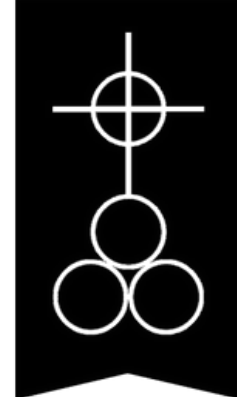


2025



# LENTEN MEDITATIONS



**Wednesday, 5 March**

**Ash Wednesday**

**Eric Eaton**

As one of two Catholics growing up in a VERY Presbyterian school, I used to dread Ash Wednesday. “Mom, do we have to go before school? Can’t we go after so no one will see it?” Being in elementary school is already awkward enough, and as we know, 3rd graders can be a little critical and have very long memories. Why would I want to be reminded annually that I am set aside from the others, marked, different, and unique? I also dreaded the daylong question of “What is that on your head?” from students and teachers alike who would try to remove it.

Today, I have grown to be enthusiastic about Ash Wednesday. Not just for the chance to visit our beloved Chapel at noon on a busy workday but to make another sign to the devil that he has lost yet again. Signs and symbols are important to Christianity. Many of the signs we make and use today were formed alongside the early church and were often used and displayed at the risk of death as Rome and other powers tried to control the unstoppable spread of Christ’s Good News. The imposition of ashes by our priests, done after they mark each other and say the phrase “remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” from our Book of Common Prayer, can be morbid and somewhat jarring to the newcomer in our pews. The idea of dying and returning to the ground to become “dust” causes many to shudder. This has perhaps kept many away from Ash Wednesday and Lent, even observant Anglicans who may not fully understand the significance of what we are symbolizing. But, like many other moments in our Christian walk through the Bible, a Voice is telling us, “Fear not. For I am with you...”

The One who created the world out of love, who created mankind from the dust of that world, the One who redeemed that world through love, and the One who will come again to erase wrong from this world is there. Every time we make signs like the ashes, we aren’t bemoaning death or being morbid about Christ’s crucifixion. No. We, as one body, are joyfully proclaiming that death has no hold. Death is not the end. Death, which will see us return to dust, will not be able to hold us in that dust, for our souls will soar unbounded to be with the One to whom we belong! It is us standing at the chasm of death, peering into the black void, and boldly proclaiming, “Yet even at the grave, we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!”. At our baptism, many of us were sprinkled with water and marked with chrism, or a pastor said the blessing of the Trinity when we were immersed in water. Regardless of how you were baptized, you were forever marked as Christ’s own at that moment. At our death, many of us will make the sign of the cross and have that same Holy oil applied. The Christian life can often come full circle through signs and symbols.

So, Christian, boldly make your signs of faith and assurance. And while chrism and ashes can be washed away, know that God’s mark upon us is everlasting. Proudly display your ashes this day, knowing that the symbol upon your forehead is the same as on that spotless banner Christ holds as He leads us onward to the ultimate victory. For truly, we are set aside from the others, marked, different, and unique. And thanks be to God for that.

Thursday, 6 March

Mia Applewhite

*1 Blessed is the one*

*who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,*

*2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

*3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.*

*4 Not so the wicked!*

*They are like chaff  
that the wind blows away.*

*5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

*6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction*

*Psalm 1*

Blessed is the person who places their faith in Christ and chooses to engage with a community of like-minded believers who inspires you to deepen your beliefs; who boosts your relationship with Christ, helping it to flourish ;who encourages you to strengthen your devotion, guiding you towards a more meaningful pious life.

What defines wickedness in people? Is it rooted in their beliefs, expressed through their actions, or perhaps a combination of both? In this Psalm, "wicked" refers specifically to those who do not share your faith. While our personal and religious beliefs may differ in nuanced ways, the core principles often remain similar. It is these subtle variations, rather than grand deviations from shared values, that should not be viewed as the source of wickedness. While not being Christian isn't the official definition on wickedness it may play a part in it.

Surrounding yourself with these supportive individuals ensures that your "leaf does not wither." You will find yourself thriving in ways beyond mere financial gain, experiencing a richness in faith, purpose, and fellowship that truly nourishes the spirit. While financial resources may offer comfort, true happiness arises from encouraging relationships with those who inspire you to grow in faith and bring genuine joy to your life.

