

We wish to express our gratitude to each person who contributed their prayerful reflection to this booklet.

May God Bless you during this Lenten season!

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Ash Wednesday, February 26

Luke 18:9 - 14

It is the season to understand
What we are and
What we should be.

Today begins the Christian season of self-sacrifice. In today's Ash Wednesday's scripture, Luke presents us with the Pharisee's laundry list of sacrifice and compares it to that of the tax collector. There are times in my life when my behavior is more akin to the Pharisee. Such as letting my girlfriends know, that not only do I intend on giving up chocolate for lent but red wine as well. And what was the true reason for this sacrifice? Had the thought ever crossed my mind that, "if I'm really good at it, come Easter morning, I might lose a pound or two?" I'd be lying if I said no.

After rereading this parable, I had an odd thought about alternative avenues of self-discipline. What if someone gave up using the word "I" for 40 days? Of course, the chance of actually accomplishing such a goal would be next to impossible. However, the chance of learning more about ourselves might become a daily lesson in our own human shortcomings.

Understanding is found somewhere
Between our unique vantage point
And Him.

Ginnie Singdahlson

Thursday, February 27

John 17:1 - 8

The hour has come. Jesus is about to enter the garden at Gethsemane, where he knows He will be arrested. He has just spoken to the disciples in a way he never has before, “plainly, and not in metaphors,” but now he turns to the Father to address him directly.

Although Jesus is not speaking to the disciples, he is still ministering to them (and to us and to anyone reading his words). Before everyone, Jesus reveals his direct access to God the Father. He is about to undergo the ultimate sacrifice, and he asks the ultimate thing: “Glorify me now so that your glory may be revealed through me” (v 1). This is the very model of faith for us, a model for the way that we, having known Jesus, can now relate to the Father. Before every trial, before every death, we can have faith enough in his eternal love to ask: Let your glory shine through me. Not mine, Father, but yours. (“Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”) We have such faith in the Father’s will because Jesus has revealed the depth of the Father’s love.

What else does Jesus ask his father before Gethsemane? Referring to himself in the third person, he asks, “...and let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him.” The nature of this eternal life is beautifully simple. “And eternal life is this: to know you, the only God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v 3). To know him—to be in relationship with him—is eternal life, a loving relationship that never ends! And it is LIFE, after all, which means that it is always growing and deepening. Even as we write about the Word, we are in relationship with it, and we experience this life. How marvelous to know that this relationship is eternally alive, never static, always deepening. What wonders we know now, and what wonders lie ahead! Forever.

Finally, Jesus says to the Father, “They were yours and you gave them to me.” With every moment of knowing Jesus, we are returning home, to the place of our eternal creation. We have always existed in the arms of God but did not know it until his Son came to pour out the Word—himself—for us to know.

Elizabeth Cuthbert

Friday, February 28

John 17:9 - 19

In this passage Jesus is with his disciples and prays for them just before Jesus is seized by soldiers in the Garden and taken to the high priest. Jesus stresses that he is one with the Father and is returning to the Holy Father. He also prays that the disciples “may be one, even as we are one.” Just as Jesus is “not of the world, they are not of the world.” But both Jesus and the disciples have been sent into the world.

It is difficult for us, as it probably was for the disciples, to be NOT of the world and still be so attached and surrounded by the world and its distractions. Perhaps this passage is reminding us that if we can be “one” . . . one community of Christians in the world, we can help each other live a life of love even if the world around us does not.

Mary O'Hara

Saturday, February 29

John 17:20 - 26

These verses come at the end of John's telling of the Last Supper. They come after a long explanation from Jesus where he teaches us the core and mysteries of our Christian faith.

As Jesus begins to speak to his disciples on these matters, they are confused and confounded: "What is this that he saith, 'A little while'? We cannot tell what he saith."

Now among my ka-zillion sins is the truly ridiculous pride and joy I take in our dog.

Groucho Charlemangie is quite simply the smartest canine on the planet. He was house-trained in less than a day; he brings the papers in from the porch every morning and gives them to Rich at the breakfast table; his vocabulary is far greater than mine was at his age; and he is already an advanced trainer of two humans. We fetch (sometimes over from great distances). We carry. And we wake up with a smile every early morning – after all who can resist the soft brush of whiskers on your forehead and neck?

Sadly however, I have tried to explain Einstein's Theory of Relativity many, many times to Groucho—and I'm afraid he just isn't getting it. He seems to be trying. But he clearly is confused and just keeps cocking his head left—then right—then left again. He is very good at letting me know that I am failing miserably as a teacher.

I react pretty much the same way when I try to fully understand the nature of God and the depth of his love for us. Watch what happens when you throw in the nature of Christ as true-man and True-God—and the Trinity: My head tilts left, then right and I get that sweetly stupid "deer in the headlights" look. (It is somewhat consoling to find the disciples apparently had the same difficulty and the same reaction: "We cannot tell what he saith.")

Clearly, our lovely little cocker spaniel simply does not have the brain power to understand Einstein. Likewise, no human has the brain power to fully understand God. I suspect our efforts to do so are a bit like a tiny insect pretending he can manage to land on the surface of the Sun and also understand the Universe.

Jesus does his best to convey these wonderful mysteries in ways that we can somewhat grasp—yet he knows that we cannot understand with mind alone. And so Jesus prays for us:

“. . . that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one;” and “that the love wherewith thou has loved me may be in them and I in them.”

