

GOSPEL BASED
DISCIPLESHIP
LENTEN REFLECTIONS
2022





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Lent 2022

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Our Vision

Trinity Church is a nurturing Christian community providing opportunities for worship, spiritual growth and commitment in a supportive and open atmosphere.

Our Mission

Explore Faith,
Embrace Community,
Expect to see a Difference, Expect to Make a Difference

Welcome to Gospel Based Discipleship

How To Use this Booklet

This booklet continues our Gospel Based Discipleship program. My continued prayer is that Gospel Based Discipleship will continue to keep us connected spiritually as Trinity Episcopal Church. It all began with the COVID-19 pandemic and yet it continues as a movement of spiritual formation. When we know everyone at Trinity is deeply engaging in the same Gospel passage we, even more than before, will be bound to one another in faith and love. May God continue to bless us and shine light in our darkness.

Gospel Based Discipleship

Q: What is Gospel Based Discipleship (GBD)?

A: It is a program/process whereby the entire community of Trinity Church has an intentional and supported way to consider the previous Sunday's Gospel reading throughout the following week, allowing the scripture to guide and shape our life together. It includes sermons/reflections/meditations, study and reflection questions, individually and in groups.

Q: Why Gospel Based Discipleship (GBD)?

A: COVID has challenged so many assumptions about the life we live and the way we live it. To be sure, we are all learning new duties and ways of being that will, in the end, strengthen and uphold us. In times such as these, the followers of Jesus are called to hear, once again, that no matter the storms and challenges of life, we have a hope that anchors us at the very core of our being. That hope is found in Jesus whose life and way we learn about in the Gospels. When we read the Gospels together we are strengthened in our understanding and in our connection to each other. Jesus' Good News is best understood in community, not isolation.

Q: Who is GBD for?

A: All members of Trinity Church, Adults, Youth, and Children (with their families). And anyone else who wants to join in.

Q: What is involved?

A: We are mailing every member of Trinity this booklet that contains the Gospel reading for each day of Advent, along with a reflection written by a member of our parish..

Q: What's different about this from what we already do at Trinity?

A: Each Sunday we hear a reading from one of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Gospel Based Discipleship is a process whereby that same reading will more intentionally continue to be shared in everything we do during the next week: team meetings, studies, Vestry meetings, etc., etc. As we go deeper into the Gospel reading we will learn more and more from the Spirit's guidance. We will also know that everyone in our church is focused on understanding, more deeply, the same passage of scripture.

How To Get Started with GBD

1. **Join in the LiveStream services on Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon** to hear one of Trinity's clergy give a sermon/reflection on the Gospel passage. The sermon will also be posted as a separate video on our YouTube Page on Monday morning and an audio version.
2. **On Wednesdays, at 12:15p we will share a video reflection** on the gospel passage from the previous week. This reflection will be from a member of Trinity's clergy or a lay member. During the seasons of Advent and Lent this reflection may not be on the gospel passage listed on that particular Wednesday but it is still a helpful part of the GBD process. This reflection will be emailed to every member, posted to our YouTube page and on other social media outlets.
3. Daily during Advent and Lent **take a moment to re-read the Gospel passage** and consider how you might be hearing it differently or in new ways. This may be part of a morning and evening routine.

4. **Each day, read the passage together with your family.** Children and Youth will always bring a new perspective.
5. **If you lead a group/team/study/program at Trinity please begin all of your meetings** by reading the Gospel of the week and asking the group to consider the questions provided in the front of the booklet. Look to see if any new meanings or perspectives emerge.

Simple Instructions

So here is a simple instruction on how to use this booklet.

Gospel Based Discipleship:

We invite you to read, learn, study and inwardly digest each week's Gospel through a number of vehicles provided at Trinity Church.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Basically, the process is this:

1. Partake in one of our Sunday worship services, hear the Gospel and the sermon/reflection.
2. Re-read the same Gospel each day of the coming week to get a "fresh" perspective and listen to anything new the Gospel might be saying
3. Engage with the mid-week reflection (released on Wednesdays at 12:15p) provided by a different clergy person or lay member. Consider the reflection questions printed below the individual Gospel reading and/or those below.
4. Read this Gospel in any meeting, study, class taking place at Trinity in the next week and consider the reflection questions (printed below) with your fellow Trinitarians.
5. Besides the questions listed below each reading, here is another way you might engage the reading. This might be particularly appropriate questions in community with others who you are meeting with, in your home, in a Trinity meeting and/or study.

Process/Reflection Questions (each day you engage the reading)

Begin with prayer.

1. Read the Gospel lesson for the day.
What word(s), idea(s) or sentence(s) stand out to you?
How is it different on another day or with other people?
2. Re-read the Gospel (maybe in another translation if available).
What is Jesus (the Gospel) saying to you?
3. Re-read the Gospel.
Where do you see Jesus' call for justice, mercy and love?
What is Jesus (the Gospel) calling you to do?
What is Jesus calling Trinity Church to do?
4. Close with prayer.

Remember, In GBD, there are no right or wrong answers. in GBD the engagement is with the Gospel, not with any leader or clergy person or with the search for correct answers.

Experienced leaders are not required, and leadership should rotate in groups. Groups and individuals using GBD regularly should expect to begin to see their call to mission differently.

Prayers To Be Used with GBD

God of peace, let us your people know, that at the heart of turbulence there is an inner calm that comes from faith in you. Keep us from being content with things as they are, that from this central peace there may come a creative compassion, a thirst for justice, and a willingness to give of ourselves in the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

— A New Zealand Prayer Book

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

— The Book of Common Prayer

O God, who has taught us that your Word is a lantern to our feet and a light to our path: Grant that as this community devoutly reads the Holy Scriptures, we may realize our Fellowship with one another in you, and may learn thereby to know you more fully, to love you more truly, and to follow more faithfully in the steps of your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and Holy Spirit, one God blessed for evermore. Amen.

— The Wolf Shall Dwell with The Lamb, by Eric H. F. Law

For Our Parish

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Before Meals

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the Morning

Jubilate Psalm 100

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands; *
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.
Know this: The Lord himself is God; *
he himself has made us, and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise; *
give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
For the Lord is good;
his mercy is everlasting; *
and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

At the Close of Day

O Gracious Light Phos hilaron
O gracious light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!
Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of Life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.

March 2, 2022 - Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

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

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Reflection:

This Ash Wednesday you may feel, as I do, that the experience of life with COVID has felt more like we have been living in a Lent that has lasted two years and not just 40 days. As we begin the Lenten journey we hear once again the daunting words from Genesis 3:19...Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. The dust being referred to comes from the ashes derived from the burned palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday.

Ashes are the residue of death. They are the ruins, the remains of something no longer alive, no longer with us.

Ashes are all that's left when a house burns down or when a body is cremated. And so it is fitting that we wear this sooty tattoo as we identify with Jesus and his journey toward death. A journey into, not around, suffering.

But here's a little irony. In the part of the Sermon on the Mount appointed for Ash Wednesday's liturgy, Jesus says that outward displays of piety are dangerous—they can lead us to be proud and self-congratulating. They are what hypocrites offer to God and to the world. So it's a little disconcerting to read this text as ashes are imposed noticeably on our foreheads, since Jesus urges us to be about the work of justice and prayer discreetly, secretly. We don't receive this sign of the cross as a symbol of our own righteousness. We receive the ashes because we've been asked to confront death—and the death-dealing ways of the world.

The black sooty cross that we wear on Ash Wednesday is ultimately a sign of love, for it is love alone that conquers death. Among the rubble and ruin of Wednesday's ashes is a black, organic substance that marks us as God's own beloved.

Let us enter on this Lenten journey as a time for deepening our awareness of God's unconditional love for us, and for responding with greater gratitude. Whatever we take on during Lent is not about earning God's love or a program of self-improvement. Our practices should arise out of our sense of God's never-failing love for us and lead us to deepening expressions of gratitude which brings healing and life in all its abundance even in the midst of challenges and pain.

Remember that you are dust, and to dust we shall all return...reminds us that the physical realities in which we invest so much of our energy will crumble, but the life God has called into being in each of us continues to shine in the light of God's love and grace. And among the rubble and ruin of our own lives, we give thanks that we have been found and saved by a love that confronts and conquers death, and the death-dealing ways of the world, and the death-dealing ways in us.

The Rev. Dennis Fotinos

March 3, 2022, Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Luke 9:18-25

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"

Reflection:

These passages reveal the struggle we have when there are good and bad choices. When I get off from work I want to sit on my couch, watch TV and not pay attention to anything. However, I'm a mother to four young children and the right choice is to play outside, go to the library, read books, engage in conversation and foster my children to be productive members of society. When a fight breaks out between my boys, I want to yell and point out all they did wrong. The right choice is to actively listen, set good boundaries, change the focus to what they could have done differently, and make them do chores. Psalm 1 describes how these choices will bring "trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season." Hopefully, the good choices I make will result in children who will grow into delicious honey crisp apples, because no one wants to eat a crab apple.

Georgiana Hogan

March 4, 2022, Friday after Ash Wednesday

Matthew 9:10-17

As Jesus sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

Reflection:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." The sick people Jesus was talking about weren't only those with leprosy and other physical illnesses. Jesus was talking about the sickness of sin. The Pharisees went into a house to have dinner and saw Jesus sitting with tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees were surprised and asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus heard the question and answered: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

Who among us is not a sinner? Who among us doesn't need healing? That to me is one of the wonderful things about church: a place where, by the very act of walking in the door, everyone declares—to themselves, to the church community, to the world—"I am here, I'm a sinner, I need healing." Jesus heals bodies, hearts, minds, spirits. He brings healing to families, and to families of nations. Jesus passes that gift of healing to, and through, us:

"Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." Matthew 10:1.

"And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases." Luke 9:1.

"For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

We are Jesus's present-day disciples. If we have faith in Jesus and faith in the resurrection, we have the requisite faith in the power Jesus gave us to heal. We don't need to go to med school or seminary to be healers. We only have to believe in Jesus, in his gift of healing to, and through, us. As the Nike swoosh ad says: Just Do It.

Lee Stockdale

March 5, 2022, Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Luke 5:27-32

After healing the paralyzed man, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Reflection:

In the reading: Luke 5:27-32, the Pharisees ask why Jesus would help the tax collector, Levi – as if this was a sin in itself, to help and befriend someone who maybe isn't the nicest person. In fact, likely the tax collector is a greedy, selfish and an arrogant jerk. Or is he?

The people in our world are so quick to judge. As I walk through school or through our city streets, following social media and watching TV, judgement comes fast and furious. It seems judging others is almost instant and instinctual behavior. So thinking about Levi, the unavoidable tax collector, rather than judge him, I wonder about him. Who raised Levi? What kind of childhood did he experience? Does he have a family to feed when his job is done at the end of each day? These are questions judgment does not allow for.

Early in the reading, Jesus heals a paralyzed man. We do not get details about this man, so in short, all we know is he was disabled and ultimately healed. Nothing to judge there, just Jesus helping those in need, right? What if the reading offered details such as: Jesus healed a mentally ill, opioid addicted, paralyzed man? What if the man was confined to a chair because he walked into 5 o'clock traffic without looking both ways?

