us that this theological sophistication must always give way to the claims of love. The theologically knowledgeable may need to limit their freedom out of loving respect for the scrupulous, the nervous, the beginners in the faith. The larger lesson is that loving your neighbor should involve social action, seeking justice, feeding the poor, but it also involves delicate tact and thoughtfulness and self-abnegation in our everyday relationships. Knowledge puffs up but love builds up!

— Vickie Gottlob

March 7, Thursday

Psalm 86 / Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34 / 1 Corinthians 9:1-15 /
Mark 6:30-46

From Heather Annis: *I invited the youth group to share their thoughts on the eleventh verse of Psalm 86. Unbeknownst to them, I used two different translations with two different groups of kids. I was curious if their responses would differ based on the text. Their observations follow.*

“Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness.” (NRSV)

- When you are having trouble making a big decision and you don’t know what to do, ask for help. Rely on God to answer; God promises to help you find the right path.
- Remember to step back and listen. Hear God saying, “Let me take the lead.” Trust God to open your eyes to ideas and people beyond your wildest imagination.
- We all fall into the habit of focusing on doing things “our way,” the way that is easiest or most comfortable for us. Pay attention to where and how God is leading you and have the confidence to follow.
- Allow yourself to trust the people around you, too. God gives us chances to change our lives for the better.

“Teach me Your way, Lord; I will walk in Your truth.” (New American Standard)

- When you feel lost because you think you’re not doing the right thing or you don’t know what to do, know that you always have love.
- Figuring out what God wants us to do is hard. Look for God’s truth in scripture, but also listen for how God speaks to you through your own experience.
- Choose your path based on what you know to be true of God.

The similarities in these responses are to be expected. What I find compelling are the subtle but clear differences. One translation is distinctively passive (“I may rely”), while the other is unmistakably active (“I will walk”). We all want God to teach us his way; how you respond is up to you. Our prayer for you during this Lenten season? Do both! Rely on God’s faithfulness. Walk in God’s truth.

— The Youth Group

March 8, Friday

Psalm 95 / Genesis 47:1-26 / 1 Corinthians 9:16-27 /
Mark 6:47-56

As I prepare to graduate from the University of Virginia this coming May, I feel a pervasive sense of homesickness. I miss Charlottesville even while I am still here, and every experience is tainted by the expectation that, soon, it will all be over. In such a melancholy fourth-year mood, I sympathize with Joseph's brothers when they introduce themselves to the pharaoh as "aliens in the land" in today's Genesis passage. Jacob's description of his life as an "earthly sojourn" a few verses later seems especially apt. No matter where I am, it's not where I'm supposed to be.

Perhaps some others can relate to this feeling of longing for something you can't put your finger on, sensing this world isn't right. I feel this sharply every time I see reports of the death and suffering in the Holy Land. What a broken world! Any attempt to make it into a home often seems like "straining at the oars against an adverse wind," like the disciples in the Gospel of Mark today. In the season of Lent, we weep for the brokenness of the world: the violence unleashed on children, the destruction of the planet, the callous cruelty of the carceral system. We weep for the world that could be a beautiful home, made into Hell by human hands.

It is in the middle of this broken world that God appears, incarnate. In Lent, we see ourselves in the lonely, sojourning family of Jacob, in the terrified disciples, in those so sick they had to be carried on mats to the feet of Jesus. But no matter how we get there, we all find ourselves at His feet. He bends down and whispers in the ears of our broken world, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

— Arlo Morgan

March 9, Saturday

Psalm 90 / Genesis 47:27–48:7 / 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 /
Mark 7:1-23

Today is my husband's birthday. We have joked that we planned our year well, with quarterly personal feast days; his birthday in the spring, mine in the summer, our anniversary in the autumn, and then Christmas in the winter. But Kirk's personal feast day inevitably falls into Lent, this season of contemplation and even darkness. We've always suspended any Lenten disciplines we've taken on in order to celebrate, but today's readings give me a moment of pause about that practice. In Mark, Jesus warns once again about the dangers of hypocrisy and then He takes a big step beyond that: "And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, folly.'"

Am I hypocritical if I choose to celebrate instead of following my Lenten discipline? Is this pride, wickedness, or folly? Or is the impulse to take all feast days that fall into our lives as a gift from a loving God who walked on earth with human feet and felt the joys and sorrows of our lives? It's easy to focus on the dark during Lent; sin and suffering, the upcoming remembrance of Jesus' suffering, contemplation of our own faults, even early Spring's often rainy weather, and today's readings certainly lead in that direction. I believe, however, we are called to live the fullness of our humanity, walking in Jesus' footsteps. Even when those footsteps lead into a dark season, we are still called to celebrate our moments of joy whether a birthday celebration or a sunbeam peering through dark clouds.