The friendships you acquire play a pivotal role in shaping your relationship with Christ. The people you surround yourself with can either draw you nearer to Him, deepening your faith and understanding, or lead you away, creating distance from His love and guidance. Your choice of companions will significantly influence your spiritual journey.

**Friday, 7 March**

**Bill Buhner**

*“...they ask of me righteous judgments;  
they want God on their side.” Isaiah 58:2b*

*“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” Isaiah 58:8*

One of my favorite movies is “The Verdict” starring Paul Newman as Frank Galvin, a washed-up drunk of a lawyer who is given a case of medical malpractice (which he is supposed to lose) and via this case, is afforded wonderful redemption. In his summation to the jury he says:

*“You know, so much of the time we're just lost. We say, "Please, God, tell us what is right; tell us what is true." And there is no justice: the rich win, the poor are powerless. We become tired of hearing people lie. And after a time, we become dead.”*

Isaiah, I think, is in exactly the same place: How do we “get right” with our Lord and with our brothers and sisters who we see every day? In this reading, Isaiah, by the grace of God, shows us the way.

It is time for us to stop being “Dead,” and to rejoin the grateful and redeemed “Living.” We know the way. Thanks be to God!

**Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, have mercy on us, all sinners. Amen**

*Isaiah 58:1-9a    Matthew 9:10-17    Psalm 51:1-10*

**Saturday, 8 March**

**David Christian**

***Archived Meditation***

The oak trees around the Chapel produce hundreds of acorns every year. If all those acorns grew, the new trees would crowd each other out and we could have no place to walk. Not one in a hundred of these acorns will actually germinate, and most of the ones that do will be mowed down or eaten by deer or crowded by other plants. BUT that is not the concern of the oak tree. The oak trees job is to produce acorns.

That is the way I think God works. God loves everywhere, indiscriminately, and “He sends the rain on the just and the unjust.” God sows his love- this grace- on the evil and the good and I think He calls us to do the same.

Now, I am not talking about an emotional kind of love but a love in which we are willing to work for the well-being of someone and sometimes we are unaware of this work. Perform random acts of kindness! God wants us in my opinion to sow our love for the sheer joy of loving. Everyday I feast on the fruits of the love shown by others who came before me. Some of these seeds of love will fall on barren ground and some will produce fruit. Such is the way of life and such is the God we follow.

I am reminded of a story of William Willimon who made a trip back to his old college to make a speech. After the speech a young man came up and said, “Dr. Willimon, remember me?” Although he looked familiar, Willimon could not immediately place him. Then the young man said, “I am Rob.” And Willimon remembered the unruly, rambunctious little boy who had gone through a difficult time in a parish he had served many years before.

Now, that child was a poised, fine-looking college student. “I’m doing great here,” he said. “And I am here because of you, Dr. Willimon.”

“Me?” Willimon asked.

“Yes,” he said. “You had a tremendous influence on my life. And I heard you say that this had been your college, so I wanted to come here, too.”

“How did I influence your life?” Willimon asked. Perhaps the boy had been influenced by one of Dr. Willimon sermons or the day camp that he had conducted. What could have caused such a profound influence.

“You remembered my name,” the young man replied. “Yep, you always knew my name and I remembered what a good pastor you were.”

Perform random acts of kindness and love indiscriminately. Who knows where it may lead and it is also good for your soul.

**Monday, 10 March**

**Julie Markle**

***Archived Meditation***

***The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all his works. Psalm 145:8-9***

As an adult woman, I am many things: a Christian, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a professional, and ... a person constantly trying to control all of the variables of her life at all times.

In recent years, I've learned that my need to control everything does not serve me well—primarily because it's a farce. I can only control a handful of minor variables at any given moment. Beyond that, God is in control. And Faith in that knowledge and a deep awareness that I have ( or will have) exactly what I need, thanks to all of His tender mercies, is the Truth. That's the Truth for all of us: the Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all his works. We are His works, and He takes care of us. Sometimes, that care comes from a unique perspective or personality trait. Other times, we receive care from one another with the abilities and sensitivities that we may lack. Most importantly, the care for others often comes in the form of our graciousness and compassion, with which we have been endowed through Him.