The difference between the tax collector and the paralyzed man is not for any of us to judge. And why Jesus helped them both without regard is not for the Pharisees and other scribes to complain about. Jesus helped them both, the sick and the sinner. Jesus is the ultimate healer and son of God.

Kindness in this day and age is always appreciated! And kindness can brighten someone's day more than we may ever know. The people who are seen as evil, bad, sick, mentally ill, addicted, greedy, all need help. With every effort of kindness, without judgment, we can make the world a considerably better place, just by being kind, like Jesus.

This reading made me think of what I can do to help others and try not to judge the people around me. Maybe they need a shoulder to lean on or some guidance to steer them in a better direction. We have all had someone in our life that made things easier. I want to be that kind of person. I want to be the shoulder, the guide, the healer for someone. Checking judgment at the door is the first step to walking the path of Jesus.

Siena Gentry

Freshman, Asheville High School

March 6, 2022, First Sunday in Lent

Luke 4:1-13

After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please."

If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'

and

'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Reflection:

After Jesus was baptized and filled by the Holy Spirit he was led into the wilderness. What led Jesus to go into the desert for a 40-day retreat after his baptism? Maybe the same reason we go on retreat – to find out who we are, where we are going, and how to get there. Led by the Spirit, Jesus began his ministry by spending his first 40 days on a “silent retreat” where he could grow close to God and receive God's power, wisdom, and presence.

In the wilderness Jesus confronts the devil. The devil is the first one to question whether Jesus was truly the Son of God and tempts Jesus to abandon his allegiance to God. First, he tempts Jesus to use his power to turn stones into bread to satisfy his physical hunger. Second, he promises Jesus would receive all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him. Finally, the devil tempts Jesus to test God's promise of protection by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. In each case Jesus resists the temptation by using words from scripture. Jesus was fully prepared to resist evil.

Returning to his hometown of Nazareth, he reads from Isaiah in the synagogue, taking for himself the words of the scripture and announcing with clarity of purpose:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” Now knowing who he is and what his purpose is, Jesus boldly states: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This will be Jesus' ministry – to confront evil in the world and heal the wounds caused by it. Jesus uses his power to benefit the most vulnerable. As imitators and followers of Jesus, shouldn't we resist and confront evil and heal the wounds it has caused, too?

This Lent calls us to a 40-day retreat to listen anew to Jesus' invitation to bring Gospel change to the times in which we live. We walk with Jesus as our guide as we are tempted and tested as we live our lives. In any form of test or temptation, we are not alone. God is with us. In the prayer he gave us, Jesus exhorts us to pray: “Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.” Let us use Lent as a time to fight against the evil within us and around us by using a different kind of power. It's an inner power that brings beauty, caring and compassion with it. Could we reveal God's love in our daily lives with those around us by opposing injustice, violence, racism, hatred, and greed, and helping to create a new world?

Let us stand with Jesus and boldly say: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news.”

Barbara Matthews

March 7, 2022, Monday Lent 1

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared

for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Reflection:

Matthew 25:31-46 is one of my very favorite passages in the Bible. I love the imagery of the people of God seeing a sick person sick or a stranger or someone in prison and helping that person. I love the notion that it is Jesus who we are helping when we help the hungry or the sick or the stranger or the prisoner. Upon reading this lesson today the first thing I was reminded of is a beautiful (and sadly under-performed) American Christmas carol written in 1948 by Alfred Burt called, "Christ in the Stranger's Guise." In this carol Alfred Burt sets an Old English Rune of Hospitality to hauntingly beautiful music. The lyrics are:

*I met a stranger yest-er'en. I put food in the eating place,
drink in the drinking place, music in the listening place,
And in the name of the Triune, He blessed myself and my house.
My cattle and my loved ones. And the lark sang in His song:
Often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.
Often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.*

This carol sums up the meaning of the passage in Matthew, and of what is expected of the people of God in caring for their neighbor...every neighbor, including the one who is a stranger, sick, hungry, or in prison. The combination of reading this lesson and going back and listening to an a capella performance of Christ in the Stranger's Guise has reminded me to look for the face of Jesus in every person I meet and to look for the ways I can care for all of His sheep, including the least of these.

Here is a link to a performance of Alfred Burt's Christ in the Stranger's Guise: <https://youtu.be/cRg62TF0eck>

Elizabeth Boulter

March 8, 2022, Tuesday Lent 1

Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus said, "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Reflection:

Do you remember the first prayer that you learned as a child?

The first prayer that I learned was “God is Great, God is Good, Now I thank him, for my food.” I can, or think that I can, remember being in my high chair at the table with my parents, repeating at first, and then saying this prayer before each meal.

The second prayer that I learned was “Now I lay me down to sleep, Bless the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I ask the Lord my soul to take.”

Are these part of your childhood memories?

And then I learned the Lord’s Prayer – Jesus’ admonition spoken with caution and love to the multitudes and to his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount, that we honor his Father, and believe in God’s will and God’s love, and seek forgiveness for our trespasses and extend forgiveness to others, and finally ask for guidance as we grow in God’s favor and turn away from temptation, trouble and evil.

Every Sunday I think about our congregation as we say this prayer as a community during the Eucharist, “as our Savior Christ hath taught us.”

We at Trinity are on our knees, and I imagine that each of us in some way brings our own concerns and the concerns of others to God as we feel the power of this prayer in unison and find not only words of instruction but words of comfort. The stronger the voice, the more open our hearts.

I believe that this prayer can, as we age, become routine, a memorized Bible verse said without being present in the words. When I say it I can occasionally “space out.” My mind wanders; I skip a beat. But one of the most fascinating strengths of this prayer is that it stays with you. My mother-in-law had a form of severe dementia. She did not know our names, or where she was but if someone started “Our Father, who art in heaven” for her, she said the rest of the prayer.

I will never forget that – the memory bank is practically empty, but look at what remains.

Jennine Hough

March 9, 2022, Wednesday Lent 1

Luke 11:29-32

When the crowds were increasing, Jesus began to say, “This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!”

Reflection:

“THIS GENERATION IS AN EVIL GENERATION...!”

There now...did that get your attention? I think it did. If you began reading the 11th chapter of Luke’s gospel at its beginning, you have nicely received our beloved “Lord’s Prayer,” and you have heard our Lord’s stirring comments on asking, searching, and knocking and you have heard his reasoned discussion on Beelzebub and the behavior of evil spirits. It is clear, however, that by the time we get to verse 29 he was becoming somewhat frustrated, even as “the crowds were increasing.” And so? Well, now comes that “attention getting” line about the “evil generation” which seems to demand some kind of response. (I well remember hearing that passage in my teens, while seated comfortably in my family’s affluent suburban parish. “What?...Evil?...Who, me?...Who us?”)

I suppose one of the more awkward aspects of religion per se ...with its diversity of ever changing popular theologies...is that it is so hard to speak directly and honestly...to repeat so many of those strong spiritual truths and directives that Jesus ripped off... because they so often seem to muddy the waters of the personal cultures that we may be trying to protect. Jonah and the queen of the South (Sheba) had been Divinely presented to Luke’s hardheaded ancestors a long, long time before but, well, the people of Nineveh finally got it. But it took a while and Sheba’s witness was totally inappropriate; she was not a Hebrew.

Richard Rohr, in his book "Falling Upward," puts it like this:

"I find that much of the spiritual and pastoral work of churches is often ineffective at the levels of real transformation and calls forth immense passivity and even many passive-aggressive responses. As a preacher, I find that I am forced to dumb down the material in order to interest a Sunday crowd that does not expect or even want any real challenge; nor does it exhibit much spiritual or intellectual curiosity. 'Just repeat what I expect to hear, Father, and maybe a joke or two!'"

Now, to that I will add a loud personal "ouch!" I think Father Rohr is a bit frustrated himself, but I do wonder of that wasn't the kind of thing Jesus may have been thinking when he labeled a whole generation as "evil." After all, he came preaching peace and liberty and justice and love to the "increasing crowds" and, more often than not, they just didn't get it. They just didn't understand that a relationship with God, as we know him in Jesus Christ, might often take a readjustment of our popular value systems. We want it all to be nice, I think, and that's understandable considering the confusion of the present time, but we also have to work at it.... And no, not salvation. Our Lord and Savior has already taken care of that. No, we need to look more deeply into ourselves and the world we live in and then be more determined than ever to make a Christ centered difference in the world that so badly needs our Lord's "peace and justice and liberty and love." That is our mission, yours and mine...that is living into our faith...not only in Lent but every day of our lives.

So then, how are we doing you and I? How are we doing?

*"Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
or we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial." (Luke 11:2b-4)*

AMEN

The Rev. Peter Hawes

March 10, 2022, Thursday Lent 1

Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

Reflection:

The Golden Rule

C.S. Lewis, talking about social morality in Mere Christianity, refers to Matthew 7:7-12 as "a summing up of what everyone...[has] always known to be right." It is the principle guideline by which Christian children are brought up and Christian adults strive to live by. It is very simple really, or is it? Let's examine this principle in our everyday lives.

Have you ever wanted something so badly that it hurt? You were so intent on asking for receiving this gift or having something occur, that you totally overlooked other possibilities? Then, when the request seemed to be unheard, you set it aside only to realize, years later, that the request was being answered but in a quite different and better way? Or perhaps you have had the privilege of helping someone who was stuck in career which made them miserable, depressed, afraid to seek. With the needed encouragement that person was able to find the right career fit and was very fulfilled by it. Having overcome the barriers to seeking led to satisfaction. Lastly, following a similar thought, it could be that we want something so much that we are knocking on the wrong door. We need to be still and wait. It may be quite another door or way that is better for you that will be opened to you.

Our daily lives are filled with little acts of kindness, or demonstrations of the Golden Rule, if we only take time to

recognize them. The Asheville area especially seems to be full of people who practice the Golden Rule. I noticed this immediately when I moved here from a large metropolitan area where road rage and “me only” thinking tend to be the rule. Some examples, mostly car related, I have experienced here are: backing my car out of the post office in the little town southwest of here, where I worked and lived for 2 years, in rush hour traffic onto the single lane road behind me. Traffic stopped and let me out! Another big example was the unknown person who turned in my purse to the office of the only place to grocery shop after 9 pm. It was raining and in my rush I’d left the purse in the cart. Everything was in the purse when I returned! Recent examples of the Golden Rule in my life are: the young man who stopped his car in another parking lot to help me load heavy groceries; the many drivers who stop in heavy traffic to let me enter the line; the cleaners’ clerk who came rushing out to bring one of the garments I’d forgotten; the man who stopped on Rte.26 in pouring rain to repair a broken windshield wiper. (He didn’t want me to wait for AAA and was only willing to take “thank you” in payment). He went away soaking wet. Most recently, while I’ve recovered from surgery, Trinitarians have brought flowers from the altar, food, sent cards and messages, visited, and offered rides to bellringers’ rehearsals. What blessings these have been!