— Rebecca Morris

March 10, Fourth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 / Numbers 21:4-9 / Ephesians 2:1-10 / John 3:14-21

What can I gather from these seemingly disparate readings? I meditate on the imagery, and seek to understand how these readings apply to my life.

Psalm 107: This psalm is a thanksgiving for God's deliverance from many troubles. We know that God responds to prayers.

Numbers 21: As the Jews travel through the Wilderness, they complain against both God and Moses. Then they are bitten by serpents. Moses responds by making a serpent of bronze and when the bitten people look at it, they live.

Looking at the serpent statue, metaphorically, helps me face my own anger and thus recover from the 'serpent's bite' of my own wrong.

Ephesians 2: Only faith, NOT the results of my works, "saves" me. Yet the paradox is that through belief in Christ I affirm that as Christians we are called to do good works.

John 3: Nicodemus asks how can we be born again? Jesus uses the metaphor of rebirth as regeneration of the spirit. In this passage, he refers to the story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the Wilderness and uses that analogy to prophesy the Son of Man being lifted up to Heaven.

Today, I give thanks for the goodness in my life and I give over to God my anger and frustration with petty things like telephone bots, spam calls, and bureaucratic responses as well as the larger issues of divisiveness, wars, poverty, and harm both here in America and in the world.

I renew my dedication to doing what I can to make our community and Earth a more equitable and beautiful home for all.

God, I ask you to help us to change the world by touching our hearts and minds to remind us that we are all in the family of humankind.

— Kay Slaughter

March 11, Monday

Psalm 89:1-18 / Genesis 49:1-28 / 1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1 /
Mark 7:24-37

Mark 7: 24-37: The writer of the Gospel of Mark wants us to know Jesus as a healer. Something in the very nature of who Jesus is inevitably pours forth a compassionate, mysterious balm that touches and restores to health. But in the case of the Gentile, Syrophoenician woman's daughter, Jesus balks. Apparently, Jesus is caught in one of those mind-traps in which all of us so often get stuck: but this one is *not of my people*; she is a foreigner, an alien, someone to whom I owe nothing, and just maybe, if I help her, I'll take away something essential from one of my own.

I have always been grateful for this story of Mark's, not simply for the desperate feistiness of this mother, but because I imagine that this simple, mortal woman stranger was able to make Jesus laugh at his own presumption. She brings him up short, reminding him that the gracious mercy of God's generous kingdom was, is, and always will be more than enough for the needs of the whole world. And from his all-too-human folly, our Lord is glad to be reminded of the godly reality he lives and breathes.

—Norvene Vest

March 12, Tuesday

Psalm 100 / Genesis 49:29–50:14 / 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 /
Mark 8:1-10

Today's readings from the Hebrew Bible open with the tender story from the end of Genesis about the death of Jacob in Egypt and the return of his body to Canaan by Joseph and his brothers. Framed by 70 days of mourning in Egypt and another 7-day mourning period after traveling to Canaan this seems an appropriate story for a Lenten time of repentance, the seeking of deliverance and the aloneness that can accompany Lent, and yet:

All we go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. BCP, Burial I, p.483

For indeed, this lesson links to Ps. 100, familiar from our Morning Prayer rite, a hymn of praise and gratitude, not for gifts, vindication or deliverance but simply for thanks that God is God. *For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever* (Ps 100:5). Laments often include words of praise, e.g. Job 12:13-25, Jer. 20:13, Lam. 5:19-22, and the fragment from the burial service above.

Paul's epistle, written roughly 20 years before Mark's gospel, includes the first account of the Last Supper as understood today. The Corinthians held common meals [*agape*] marking Jesus' dining with his friends and followers. Paul learns that many of the more prosperous arrive early consuming more food and, in particular, more wine than others in the community with predictable consequences. While chastising the boorish behavior, he recounts the first Eucharist and suggests that the bread and cup are a sufficient memorial (and if members are hungry to first eat at home).

Mark's passage, the feeding of the crowds, the only miracle recounted in all 4 gospels, mirrors the *agape* in the communal breaking of bread. Surely, *I am the bread of life* (John 6:35). Amen.