This Lenten season, as we engage in sacrifice and anticipation, I will continue in my resolve to give up the fallacy of control. Instead, I will reflect to respectfully acknowledge and gratefully pray for the gifts I have been given. I'll also try to be more aware of my surroundings—paying particular attention to the amazing humans in my life that support and offer me help, grace, and mercy. Lastly-and this is the real challenge- I will search for ways in which God wants to use “my” gifts as a way to provide and serve others in need. I will be open and looking for the moments when God points me in a direction in which I may serve another, and thereby Him.

Further into Psalm 145, we read that “The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. The Lord is nigh unto all of them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.” How might we be of service to the Lord, as He avails himself to all that call upon Him? By understanding that our gifts are bequeathed to us as a result of His graciousness, and that those gifts are not intended to be kept to ourselves. Rather, they are meant to be shared with those in need. Remaining open to the opportunities to share our bountiful gifts, offers us a way to fulfill our purpose- as works of God.

**Tuesday, 11 March**

**Ellen Durst**

*17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.*

*18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit*

*19 The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;*

*20 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.*

*Psalm 34:15-22*

In Catechesis of the Good Shephard, we teach the colors of the liturgical calendar. There is a cute song that goes along with it and it begins with “Purple for preparation....” As I am sure many of you have noticed, our altar linens are currently purple. We are preparing. Preparing for the Resurrection of Christ. The preparation of Lent is often a somber, reflective period of time. We are reflecting on our own sins, and the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus gave when He gave his life for our eternal life. It often makes me think of the hardest times in my own life and how the Lord led the path righteousness.

About 12 years ago, I gave birth to twins. They were born more than 4 months early. One of the twins survived, and one of them did not. And I was ANGRY. I cried out at GOD, angry that such trouble was upon myself and my family. And while I never lost my faith, my anger made it hard for me to pray. I counted on others to do it for me. Not to just pray for the child that was fighting for his life in the NICU, but for myself who was so angry at the Lord for putting this in my path. It was the most troubled time of my life.

But, as this Psalm tells us, the Lord delivers us from them all. He protected me, just as he protects you in your time of need. He stays close to us in all our troubles, walking with us, and even when our own faith may waiver, our Lord never loses faith in us.

**Wednesday, 12 March**

**Stan Flint**

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.*

*Psalm 51:12-13*

Poor old Jonah. Boy, did. He not have a “willing spirit”! He fled God’s command to go to Nineveh the first time, so God intervened. Nineveh was among the wickedest, cruelest, and most idolatrous cities in the world. Can you imagine how it would go if you went to Bourbon Street with such a message? “Uh, no thanks, Lord?” Yet, as Christians, that is exactly what we are called to do each day in our lives.

So, you may ask, “Where is Nineveh? To whom are we called to deliver warnings and wisdom, offer repentance and guide to deliverance? Or we may ask ourselves, “Do we hear Jonah warning us today?”

Sadly, we don’t have to look far. Acrimony, hatred, fear, incivility, division, deceit, cruelty, greed, and malice are everywhere to be witnessed. All one must do is read the news. Wars and rumors of wars, brothers turned against brothers, children against their families and enterprises, and countries dedicated to evil. The harvest indeed is plentiful but the laborers are few. After all, which of us wants to be the one to say, “This is wrong, stop doing it or you will be destroyed”? Understandably, Jonah was not willing. I guess many of us are not willing, either because we fear the impact it may have on us, our relationships, and/or our welfare.

Still, the call to Jonah is every Christian’s call, and we shirk that duty or ignore the warnings at our own peril and the peril of those we love. Israel faced a similar fate as Nineveh. Their prophets warned them, but they did not repent and suffered captivity in exile for five hundred years in Assyria. They had their warning but ignored it.

Ironically, Assyria is home to Nineveh and its leader, Nehemiah. Everyone from King Nehemiah on down responded to Jonah’s wisdom, turned away from their evil ways and were redeemed. It does not always work that way, and it was more likely that Jonah would be executed rather than obeyed. But God does work in strange and mysterious ways when we have the courage to follow his will. Years later Nineveh, after being redeemed, returned to their evil ways and the city was eventually overthrown. They had their warning.