Is Jesus telling us faith and love and his grace will provide a journey toward unity? A union with our fellow man, with Christ and with God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost. Not a trip past our less-favored neighbors to a geographic place called “heaven.” But instead a path toward a more perfect union with those same neighbors and with our Lord?

St. Paul is encouraging: And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

Michelle Casuccio

Sunday, March 1 (Lent I)

John 12:44 - 50

Jesus is the True Light (John 1:9), illuminating our path along the narrow way (Matt. 7:14), the way of eternal life (vs 50). In today's reading, Jesus reinforces the authority with which He has spoken, the divinity of His words, and sets the stage for our current age and the age to come.

Jesus spoke "just as the Father has told [Him]," (vs 50) but that same Word, spoken by Jesus, is God Himself, as begins St. John's Gospel. Jesus states the commandment of the Word from God Almighty is eternal life (vs 50). Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save the world (vs 47). Therefore, the Word being synonymous with God, it is through the Word by the Holy Spirit that we may have everlasting life.

The Word, on the last day, will serve as judge. Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), judges us not, until the last day, that we may not remain in darkness but have everlasting life. Praise be to God that we have the narrow way illuminated for us and may know the Judge of our salvation!

The passage reinforces Jesus' authority but also serves as a warning. "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in Him who sent me" (vs 44). However, by seeing Jesus, we "see him who sent [Jesus]" (vs 45). How can we see God by seeing Jesus, and yet not believe in Jesus, but in God? It is not because they are divisible, but because worshipping Jesus' humanity would miss the point; Jesus' authority comes from above and rests with the Father, not with His humanity. And while we can't put our fingers on His hand or in His side, we must fight in our lives the same tendencies of the world that distract our gaze from Heaven. It is by the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), the Word of God, that we fight against all that tries to tear us away from Him.

So let us this and every season read the Word given as the way to eternal life, pray earnestly, examine our lives, and amend our ways, that we may be made perfect and become a beacon inviting others to come to know the Word.

John Bryant

Monday, March 2

Mark 1:1 - 13

Just as the creation begins the universe, this passage in Mark begins Jesus' ministry. From the baptism in water by John to the battling with Satan for forty days in the wilderness: His journey starts here. With the simple act of being dipped in the waters all the wonders and miracles of his time preaching begins. Mark's words, or at least the English translations, gloss over how much of a "Eureka!" (or perhaps: Shazam!) moment that must have been for Jesus. The skies ripped open and the wonder of Heaven blasted into your consciousness; God speaking and singling you out . . . and then shoving you out into the desert to be tested. It is easy to see that Jesus was not an average man; an initiation worthy of one to be the King of Kings. It may be, however, that these tumultuous events are glossed over, to a degree, simply because they are just an initiation, a proving, a test for the life he will come to lead that is so much more important and necessary. So, as they say . . . the rest is history!

Bill Chapman

Tuesday, March 3

Mark 1:14 - 28

Jesus starts his ministry at the Sea of Galilee. He calls Andrew, Simon, James and John to follow him. To be the fisherman of people. They leave their homes, their jobs, their families and their responsibilities to follow Jesus. These men had such faith.

I always wondered if these men knew Jesus at all before Jesus called them. If you read John you know that Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist and was waiting for the messiah. John pointed Jesus out and said he was the one they had been waiting and he was the Son of God. Andrew ran and got Peter and they followed Jesus and heard his teaching. So they didn't follow Jesus blindly but still their faith was strong to leave all and follow Jesus.

They sustained that faith through difficult circumstances until their death. I pray every day to have faith that strong that no matter my circumstances I will always believe and always follow Jesus.

Anne "Kat" Dittrich

Wednesday, March 4

Mark 1: 29 - 45

The beginning of the book of Mark is like the kickoff of a candidate's "listening tour," except Jesus' "tour of miracles" is all action. He goes out into the countryside to show the people who he is—The Messiah. What better way to reveal himself to others than to miraculously cure their ailments? We know the story well—As soon as he vanquished the fever from Simon's very sick mother, she rose from her bed and began her usual household duties. Soon, at the door people arrived with "all the sick and demon possessed." He then prayed about it and decided he must go to the countryside to preach—"that is why I have come." He drove out demons and cured leprosy, always with compassion for the afflicted. The word spreads and soon people will believe he is truly the Messiah.

I wonder if Jesus saw this as a strategy for reaching people or did he act by listening to God and trusting to walk that path revealed? I think the latter. Our own lives can be like that as well as we struggle with choices of which paths to take. I can testify the path is often revealed to me after prayer in a kind of revelation.

Jan Hafer

Thursday, March 5

Mark 2: 1 - 12

The story of the paralytic being lowered through the roof by his four friends is one of the many healing miracles attributed to Jesus. It is well known and needs no retelling, but what got me about the story is the willingness of his friends to do everything they possibly can do to have him reach Jesus and also, the amazing faith they had that if he reached Jesus he would be cured.

How many of us are willing to climb on a roof, even a metamorphic one for a friend? Do we go out on a limb, beyond where we feel safe to help a friend? How many times in our lives have you or I thought, “if only I had done this, it would have helped my friend”? Yet we were not willing to take that extra step to help or support our friend.

What the four friends had was faith, faith in Jesus’ power to heal. What we need is faith, faith in God that God will be with us when we step out on that limb, when we dare to go outside of our comfort zone to help, to encourage, to be there for our friends, no matter where or when; when we act without consideration to ourselves but out of love for our friends.