— Peter Dennison

March 13, Wednesday

Psalm 119:121-144 / Genesis 50:15-26 /

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 / Mark 8:11-26

Thirty five years ago on a summer morning I sat on my second floor deck under the tree canopy. I was looking up at the leaves of the Willow Oak tree. To my amazement I became aware of energy pulsing out of each oblong leaf. When my mind kicked in I thought, “Oh my gosh, look at that! How amazing!” The vision vanished. As I reflected on that moment, I realized that my sense of time had ceased to be and I had become “at one” with the tree. I had an awareness that all is part of a whole.

In Mark 8:22-24 a blind man was brought to Jesus who laid his hands on him. When asked if he could see anything he replied, “I see men but they look like trees walking.” After Jesus laid his hands on him again the man “looked intently and was restored and saw everything clearly.” I am aware that much of the time I move through my days seeing but not “seeing clearly.” How often do I miss the essence of what is before me . . . whether it is a part of nature or a person or a situation?

When I return to my time on the deck thirty five years ago I realize that I had stopped long enough to just be present to the moment. As Jesus often took himself away to a quiet place, perhaps if we, too, make time regularly to be still and open to the Divine, we will see more clearly like the blind man, having new vision and a deeper understanding of what is before us.

— **Brenda Peterson**

March 14, Thursday

Psalm 73 / Exodus 1:6-22 / 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 /
Mark 8:27–9:1

The common theme running through today's readings is worldly prosperity, power, honor, and our relationship to it. The lesson is dark, but true.

The Psalmist begins with a confession of almost slipping into envy of those whose worldly wealth is of the kind that still provokes jealousy today. Is it the hope of God's retribution, or God's sustaining wisdom that keeps us from pursuing riches and power? "I saw the prosperity of the wicked, for there are no pains in their death." But dead they are, and all their wealth has passed to others.

Exodus tells of how Israel was oppressed when one who did not know Joseph took power. There is no claim that they could have avoided worldly power. Worldly authority is real, and can be dangerous. But this power is also but for a time; it too shall pass.

Paul tells us that we are one body in Christ. Some are Christ's hands, some Christ's feet, and though many members, one body. Paul continues that while some members are more honorable, and some less, all members compose the body. I enjoy the honor that applause implies as much as anyone, but applause only lasts as long as the reverb of the room. All this world's honor also passes away.

Jesus speaks plainly in Mark. When Peter rebukes him for predicting his sacrifice, Jesus rebukes Peter. "For whoever wishes to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." This life includes our possessions, power, and honor. The world will note our passing as the water in a glass remembers a finger pulled from it; whether it takes a season or a century, we will be forgotten. There is no profit in exchanging this world for our souls.

— Kelly Carney

March 15, Friday

Psalm 95 / Exodus 2:1-22 / 1 Corinthians 12:27–13:3 /
Mark 9:2-13

As I was reading the lesson for today from Exodus I couldn't help but think of Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn who describes the story as "Moses and the Bull Rushers." Then I was intrigued about the naming of Moses. How did pharaoh's daughter know enough Hebrew to give Moses a name that means, in Hebrew, "to draw him out of the water"?

Down the Internet rabbit-hole I went! It seems that the interpretation of the Hebrew etymology of Moses' name is suspect. It's probably more likely that the name comes from the Egyptian word for "to beget a child" as in the name Thut-mose ("begotten child of Thut"). Hebrew storytellers transformed the etymology, reminding us, perhaps, that Moses will lead his people through the waters ("draw them out") of the Red Sea. At the same time, we are reminded that Moses belongs to two worlds, Egyptian and Hebrew, and he will be transformed by God into the leader, emancipator and law-giver of the Hebrew people.

Thus Moses' story, like so many in the Bible, is one of transformation, with naming and re-naming as an indicator of new beginnings. Abram becomes Abraham ("ancestor of multitudes") and his wife Sarai becomes Sarah, a "princess." Their son, Isaac ("he laughs") recalls his parents' response when told they would have a child in their old age. Jacob wrestles with God and becomes Israel ("one who strives with God"). Our parish patron, St. Paul, was named Saul, a participant in the stoning of Stephen, until he is transformed and re-named on the road to Damascus.

The holy name of Jesus was proclaimed to his mother by the angel at the Annunciation. He was further identified by God at his baptism, and again at the Transfiguration as depicted in today's lesson from Mark's gospel. May we who witness the transforming power of God know that we are named as God's own forever. Amen.

— Charles Lancaster

March 16, Saturday

Psalm 33 / Exodus 2:23–3:15 / 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 /
Mark 9:14-29

I Cor. 13:1-13

“And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

I am nothing if I have not love. Reduced to zero.