Jesus compared himself to Jonah in today’s Lenten reading, reminding us that we must heed the wisdom he offers in his warning to confront and turn away from evil. Jesus’s statement strongly implies there will be no second warning. If we do repent and maintain our repentance we will be saved, and we will save many others, as Jonah did. We may not be swallowed by a whale or be commanded to spread the news in the French Quarter, but we are called every day to our Ninevehs. Earlier I posed a question, “Where is our Nineveh?” It is everywhere we go. It is at the grocery, driving our cars, at work, at home or on

social media. We are called to confront cruelty, to call out meanness, selfishness, deceit, and callousness and to announce God's redemption.

"You have to turn on evil and when it tries to hide, you have to go in after it and never be denied. Time is running out. Let's roll."

Neil Young wrote these lyrics to his song "9-11". I do not think anyone would confuse Neil Young with Jonah or Jesus, but these warnings are blaring all around us. Will we have courage to stand in the congregation, in our workplace and in our lives? Will we be "more willing" than poor old Jonah to follow God's call and more willing than ancient Israel to heed the warning?

**Lord God Almighty, grant us the courage and willing spirit to follow your will, your ways and your words. Empower us to call out and turn on evil in all its forms, becoming a conduit for your redemption to those around us. So be it, in the name of the everlasting God, who along with his Son and the Holy Spirit reign forever. Amen.**

**Thursday, 13 March**

**Betty Ruth Fox**

*Esther (Apocrypha)*

*Matthew 7:7-12, 14: 1-6, 12-14*

*Psalms 138*

Today's scripture readings from Esther and Psalm 138 are ones of distress. Queen Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord. She pled, **"save us by your hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, O Lord."**

Psalm 138 continues: **"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand shall save me."**

In the gospel reading, Jesus uses action words for those who seek Him. **"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."**

I suspect you are like me in that just coming onto the grounds of the Chapel gives me comfort from any distress I may be carrying. It is fascinating to me that the architecture of our Chapels is designed so that the nave – the main worship space – is constructed like an upside-down boat. A nave roof is often vaulted with exposed wooden beams that resemble the keel of a ship. Nave comes from a Latin word *navis* which means ship.

Considering the construction of the nave, it is amazing that such a chaotic situation – an upside-down boat- brings me great comfort.

It confirms that we come to this place with our chaos and imperfections to be made whole. In fact, I think what Jesus meant when he said the Pharisees had no need for him since they were well is that to really experience God's love and that of others requires that I come as a broken person asking, searching, and knocking . . . which I do every single time I walk through the Chapel doors.

The gospel reading ends with **"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."** I think the song R-E-S-P-E-C-T by Aretha Franklin says it all!

*Dear God, please help me admit my brokenness and embrace your help and that of others. In doing so, help me to help others and respect every single person. Amen.*

Friday, 14 March

Doug Goodin

*1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice;  
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.*

*2 If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand?*

*3 For there is forgiveness with you; therefore you shall be feared.*

*4 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.*

*5 My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.*

*6 O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy;*

*7 With him there is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.*

It is fitting that in the time of Lent, we turn our focus to the practice of waiting. Whether we address it by any other name, rest, linger, discern, or halt, waiting is not necessarily a strength of us as people. We live in a time and a world where it is far better to stay vigilant and in motion than to bring things to a pause, and yet, we find the psalmist describing a soul which waits for the Lord while calling us to do the same.

We see here the true nature and emotion present through waiting. The psalmist is not simply sitting quietly for God to hear or acknowledge them, but they are crying out, “I have called to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.” We hear time and again the mantra which proclaims “God’s time is not our time,” and while this is true, it is often a sentiment in which it is hard to find comfort. This psalmist knows our grief and our uneasiness that comes from waiting in the silence of an unseen yet still present God. This psalm is not one of only grief and exasperation, but it is one of reassurance for the hope that is present. “O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy; with him there is plenteous redemption.”

Friends, in this season of reflection and preparation, let us not overlook the blessing apparent in waiting on the Lord.

**Amen**

**Saturday, 15 March**

**Stan Herren**

*“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 the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”*

*Matthew 5: 43-45*

This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount. As such it is not just about how we behave under the law. It is about discovering the living God in the loving of everyone and learning to reflect that love into the world we live in.