Dear Lord,

May I trust in you so that I can go beyond myself to help those in need, whether in body, mind or spirit. May I know that you are always with me and that you support me all the day long. May I, like the paralytic friends, find the strength to go that extra step for my friends.

Amen

Annette van Hilst

Friday, March 6

Mark 2: 13-22

“Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

“While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’”

As we sit in prayer for our Lenten meditations, we should remember these words. Jesus did not look at Levi and see the outward appearances that the Pharisees saw. The Pharisees based their negative opinion of him only on his position as a tax collector. Jesus looked past this and into his heart. He knew that Levi was a tax collector that dealt fairly with the people he was responsible for. That evening he even sat down and had dinner with him.

If we want our hearts to attract Jesus, we must also deal fairly with our neighbors. A loving heart does not take unfair advantage of life. As we read and inwardly digest the words of Jesus, we come to both know and strive to live the life that the Father has prepared for us.

Jesus as the Cosmic Christ still walks in the world and can look into our heart. May he see past our many sins and into our feeble attempts to live his words. He truly wants to sit down with us and eat with us during this holy season.

Alex Shaw

Saturday, March 7

Mark 2:23 - 3:6

Jesus and the Sabbath.

In this passage, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a wheat field on the Sabbath. The disciples became hungry and so they picked wheat as they walked along. Some Pharisees saw them and said they were breaking the Law about working on the Sabbath. Another time, Jesus was in the temple on the Sabbath and saw a man with a deformed hand and he healed him. Again the Pharisees rebuked him for working on the Sabbath.

While “remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy” is the fourth commandment, Jesus felt the Pharisees had gone beyond God’s intended meaning. Laws are important and meant to protect us, but we need to consider what God’s real purpose was for us in this rule. It is to take time for God and away from the usual activity of the week. “The Sabbath is handed over to you, not you to it.” This reminds us that the function of the Sabbath is meant to promote life and worship God. It is always the right time to do good and help other people. He would never want us to put that off and what better day than the Sabbath for the healing of another.

Cathy Baker

Sunday, March 8 (Lent II)

John 5:19 - 24

This passage reminds us that it is through the words and teachings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God that we learn of the will of God the Father. The Son is the beacon who illuminates the path, which, if we follow, will lead us to an understanding of the Father's wishes for us and to eternal salvation. The key is to have faith that if we heed the teachings of the Son, we will be heeding the words and will of the Father.

Raymond O'Connor

Monday, March 9

Mark 3:7 - 19a

⁷Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; ¹⁰for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" ¹²But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

¹³He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

for your personal reflection

Tuesday, March 10

Mark 3:19b - 35

Then he went home; ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

for your personal reflection

Wednesday, March 11

Mark 4:1 - 20

In this passage, Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower: “Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up . . .”

As the parable goes, some of the seed fell by the wayside and was eaten by birds. “Some fell on stony ground where it had not much earth,” and grew rapidly, but then “because it had no root, it withered away” in the hot, scorching sun and rocky earth. Other seed landed amid thorns, but “the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.” Some seed, however, “fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased” with varying degrees of joyful abundance.

Over the years as I have read this passage, I have always been preoccupied with the idea of being “good ground” in relation to the bad soil of the “wayside,” or the “stony ground,” or the land of “thorns”—and wanting, of course, to please God and be an abundant producer of the fruits of the Holy Spirit!

But lately I’ve begun to see another meaning in the parable. Jesus is the wise sower who is continually sowing seeds everywhere. He knows that **not all** the seeds are going to grow, but **nonetheless** scatters seeds with loving generosity **everywhere**, for the sake of the seeds that do grow! If God did not scatter seeds everywhere in my heart—by the dead-end “wayside” of my rebellion, on the “stony ground” of my stubbornness, and amid the “thorns” of my stingy disbelief—then **no seed anywhere** would grow within me.

It is God’s willingness to “waste” good seed on me, always hoping that it will grow, that transforms my stubborn, rocky, rebellious, shallow, thorny heart. God’s willingness to “waste” good seed on me transforms my soul—or promises **eventually** to transform my soul—into an abundantly producing, flowering oasis of good ground! It is God who is everything. It is God’s endless charity that makes me better ground, day by day, minute by minute, seed by seed.

Sam Cuthbert

Thursday, March 12

Mark 4:21 - 34

I think the caption for this reflection should be, “USE IT OR LOSE IT.” These words are often directed at senior citizens as a warning to avoid becoming a couch potato that ultimately results in severe deterioration of the muscle mass and a complete loss of will.

Is it within our power to become a human example of the biblical mustard seed? When speculating on this question, I recalled a long-forgotten newspaper report about a seemingly powerless woman. I can't recollect her name, nor where she lived, or exactly her job description. When I first read her story, I was not aware that decades later these facts would add color to this narrative. If I knew her name it would be simple to Google the woman and bring her story full circle. What I do recall is that she was of African American decent and spent her days cleaning up after those who hired others to tidy up after themselves. This nameless person most likely earned, at best, a minimum wage. Twenty years ago, as is the case today, little or no money would remain to save for unexpected expenses.

Nevertheless, this saint among us lived a penny-wise life and she faithfully saved towards a cause focused on other's needs. For years and ultimately decades her savings grew and invested so wisely that she was able to fulfill her dream. That dream was to make it possible for numbers of gifted students to attend college they otherwise couldn't afford. Not only did she open up the future for the recipients, but she shared her wisdom, compassion, and helped them adjust to their challenging new environments. Not only did these students receive a debt free college education but they were given the gift of a value system to guide them through the rest of their lives.