How is your life blessed with the kindnesses of the Golden Rule? How do you bless others with the kindnesses of the Golden Rule? Here is the difficult question I struggle with almost daily. What do you do when you see a homeless person standing with the ubiquitous cardboard sign at an intersection? Do you come back with a bag of food? Do you give cash knowing it may be spent on drugs? Do you avert your eyes knowing there is community help if they will just seek it out? What do you do?

Corkie Morrill

March 11, 2022, Friday Lent 1

Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said, “I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Reflection:

Anger seems to be the theme of the decade. I often feel angry with people, institutions, and groups in our society whose values and ideas differ greatly from mine. It is actually very easy to live in anger these days – there are forces in the world that seem to revel in keeping us mad: mad at each other, mad at the past, mad at our future, just mad at everything and everyone. Anger eats away at our souls, keeping us from being able to appreciate the beauty of God’s creation and moving our focus away from doing good works and finding peace in each day.

I get it, but still anger persists. Is there a place for anger, when it moves a Christian to action? Yes, there must be. This is where I struggle. Without some anger I feel complacent. But Matthew 5: 23-24, regarding anger against a brother or sister is pretty clear. Jesus says our anger has no place in communion with the Father. “Leave your gift at the altar,” he says, and reconcile before offering your gift. Sure, there are ramifications if we don’t leave our anger before coming to God but the most significant is the chasm it creates between us and God. We are unable to commune with God when the strong grip of anger and hate holds us captive. If we can leave our anger and bring only our purest self to the table, then in God’s infinite love we are held close.

Jennifer Pearson

March 12, 2022, Saturday Lent 1

Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Reflection:

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Whenever I come across this passage, my first inclination is to think of the Golden Rule. Treat others as you would like to be treated. With that said, Jesus, takes it a step further and says we should love even those who do not love us. He is challenging us to get uncomfortable, as he says we as Jews should love even the tax collectors and the Gentiles. God doesn't choose who he gives sunlight to. He gives it to everyone, good or bad, because if he didn't, people would suffer. Therefore, we should strive to be perfect - not literally, but we should make every effort to do good things every day for our fellow man, regardless of our feelings towards them. This is a tall task, particularly in today's toxic media and instant gratification situations(s). We spend far too much time glancing at headlines, rather than reading the entire article. We are quick to judge based on what we see on Facebook and Instagram. Because of this, we are caught up in the cocoon of self-gratification rather than getting uncomfortable and working on figuring out and challenging ourselves to love even those who don't love us. Think about that the next time you're on the phone with a back-order situation, can't get in to a restaurant you want to go to, have to wear a mask on an airplane. People that are on the other end are only doing their jobs. Rather than treating them with disdain, step back, count to ten, and think to yourself that you're going to love these people, not dislike them. Finally, most of what we get worked up about against our fellow man, are really First World problems, right? Take that negative energy and channel it too good energy. Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

Mark Whitney

March 13, 2022, Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:31-35

Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Reflection:

At some point in these pandemic times I found myself perusing Albert Camus' The Plague. Wouldn't you know it, the range of responses we have seen in our own plague have been quite similar to those described in the novel. Some folks retreat into cowardice. Some folks quietly adjust to life under the restrictions. Some folks deny or minimize the threat. Some folks profit massively, financially and otherwise, off the fear and scarcity. Some become heroes, at great personal cost. Some utterly come apart due to their losses and are never the same. People of all sorts are sickened and die. People of all sorts survive and go about their lives when the Plague finally recedes.

I have often been taught that Jesus' coming — into the world, into a community, into my heart — changes everything. And yet, here in Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem, I see how much things remained exactly as they had always been. Jerusalem will again kill the prophet. The religious leaders, just as chronicled throughout Prophets, will miss the

point and take advantage of the people. The people, echoing the disgruntled Israelites in the wilderness, will turn and call for Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples, even knowing Jesus' most intimate care, will abandon Him. Jesus will die. A group of women will stand vigil and seek to prepare His body for burial. A member of the council will ensure Jesus is buried with dignity.

When I see humanity and myself making the same grievous mistakes over and over, when I see us scattered by trials that could draw us together, I often become discouraged, outraged, despondent. "If we could just learn the lessons," I think, "things really could be better this time." But in so many ways we don't learn. We don't change, at least not collectively or consistently. We're heroes one moment and cowards the next. And who can tell which way any of us will go at a given time? In spite of our best intentions, we are blown about by our own traumas, the people and cultures around us, and a whole mess of conflicting desires and motives.

What I am trying to absorb into my marrow is that God is not the least bit surprised by this. Grieved, yes, and even filled with righteous anger, but not surprised. Jesus' coming was not the fulfillment of God threatening "don't make me come down there and straighten you out once and for all!" Jesus knew what was going to happen – He makes this abundantly clear. The mystery is that we humans largely stay the same, but somehow we are not forsaken. God still comes.

Erin Collins

March 14, 2022, Monday Lent 2

Luke 6:27-38

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

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

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

Reflection:

I was searching for spaghetti sauce on the shelf at Whole Foods when I saw them coming. A young man and woman, holding the hand of a boy who looked to be five and carrying another boy who looked to be about 15 months old. No one was wearing a mask.

Now, I'm vaccinated and boosted, as they say, and I haven't had COVID. But I'm also on the far side of 60, have had pneumonia twice, and take medicine for an autoimmune disease.

I'm also very careful about wearing a mask outside my home. So when I saw the little group my first thought was, "How dare these people not wear masks inside a crowded store?" Then I thought, "What about the children – shouldn't they at least be masked?" And finally, the worst thought, "Are these parents trying to make a political point?"

"Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned," Jesus says. When I think about this experience I realize I didn't really know what was going on with the parents. Maybe they were vaccinated but somehow didn't think the kids could get COVID. Maybe they had gone to see grandparents, decided to run by the store to get snacks for the ride home, and innocently forgotten to grab everyone's masks. I wasn't the only person staring at them, and they looked a little frightened.

But, on the other hand, was I so awful to think what I was thinking? I was a little frightened too. As a single person whose only child lives 6 hours away I would be in a lot of difficulty if I got a breakthrough infection. I believe, though, that Jesus knows that fear is what drives us to judge others. He understands that we worry about

what might happen if we do good to those who hate us. What if they continue hating anyway or act in a harmful way? He knows we fear that we might be seen as pushovers or easy marks.

This understanding is why, after teaching us at length that we should do good to others, Jesus also encourages us. Follow his teachings and we will “become the children of the Most High,” he says. And in the most visual metaphor possible, he promises that “[A] good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap,” he says, “for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” In other words, generosity begets generosity.

My promise back to him is that I will strive to re-direct my thoughts and react in a generous way to others, even in difficult circumstances. The next time I encounter a version of the young family, in whatever form, I will smile at them and think “God is protecting me – and these people are doing the best they can.”

Graeme Browning

March 15, 2022, Tuesday Lent 2

Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Reflection:

In Jesus’ day, the leaders of the church were teaching people the laws and examples of Moses and verbally exalting God, but these preachers did not practice what they preached. These church leaders treated Herod as a god on Earth and believed that their position in the church automatically made them more important people in God’s eyes than ordinary folks, because Herod looked favorably upon them. They put on airs of elitism in their dress and their actions in direct contrast to the humble teachings of Prophets. Jesus called them out, saying that they didn’t deserve the title of Rabbi when they disregarded the lessons they were preaching about. To be called “Rabbi,” humility and servitude based in love must be their way of life. All of God’s children should be looked upon equally as brothers, and if a burden lands on the shoulders of any one person, all of his brothers should be ready and willing to help carry the load. Those who look the other way, believing it’s someone else’s problem, do not earn the love of God and will not be treated with love as a brother. They will be destined to walk alone in the desert.

So many people are persecuted and left to carry a heavy burden these days. We, as their brothers in Christ, must help to bear their loads. An important part of choosing Trinity as my church home is the programming, from helping to fund groups that assist those in need, to feeding the homeless and attending to many of their needs, to providing shelter for women in need, to mission trips that educate children of the needs that exist, and so much more. These downtrodden folks have a heavy burden, and I’m so thankful for the humility and service of my fellow parishioners and their willingness and desire to help out. While many churches operate like Trinity with a mission of servitude to allow equality for all, there still exist churches similar to those to which Jesus refers. We read of preachers who teach the Bible stories but twist words to serve their own agendas. Some hoard money and live extravagantly. Some attempt to define love in a way that goes against the teachings of the prophets. These self-serving preachers mimic the church leaders of Jesus’ time.

Elitism is a horrible way to live one’s life. Those who constantly exalt themselves, believing that they are better than others, often walk alone in sorrow, carrying their own burdens. Many people speak of these hypocrites with disdain and scorn, while those who follow the laws of Moses are exalted and praised. One can preach love without practicing it. Some can explain love pretty well, but the true lesson in love comes from the life of the Messiah, whose example teaches us how to be: always ready to serve those in need by helping to carry their burdens, to the point of crucifixion.

Art Garst

March 16, 2022, Wednesday, Lent 2

Matthew 20:17-28

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised."

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Reflection:

OUR HIGH CALLING TO DOWNWARD MOBILITY

In the brief verses of today's reading, Jesus sums up one of the dilemmas of the Christian life: the tension between the world's notion that our worth is measured by what we can achieve and get from life by climbing the ladders of success, and Jesus' teaching that our highest calling and deepest joy is found by what we give trekking along the lower pathways of humble service.

This is no easy practice. Never has been. It certainly wasn't for Jesus' disciples. He tells them that he is to be arrested, condemned to death, mocked, scourged and crucified. And what is the response from his faithful followers? Silence. They don't say anything. Not a peep of sympathy, not a prayer for their friend, not even a "Sorry you're going through a tough time." No, they huddle up to consider who will be promoted and be in charge and envision the line of succession.

"This kind of behaving will not be so among you," he says. "The greatest among my followers must be your servant, and the first must be servant to the servants."

In other words, they were thinking with the mind of the world rather than the mind of God. They assumed what had come naturally since the beginning, that the norms and standards of the world were the only way to assess life.

To be clear, ambition in and of itself is morally neutral, it's not right or wrong. We have to ask, what is its trajectory? How do we plan to use it?

There is nothing wrong with bettering ourselves and our plight. However, if we find ourselves in an uncontrolled drive for personal upward mobility, in which making it to the top becomes an end in itself, then we stand a good chance of getting spiritually lost along our climb. There is a profound difference between this false ambition that feeds on greed for personal power to the exclusion of the greater good and larger ideal, and the true ambition that holds at its heart a holy longing for the divine good.

Jesus says this truer longing is founded on the principles of giving, even emptying ourselves by serving others, especially the weak, the feeble and those who cannot help themselves.

We have found, and inevitably may find, ourselves drifting along the well-worn ways of worldly norms. We are human after all. But we are ever mindful of, and called to, walking the Jesus way of love and compassion, spending ourselves, our souls and bodies as living sacrifices for the Cause of Christ.

This servant life to which we are called may find expression in prayer, a simple gesture of a smile or a phone call, or an act of unexpected kindness. Kindness matters.