Sometimes people mistake this teaching as an admonition to be passive. But the behavior that Jesus calls for is not passive, but active. GIVE; LOVE; LEND (expecting nothing in return); OFFER your other check. Live this type action every day in all that you do!

God is kind and merciful to ALL; no matter whether they are good or wicked. We as Christians are called to a higher standard. We are called when faced with evil to respond with restraint and kindness. We should be willing to take controlled action and work for the well-being of everyone at all times.

Jesus asked us to love one another. Of all the commandments and all the powers, love is the most powerful and important. I think this love is shown through our willingness to work for another person's well-being. I also believe that this command means we do not necessarily have to like a person. But we cannot let liking or disliking someone stand in the way of loving another human being. We show love in our desire to take action to work for everyone's well-being.

Last year I wrote a meditation on the significance of “the Peace” in our order of worship. It is important that we genuinely make peace with our friends and our enemies before we approach the altar. For peace of the Lord to be with us, we must reconcile with everyone and show our love equally.

We are called to value and love each of God's children. It is especially important during Lent that we recognize the significance of every human being. We are to see each person as a child of God and to love and be at peace with even those who hurt us. Let us truly love one another and seek God's face in every face we encounter.

*We ask for Your grace to show love to all as a way of daily living. Amen*

**Monday, 17 March**

**Annell Holland**

*“But 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.” Luke 6:27-38*

Earlier in this chapter, Luke tells us Jesus is addressing “a great crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people.” I expect there were many predisposed notions among His followers for Him to overcome. There was, and still is, much to unpack in His teaching: pray for those who mistreat and abuse you, give and expect nothing in return, be merciful and forgive, don’t judge, love your enemies... not exactly an eye for an eye theology!

How confusing these words must have been for His followers? The notion to love, even when you are met with hate, to forgive when you are met with abuse, and to offer acceptance not judgement. All of these are fairly simple in concept, yet not so easily lived. What is Jesus calling us to do?

I am drawn to these words of forgiveness. Every time, yes every time, I pray the Lord’s Prayer the words: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” scream to my heart. I know I have much work to do there. Is Jesus saying He only forgives me as I forgive others? “For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

When I think about His words regarding judging others, I am reminded of my husband’s philosophy. He says, “God and I had a conversation a long time ago. God said when it comes to judging people, you can stand down. I got this.” And truly He does. In the end, standing in His presence, we will be judged.

In the meantime, let’s choose to love. Yes, we will stumble, fall, ask for forgiveness, and receive His forgiveness. Let’s be in communication with Him constantly through prayer, church, the Eucharist, reading His words... I believe it is here we will find what it is He truly wants us to do. We will find how to be the hands and feet of Jesus on earth. I love a prayer my sister has written on a sticky note and

attached to the dashboard in her car: “God, please help me to be a better person today than I was yesterday. Amen”

Let’s remember His example. He was betrayed, judged, beaten, nailed to a cross, and left there to die. In return He prayed for His persecutors, “Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

*Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against thee in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved thee with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in thy will, and walk in thy ways, to the glory of thy Name. Amen*      *Book of Common Prayer page 331*

**Tuesday, 18 March**

**Nelly Hosler**

***“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Isaiah 1: 18b***

We live in a broken world, but that does not define who we are. At times, we face challenges and difficulties—whether in our work, families, friendships, or even through trauma and grief. Yet, God calls us to do the right thing, not for our own name or recognition, but for His glory. He commands us to love others regardless of their social status, race, or background. We may be popular, have fame, or be surrounded by many friends, but if all we do is for our own reputation, God calls that hypocrisy (Matthew 23).

God loves us. He loves us no matter who we are. He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, and as long as we love Him and accept Him in our hearts, He washes away our sins.

On May 26, 2021, my son fell into a coma in the hospital because of a crime committed against him. I was speechless; my heart shattered. I couldn't understand why this had happened. Day after day, I stayed by his side in the hospital, searching for answers. Then, I remembered a dream he had shared with me a few months earlier—an unusual dream for a 12-year-old boy. He told me he was sitting in a beautiful garden, feeling peaceful and happy.