I have found that contemplating this most eloquent expression about the nature of love in the English language can kindle a fire in the soul of a Christian. Many may sequester this chapter under the file, “wedding,” but it is far deeper and more complex when you consider each of its paragraphs. And it is wonderful to hear it read out loud. We heard it not long ago.

I once worked in a seminary bookstore and had the opportunity to purchase a number of framed Bible passages done in calligraphy by Michael Podesta, and the only one I did not eventually give away was I Cor. 1:4-7, 13. I lent this tableau for a number of years to our poor oft-flooded choir room downstairs (nicknamed “the Bat Cave” by a student) which we no longer use for rehearsals (and I am excited about what kind of choir facilities the new building will have). But recently I took it out from the closet where it had long languished, and replaced another artwork which hangs near my front door with it. Now it reminds me whenever I go out what is greatest among this famous Pauline trilogy of faith, hope, and love.

I have been creating quilts for each of my grandchildren, and now it is time for me to start a new one for the baby. Each time when I finish I do a little embroidery on an edge or so. No dates, but knowing that every stitch has been taken with the love I have for each of these little ones, I embroider their name and have also stitched the simple words from verse 8, the first sentence: ‘Love never ends.’ I hope when they are older they will ponder this.

No, love cannot be quenched. It will gush forth even when we “know fully.”

St. Paul illuminates this when he writes, “Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem”—now we see in a glass darkly, then we will see face to face. Of this, the Irish theologian and philosopher, John O’Donohue, has written, “Perhaps after death we will be given a glimpse of how everything holds together and how each thing that happens to us fits precisely in the blueprint of our creative destiny.”

— Vicky Lee

March 17, Fifth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 51:1-13 / Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Hebrews 5:5-10 /
John 12:20-33

While I am not called to serve as a high priest, as is the man “after the order of Melchizedek” of whom St. Paul writes in his letter to the Hebrews, I can pray each day and be grateful for God’s gifts, great among which is His role as “author of eternal salvation” (v.9), if only I can obey Him. What an awesome plan God has—and how hard it is all the same to be obedient!

Lent is an opportunity for taking stock of where I fall short of serving fully as God’s instrument to others; my students, for example, hunger for quicker turnaround on feedback and grades. My occasional suffering as a post-pandemic teacher pales to that which Jesus anticipates in St. John’s account of his speaking with the Greeks upon His arrival in Jerusalem. If I serve my students better, I serve and follow Jesus and can be honored by His Father (v. 26). I must ever more embrace the opportunity to help them grow and give thanks for that chance.

After I offer God praise and adoration, and thanksgiving for His many blessings, and before interceding for others, I find it appropriate to pray in sorrow for my transgressions and to ask mercy and forgiveness. David writes Psalm 51 after having “gone in to Bathsheba”; I too, keeping in mind my own iniquities, might ask daily for God to “create a clean heart . . . and renew a right spirit within me” (v. 10).

We can make such a request based on faith in the salvation that God has had in mind for us since the beginning and that he shared with the prophets. Jeremiah writes that, despite the people of Israel having broken the original covenant with Him, God will make a new one with them. So it is with us: He “puts [His] law in [our] inward parts”, and forgives our sins” (vv. 33-34). Pray, and be renewed!

— Barry Keith

March 18, Monday

Psalm 31 / Exodus 4:10-20, 27-31 / 1 Corinthians 14:1-19 /
Mark 9:30-41

(yet in the church) I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:19)

My friend with Alzheimer's is often afraid. On the phone or in person, she speaks of being terrified, confused, or unable to understand what is happening next. This grips me with sadness and frustration, and I want to help. Too often, my "helping" manifests as a barrage of words: interrogating her about the derivation of her fear; using sentence after sentence to explain or justify the day's happenings; or negating certain facts she considers undeniably true.

I can see in my friend's eyes, or sense, in her tone on the phone, that I have made the air foggy, and the message of comfort has gotten obscured in that fog.

It is important that I stop, take a breath, and try to re-group and simplify. What I really want her to know is: **it will all be okay.**

I have this human goal: to help. And I also have this human failing: speaking in a tongue, really—the tongue of "well-intentioned wordiness." How can I keep from "speaking into the air"—in my efforts to make a friend feel better? How can I limit my word count, and let a message reach from my heart to hers?

It will all be okay. Isn't that what God is trying to tell me, as I walk through muddled days or thrash through dark nights? If I can only calm my inner cacophony, and receive this message, then maybe I can share it. I would like to try.

What five words might you choose to comfort or console another, or yourself, today?