These actions and gestures of servant ministry are the very moments when we are most united to the Living God. Be they great or small, when we are in solidarity with humanity in the role of Christ's servant, we are giving the very best of who we are as fellow children of God. We are most one with God when we are serving our neighbor, another

human being.

During Lent 2022, may we venture down the road less traveled of humble service and loving kindness, in Christ's Name, not counting the cost. Our expressions of revolutionary love will join ranks with all those who have gone before. Simple acts of loving service always have, and always will, aid in the transformation of the world.

Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew this truth and shared these thoughts among his last while awaiting execution in a Nazi prison: "The Church is the Body of Christ only when it exists for others – not dominating, but helping and serving. I must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others."

The Rev. Scott Oxford

March 17, 2022, Thursday, Lent 2

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house~ for I have five brothers~ that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Reflection:

After seeing the assigned Lenten readings, a fellow parishioner said to me, "You have a hard one."

I immediately read three versions, and I believe him. Perhaps you will be, as I was, tempted to seek out a Biblical scholar, but after a morning quiet time I decided to "wing it." Hope your analysis will do that too (and tell me what you think).

These words of Luke are not those of a God I know. Then why is Jesus quoted thus?

1. Maybe we need to be awakened, to be "all shook up."
2. Perhaps the writer thought it would be good sermon material for Every Member Canvas.
3. Because some verses demonstrate that each of us need more proof in our struggle for our faith. "Let Lazarus come back to help them."
4. Could it be that Jesus was now feeling more encouraged by the increasing numbers of his followers and could broaden his message? "Incline your ear. . ."
5. We all know that Jesus never excluded. Then where were the people of other faiths. (i.e. Sufis, Hindus, Jewish prophets) in this parable? How many paths are there to God?
6. Think about whether our personal use of money equates to spiritual blindness. Were the passersby unseeing to Lazarus' obvious needs? What about Asheville's homeless population?
7. And what do these verses say about a second chance?

Conclusion: One premise is obvious: our Lord's purposes are larger than we can comprehend. So, in the words of Richard Rohr, "The light of understanding of this passage now dawns; thankfulness for the conversation it provides between you and God."

Grace Pless

March 18, 2022, Friday, Lent 2

Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus said, "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

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

"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

Reflection:

Did you ever let someone down? Maybe you remember disappointing your spouse, an employer, or a friend. Whether you were in over your head or just dropped the ball, expectations were not met. Chances are you were chastised, reprimanded, or at a minimum, burdened with a guilty conscience for not doing what you promised. Hopefully, you were given a second chance and performed better the next time around.

What a burden God has in being let down on a daily basis. Like the vineyard owner, God gives us everything we need in life to succeed, yet we instead follow our earthly desires, forgetting payment for the fruit we bear. In our case, payment comes in the form of the Golden Rule and forgiving others like he forgives us. The only difference between us and the evil tenants are at least we are not purposefully (I think) ignoring our obligations. No one wakes up and declares, "Guess I'll put one over on God again today!" But I know that I'm guilty of starting my day without a plan for how I can improve my actions and do better following the way Jesus has shown us.

And yet, we wake up the next day and there is the vineyard and the press – everything we need to produce the fruits of the kingdom.

Prayer: Dear Lord, grant me strength to follow through on my promises to you and others. And when I fail, give me grace to ask for forgiveness and to try tomorrow with purpose.

Lang Hornthal

March 19, 2022, Saturday, Lent 2

Luke 2:41-52

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Reflection:

Every parent's worst parenting moment is when their child is lost!

I will never forget the anxious minutes when my three-year old did not return from the annual Easter egg hunt the town of Vestal, New York, held on the high school football field.

He was with his sister and another child and two returned with their Easter baskets filled with eggs. "Where is Eddie," I anxiously asked. His sister, age 5, replied "I couldn't find him!"

My heart pounding, I searched an empty football field. This was before there were cell phones. With my daughter crying hysterically, I went to the car to find my son calmly sitting in the back seat. He had the common sense to find the car. Someone had opened the door for him to get in. His only concern was that "the big kids" took all the eggs!

As one can imagine, the passage in Luke with Jesus's parents frantically searching for him resonated with me in a personal way. It is interesting that this is the only one of the four Gospels relating the story of Jesus as a 12-year-old in the Temple. In Luke's writings, however, we find the most complete account of Jesus's birth as well as Mary and Joseph's "performing everything according to the law of the land," which refers to the purification rites at the Temple when Jesus is 8 days old. This is when Simeon proclaims to Mary and Joseph that he can now depart in peace having had the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the "Lord's Christ." (Verses 22-36)

One needs to go back to Luke, Chapter 1:26-46 I, in which Mary is told by the angel Gabriel that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the son of God."

In the ensuing twelve years one wonders if Mary had become preoccupied with parenting other children (there are references to Jesus having siblings) so that she had somehow forgotten the early revelation of her first-born, Jesus, being "Holy - the son of God"? Mary and Joseph's astonishment when they witness his interaction with the teachers did not allow Jesus to get off with no parental discipline, as mentioned in the verse "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them." However, we are left with Mary "treasuring these things in her heart." We ponder the ways the Holy Spirit comes into our own lives.

Polly Feitzinger

March 20, 2022, Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them-do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Reflection:

In today's Gospel, I found myself focused on this second paragraph. "Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" I may not be a Bible scholar, but I do try to garden.

At this time of year, like a bad habit, I rally my spirits to once again try to bring seeds to life, raising my own tomatoes, poblanos, carrots and herbs. I give the greenhouse a good scrub, fine tune the heating system to resemble springtime nights at 50-55 degrees and formulate a schedule for fine misting of each little dirt pocket of hope.

My greatest weakness as a gardener is that I get distracted, by life or work or obligations. The seedlings wilt when the greenhouse temperature soars on a sunny day, or I forget that misting must occur twice a day. My second weakness is that I have trouble pulling out or cutting anything in the outside garden that looks intentional—if the leaves are even remotely organized and there's the probability of growing into something wonderful. As my buddy James, the Smithsonian's horticulturist taught me, a weed is just something that is growing in the wrong place.

I also realize I have a bit of a black thumb, but I also know that there is a cure — a credit card. I used this tactic to replace 2021's pathetic and mildewy tomato plants, and in 2022 this cure is being called upon to till up a wildflower field overcome by wild roses rather than cosmos and anemones whose seeds I carefully spread on top of the snow, to melt into the earth and become a gorgeous stretch of color.

Of course, gardening isn't what this Lenten reading is about at all, no matter the reference to loosening and feeding the earth to encourage healthy, productive growth.

Instead, Jesus cautions us to not think of ourselves as blessed or lucky, and conversely believe that those who suffer tragedies must have done something wrong. Each of us—no matter how weak our stem, how unproductive our fruit, how broken or unworthy we are—has Jesus's love.

Jesus asks only that we repent and that we also feed and nurture those in need. By doing so, we are ready—ready for what this season brings.

Carole Hedden

March 21, 2022, Monday, Lent 3

Luke 4:23-30

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Reflection:

I'm grateful for the opportunity to reflect on Luke's gospel concerning the ministry of Jesus just as he was beginning to preach and teach in the towns and villages of Galilee. It is especially fascinating to learn of his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, where he grew up.

Jesus was about 30 years old when he was baptized in the river Jordan, following which time he spent 40 days in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. After this trial period, and after becoming filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus began teaching and preaching in the synagogues in Galilee. Everyone praised him for his new ministry.

Eventually, his ministry took him to Nazareth, where he spent his youth, and to the synagogue there. No doubt he was looking forward to appearing before family and friends, although it was said that a visiting teacher or speaker never knew what type audience they might encounter. Some congregations would come to learn more about their Jewish religious laws and teachings; some would attend out of curiosity, depending on who the speaker happened to be. The group of locals that came that day was a skeptical crowd, there mainly to size up Jesus, a local boy, and to witness the miracles they had heard about Jesus performing in Capernaum. (Note: there is some question if Jesus had already been to Capernaum before Nazareth. Luke apparently had his reasons for the chronology of events.)

Instead of miracles that day, however Jesus began by reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah which declared "Today this scripture is fulfilled," i.e. that Jesus comes as the anointed one. At first, all in attendance spoke well of Jesus (isn't that Joseph's son?) because his words were so gracious and spoken with authority. But then, after reminding the people that "no prophet is accepted in his hometown," Jesus proceeds to relate the story from Elijah's time about non-Israelites (that is, Gentiles) receiving God's blessings. This story angered the people in the synagogue so much that they "got up, drove him out of town, and took him to the brow of a hill in order to throw him off." However, Jesus "passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

The main message I glean from Luke's passages is to see vividly that Jesus intended to include everyone in his ministry, not just the Jewish or "established" believers. This is one of the central themes of the Christian religion and why, I believe, it has endured from the early days of Jesus' ministry in the land of Israel.

Tom Dowden

March 22, 2022, Tuesday, Lent 2

Matthew 18:21–35

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Reflection:

This scripture begins with Peter asking Jesus how often he must forgive someone. Peter feels he is being magnanimous when he suggests "seven times." He is then stunned when Jesus responds "seventy-seven" times. The King James Version makes Jesus' statement even more astounding as it translates it "seventy times seven." We want to put a limit on our forgiveness, but Jesus is saying no limits – forgive, forgive, forgive.

We each come to God with our "ten thousand talents" of debt – big sins, little sins (a talent being the equivalent of 15 years' worth of wages) – an amount so large, we could never repay it. But the God of grace in pity and mercy forgives us all of it. Knowing that we have been bounteously forgiven by God and others, Jesus exhorts us to be just as bounteous in return.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Gratefully, my disposition makes me rarely able to hold a grudge or withhold forgiveness for long, but I have seen it in so many others – children estranged from parents, siblings estranged from each other, friendships severed. What then?

Jesus lays it out plainly in the prayer he taught us: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." We are to ask God to forgive us in the same way we forgive others. That should give us pause.

If anyone had justification for unforgiveness, it was Jesus – an innocent man accused, tried and sentenced to execution. And yet, with almost his last breath he utters, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

For many of us, there are plenty of good reasons and justifications to withhold forgiveness. Like many of Jesus' teachings, this one isn't easy. Often it's only through the power of the Holy Spirit within us that we can even attempt to forgive. But, like in all his teachings, Jesus is trying to give us the keys to abundant life and to living in the Kingdom of God now.

In this parable, Jesus lays out the consequence of our unforgiveness: a life of misery and imprisonment, a prison of our own making. As we practice forgiveness – whether it's seventy-seven times or seventy times seven times – the chains of our imprisonment are broken, and we become free to live a life of love.

Nelson Mandela understood this message in the depths of his heart as he said:

*"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom,
I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind,
I'd still be a prisoner."*

*God forgives us – a weight is lifted from our soul.
We forgive others – we are set free.*

Susan Edwards

March 23, 2022, Wednesday, Lent 3

Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Reflection:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called last in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

When something was brought to my mother's attention, something she considered completely insignificant, she would say, "Well, that doesn't matter one iota." She pronounced the ninth letter, and smallest letter, of the Greek alphabet like this: eye-oh-ta. Indeed, it connotes "an extremely small amount." This is the letter – the short line with a dot above it – the i of our alphabet, that Jesus referred to in this passage. The King James Version translated it as "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all be fulfilled."