Each of these graduates was given the opportunity to create their own mustard shrub and scatter a new generation of seeds. They acquired the skills to attain a well-paying job and establish a substantial estate along with the gift of wisdom and compassion to guide them. The question remains, “Will those new seeds be nurtured, or will a foolish investment of talent and treasure take all those resources away and leave the beneficiary without assets or a will?”

Ginnie Singdablsen

Friday, March 13

Mark 4:35 - 41

Wind and Sea Calmed

Jesus and his disciples are in a boat. Jesus is sleeping while the boat is attacked by wind and waves. Even though some are fishermen, the disciples become afraid. They awaken Jesus who calms the storm and then chastises them for having little faith. Assuming this is not just another story by Mark to further his negative portrait of the disciples, I wonder why the disciples would have called upon Jesus if they had little faith in him? Perhaps the faith in question is faith in themselves. After all, at least four of them were fishermen. Surely they had experienced storms before. If they were sore afraid, it must have been a magnificent storm. I wonder what these men of little faith expected when they woke him up. What might we expect when we are faced with a time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger and we are afraid because we see no way to cope or escape and we are hopeless and so we call upon God? I won't even try to guess. However, I do hope that whether I am faithful or of little faith, knowing that God loves me unconditionally would suffice.

David Coe

Saturday, March 14

Mark 5:1 - 20

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ²And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." ¹⁰He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; ¹²and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." ¹³So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

¹⁴The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. ¹⁸As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." ²⁰And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

for your personal reflection

Sunday, March 15 (Lent III)

John 5:25 - 29

Chapter 5 of the Gospel of John begins with Jesus healing the invalid at the pool of Bethesda and continues with his declaration that he can do only what he sees the Father doing. He declares that those who hear his voice will have LIFE, even those in their graves will rise.

“I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” John 5: 25

For many years I felt I was among the walking dead (at least dead in the Spirit). One night I looked up at the stars and said to myself, “maybe there is a God.” I decided to search that idea and began by reading the Bible which didn’t mean much to me at the time. However, I continued to be drawn to explore. It became a burning question: “Is Jesus really the Son of God?” and “how could I believe that?” It was when I felt the unconditional love of God, who has life in himself, sweep over me like a waterfall and I could see the deadness of my ways and look toward God’s light and love and forgiveness that I awakened to life in the Spirit. The Bible began to make sense to me, and I started going to church. Jesus became alive to me.

This journey has not been a straight path. There have been twists and turns and backtracks and leaps forward, but my heart is set toward the Light. Sometimes that Light is bright, and tears flow and joy fills my heart, and sometimes it is like walking in a fog and hoping I am heading in the right direction.

A favorite prayer of mine is from Thomas Merton:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I BELIEVE THAT THE DESIRE TO PLEASE YOU DOES IN FACT PLEASE YOU. AND I HOPE THAT I WILL NEVER DO ANYTHING APART FROM THAT DESIRE (my emphasis). And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Susan Lewis

Monday, March 16

Mark 5:21 - 43

I have always liked the image of Jesus healing the sick. We take this miracle a little more for granted today thanks to the miracle of modern medicine, but even now the power of immediate healing is exciting to us. Jesus, and faith in Jesus, make us better. I think that's true of all of us. Mark describes a woman who couldn't even go before Jesus, yet by her faith in him she was healed. I felt like that sometimes, like the things that are wrong with me or that my sins come between me and Jesus, but that is not so. He even stopped to find the woman. He knows us. In the last part of the book he brings the girl back from the dead, but interesting that he did not make a spectacle of the event. Again, Jesus has a personal connection. He sees things we may not and gives us what we need and in his own time, always making us better than we were before.

Hans Fogle

Tuesday, March 17

Mark 6:1 - 13

When Jesus went home to Nazareth the people could not understand how Jesus could speak with such authority. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Juda and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

I can understand their disbelief. This was the boy next door. They knew his parents, his siblings, they watched him grow into a man. They could not find the faith to believe that the boy they knew was the son of God. And Jesus understood this, saying, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there.

He then went out teaching and also sent his disciples out. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. Can you imagine leaving with only the clothes on your back, no money, no food, nothing and relying on people hospitality? But the disciples had faith in Jesus and did as they were told.

Lord, please give me strength and faith to always do what you require of me as the disciples did.

Anne “Kat” Dittrich

Wednesday, March 18

Mark 6: 14-29

Why John? Why did he have to be beheaded? All because of a grudge. John the Baptist was an admirable person who preached and followed God. But, because Herodia took umbrage at being told her marriage was unlawful to King Herod, something had to be done. We've all been in her shoes—well hopefully not literally—and didn't like it when someone told us we were wrong (when of course we *knew* we were wrong). We may have taken action to settle the score—again I hope not physically or in any means—but this is where the New Testament and Jesus bring hope. We are told **not** to take action when someone says or does something, but rather to forgive.

I will admit this is not my favorite passage and as I randomly chose a meditation, this is what happens. I pick a not-very-happy passage. But that's life. It's not always roses and rays of sunshine. We have to look past the insults, the hurts and concentrate on the message left by Jesus: "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all our soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . love your neighbor as yourself." (NKJV Mark 12:29-31)

Melissa Chapman

Thursday, March 19

Mark 6: 30-46

Jesus feeds the 5,000.

When I first read this passage to Stella, I asked her what she thought the point of the story was. She said there is always room at the table to receive God's love and that he will look after us no matter what the circumstance.