— Martha Haertig

March 19, Tuesday, Feast of St. Joseph

Psalm 89: 1-29 / 2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16 / Romans 4:13-18 /
Luke 2:41-52

In Italy when I was a child, one's birthday was not a reason for sugar-laden parties and expensive gifts. Instead, the *onomastico*, the name-day, was the big anniversary. Italians still observe the *onomastico*, in addition to the consumerist birthday imported with American television and movies.

The name-day is the feast day of one's patron saint. No one knows or cares how old you are. However, it does change as one grows. An Italian child might get little candies and small mementos from parents and relatives. The adult brings champagne and *ciambelle* (fried doughnuts—don't ask!) to the office or job site, to share with co-workers.

Those whose name does not appear on the Church calendar pick a Christian name at Confirmation. Because I was raised by a single woman, Joseph meant a lot to me, so today is my *onomastico*, and Joseph is my patron saint. Among other things, he also is the patron of the Universal Church, families, fathers, expectant mothers, travelers, immigrants, house sellers and buyers, craftsmen, engineers and working people. He is the patron saint of many Christian countries, including Italy (not the Virgin Mary, as you may have thought). The feast day of Saint Joseph the Worker is Labor Day in many places.

Jesus was about thirty years old when he left home for the last time. Who did he call *Abba* (Daddy) as a boy and a young man? Who taught him how a real man should behave? It should not be surprising that this is also Father's Day in some countries.

For more than two thousand years, the machismo of patriarchal societies has never erased the example of the one who taught Jesus how to be a man.

Thanks be to God, who raised up Joseph to show the way to Him who grew to be the Way.

—JT Hine

March 20, Wednesday

Psalm 130 / Exodus 7:8-24 / 2 Corinthians 2:14–3:6 /
Mark 10:1-16

Why on earth did I agree to write this meditation?! I feel the least qualified to write such. I have always been confused by all the contradictions in scripture.

In Psalm 130 the psalmist pleads with God for forgiveness and redemption for Israel: “Hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.” In Exodus God is seen to deal with the power and the hardened heart of Pharaoh by imposing a series of plagues upon Egypt to force Pharaoh to “let my people go” from slavery to freedom. In Corinthians, Paul addresses the issue of who is a competent minister as a follower of Christ, writing that we do not need an official “letter of recommendation” (stamp of approval?) if we are moved by the holy spirit: “You show that you are a letter of Christ, written not by ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” In Mark, Jesus addresses trick questions from the Pharisees about divorce. He seems to challenge the idea that divorce is a male right and states that God created male and female as equals. But Jesus also states, “what God has joined together, let no one separate.” In this passage Jesus also brings the little children (the least among us) to him, stating, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

I tend to read the Old Testament as a history of mankind’s struggle to understand the mystery of God from the context of their individual and historical circumstances. I can only make sense of the passages above and scripture in general by holding tight to the example set by Christ that we must be loving, inclusive, and challenge any power and authority which act against these teachings.

Christ is God’s final Word.

— **David Truslow**

March 21, Thursday

Psalm 131 / Exodus 7:25–8:19 / 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 /
Mark 10:17-31

“A veil covers their hearts,” the Apostle Paul says, and “only in Christ is it taken away.” In their first century context, Paul’s words are a polemic against God-fearers and members of his own Jewish community who have not embraced Jesus. But reading these words in Lent, I find that they take on a different hue. Lent, after all, is a time when many churches place veils over the crosses and statues in their sanctuaries.

This last Lent, worshiping with a church here in Durham, I was struck by how beautiful the brass cross looks under its purple veil. I remember noticing it from the choir at St. Paul’s, too. The gold-colored metal seems to glow and shimmer under the sheer fabric. I found myself looking at the cross more closely, noticing it more frequently than before, when it was uncovered. Veils separate and conceal, but they also entice. Seduce, even.

The second chapter of the Song of Songs—traditionally read by Christians as an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the Church—also contains a veil. The lover is imaged as a stag, “bounding over the mountains” who “stands behind our wall, peering through the window, peeping through the curtain.” Here, the deer (Christ) peers through the curtain-veil at the lover (the Church), and the Church peers back.

Lent reminds us that a veil still separates the world from the abundance God desires for it. The veil is death, decay, cancer, scornful words, broken promises, broken relationships. Lent also reminds us that it is the vocation of the church to peer through that veil, and to see through its sheer fabric the glowing, unfailing promises and the loving purpose of God. Paul, after all, was right. In Christ, the veil will ultimately and forever be lifted.