Jesus hasn't come to take even the smallest letter out of the law or the prophets. Rather, he has come to awaken his hearers to the full spirit of the law. His first example is "You shall not murder." He says that if you harbor anger against someone you are liable to the judgment of that law. He goes even further by saying that to demean someone by calling them a fool will also hold you liable. So, Jesus expands the sin of murder to mean anything that diminishes a person.

How many times have I tried to recall any sins I have committed during my day and have come up with nothing? I didn't commit murder or adultery. I didn't lie or steal. What is there to confess?

In actuality, the notorious sins of the Ten Commandments aren't the beginning signs of separation from God. They are the penultimate ends resulting from repeated thoughts and actions that numb our consciences and draw us from the love of God. They are the tragic results of conformity to cultural, corporate and national pressures that lead us into complicity with "the evil powers of this world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God."

Indeed, Jesus did not come to abolish or change the law. He doesn't want to change even an iota of it. He did come, however, to awaken us to life lived in the fullness of the presence of God, and, to see in ourselves desires that may seem small and insignificant but that separate us from the freedom to fully love God and neighbor, and last but not least, ourselves.

The Rev. Dena Whalen

March 24, 2022, Thursday, Lent 3

Luke 11:14-23

Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? –for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebub. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

Reflection:

In this miracle told in Luke, we do not encounter the Jesus gentle, meek and mild, but rather the Jesus under fire with his penetrating responses to the slander of the Pharisees. The story goes that Jesus casts out a demon in a deaf

mute. While most of the crowd marvels, some accuse him of driving out demons by the power of Satan while some others ask for a sign from heaven. Jesus answers in three ways:

- 1. If Satan were attacking his own forces, he would soon defeat himself.*
- 2. Jewish exorcists, of whom there were many at this time, would be subject to the same criticism.*
- 3. Freedom from Satan is only possible through obedience to God's word.*

This conflict began in the context of Jesus' everyday ministry of preaching the Word, healing the sick, and casting out demons. In this story Jesus heals a mute man who is unable to speak. Jesus has undoubtedly discerned that the root of his physical ailment is spiritual, not organic, so he expels the demon causing the affliction. When the now healed mute speaks most of the crowd is amazed.

Jesus' ministry has moved south at this time from Judea, now closer to Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. Jesus' successes are also attracting critics. Unwilling to see God's hand in these healings and exorcisms, the Pharisees and scribes present an alternate theory. They accuse Jesus of being casting out demons "by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." Jesus answers this slanderous charge rather fully in verses 17-23. By Jesus' day, Beelzebub has become the popular name for Satan. The Pharisees and scribes attribute Jesus' successes at exorcism to being empowered by Satan and not God through Jesus, which is slanderous.

Jesus knew the accusation was outrageous and left unanswered would entangle his ministry so he had no choice but to speak to these allegations. He first appeals to his hearers' reasoning by demonstrating that the accusation is ludicrous. An internally divided kingdom will crumble from within. If Satan goes about scattering his own forces, he can't survive. Thus, the charge is foolish! If Jesus is not casting out demons by Beelzebub, how is he doing it? He continues with a parable explaining the spiritual dynamics of what's going on when he casts out demons by telling a brief story of a wealthy man whose home contains rich treasures, so rich that he hires armed guards to protect it. No one is able to break in by stealth, only by greater strength. When a stronger force attacks the armed guards and disarms them, the house's contents can be looted. It's a story about a superior force overcoming armed might, plain and simple. Jesus casts out demons by his God given superior power and not by Beelzebub's lesser power.

In verse 23 Jesus makes it clear that when mighty forces are arrayed against each other, individuals must take sides or be crushed in the battle. The strong man, the prince of demons, has taken a stand against the Anointed One and his angelic armies of heaven. Jesus' ultimate question is "Are you with me or against me? You cannot straddle the fence." The point of the parable is to illustrate Jesus' saying, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters".

There can be no neutrality in a spiritual battle. An amazing, miraculous thing about Jesus is that he embodies the loving character of God the Father while maintaining his righteous judgement of unbelief. He could have simply ignored his naysayers in this story but instead he took the time to set straight their twisted logic while sternly warning of the dangers of unbelief on man's soul.

Mary Bruce Woody

March 25, 2022, Friday, Lent 3

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection:

In these verses the angel Gabriel foretells the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This stunning announcement is made to the Virgin Mary by an angel. After one simple question, "But how?," Mary's response

is one of submission, trust and faith. She “sees” the apparition of an angel and believes his unfathomable announcement: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God . . . For nothing will be impossible with God.” She trusts the mystery of it all and submits herself as “servant of the Lord.”

In the verses that follow Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, who by the same mystery has conceived a child in old age. Elizabeth says to Mary: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Then follows Mary’s Song of Praise, The Magnificat.

As Christians we believe what we cannot see: the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We believe in this mystery. We believe in the mystery of Christ’s resurrection. We have faith in the mystery. I am reminded of doubting Thomas who had to see the wounds of Christ in order to believe in his resurrection. Jesus responded, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And so by submitting, trusting and having faith in the mystery of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, blessed are we.

Peyton Evert

March 26, 2022, Saturday, Lent 3

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Reflection:

Everywhere we look we are witness to disruption, separation and division between political parties, races, religions and even within families because we see things from a relativistic viewpoint. This is good and this is bad. This is right and this is wrong. This is just and this is unjust. In other words, we see things from our individual experiences and we mistake that for truth. The result is little listening, less clarity and a lot of anger, projection and separation. But we are not separate from one another, no matter how it appears to be. We are all one. How do we know what is true and what is illusion?

Truth is truth. It never vacillates; it is always true whether we believe it or not, whether we live in alignment with it or not. For example, all human beings are created equal. Judaism and Christianity assert “we are made in the image of God.” Tat Tvam Asi, translated from Sanskrit means, “thou are that” and is a Hindu expression of the relationship between the individual and the Divine. These sacred texts do not say, “Some of you are made in the image of God,” or “One day maybe if you’re really good...” They say you are, I am, they are “it.”

What would happen if we could see ourselves in this light? What if we could see the Divine in one another? How would that cosmic shift influence you, your family and the world?

Because we see ourselves as lacking, not good enough, smart enough, not “cutting it,” it is nearly impossible to see others in any other way. Only like can enter like. Consider this: what I see in others I am strengthening in myself. If I recognize this, what will I choose to see in others? We must train ourselves to see what lies beyond our senses: to see, even in those with whom we disagree, the Divine, the transcendent potentiality. Most importantly, we must learn to see the Divine within ourselves and to love ourselves as we love others.

“God, thank you for creating me in your image. Help me to see that kindness created me kind, helpfulness created me helpful, love created me loving and perfection created me perfect. Help me to see this in my brothers and sisters and use me as an instrument of unity and peace in the world. Amen.”

Terry Hasty

March 27, 2022, Fourth Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So Jesus told them this parable:

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Reflection:

The Gospel passage for today is well known. At different times in my life, I have been the father and each son. The redeeming and reconciling theme is love of the father for his children, and love of the Father for all Creation. Love is boundless and wishes for reconciliation of all of us to each other. The dream of God is for all of Creation to feel Divine Love and to return to God for wholeness.

"All God asks of God's children, he told me, is that they come to God for love. The reservoir of God's love is so vast, that if all God's children came to God at the same moment and in that instant received all the love they could ever want or need from God, it would be as if a tiny bird took a sip out of the ocean."

From "Jesus Appeared to Babaji," by Rev. Charles P. Gibbs, available at <https://www.revcharlesgibbs.net/essays/2016/11/28/jesus-appeared-to-babaji>

Chris Kamm

March 28, 2022, Monday, Lent 4

John 4:43-54

When the two days were over, Jesus went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was

going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Reflection:

The town of Cana in Galilee forms a certain axis, a place upon which miraculous events marking Jesus' life and ministry turn. Once, he transformed water into wine at a wedding feast there, his first public miracle, a celebration of life and love.

Now he returns, having been in the Holy City of Jerusalem, and then among the hated Samaritans, where he offered water from the well of life.

When Jesus comes again to Cana in his native Galilee, the town this time does not offer a portrait of shared joy about a hopeful future. Rather, it presents a moment of grievous loss, the imminent death of a little boy, suffering at home almost 20 miles away in Capernaum. An unnamed royal official ~ unlike so many in positions of power throughout the Gospel, those ones who have no use for, nor understand their need of Jesus ~ now appears before Jesus in distress, but also in hope and faithfulness. And Jesus once again brings life and love, pronouncing that the child on death's door will live. The faithfulness of the father and the new health of the boy open our eyes to the possibility of life coming out of what looks to be certain death.

That promise of life out of death will receive yet another fulfillment, not in Cana itself, but in the eyes of one of its native sons, Nathanael, who, gathered with the other disciples along the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, will encounter the risen Christ, still tending to the needs of those about him. He will cook for them out of an abundant catch of fish and will offer bread for their journey as they are called to tend his lambs and feed his sheep.

Much can turn on the axis of a place like Cana of Galilee, especially when it is seen through the eyes of Christ's faithfulness among those who seek his love.

Ed Bleynat

March 29, 2022, Tuesday, Lent 4

John 5:1-18

There was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

Reflection:

Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day and I, too, am working." John 5:17

Today's reading is about one of Jesus's many miracles of healing. Contrary to the woman who sought out Jesus and touched his cloak (Luke 8:44-48) this crippled man, lame for 38 years, was sought out by Jesus at Bethsaida. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Instead of saying "Yes, Lord," he proceeded to tell Jesus how he couldn't get into the waters to be healed. Jesus said, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk." He walked away and didn't even say

thank you. When approached by the Jews for carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he referred to Jesus as the man who healed me, not even realizing it was Jesus. Later, Jesus found him again among the crowd and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." He still showed no gratitude, but told the Jews that Jesus healed him. Apparently, Jesus knew the man was involved in something he shouldn't be. We don't know what happened to him. Jesus is persecuted by the Jews for breaking the law of the Sabbath and they wanted to kill him. He said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day and I, too, am working."

God is not bound by human law. Jesus came in human form to show us how to live by God's law. During Lent we are reminded of Jesus's journey to the cross. We are shown by him how to be penitent. We should always be at work doing God's will no matter what day it is. We can keep holy the Sabbath but that doesn't mean to stop helping or loving our neighbor. God is always working for us, so we should always be working for him.

We don't know what happened to the man Jesus healed, but I would hope that he realized the miracle that had taken place and that he came to believe that Jesus truly was the Son of God. I would hope that he experienced another miracle, a conversion to becoming a witness for Jesus Christ. That is surely our calling, to be a witness for Jesus by following his example, not only in Lent, but always.

"Dear Heavenly Father,

Guide and direct us in our daily work. Help us to be penitent and humble. Grant us mercy in our failings and give us the ability to see you working in our lives every day, bringing healing and love to us all. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen."