After we discussed it, I thought about what sorts of things the passage evokes for me. I agree with Stella's interpretation, but I also remember as a kid, and even now, I could always bring a friend to dinner at my parents. Dad used to say, "we can always add a cup of water to the soup." Which was mostly a joke, because the table was always open to friends and no one would leave the table hungry. I also think of the times I volunteered at the soup kitchen in Washington, D.C., where we fed hundreds of people, and again no one walked away hungry. The gathering at the table is an opportunity for community, food, and shared experience. We are nourished in body and mind when we gather together for a meal or to worship. I love the times I get to sit with friends and family and share prayers and share a meal. It is truly nourishing. These are the things that fill me up: time at Trinity, time at Peterkin, time with family and friends, time spent in thankful prayer. I see how these moments also affect Stella and I am forever thankful for them and to God for leaving us a seat at the table.

Chrissey van Hilst

Friday, March 20

Mark 6: 47-56

The most repeated command in all the Bible tells us not to be afraid. Fear not. Do not be dismayed. Why is this so difficult to follow? We worry, we stress, we fall into the fearmongering traps set by the media and politicians. Coronavirus! Immigrants! Shelter in place! It's a never-ending barrage.

In this chapter of Mark, we see the disciples in a boat, at night, in the dark, in the middle of a lake, struggling against the wind. I would be scared too. Here Jesus walks on water and scares the—pardon the awful pun—Bejeezus out of the them. They cry out, thinking he's a ghost. "Take courage!" he tells them. "It is I. Don't be afraid." And when Jesus climbs into their boat, the winds die down. All is well.

By this time, Jesus has reached celebrity status. He draws crowds wherever he goes, people flock to see him, beg to touch the edge of his cloak so they might be healed. Unlike today's mouthpieces, Jesus never uses his platform to spread fear. Only love . . . only peace.

Whenever I find myself struggling or in a place of fear, I think of Jesus' words. "Don't be afraid." I do find courage and strength in those simple three words. I know that Jesus is with me. I don't need to fear. Eventually, the winds do die down.

Cathy Baldau

Saturday, March 21

Mark 7:1-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” ⁶ He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.”

⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

⁹ Then he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹ But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban’ (that is, an offering to God)— ¹² then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.”

¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

¹⁷ When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, ¹⁹ since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. ²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication,

theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

for your personal reflection

Sunday, March 22 (Lent IV)

John 6:27-40

Channel 4, the NBC station in Washington, D.C., runs an ad for an occupational therapy organization in which the group's clients tell viewers, "I'm perfect for the job!"

When I read the text of today's meditation, it hit me that of all the people in this congregation, I am uniquely qualified to write about this passage.

For as long as I can remember, I have spent an inordinate amount of my time in the acquisition and preparation of food. My rough guess is that I have devoted at least 25 of my eighty-plus years to figuring out the tastiest ways to satisfy my appetite. In short, I'm perfect for this job!

In John 6:27, Jesus seems to be speaking directly to me when he says, "Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you."

When the disciples ask how they might do the works of God, Jesus answers, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him, and on Him who He hath sent. He that believeth on me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." To me, this says that while the hours I spend preparing food may feed my body for awhile, the time I spend in prayer and meditation will, as the psalm promises, restore my soul. Lately, bombarded for this world's negativity and sensationalism, I find myself hungry and thirsty for that blessed restoration.

As we sing, "Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our feverish ways. Reclothe us in our rightful minds, in purer lives thy service find, In deeper reverence, praise."

In His sermon on the mount, our Lord distilled his thoughts into one sentence: "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Carolyn Banks

Monday, March 23

Mark 7:24-37

Two miracles are presented here, almost side by side, and our natural inclination is to compare them to determine from the contrast any lesson that comes forth. Jesus is the moving force in each case. One miracle is hands on, the other is not. One involves a deaf man with an impediment in his speech, the other a child confined to her bed at home who is possessed by a demon. In each case the afflictions are removed. Jesus touches the ears and tongue of the deaf man. Before touching the man's tongue, he places saliva upon his fingers. At once, the man begins to speak properly with all signs of deafness removed. Touching is the key. Many times, I've asked myself during prayer whether the absence of the person prayed for short-circuits the intended blessing. In other words, will my daughter receive the benefit of my prayers when she is in Denver and I'm in Shepherdstown? This passage serves to eliminate that doubt. The mother who is seeking a miracle for her daughter goes home to find the child free of the demon that possessed her. Another message comes forth that relates to the vain attempt by Jesus to carry out what amounts to a coverup. He enters the house in question not wanting anyone to know he is there. He picks a distant location to cure the man's infirmities so that the crowd can't see what is being done. Lastly, he orders the crowd to tell no one about what they have observed. Does he really believe that will happen? It is like bringing the Pope into a banquet disguised as a circus clown. The attempted coverup won't work. Likewise, Jesus' objective of trying to exclude Gentiles from the benefit of his healing talents (confining the good bread to his "children" alone) has the same low chance of success. The woman makes that point when she indicates that she is willing like the dogs to confine herself to the crumbs that fall under the table.