— **Lachlan Hassman**

March 22, Friday

Psalm 143 / Exodus 9:13-35 / 2 Corinthians 4:1-12 /
Mark 10:32-45

We just don't get it.

These passages remind me of Isaiah 55: 8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord."

Whenever I want God to be like me/think like me, I remind myself of the chasm of understanding between my ways and God's. God reaches across that chasm in love, but we can't ever really comprehend the entirety of God's purpose or truth.

And many times, we simply mess up. I think it's all about me—and that is so rarely the case!

Look at Pharaoh in Exodus, for example. He so believes in his own divinity that he brings plague after plague, and even death, upon his people.

Or look at James and John in Mark. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem with the twelve, telling them about the grim fate that awaits him, and what do these two say? They ask for the special privilege of sitting at Jesus' right and left hand in glory. No acknowledgement of the terrible anguish Jesus may feel. Jesus responds: "You do not know what you are asking. . . ." Wow, is that an understatement!

And not only are they oblivious to Jesus, but they are oblivious to their fellow apostles, who respond in anger to the absurd request James and John have made. And how does Jesus respond? Does he rebuke them, or answer in anger?

He teaches them with one of the Bible's most memorable phrases: ". . . whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all."

We have so much to learn.

— Rebecca Girvin-Argon

March 23, Saturday

Psalm 43 / Exodus 10:21–11:8 / 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 /
Mark 10:46-52

So, we have come to the eve of Palm Sunday. Tomorrow, we begin the inexorable journey toward Jesus' death and Resurrection. It is a familiar path that we travel each year.

The readings suggested for this day are Psalm 43, Exodus 10:21–11:8, 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 and Mark 10:46-52. As I read each of these biblical writings, I was struck by the theme of stasis and travel.

The 43rd Psalmist prays to God to *send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.* (I will go where I am inspired to go.)

Exodus walks us through the Ninth Plague, darkness, and the warning of the final Plague, death of the firstborn. During the Ninth Plague a dense darkness spread over the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another; they could not move. Only the Israelites had light. Pharaoh told Moses to go worship the Lord, to get away. The Lord said to Moses: *I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt.* As it turned out the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land. (I will remain still at the direction of the Lord.)

Paul greets us along our journey to say: *even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.* (I will have faith in the Lord as I am changed.)

Our readings end with Mark and the healing of the blind Bartimaeus. We are once again on the road. Bartimaeus says: *my teacher, let me see again.* Jesus says: *go; your faith has made you well.* Bartimaeus regains his sight and follows Jesus. (I will travel the path to the Resurrection.)

So, we have come to the eve of Palm Sunday. Tomorrow, we begin the inexorable journey toward Jesus' death and Resurrection. It is a familiar path that we travel each year.

— Nancy Grable

March 24, Palm Sunday

Psalm 31:9-16 / Isaiah 50:4-9a / Philippians 2:5-11 /
Mark 15:1-39

Humbly born humbly lived
Not as a king did he come
But as a slave never defended.
Born in a barn, hay his bed
He rode in on a lowly donkey
He was hung on a tree to die.

So what did He come to tell us?
To trust without question
The power of love, the power of letting
God's light shine through our lives
To know that He is always there
That the good we do is His doing.

As a mountain stands steady
As the tides come and go
As the moon follows its course
Through the sky, His is an always
Love, everlasting, pure, forever love.
His triumph, faith, His trust in God's love.

— Alice Meador

March 25, Monday in Holy Week

Psalm 36:5-11 / Isaiah 42:1-9 / Hebrews 9:11-15 /
John 12:1-11

Sometimes Jesus just doesn't make sense.

Wash his feet with expensive perfume that could be sold and the proceeds given to the poor, as John recounts. Inappropriate.

Believe that He comes from a living God because He dies, as Paul writes. Confusing.

Watch for Him to establish justice in all nations without lifting up His voice, as Isaiah foretells. Fanciful.

But those who oppose Jesus, operating in the light of everyday realities, don't always make sense either. Look at the Chief Priests in John. Their reaction to hearing stories of one man raising another from the dead? Let's kill them both. Yes, it was a complicated situation and there are nuances to their motivations, but on a basic level this is true: Faced with the possibility of the unimaginable beauty and wonder of bringing life forth where there was none, their response is to bring more death.

That thought makes me look at Jesus anew. It makes me see the possibility that in some different light what seems inappropriate, confusing, and absurd, is in reality—different than our daily reality—fitting, clear, and serious. And in that moment I see Jesus protecting a dimly burning wick, and I see the light it provides, as the psalmist sings.