Nancy McCorkle

March 30, 2022, Wednesday, Lent 4

John 5:19-29

Jesus said to the Jews, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

"Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Reflection:

New Life

Jesus marks his familial relationship to his Father, the Creator God. As the Father is the giver of life, so too is the Son the giver of life, a new life through redemption.

Natural life abounds in the Blue Ridge. As a child growing up in the Northeast, I was well acquainted with mountains, from the Green Mountains in Vermont to the wild Adirondacks in northern New York. In awe, I watched them soar majestically toward the sky. I climbed them, I skied them, voraciously partaking in their beauty. And while I love those mountains still, I have been smitten by the mysterious beauty of the Blue Ridge. Meditating on their blueness and unique layering faithfully restores my spirit. This is the place I now proudly call home.

Lent is a Middle English word for spring, a time for new life in the natural world. It's a time to take joy in watching spring green buds percolating on the trees and the new flowers working in progress, like the crocuses, the overachievers of spring. They arrive early on, anxiously pushing their way to the head of the crowd, eager to break ground and longing to bask in the warmth of the sun.

Lent is a time for us to experience new life within ourselves. Meditation on our redemption is a wellspring for this

sense of new life. Redemption releases us from the past. We are no longer burdened by it. Without the weight of the past our being is free to float upwards before it takes off. It soars toward the stars. We are pointed in a new direction. We begin on a new heading of our existence to a place where our brokenness is healed and we are made whole once again. We eagerly break ground to receive the warmth of a place of perfect peace, a place of wonder, a place of fulfillment in oneness with our Creator. This is the place our spirit calls home.

The Rev. Bob Zito

March 31, 2022, Thursday, Lent 4

John 5:30-47

Jesus said, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

"You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

Reflection:

This scripture is difficult for me to decipher. As an attorney, I'm used to breaking down trial testimony into bullet points and simple metaphors that hopefully persuade each member of the jury. Jesus's "testimony" makes my head spin. "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true." Huh? Not the usual speech I want from a witness.

Here, Jesus is presenting his case in the traditional trial format of the time (needing several witnesses), but thankfully he is more Teacher and Savior than Lawyer. Citing witnesses John, himself, and ultimately God, he chastises his accusers who pride themselves on their "glory from one another" and their legalistic studies of scripture, rather than grounding themselves in their faith, or belief, in Jesus. "[T]he Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You ... do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent."

Jesus explains that his own judgement is just, in contrast to theirs, "because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me." This "will of him who sent me" is a divine truth, a divine verdict, if you please, that we should all be seeking.

In this Lenten season, I want to act as a believer and not a juror. I will try to prayerfully go through this day seeking not my own will, but the will of God.

Juleigh Sitton

April 1, 2022, Friday, Lent 4

John 7:1-2,10,25-30

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near.

But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret.

Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." Then Jesus

cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Reflection:

“Where are you from?”

In our highly mobile American society, this is a question we hear (and ask) frequently upon meeting new people. I usually answer that I grew up in Atlanta, but that is really an unsatisfactory response. My father was from Columbus, Georgia; my mother from East Tennessee. I was born in Tokyo, lived in Virginia and Tennessee, and moved to Atlanta at age 8. My adult life has been peripatetic. I've lived in 10 states and 8 foreign countries, and sometimes call myself a professional vagabond, though I think sojourner is a much nicer word for it. Now, I'm “from Asheville”, even though I live in Weaverville. It's complicated. And all of that tells you not very much about who I am.

The question could be better phrased as “where were you formed?”, or “where were you made who you are?”. Jesus is trying to get across to his listeners that he came from God to be God among us. They are thinking, as we all do, in worldly terms: “This man comes from Nazareth, so obviously he can't be the Messiah! Who of importance would come from Nazareth?! We know his family and they are just regular people.” But Jesus, pushing them into a different mindset, says no, I am of the world of the Spirit, and “you know where I am from.” He says very directly that he is from God, and knows God, and was sent by God. And they and we are left to consider the magnificence of God's gift, the power of Jesus' statement that he knows God and that God is true, and that he came to share our humanness, to know our hurts and joys, and to bring us to God.

If you were asked by a friend or new acquaintance “where were you made who you are”, what would your answer be? I imagine it would be much more profound than a casual response to “where are you from?”.

Linda Watt

April 2, 2022, Saturday, Lent 4

John 7:37-52

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.” Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

Reflection:

Why did Jesus wait till the festival's last day to cry out supporting the thirst that comes from within? This festival was the last of three and seven days long in Jerusalem. The spirit of living water was an invitation to all if they were willing to believe. This salvation was not with physical water, but in truth, a spiritual water that would be confirmed once Jesus had been glorified. The offer from Jesus can be perceived as a conviction of truth through belief or in turn, could be rejected and seen as absurd and not believable.

The rest of this Gospel is very challenging, as there is great division among many from this area. There was great strife around following ideas of Jesus being the Messiah or prophet. There is also a great misunderstanding about who supported Jesus and who wanted him arrested. Many of his followers had seen many miracles happen before

their eyes. All of these players, including his followers and those who supported the Jewish law, had their own opinions. Lastly, many who heard Jesus were challenged in understanding where Jesus came from. Some of those that challenged his acts did not know much about him and that he traveled around the area of Galilee. There lies the idea that Jesus was from Galilee and not from Bethlehem.

Nicodemus, now a follower of Jesus, supported him when the authorities had questions about his intentions. Nicodemus defended Jesus, saying he should first be tried to see his intentions based on laws. Nicodemus was questioned about his loyalty to Jesus and his birth place. Even the officers were beginning to believe Jesus was the promised one and did not arrest him. There was division among families and even infighting among Jewish leaders themselves. This event sets the stage for more miracles performed, more followers, and even more hostile encounters with Jesus and the Jewish rulers of the time. To be continued!

Dave Hensley

April 3, 2022, Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Reflection:

Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama's insights about Judas color my reflection on this Lenten reading. Check out Mathew 27. I had never noticed he gave back the money and confessed his wrongdoing, horrified.

Most interpreters of Judas' story are quick to say his repentance was not real; it was mere remorse that ended in a despairing death, rather than a true turning to God. It's comforting to cast Judas as someone utterly unlike us, whereas I suspect Judas' experience of his own treachery was complicated, confusing and full of suffering.

Likewise, the narrator of this Gospel passage theorizes a greedy motive behind Judas' rebuke of Mary's extravagance. But for a moment, I'd like to take Judas' objection at face value. I see myself in his zeal and pragmatism. Isn't it fair and prudent to ration a good thing?

Judas who repented, you are not alone in acting as if God were pinched and exacting.

I, too, sometimes worry there is not enough for everyone, and think it is my responsibility to make sure others do the Right Thing.

This way of being makes for a life that is stingy, rigid, resentful and exhausting.

"Jesus the reckless and wasteful, you break my rules.

You are friends with the wrong people.

You celebrate too wildly.

You rest without guilt.

You honor costly love in all its forms and faces.

Teach us gentleness and generosity.

Teach us there is enough, because you really are freely given.

Teach us to crouch low with you, where perfume and food and wine and bodies and earth await.

Make a way in our wilderness and bring water to our desert hearts.

Amen."

Sharon Lechner

April 4, 2022, Monday, Lent 5

John 8:1-11

Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Reflection:

Many years ago, I participated in a Quaker retreat at Cape May, New Jersey. We decided to hold meeting out on the beach early Sunday morning to avoid the crowd. We settled down in a great circle. Many of us closed our eyes as we entered into silence, listening to the surf and praying. We had fallen into deep meditation when suddenly a burly beach guard demanded, "Where are your beach tags?" I swear we levitated three feet off the sand! We laughed and moved off the beach, but it was hard being ripped from that sublime moment back into the world of beach tags and overzealous civil servants.

I imagine the people listening to Jesus in the temple felt similarly ripped back by the Pharisees. We don't know what Jesus was teaching, but surely, he was opening their hearts and minds to new understanding of God and what it meant to live in God's kingdom. They had to be in one of those thin places where the boundaries of heaven and earth blur.

Jesus did not want to look at the Pharisees, much less answer their questions. Their self-righteousness was one thing, but to drag this woman in front of him like this, to degrade and abuse her...

I wonder if he was writing in the sand to keep from losing his temper!

The Pharisees professed a love of the Law and prided themselves in keeping it to the letter. That was what defined them. Yet, they readily manipulated it here to suit their purpose and showed little regard for the consequences. When Jesus straightened up, looked them in the eye, and said "let anyone without sin throw the first stone," he called them on it. As their shame overcame them, they quietly slipped away.

Jesus rose again, this time looking at the woman. He refused to condemn her. He didn't condone her sin, but he knew it did not define her. She was much more. She deserved a second chance.

Bluegrass singer, Rhonda Vincent, wrote "You Don't Love God if You Don't Love Your Neighbor." Let's sing along as we continue our Lenten journey:

*"Oh you don't love God
If you don't love your neighbor
If you gossip about him, if you never have mercy
If he gets into trouble, and you don't try to help him
Then you don't love your neighbor
And you don't love God."*

Mary Howell

April 5, 2022, Tuesday, Lent 5

John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Jews, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from

him.” They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Reflection:

Our children don't go to church. I worry about this. In their daily lives, where will they experience music, poetry, mystery, and community if they don't settle into the weekly routine of pondering in a sacred space? Where will they learn the biblical stories that frame literature and art? Or more simply, how will they learn to become comfortable sitting in church at weddings and funerals? Why don't they believe?

In today's lesson Jesus is challenging the hierarchy, traditions, and rituals of his day. He is calling for a new vision and a new gospel in the name of “the Father.” The Pharisees did not understand his metaphorical answers to their literal question “Who are you?” Jesus' confusing responses offer little clarity. The mysterious question “Who do you say that I am?” continues to be a question for many of us. “I do nothing on my own but I speak these things as the Father has instructed me ... for I always do what is pleasing to him.” Jesus is offering a fresh perspective and a novel way of engaging the Father—through him. Surprisingly, at the end of this confusing lesson, “[a]s he was saying these things, many believed in him.”

Like in our day the temple in Jesus' day was full of politics, power, division, separateness, judgment, and confusion. This perception of the “church” and “religion” is consistent with my children's view of our beloved institution. I understand their perspective. One doesn't have to look very far to find reports of disputes and abuses in the name of the Church. Yet, in this passage, as Jesus was saying these things that condemn and confuse, “...many believed in him.”

Perhaps, one day, our children and grandchildren will be able to see through the confusion and division of our own day and believe. They may not come to believe in the Jesus, the Father, or the Church that I know and love. But maybe they, too, will find a fresh perspective and a novel way of engaging the Father. I trust that in time, they will be part of the Church that we are becoming. I hope that they will be able to see beyond the institutional faults and find the mystery and the beauty that calls us all to believe.

Frances Smyth

April 6, 2022, Wednesday, Lent 5

John 8:31-42

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.”