Rick Taylor

Tuesday, March 24

Mark 8:1 - 10

In the passage for today, we see Christ once more feeding a great multitude of followers just as he had in Mark 6. This second miracle brings several things to mind. First, we observe how great is the kindness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ for the multitude of people (at least 4,000 men, and women and children) who are far from home with nothing to eat. This takes place in Gentile country and undoubtedly many of those followers were Gentiles who brought along the curious and the sick. Feeling compassion even for a group such as this that did not include his people, Jesus insisted on feeding them all. He recognized that they had travelled long distances with very little food available for their sustenance. His disciples expressed grave doubt, or we might say disbelief, that seven loaves of bread and remnants of a few fish could accommodate such a large crowd. Faith and prayer were the answer, Jesus insisted, even when the outcome appeared impossible. Pure logic would indicate that compassion could only be stretched so far, but logic to Jesus had no place in the analysis so long as faith was available to carry the day. Second, this miracle is visible to all. Yet we learn in the following verses of this chapter of Mark that even when there were seven baskets of broken pieces left over the disciples did not get it. They should have seen the simple truth that nothing is too big for Jesus. Is it not our blessing that we, far distant from this miracle, have scripture to read so that we can understand?

Do we have loved ones who refuse to believe? Do we have family members who suffer because of physical or mental problems? Do we find ourselves saying that faith founded in prayer could not possibly turn the tide? In these cases, we should look to this passage and recognize that nothing is beyond the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Shannon Taylor

Wednesday, March 25

Mark 8:11 - 26

After Jesus fed the 4,000 with seven loaves of bread and some fishes, he was asked by some Pharisees for a sign, in order to test him. Jesus told them there would be no sign, “sighed deeply in his spirit” (KJV) and left by boat with some of his disciples.

He warned his disciples about the Pharisees, saying “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod.” The disciples took this literally and thought he was pointing out that they had not brought bread with them.

Jesus responds by asking them, in effect, are you completely clueless? He asks, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Have you no inkling yet? Do you still not understand? Are your minds closed?” I read somewhere that when the disciples thought that Jesus was talking about literal bread, and not about the ideas of the Pharisees, that this was “human nature at one of its silliest levels.” Although he had just fed 4,000 people, the disciples were worried that there was now not enough food to feed them.

I’d say that whether or not this is human nature at its silliest level, it is certainly human nature at its most human level. We worry. We worry about what we are going to eat, when will we get to our next destination, where the money is going to come from, where are we going to sleep. We are concerned with details and concerned with how the mechanics of the coming hour, day, and week are going to play out.

And the message of Jesus is worry not. Do not be afraid. It’s all in God’s hands. You are in the boat with me. I have just fed 4,000, and I can certainly feed the 12 of you. I can feed you with bread, but what is more, I am the Bread of Life. I will sustain you, in whatever situation you may find yourself. Trust in me. Do not be afraid. I am with you always.

Christel Devlin

Thursday, March 26

Mark 8:27 - 9:1

This was a difficult passage to do with a five-year-old. I really need to read the passages before letting Josephine write her name down.

Here is her take away:

“Don’t sell your souls to a unicorn.” Ok so I did a poor job trying to explain in five-year-old terms, but as Bill said that’s not a bad lesson. “Don’t sell your souls for anything because when you get to Heaven, you’ll have everything you need.” Quite right.

Our take away: Jesus shows (again) that he is a prophet when he tells his disciples about his impending death, how everyone will turn away from him, that he will rise again in three days’ time, and then rebukes Peter for his disbelief in a suffering Messiah. He then goes on to teach the disciples (and us) how to follow Him. Essentially to put Jesus and His words before everything else or “the Son of man will be ashamed.”

Josephine Chapman & her Mommy

Friday, March 27

Mark 9:2 - 13

The dictionary defines transfiguration as the act of becoming more beautiful or elevated. I have been transformed physically when I get my hair done, put on makeup, wear a new outfit. Is that transfiguration? No. I do not think so.

My house seems brighter and more inviting when it is clean and sparkling. Is that transfiguration? No. I do not think so.

My students' eyes shine and their faces light up when they learn something for the first time. Is that transfiguration? No. I do not think so, but it must be close.

When the church is full with the children letting themselves be known, when the sermon is inspiring, when the lines to communion are long—Is that transfiguration? I do not know, but the Holy Spirit is among us. Can't you feel it?

I do not really know what transfiguration is for us. I know that Jesus was transfigured—changed in appearance for sure. How else was he changed? I do not know.

His friends must have been changed forever. To experience with Jesus his transfiguration and then not be able to tell anyone must have been quite a challenge. At least Peter and James and John could talk about it amongst themselves.

So, maybe that is what we are called to do. Talk about the transfiguration with our friends. And then we can tell everyone! Isn't that what we are called to do at Easter?

Dear God,

Please let me be aware of the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . be aware of the change . . . be aware of the beauty . . . be aware of the light . . .

Amen.

Mary Lee Blue

Saturday, March 28

Mark 9:14 - 29

¹⁴ When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. ¹⁶ He asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” ¹⁷ Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; ¹⁸ and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.” ¹⁹ He answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.” ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²² It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” ²³ Jesus said to him, “If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” ²⁶ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. ²⁸ When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹ He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

for your personal reflection

Sunday, March 29 (Lent V)

John 8: 46 - 59

The Jews attack Jesus and their desire to kill Jesus forfeits their claim to be heirs of Abraham's faith and true children of God. They insist that God is their father. Their murderous intention and resistance to the truth misstate this and brand them as children of the devil. The fault is in them and not in Jesus. The Jews turn to insults and lies.

Jesus assures them that God is judge and will vindicate believers in Jesus with eternal life. Their refusal to believe he is the Messiah severs them from Abraham who in the Old Testament rejoiced in the hope of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus says Abraham saw it and was glad.