— **Frank Rambo**

March 26, Tuesday in Holy Week

Psalm 71:1-14 / Isaiah 49:1-7 / 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 /

John 12:20-36

Have you ever watched a young child—a toddler or preschooler—solemnly and seriously performing a simple task? Or listened as they gravely informed you about something which seemed to you rather trivial? From the perspective of an older person, the intensity of little children can be amusing, even charming. I don't know that many would consider them foolish, but likewise I doubt many would call them wise. How do we determine what is wisdom and what is folly, what is serious and what is silly? God often takes what we think we know about the world and turns it upside down. If God's foolishness is greater than human wisdom, what would it look like for us to be wholly (holy) foolish? If we are children of light, known before our birth by our Creator, what can we do to be like the toddler intently sweeping the floor, regarded fondly by a more mature presence?

— Megan Brett

March 27, Wednesday in Holy Week

Psalm 70 / Isaiah 50:4-9a / Hebrews 12:1-3 / John 13:21-32

“Troubled in spirit.” Twice in John’s gospel Jesus is troubled in spirit. The first time is when he sees Mary and fellow Jews weeping over Lazarus’ death and he decides to bring Lazarus out of the tomb. Jesus knows that such a public, life-giving act will bring the wrath of the authorities down on him—which it does. Thereafter they seek a way to put him to death. The second time Jesus is troubled in spirit is when he tells his disciples that one of them will betray him, a betrayal that will likewise jeopardize his life. Jesus has just taken the extraordinary step of washing his disciples’ feet, given them a brief teaching about servanthood, and alluded to his betrayal. Jesus is troubled in spirit not only because he says that one of them will betray him, but also because he knows that the betrayal is imminent. How it must have troubled Jesus that one so close, one of the twelve, was about to hand him over to those who sought his life. How it must have troubled him that his death was on the immediate horizon.

How it also must have troubled Jesus that the rest of his disciples did not grasp what was happening, that they were surprised and clueless about who it might be. But that is part of what betrayal entails: you don’t see it coming and it’s often from someone you least expect. That is what makes betrayal so painful and shocking. After Jesus all but says that Judas is the betrayer and tells him to act quickly, the startled disciples still do not perceive what is happening, or perhaps being stunned they are in a kind of denial, believing instead that Judas was leaving them to buy goods for them for the coming Passover festival or going to distribute some money to the poor. Betrayal is so disorienting; it troubles the spirit. Nevertheless, Jesus stays true to his mission of revealing God’s love in all of its tremendous, even agonizing depths. Thus, we can imagine Jesus in his moment of betrayal saying with the psalmist, “O Lord, make haste to help me!”

— The Rev. Dr. Heather Warren

March 28, Maundy Thursday

Psalms 116:1-2, 10-17 / Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14 /

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 / John 13:1-17, 31b-35

The church's name for today, "Maundy Thursday," comes from our annual remembrance of the events described in today's reading from John's gospel. ("Maundy" is derived from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning "commandment.") Today, we remember the "new commandment" Jesus gave his disciples on the eve of his passion: "Love one another as I have loved you."

The command to "love one another" itself isn't new. Our scriptures are filled with commandments and exhortations to love others. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). It's been a key focus of Jesus' preaching and teaching from the beginning of his ministry. "Love your enemies" (Mt. 5:44). What's "new" here isn't so much the command as the comparison; it's the way Jesus reframes the context, inviting us to reimagine what it means to love in relation to him and the example he's given. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn. 13:34).

The giving of this command follows the extraordinary scene of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. There is no parallel in ancient sources of a person of authority doing such servile work. Set in the context of the festival of Passover, the people of Israel's annual celebration of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Jesus performs the service of a slave. It is an act that anticipates the scandal, and the reversal of expectations and values, of the crucifixion of Jesus, the Son of God. This is our entry to the paschal mystery. Our great high priest is the lamb that is slain. Our king of kings is a suffering servant. And Jesus, "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands" uses those hands to wash the feet of his disciples, including those he knows will betray him, deny him, and abandon him during his time of trial.

Jesus calls us to follow his example in this new and radical way of love. To have our share with him in lives of service to one another, building communities where authority is a form of humble, self-emptying, service to all.

Washing one another's feet, as we will do this day, symbolizes how we are to pattern our lives—with gentleness, and humility, and vulnerability—welcoming one another in love, just as Christ has done for us.