When that memory surfaced, something stirred in my heart. I felt as if God was telling me that He wanted my son to come home. It didn't make sense to me—I wanted him to stay here with me. On the sixth day, I prayed and spoke to my son, even though he was still in a coma. I believed he could hear me. In my prayer, I forgave the perpetrator. I told my son that I remembered his dream and that, as his mother, I wanted him to stay on Earth with me. But if he chose to go to the beautiful garden with God, I would surrender to God's will.

It was so hard for me to accept this, but just less than 24 hours later his brave little heart slowed down and finally stopped beating; Jose went home to his Father in heaven.

The news of the crime was everywhere in my home country. A week after my son's passing, the police arrested the perpetrator. In that moment, the Lord reminded me of His own Son—Jesus, who died on the cross, even for this man who had taken my son's life.

I knew what I had to do. I took a Bible and went to the jail to see him. I only spoke to him for about ten minutes. At the end of our conversation, I told him, “I am a Christian, and I forgive you because of Jesus.” Then, I handed him the Bible. He crouched on the floor, bowed his head, and apologized. I told him to repent and ask Jesus for forgiveness. Soon after, the police took him back to his cell. That was the first and last time I saw him.

I knew in my heart that I had done the right thing—not for my own sake, but for God's kingdom. If I had done it for my own name, I would not have had the strength to face him. But because I remembered who I am—a servant of God—I did not act according to my fleshly desires. Instead, I felt a victory in my heart. Though I grieved, I felt God's reminder:

*"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, if you are willing and obedient."*

When I looked at the perpetrator's face, the Lord reminded me that I, too, am a sinner. The world once chose to free Barabbas and crucify Jesus. It was all of us who nailed Jesus to the cross. And yet, Jesus died for that man, just as He died for me. In that moment, I felt unworthy to judge him. Instead, I felt the Lord take away my anger and hatred, replacing it with a mission—to serve His kingdom.

### **A Prayer of Forgiveness**

*Lord Jesus Christ, we invite You into our hearts. Forgive us our sins, just as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Use our lives as Your hands and feet in this world. Amen.*

Wednesday, 19 March

Lucy Jones

*“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the company they went a day’s journey and sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking 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; And when they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.’ And he said to them, ‘How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.” Luke 2 :41-51*

In remembering this Bible story from our youth, we know that as a religious family, Mary and Joseph take Jesus, who was twelve, along with friends and family to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover; a trip they probably took each year. After the festivities, Mary and Joseph travel a day towards home before realizing Jesus is not with the group. They return to Jerusalem to find him in the temple speaking to and asking questions of the teachers. He displays a great understanding and insight that is amazing to all who hear him. Mary and Joseph scold him for staying in Jerusalem, and Jesus responds, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Jesus returns to Nazareth with his parents, increasing in wisdom and favor with God.

This passage from Luke is the only information in the Bible that speaks of Jesus as he develops from young child to adulthood. The passage also demonstrates Jesus’ extraordinary understanding of scripture and His recognition of divine sonship; hence, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” More can be taken from this passage, but this Lent I want to focus on Mary and Joseph and what their actions might mean to us.

Mary and Joseph appear to be loving and conscientious parents as they travel home from Jerusalem. Busy with life and preoccupied, it takes a day to realize Jesus is not with them. They lost Jesus! They must have left him! As a parent, I can only imagine how panicked and scared they might have been as they turn around and return to Jerusalem. After a long search they find Jesus in the Temple, calm and engrossed in conversation.

How many times like Mary and Joseph are we so busy with life and too preoccupied to realize that we too have left Jesus behind? Although not an intentional choice, it’s easy to find ourselves taking matters into our own hands, being just too busy this week to read our Bibles or pray regularly, skipping a church

service just this once, or all the many other ways we close ourselves to God's grace and our own developing spirituality. However, like Mary and Joseph, if we have let "life" get in the way, we too can turn around and find Jesus. While we may leave Jesus for a while, Jesus, with His unconditional love, never leaves us. The triune God is always present in our lives with outstretched hands waiting for us to return.

*Heavenly Father, help us renew those practices this Lent which brings us closer to you. Amen*

Thursday, 20 March

Meg Kilgore

*9 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ 25 “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us. 27 “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ 30 “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ 31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” Luke 16: 19-31*

When I read this scripture in Luke, I have a very distinct image of the rich man (after death) behind heavy bars with intolerable heat/flames directly behind him, asking for pity and begging for the cool water of God’s eternal paradise. This “caged” eternal dead-end environment reminds me of a simple short story by John Eades, PhD entitled “New Year’s Resolutions”.