They question Jesus if he has seen Abraham to which he attests, "before Abraham was, I am." This claim to preexistence and oneness with God is a reference to the Israelite divine name for God spoken by God to Moses in Exodus 3:14. At this claim the Jews took up stones to throw at him but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

We have to be extremely careful in our time that we do not prejudge people whom we deem too outspoken. Our faith assures us of the second coming of Christ. We know not when, where or in what fashion he might appear. We are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. We need to be vigilant that we approach others and treat them as children of God and as potential messengers of God.

Jean Jacobs

Monday, March 30

Mark 9:30 - 41

SNAP SHOT ONE: A visual image of the twelve bickering disciples. The thought of a band of grown men arguing like school boys is laugh-out-loud funny. What could be more human than claiming that one is greater than the other? Jesus must have had his hands full corralling his assemblage of fully human followers. As a mother, I remember attempting to make order out of chaos and I only had two boys to contend with.

SNAP SHOT TWO: Jesus sitting quietly with a child on his lap. What a contrast of scenes: peace vs. chaos, tenderness vs. belligerence, compassion vs. egotism.

MEDITATION: Every soul entering into the after-life as a child. There would be no indication of who we were or what position we held. Generals stripped of their hard-fought medals, CEO's without coveted corner offices and golden parachutes, performers out of the spotlight, and floor cleaners on an equal footing with all. Imagine every being indistinguishable from every other as they enter this new order of existence. To enter as a child-spirit would be the great leveler.

Ginnie Singdablsen

Tuesday, March 31

Mark 9:42 - 50

These verses use the cutting off of hands or feet and the use of salt as metaphors for cutting out the sin from our lives and purifying our souls. To me, it means accepting our God and Savior, having love and kindness in our souls, accepting that sacrifices will have to be made to have everlasting life.

Prayer of Confession:

God of truth in all times and places, we so quickly assume that what we believe or what we discern is pleasing in your sight. We assume too quickly that you are on our side before asking ourselves with honesty whether we are living and witnessing as those on your side. We assume that only those who are our people are the ones you choose to share your saving graces and miracles. We know, but keep forgetting, that a stranger who is not “one of us” is still one of yours, part of the community of the faithful which you are knitting together. You have never asked too much of us—a cup of water, a loaf of bread, a prayer lifted up in faith, a miracle shared—but we tell ourselves we are overwhelmed and cannot do any more. Holy One, give us the courage, we pray, to change our lives that we might make a difference in the world.

Paula Lelansky

Wednesday, April 1

Mark 10:1 - 16

He left that place and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them.

² Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³ He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴ They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵ But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

¹⁰ Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

for your personal reflection

Thursday, April 2

Mark 10:17 - 31

As I read this passage, I am reminded that material wealth means nothing if we do not accept the Lord our God's teachings that such "wealth" means nothing if we do not have God's presence in our lives.

Realistically, material wealth does allow us to share that wealth with those in need, and if we remember that the spirit of giving and caring for our brothers and sisters is part of God's plan for us, then we are heeding the words of his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are enriched when we care for others in ways material wealth can never provide and if we remember this, we will be richly rewarded with the gift of eternal peace and happiness in God's kingdom.

Raymond O'Connor

Friday, April 3

Mark 10:32 - 45

³² They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; ³⁴ they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

for your personal reflection

Saturday, April 4

Mark 10:46 - 52

This is the second blind man healed story that I have read this week. The first was of the man blind from birth at the waters of Bethesda. Jesus healed that man with a mud and water mix. When the man washed his eyes he was healed and could see. This was on the Sabbath and it began the Pharisee's issue with Jesus in that he healed on the Sabbath, considered a no-work day.

The Mark 10: 46-52 was a more direct healing from the beginning. The man was begging by the road when he heard Jesus was coming. His faith was the major difference. It was based on a belief that Jesus could and would heal him. In this instance Jesus has no direct contact with the man. All he says is go, thy faith has healed thee.

I have much faith in Jesus. He healed my stroke 16 years ago and I see his work every day with each sunrise and sunset. He is truly my everlasting Lord and Savior.

Mike Jacobs

Palm Sunday, April 5

Luke 19:41 - 48

Jerusalem was and is important in our faith. It was important from the time of David as a center of civilization not just for the temple. Jesus is a change agent. He was a new relationship with God. The temple was the center of the establishment for the Jews. Jerusalem is at least 3000 years old. It is still a center faith, a center of three faith traditions. Change is difficult. Jesus is change. We struggle with what is new. How much do we press against it?

Why did Jesus have tears? We shed tears for loss of a loved one. Sports losses cause tears for some people. Celebrations too can lead to tears. Were Jesus' tears for joy or sorrow? Jesus knew the future. The city rulers, priests and temple scribes could not or did not want to see what was new. Jesus was new. He was an obstacle to them. We celebrate Palm Sunday with joy and a prelude to newness.

What can be new in our life of faith? What do we hold to and what do we discard? Joy and sadness are intertwined. Can we accept the good new and let go of that which holds us from it?

Tom Miller

Monday, April 6

Mark 11:12 - 25

¹² On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.

¹⁵ Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶ and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

¹⁸ And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

²⁰ In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” ²² Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. ²³ Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. ²⁴ So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

²⁵ “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

for your personal reflection

Tuesday, April 7

Mark 11:27 - 33

This vignette is a quandary for the Pharisees, if they say, Jesus's authority is from heaven, they acknowledge him as God's son, if they say from the World, they will upset John the Baptist's followers, so they say nothing. How often do we find ourselves in situations where saying nothing like the Pharisees seems to make the most sense?