— The Rev. Dr. Peter Kang

March 29, Good Friday

Psalms 22 / Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 / Hebrews 10:16-25 /
John 18:1–19:42

“Who,” asks Isaiah, “has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” In John’s account of Jesus’ arrest, John reports that soldiers, Pharisees, and police from the chief priests fall to the ground when Jesus confirms that he is the one they seek. There are myriad theories about why this happens, but I like to imagine that at least some of the people who persecute him finally recognize who Jesus truly is.

Scripture is full of folks falling to the ground like this, from prophets and disciples to lepers and angels. It is an understandable, albeit dramatic, response to the shock and surprise of encountering God in tangible form. Even *Jesus* throws himself to the ground at Gethsemane, as he comes face to face with his own divinity.

Scripture is also full of folks who are the most unlikely candidates for divine revelation. Shepherds—social outcasts!—recognize him. The magi—Gentile outsiders!—recognize him. Demons—demons!—fall down before him and shout, “You are the Son of God!” That the Lord is revealed to the likes of centurions and criminals is worth contemplating.

Finally, scripture is full of people who ought to recognize Jesus but don’t. After the resurrection, Mary Magdalene mistakes him for the gardener, until he says her name. Travelers on the road to Emmaus only realize it is Jesus when he breaks bread with them. His own disciples don’t recognize him until he has helped them catch a netful of fish.

It’s easy to sit here and wonder how anyone could fail to recognize Jesus, until we think about how often we fail to realize that God is in our midst. Like it or not, we have a lot in common with all those people I’ve mentioned, and I think it is a useful exercise to reflect on what it means to recognize God. The literal meaning of “recognition” is “*to know again*.” The act of noticing and responding to God’s presence is an ongoing, lifelong process. The Lord is revealed in unlikely forms and at unexpected times; as Easter approaches, may we come to know and be known by God again and again and again.

— Heather Annis

March 30, Holy Saturday

Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16 / Job 14:1-14 / 1 Peter 4:1-8 /

John 19:38-42

“Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.”

Among the laws set out in Exodus 22 is a provision about what happens when “a thief is found breaking in.” The law makes a stark distinction between a nighttime break-in and one that occurs after sunrise: In the dark, you may be excused from beating the thief to death, but in daylight, “bloodguilt is incurred.” The rationale seems to be that lethal force is a reasonable response when you can’t see who’s who or what’s what; in the daylight, perhaps you have more information and more options.

In Bible stories, many mysterious things happen in darkness. In the beginning, darkness covered the face of the deep when God spoke light into being. When Israel, fleeing Pharaoh’s army, reached the Red Sea, God “drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night,” allowing them to pass safely through. “At dawn, the sea returned to its normal depth.” Although it’s not explicit in the Gospel accounts, we think of the birth of Jesus as happening in the night. And we know that the mystery of the empty tomb lives in the pre-dawn darkness.

In these days of conflict, tragedy, cruelty, mystery, and death, the execution of Jesus takes place at midday. There is no mystery about this death. And when the sun comes up on Saturday, if there’s a sense of peace in contrast to the angst and terror of the previous days, it’s cold comfort because the powers of death have clearly won. But then here comes Nicodemus, who first came to Jesus under cover of darkness, aligning himself publicly and openly, in broad daylight, with the dead, defeated Jesus. Maybe he felt he had nothing left to lose? Or did he somehow trust or know, that God’s mysterious power would come by night, in triumphant reply to the Empire’s blunt-force midday power, and turn everything upside down again?

This is the night.

— The Rev. William Peyton

WORSHIP SERVICES IN LENT

Ash Wednesday (February 14) 7:30 a.m., 12:15 p.m., 6:30 p.m.

Sundays @ 8 a.m., 10 a.m.*† Holy Eucharist

Sundays @ 7:30 p.m. Evening Worship

Monday thru Friday @ 8:00 a.m. Morning Prayer in Chapel

Mondays @ 8 p.m. Chanted Compline

Tuesdays @ 12:15 p.m. Holy Eucharist in Chapel

Wednesdays @ 5:30 p.m. Evening Prayer

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Palm Sunday (March 24)..... 8 a.m., 10 a.m.*†, 7:30 p.m.

Monday in Holy Week 8 p.m. Chanted Compline

Wednesday in Holy Week 5:30 p.m. Evening Prayer

Maundy Thursday 6:30 p.m. Eucharist with Foot Washing

Good Friday noon Good Friday Liturgy

Good Friday 6:30 p.m. Liturgy with Chanted Passion

Holy Saturday 7:30 p.m. Easter Vigil

Easter Sunday (March 31).... 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m.†, 11:15 a.m.*†, 7:30 p.m.

**These services also livestreamed on Zoom.*

†Nursery care provided for children ages 3 and under.