This story begins with two bird hunters walking in a farmer’s field beside a bubbling stream with lush vegetation discussing changes they would make in their lives as they faced a new year. Changes like doing things that would make them happier, healthier, wealthier, wiser to improve the “quality” of their lives. They agreed that too many extenuating circumstances had prevented those changes in the previous year.

Suddenly they stopped upon seeing a very odd sight—a large, golden, glittering bejeweled bird cage with a heavy lock on the door to prevent any possible escape. Admiring the beauty of the cage, they finally spotted a beautiful dove lying lifeless on the floor of the cage, with empty seed shells and a dry water bowl next to it. They concluded the bird died of thirst and hunger. They didn’t miss the irony of the expensive locked cage hanging beside the beautiful stream and lush landscape and the “torture” the bird must have felt being so close to what it desired for life and unable to reach it. There was no sign that the bird struggled or even tried to escape. One hunter commented that the bird “sure lived in a fine cage while it lived though.”

The men then sat on the side of the stream and ate lunch before heading out to continue their bird-hunting trip. They sat in silence for a long while perhaps thinking about their own lives: both lived in very fine “cages” but seemed to be unaware of the cost of trade-offs they had made for true happiness. Some things are just too difficult to think about much less speak about.

Finally, one hunter spoke up and said “What I do know is I’m ready to go kill my own birds.” Still puzzled with the odd site, he again went to examine the cage. What he saw shocked him, and he couldn’t understand how he and his buddy had missed it the first time. Toward the top of the cage was a hole—made by someone who had neatly sawed away several rows of bars through which the bird could have easily escaped. He called his buddy over to see what they missed. He said “Well, I’ll be damned.” They concluded that the bird was “too stupid” to know how to escape. The second hunter couldn’t believe how he, too, had missed such an obvious way out.

This scripture in Luke reminds us that we, alone, are in control of our relationship with God and his son Jesus Christ who came to save us from our sinful, secular world and offers a peace that passes all understanding and an eternal paradise. We must avoid being “damned” to a place of torture with no escape. As Abraham says, we as individuals have to be silent and listen and look up to accept His grace in this crazy, bustling world that never stops and is so hard to disconnect. We are God’s chosen when the world doesn’t choose us. There are no “cages” that can hold us. Look up for that “hole in the cage” through which we can escape the world that often holds us back from God’s grace.

I would like to leave you with a prayer from a recent Daughters of the King newsletter:

*Heavenly Father, as I come before you today, I humbly ask for your renewal in my life. Wash away the old and worn-out parts of me, and fill me with your fresh grace and your power. Guide me to walk in your ways with a renewed heart, filled with purpose and joy. Thank you for your unending love and the promise of new beginnings in Jesus' name. Amen."*

Friday, 21 March

Keith Obert

*33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.*

*35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.*

*38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

*40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"*

*41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."*

*42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:*

*"The stone the builders rejected*

*has become the cornerstone;*

*the Lord has done this,*

*and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"*

*43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.*

All of us who proclaim to be Christians are children of the Kingdom of God. We live our busy lives each day and we find our way to The Chapel on Sunday and pray for the church, the people, the sick, those who have died, leaders of our country, leaders of the Episcopal Church, those in the military, and for all such others. When we do this, I wonder whether we should consider whether we are producing or bearing fruit. I often look at going to Eucharist as my time to share in the Lord's Supper and have bread and wine, representing the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. I look at this as my way of filling my own cup.

But, I ask myself, is this enough, or is being involved in the church enough, or is supporting those with family members who are sick, or deceased, or digging a grave, or smoking meats in the Ministry of Smoke and giving proceeds to philanthropic projects, or by opening our Chapel doors to the community at Day in the Country and Christmas in the Country and on and on...is all of this enough? Are we truly producing or bearing fruit?