For almost 20 years I have been a member of an Episcopal women's organization known as the SCHC (the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross). For many years, we felt it was best that we not discuss our organization and so we acted more like a secret society than an organization that welcomes all women that are deeply concerned about intercessory prayer, about the unity of the church, about the world and about peace.

Today, our focus has changed radically, we are an open organization, welcoming women to come to our retreat center for life affirming programs and retreats, to our chapter meetings and even just to meet together for a cup of coffee or tea to talk about our faith and concerns. We are over 600 strong with members throughout the USA, India, the UK and even Japan.

Yes, all of us, at one time or another have not spoken or as the Beatitudes say, "hidden our light under a basket." We, like the Pharisees, have kept quiet. What would have happened if they had said, "The authority to heal comes from God." This might be a very different world indeed. Taking a stand, saying what you believe, living your faith, all of these can make a difference.

Dear Lord,

Help me to know when I should speak and what I should say. Help me to show my faith not just with my lips but with my life. Help me to know what is good and what I should do. Help me as I walk the way of cross with you and help me to find peace in this world and the next.

Amen

Annette van Hilst

Wednesday, April 8

Mark 12:1 - 11

Then he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ²When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. ³But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. ⁵Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. ⁶He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Have you not read this scripture:

¹¹“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes?”

for your personal reflection

Maundy Thursday, April 9

Mark 14:12 - 25

On the day of Passover, celebrating the sacrificial lamb that saved the Israelites in Egypt from losing their first born, Jesus himself takes the first step toward being the sacrificial lamb himself, the one who will save us all. I find it difficult to realize what it was like for the disciples to hear Jesus' words. Their friend, teacher and leader was telling them that his death was imminent. He had earlier alluded to it, but now He was making it more definite. He tells them one of them will betray him. I think they would have been saddened, of course, but possibly frightened as well. Wondering how this would happen. Don't we often feel that way today about predictions? Severe weather, a diagnosis of a terminal disease, a threat of harm by someone, anything that is at the least unpleasant to consider.

But in Matthew's account of this event, Jesus also predicts his resurrection. So something wonderful can follow something terrible. Severe weather may be followed by many volunteers helping with clean up and other help, exemplified by Hurricane Katrina. When my first wife was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, we were devastated to hear a life expectancy of three years. But she lived ten, and said at one time, they were the best years of her life. And a threat of harm could lead to a meaningful relationship.

Easter follows Good Friday. Good may always follow the bad. God does not abandon us. This is important to remember when things look grim.

Bob Singdablsen

Good Friday, April 10

John 13:36 - 42

“Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going.” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”

Today is Good Friday, the day that Jesus was taken from us. But for Peter, Jesus was taken from him the day before. Even though he was one of the first and had been with Jesus for three years he was not quite ready to stand alone. Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times that night but assured him that later in his life he would be ready to follow in his footsteps.

Peter was used to having Jesus standing right next to him and giving him strength. He even was able to walk on water as long as he kept his gaze on him. How did he grow enough to heed a vision from God and return to Rome and certain death? First, he personally met the resurrected Christ. Later he was bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we remember the Good Friday events today, we also know that he will rise again. Pray that the risen Christ will be by our side and give the strength through the power of Holy Spirit to do what is right in our lives. Let our study of his words lead us in this task.

Alex Shaw

Saturday, April 11

Romans 8:1 - 11

“If God is with us, who can be against us.”

These words are taken from the latter half of chapter 8 in verse 31 of Paul's *Letters to the Romans*. This thought frames his conclusion with the preceding verses showing Paul's thinking, the logic exercise of a disciplined writer who is trying to find the words that will convince the Romans and himself that the road to life is through “death.” Paul appears to define death figuratively injecting words like *flesh*, *sin*, *carnal* and *the law*. All appear to be impediments to one's journey to find God, circumstances to be overcome. Even the law is questioned as the law in Paul's lexicon is the dictionary of wrongful deeds. The sinful, carnal desires of the flesh once overcome make the law obsolete. This might be Paul's definition of freedom, a liberation from both sin and the law. Paul's logic is pure geometry. But what is the equation? To Paul the calculus is Christ through Jesus where the algebra cancels out the desires of the body leaving only the Spirit, which to Paul is life in peace. This conclusion is what Paul defined not only for himself while facing death, but a legacy for those who follow and read his words.

Richard Casuccio

Easter, April 12

“Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia!” The day for which we have all longed. The Resurrection of Jesus that has changed everything, revealing that God is at work in our world and in our lives always bringing life and hope from death and despair. How hard that reality can be to see in the midst of so much turmoil and noise in our lives. We are so often assaulted on every side by so much gloom and doom. How sorely we need this potent reminder that at we are not abandoned to that gloom and doom, but the truth that at all times and in all places, no matter what it feels like, God is at work. As the collect reminds: “things which were cast down are being raised up, things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are being brought to their perfection.” Let yourself see and know this marvelous truth of God’s love and life. Let Jesus Easter in you as well.

Rev. Dr. George T. Schramm, Rector

Some helpful internet sites for reflection and meditation

A podcast: The Way of Love with Bishop Michael Curry

Apps: “Pray as you Go”, “Reimagining the Examen”

Dailey meditations from Fr. Richard Rohr:
meditations@cac.org

Morning and evening prayer: “Mission St. Clare”