Reflection:

My maternal grandmother died when I was an infant. My mother was in her mid-twenties, far too young to lose her Mama just as she was learning to be one herself. From early childhood I learned that questions about my Grandma made everyone sad. I learned not to ask. But I'll admit that I was surprised at Mama's resistance when I, by then a mother with children of my own, began to research our family's genealogy. Both of my parents were only children so there were no aunts, uncles or cousins to pass on family lore. I felt a deep yearning to know who I was, who I was connected to, what stories and circumstances had shaped my family. I knew that I was more than the sum of my

own experiences. The more I discovered, the prouder I became. The poverty of growing up in a coal mining town, the shame of being part of an ethnic group synonymous with laziness, thievery and superstition was very real to my mother. The effort, the striving, the aspirations and accomplishment were what was real to me.

In this section of John's gospel, Jesus is confronted by some Jews who are offended by his reference to their history - their enslavement both to powers and to sin. It is important to note that we must always read John's gospel carefully when Jesus encounters "the Jews" - who are not intended to be representative of an entire religion or ethnic group. Here, Jesus is harangued by a group of religious leaders who seem to have hung their identity on their adherence to the law and their connections to past identities. "We are sons of Abraham. We have never been slaves," they insist. Even the most cursory reading of scripture will remind us that the sons of Abraham had endured a long and harrowing history of enslavement, and their story always ends, not with their own self-sufficiency, but with the redemptive power of God.

Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, reminds them that true discipleship is grounded in him, the One who is truly God. "If you follow me, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." The stain of sin, the old identity as those bound by the law, the precarious genealogy of slaves and wanderers, need no longer define them.

God has intervened in human history, once and for all. In Jesus, we become sons and daughters of God, and heirs of the legacy that was promised at our baptisms. No need to shake the family tree to figure out who we are. Jesus reminds us what freedom really means. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own... forever.

The Rev. Dr. Sam Faeth

April 7, 2022, Thursday, Lent 5

John 8:51-59

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Reflection:

I can only imagine what the Jews must have been thinking as they questioned Jesus. In this passage, each statement Jesus uttered seemed more unbelievable than the other:

If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.

Before Abraham was born, I AM.

To the Jews, this last declaration was absolute blasphemy as in the Old Testament scriptures God said to Moses: "Tell the children of Israel that the I AM has sent you." (Exodus 3:14) Jesus' claim that he was God was outrageous. Consequently, the Jews had heard enough and were ready to stone him.

How are we to approach this? Literally speaking, in a material world, I think it is impossible. Spiritually, however, it is plausible. It is our responsibility to keep our minds open, to allow the spirit of Christ to flow through us. Our challenge is to trust him and search for his presence through prayer and reflection.

As I finish writing this, I have just come back from the Rev. Bill Whisenhunt's glorious memorial service. One of my very favorite hymns was sung, and this verse struck me as so appropriate for this reading as we approach Jesus with childlike joy and faith:

*I'm looking for the coming of Christ,
I want to be with Jesus.
When we have run with patience the race,*

*We shall know the grace of Jesus.
In him there is no darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

Leslie Welker

April 8, 2022, Friday, Lent 5

John 10:31-42

The Jews took up stones again to stone Jesus. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there.

Reflection:

"[E]ven though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

Jesus is found defending himself once again in this passage. Up until now, you obey God and you are rewarded. It has been a transactional relationship. The Jews are struggling. One of their own is going against everything that is sacred and turning it on its end. Even worse, Jesus has gained a following. And this idea of God, the Divine, becoming human, it is too much. Does he really believe he is the son of God? This concept he has of love and bending the rules is too radical. Jesus' works and his claim to be the son of God goes beyond the Jewish teachings, their way of life, and their concept of God's love. Jesus quotes their own scriptures to them, but still it is not enough. Jesus must go and he must go now.

I cannot fault the Jews for not wanting to change what has been. Although difficult to admit, I am quite sure I would have also been a skeptic. Once I can move past this, I can see this man named Jesus who simply cannot convince the establishment of his own faith community that are called to begin to experience God's love in a different way.

Jesus cannot change their hearts so he has to walk away. The sting of humility and rejection is such a human experience but there is more here than threats and disappointment. Jesus refers to the scriptures, proof of His own grounding in the same words we read today. There is the acceptance and faith Jesus encounters in the crowd once he moves on and is closer to those who have experienced John's words. There are those who believe him on faith alone. Jesus is steadfast and true to his ministry throughout. There is no denying his mission at this point or the signs. He will soon turn toward Jerusalem.

It often deepens my understanding of scripture to take pause and think about that simple but profound Godly Play question presented to the children each week after a Bible story or parable presentation, "Where do you see yourself in this story?" The response might change at times for all of us. One day we are a skeptic and ready to throw stones at all that is different or threatening. We are rejected and criticized by our own and struggle to prove who we are. The next day we are embraced by those who believe in us.

The road to Jerusalem is not an easy one to travel. The disciples are taught this throughout the Gospels. The one constant is the longing to be there. The knowledge that nothing else compares. How wonderful it is to stumble back to that unceasing and true Jerusalem journey with Jesus. It beckons us to move toward radical love and acceptance.

Rhonda Candler Kilby

April 9, 2022, Saturday, Lent 5

John 11:45-53

Many of the Jews who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

Reflection:

In the immediate aftermath of Jesus resurrecting Lazarus there were many different reactions to the miracle those present had witnessed. Mary and Martha were overjoyed but the leaders of the religious establishment had the opposite response. The chief priests and the Pharisees were fearful that once word got out the Romans would take this miracle as an excuse to destroy the Jewish nation and people. In the interest of self-preservation Caiaphas, the chief priest, argued that Jesus should be put to death in order to save the rest of the Jewish people.

On the surface, this passage seems to be merely setting the stage for the ultimate betrayal of Jesus to the Romans by Judas Iscariot. On further reading, this is a classic example of the challenges of the philosophical principle of Utilitarianism. In this philosophy, the right thing to do is that which provides the greatest good for the greatest number. Caiaphas explicitly states this in John 11:50: "[I]t is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."

The flaw in this utilitarian approach, whether it is Caiaphas or any of us applying it, is the arrogance and hubris of believing that we truly know what is the greatest good. Although the death (and subsequent resurrection) of Jesus has indeed saved the world, it did not ultimately save the Jewish nation. For centuries the decision to have Jesus killed has been used as an excuse to persecute the Jewish people. The ultimate sin of the chief priests and the Pharisees was not that they decided to have Jesus killed but that they presumed that they could take the power to determine the greatest good from God.

We are all the beneficiaries of God's grace. As is stated in the Book of Common Prayer, "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies." During this Lenten season, let us all remember that God's grace and eternal love for us ensures that our greatest good is being prepared for us in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Doug Scothorn

Sunday April 10, 2022, Palm Sunday

Luke 23:1-49

The assembly of the elders of the people rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this

man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Reflection:

"Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

They replied, "The Lord needs it."

I have lots of questions. On the way to the village, were the disciples anxious about the task?

Did they think the owners would really just hand over their valuable possession without issue? Did they wonder why they had pulled this duty?

If indeed the disciples were a bit apprehensive and concerned, then I can relate. I have experienced many times when I was worried silly about a situation that I faced or a task to which I had been assigned. Was I prepared to handle the job? Would everything turn out OK?

Our modern culture is filled with anxiety and worry. Society moves from hysteria to complacency very quickly, and online media bombards us with ways to cope: exercise routines, meditation apps, medications, tips to manage stress, techniques for dealing with anything life throws at you.

For me, the central point is that Jesus prepared the disciples for the future encounter with the donkey owners. He told them all would be well. And apparently it was! As I reflect on this scripture I realize that I need to have faith and remember that God promises to be with me always, even through my anxiety and fear and self-doubt.

How will I carry out this intention for increased faith? Prayer, study, worship. I will realize God's promise through an encouraging text from a friend, the joyous laughter of my grandson, the sight of a bird at the feeder. And maybe even a meditation app!

Sandy Grant

April 11, 2022, Monday in Holy Week

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Reflection:

In the Gospel of John Chapter 12: 1-11, the chief priests want to put Lazarus to death in addition to Jesus. Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus and now he faces death, again, by execution of the state because of his relationship to Jesus. The love Jesus spreads cannot be stopped by the chief priest murdering him or those who follow Him. One must be brave to walk with him; it's not without a cost to love Jesus. What is gained is the deepest soul-satisfying freedom and love possible only through him.

By resisting the oppressive cultural conditioning to conform to the expectations of the day, Lazarus welcomed Jesus and sat at the table with him. Lazarus has life because of Jesus. How courageous, empowered, and peaceful he seems in hosting a supper for him. When he was raised from the dead, did his life take on new meaning? Did his fear of death disappear and his commitment to love Jesus embolden him to spread the good news? What new peace and freedom did Lazarus experience? The power of this miracle magnified the movement Jesus led. The crowd of Jews learned they were together and were coming to Bethany to see them both. "... Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus." Jesus' radical acts of love and healing changed the world then and is changing the world now.

How are Jesus' radical acts of love and healing changing the world today? The power of his example and the invitation to walk in the way of love are inviting for the soul and yet hard for the ego. In the American culture it seems ego-driven goals that lead to material and worldly fortune take priority. When one is guided by ego in this way, one is not free. One is bound to material things. Seeking the heavenly treasure that is there for each of us is what can set us free. What did Lazarus' courage teach us? If given a second chance at life, how might we prioritize things differently?

Page McCorkle

April 12, 2022, Tuesday in Holy Week

John 12:20-36

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father

will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say~ `Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Reflection:

It is said that the nature of a virtue is that a vice is almost always hidden inside. That is certainly true for me. Strong willed and determined, I have used those virtues to achieve success and overcome hardships. Too often, though, those traits degenerate into stubbornness, obstinacy, and rigidity. I often get really hung up on how things "should" be, and try to impose my will on situations, rather than having faith that things will ultimately work out, despite all immediate appearances to the contrary. I hate to say it, but I can so easily see myself as part of the crowd at the festival, questioning Jesus. I'd heard that the Messiah will remain forever. What could he possibly mean about being lifted up? That's not the way things are supposed to be!

When I was younger, I had my life all planned out. I would get that promotion and marry at this time and buy a house in that neighborhood that my husband and I would share with our 2.5 children, and we would all live happily ever after. A bitter divorce and job loss did not figure into my plans. Life circumstances demanded that I let go of all my should-haves and must-haves. There came a moment when I realized that, although it seemed I had lost everything, I found my faith – and that was everything.

John Lennon is quoted as saying, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." When the seed falls to the ground and dies, when someone loses their life, when you are forced into a position of servitude when you think you should be the master, when you are walking in the darkness – that is exactly the time and place to put your trust in the Master of dichotomies, and have faith that it is exactly in those moments and at those times that salvation and redemption are near.

Cassia Imholz

April 13, 2022, Wednesday in Holy Week

John 13:21-32

At supper with his friends, Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples~ the one whom Jesus loved~ was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once."

Reflection:

Why doesn't Simon Peter ask Jesus directly the name of his betrayer, instead of urging the (unnamed) beloved disciple to do it? Why does Jesus use a silent gesture to indicate his betrayer instead of just naming him? How is it that the disciples can attribute the best of intentions to Judas' exit? And how can the betrayal of a friendship be a moment of glory?

These questions invite speculation, of course, but underneath them is the reality that our beloved weekly sacrament, initiated in the Last Supper, is ringed with triangulation, hierarchy, and deception, all destructive to building beloved community. The other accounts of this sacred meal seem so much more straightforward and even give us the language that we solemnly repeat at each Eucharistic celebration.

You may be more disciplined than I in your prayers in church, but my experience of approaching the communion rail is a muddle of concerns. I try to make sure that gratitude is primary, yet frustration with myself, guilt, self-recrimination, and uncertainty are all there, too.

So maybe this passage assures us that it has ever been so. John's gospel always seems to be presenting us with the eternal Christ, surrounded as here by the transient, human foibles of the rest of us, yet always going forward towards a lonely destiny that promises glory-for him and for us-out of the darkest night.

The Rev. Bill Smyth

April 14, 2022, Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord-and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Reflection:

Here in John we are introduced to the practice of foot washing we celebrate on Maundy Thursday. We also experience the revelation of Jesus to his disciples that he is both Teacher and Lord. Additionally, Jesus announces a new commandment, that we love one another, just as he loved them, and it is through the demonstration of this love that they will be known by everyone as his disciples. We are told that Jesus knew that his time to depart this earth and return to his Father was at hand. He even knew he had been betrayed by one of his disciples. The revelations he needed to make were of great importance, and he needed to be sure he had his disciples' attention. He chose to humble himself and wash their feet. Through this act, he prepared them to receive his revelation that he is both Teacher and Lord, and impart a new commandment for the new covenant his earthly ministry had brought forth. As Teacher, he taught through an act of humbling service. As Lord, he imparted a new commandment, after demonstrating what love for one another looks like.

We journey to this holy day in Lent, seeking to be cleansed and renewed as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. While we sacrifice our bad habits, and spend our time in prayer and thoughtful spiritual discernment, our cleansing is made complete by having our feet washed by our priest, who in that moment is transformed from Teacher to servant. May we remember today that it is through loving one another that we truly become Jesus' disciples, and may we seek daily to demonstrate our love of Jesus by loving and serving others.

Chad Hardy

April 15, 2022, Good Friday

John 18:1-19:42

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here

is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Reflection:

Long before pet image recognition technology was commercially available, my son-in-law, once a Harvard experimental physicist, built such a system for his and my daughter's home in Brooklyn. They had two cats

who came in and out of the lower level through a pet door; feral cats and raccoons, however, were using it also. Consequently, he hung a camera just over the door and connected it to a dedicated computer with image recognition software he had written. If the system recognized either of the two cats, the door would open. If not, it would remain shut. With a video feed to track the system, the cats were freely able to come in and out, oblivious to being observed.

One day, a proud cat caught a bird in its mouth and tried to bring it inside, likely a present for Canon Jeanne, his loving food source. The system did not recognize the cat/bird image, and the door would not open! The video showed the frustrated cat butting the door with its head, not letting go of the bird, confused and distressed, and shut out. No onslaught of deception would provide entrance, the anxious pet learned.

I wonder. Judas, did you know?

That you could do this thing, this betrayal, but still the door would open to you? Or, did you imagine having to butt your head, and rend your garments, and hang yourself, and still be excluded from salvation's mystery.

The stress Judas felt is unfathomable. You see, all we have to do is ask to be forgiven. No matter how egregious is our sin, revealed at the closed and protected door. Nothing can separate us.

God recognizes my face. (I have called you by name.) The door will open, I will enter, and surely, with the confidence of amazing grace, leave my sin on the cold ground outside.

I choose to think Judas knew, even in the pain of remorse, even in suicide, even before the resurrection. The prophetic liturgy of The Last Supper, I pray, was his final conscious, healing, thought. Let it be.

Sandra Finley

April 16, 2022, Holy Saturday Easter Vigil

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Reflection:

The day after the death of Jesus was the Sabbath, the traditional day of rest. This Sabbath day must have been a long day of painful grief and maybe not so much rest for those who knew and loved Jesus, particularly the women who had come with him from Galilee. It was one long day after his brutal beating and killing during which the body of the beloved Jesus could not be tended to. So it was the day after the Sabbath, the third day, that the women took the spices that they had prepared, to the tomb for the ritual anointing of the body of Jesus. They were expecting his body to be in place in the tomb, even though Jesus had told them that he would rise from the dead on that third day.

I freeze here as I consider the unfathomable, incomprehensible, crushing burden on these women. They managed to get through the first day, the horrible day of Jesus' death; to get through the second day, the day of despair and inability to act; and finally to get themselves up and out at dawn on the third day with the dutifully prepared spices, unsure of how they would remove the stone so they could enter the tomb. They must have longed desperately to see Jesus and to honor his body with the customary ritual of anointing. I believe that there is comfort and a sense of order inherent in the deep belief and the participation in sacred customary ritual.

The stone is moved, the body is gone. There is no use for lovingly prepared spices and no opportunity for comfort found in ritual. Only confusion, maybe panic.

Angels (men) came down and stood beside them and reminded them of what Jesus had told them. On the third

day he would rise from the dead. Yes, they remembered what Jesus had told them, but now what? There was no customary ritual here, no roadmap. Perhaps for a moment they fondly remembered Jesus teaching and telling them that this was what would happen to him. Sweet memories of Jesus. And then they left the empty tomb to tell the apostles what they had seen.

This was the Resurrection of our Lord. The beginning of our Christian tradition as we know it today. The difference between living solely by the Law given through Moses and now living by grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Kary Deuel

Holy Week & Easter Worship Schedule

Shrove Tuesday

March 1, 2022

Pancake Dinner with
Crafts and Games
6:00 pm

Ash Wednesday

March 2, 2022

7:30 a
12:15 p
5:30 p

Palm Sunday

April 10, 2022

8:00a	Eucharist and Liturgy of the Palms: Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ
8:45a	Nursery opens
9:00a	Breakfast
9:30a	Christian Formation
9:30a	Children: Making Resurrection Gardens - Tuton Hall
10:45a	Eucharist and Liturgy of the Palms: Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ
5:30p	Celtic Eucharist and Blessing of the Palms with music from Pastyme

Maundy Thursday

April 14, 2022

7:00p Eucharist and optional foot-washing and stripping of the altar, Nave

Good Friday

April 15, 2022

12:15p	Good Friday Liturgy with the reading of the Passion Gospel
5:30p	Good Friday Liturgy with the reading of the Passion Gospel

Easter

Saturday, April 16

8:00p Easter Vigil (begins in Memorial Garden)
(followed by a champagne reception)

Sunday, April 17

7:00a	Eucharist
7:30a-10:45a	Champagne Breakfast in Tuton Hall
8:45a	Children's Hour in the Undercroft*
9:00a	Full Choral Eucharist with Brass Quartet and Chancel Choir*
10:30a	Easter Egg Hunt (Chapel Courtyard)*
10:45a	Children's Hour for the 11:00 a service begins (meet in Undercroft)*
11:00a	Full Choral Eucharist with Brass Quartet and Chancel Choir*
5:30p	No Celtic Eucharist

*Nursery Provided.

*Parents, note that the Easter egg hunt is in between the 9 and 11 am services, so all children can participate, whether you are attending the 9 or 11 service!



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A Parish of the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina
The Right Reverend José A. McLoughlin, Bishop

The Reverend Dr. R. Scott White Rector
The Reverend Bob Zito Deacon
Dillon Manly Director of Financial Ministries
Jan Hildebrand Financial Assistant
Ken Wilson Director of Communication and Administrative Ministries
Sharon Carleton Boone Music Ministry
Debbie Cox Fellowship & Youth Ministries
Beth Chestnut Children & Family Ministries
Jo Rice Administrative Assistant to the Rector and Programs
Robyn McNeal Program Assistant
Glenn Childes Sexton

VESTRY

Class of 2022

Mack Day
Lynne Diehl
Robert Haden
Page McCorkle
Leslie Welker

Class of 2023

David Hensley
Katherine Ray
Doug Scothorn
Cissie Stevens
Linda Watt

Class of 2024

Nancy Dexter
Jennifer Pearson
Matt Sharpe
Ralph Simpson
Constance Wilson

Leslie Welker *Senior Warden*
Mack Day *Junior Warden*
Nancy Brooks *Treasurer*
Katie Chappell *Clerk*

Explore Faith • Embrace Community • Expect a Difference

Our Vision Statement

Trinity Church is a nurturing Christian community providing opportunities for worship, spiritual growth and commitment in a supportive and open atmosphere.

difference.

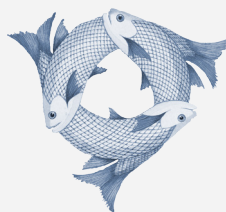
Be Curious
Be Present
Reimagine

Trinity Asheville | Lenten Study

Sundays 9:30 to 10:30

In the Undercroft AND Online

Sundays: March 6, 13, 20, 27 April 3



Difference: The Power of Faith in a Conflicted world

Difference is a class that explores what it means to follow Jesus in a complex and divided world, seeing transformation through everyday encounters. The course, inspired by the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Network, seeks to help each of us navigate across divides, disagreements and pursue a just a flourishing world.

Have you found yourself in deep disagreements with family and friends? Have your disagreements affected your relationships with others, others you love, and are an important part of your life? Come and explore how we are called to live joyfully in a conflicted world. The five-week course includes these focus areas:

- *Understanding God's Call To Life in a Divided World*
 - God can transform relationships in a conflicted world. God's call and equipping make it possible.
- *Crossing Divides*
 - God invites us to see where difference or prejudice divides us from others and offers us opportunities to see them as he does.
- *Navigating Disagreement*
 - God is with us as we face the challenge of disagreement, which can become an opportunity for stronger relationships if handled well.
- *Practicing Forgiveness*
 - God is with us in the mess and complexity of trying to put forgiveness into practice in our relationships.
- *Risking Hope*
 - Doing relationships God's way will sometimes be risky and resisted, but the hope it brings is transformative.

Walking the Way of Lent

Faith, Fellowship, and Food

Walking the Way of Lent

Wednesdays

12:00 - 1:00 pm

Undercroft (lunch)
and Tuton Hall (labyrinth)

**Wednesdays March 9, 16,
23, 30, April 6**

This year we are focusing our Lenten Mid-week gathering on fellowship. We have been separated and distanced from each other for so long we want to provide as many ways possible for our common life in being together. This one hour on Wednesdays is time for prayer and meditation, food and fellowship, and an optional offering of additional prayer and meditation in walking Trinity's Labyrinth

**12-12:15 Noonday Prayer
and Meditation**

12:15 Lunch

Labyrinth Open in Tuton Hall from 12:00 to 1:00p for those who wish to partake.

Lenten Lunches - \$6.00 per person
Includes dessert

March 9	Soup/Grilled Cheese
March 16	Chicken Casserole/Rice
March 23	Soup/Salad
March 30	Baked Potato Bar/Salad
April 6	Baked Chicken/Rice

If you would like to volunteer to help cook or clean up, please contact Debbie Cox at 253-9361 or debbie@trinityasheville.org.