Perhaps there are other ways that we can produce or bear fruit, by helping someone get to church where they may be handicapped, taking communion to those homebound, or being kind to someone in Kroger who seems to be having a bad day, or by not getting mad at that person who cut you off in the Kroger parking lot, or by not racing down I-55, jockeying for position to get to our jobs wherever they may be. In these instances, are we truly bearing fruit? Is there more that we can do each day to bear fruit? I challenge myself and each of us to find a way each day to be kind to those whom we encounter on our daily journeys, and by doing so, is that bearing the fruit which Jesus is requesting of us such that, the fruit that we bear in others, ultimately bears fruit in the folks that they encounter each day, and so on and so on. I truly believe that we have opportunities each day to stop, breathe, take in the situation, and bear fruit, instead of acting in a worldly, usual manner. Perhaps by doing so, our bearing fruit in others, will begin a wagon train of others bearing fruit, a trove of benevolent deeds, in those that we encounter each day.

*Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for each day, and we thank you for the blessings that you have bestowed upon us; but, may we find a little way each day to bear fruit and begin that domino reaction of others bearing fruit, just as we are told to do in this parable from Matthew. May we be more like Jesus and find simple ways each day to bear fruit in others and through that bearing of fruit, we spread the love that Jesus intended for us to share each day. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

**Saturday, 22 March**

**Dr. Logan Polk**

*“...God retaineth not his anger for ever because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, and he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”*  
– Micah 7:18-19, KJV

In the olden days of the Prophet Micah, the sages, the kings, the priests, and the people all alike referred to a God Who will come, Who will have compassion, Who will save us, and so on. 700 years later, the God the Hebrews knew would come did come, in the human flesh of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the lowly Shepherd and yet the Prince of Peace. He walked, laughed, ate, drank, taught, healed, forgave, was tormented for our sins, killed for us, was ultimately resurrected from the dead and ascended to the Father above to open the way for us. Much like the Hebrews of Micah's day, however, who longed for their savior who will come, how many of us today believe Christ has not only come, but that He is present with us right now, in this very moment, even as you are reading this message?

The Saintry Micah prophesied that God would turn again and have compassion on His people, and that compassion came in the form of Incarnate Love, Jesus, the eternal bridegroom of all believers. Yet many Christians today live as though they are still waiting on their Savior to arrive and lift them up from the muck of life. Our prayers seem to fall on deaf ears, as we bang on a cold door long since closed off to us. Christian believers who are told to “be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!” (Jn 16:33) look upon our world and the current state of things and wonder how such a thing can possibly be true. Yet we must remember that Christ promised it, and so it must be. Micah spoke in the future tense, of a God who will come, who will save, and yet Jesus speaks in the present! Not only of a world to come, but right now! I am reminded of a story of a recently departed Saint, the Rev. Merlin Carothers, who heard the voice of Jesus speak to him one day as he was praying due to horrible tooth problems, problems waking up, and many other bodily issues plaguing him daily. “Merlin,” Jesus said, “what is it you want from Me?” Merlin responded, as surely we all would, “I want you to solve all my problems!” Jesus replied “Merlin, I already have!” The Reverend responded with, “Of course you haven't, I'm still wallowing in misery!” To which Jesus responds “I've forgiven you all your sins. I've already given you eternal life with Me for all eternity. What more could you want?” To which Merlin could only respond with, “Oh.” Jesus left off with the message, “Merlin, I want your joy! You can start by waking up every morning with a smile!”

In that same way as the Rev. Merlin was reminded that God's promises are alive and active right now, we too have to be able to find joy in everything, even our pain. God has a plan for everything, and no amount of our free will is ever going to screw up His desires for us so long as we place ourselves in His wonderful hands as clay in a master potter's grip. We must renew ourselves every day with a smile and praise His Name, no matter how bad things are. When we give praise, even for horrible things in our lives, we will find that we can finally let those bad thoughts go! I used to struggle with horrible depression until I discovered this simple remedy. When we give glory and praise even when things seem at their worst, offering those awful parts of our life up to Jesus, it allows God to work in our lives fully

and shape us as He desires. One might wonder how we can simply fully surrender ourselves to God, especially in an age where we are taught to be complete individuals and rely on no one. The simplest way is to remind ourselves of Jesus' daily presence.

I will leave you with 2 simple prayer rules I was given by a long-departed Saint, Hannah Whitall Smith. She said the two most valuable phrases to recite in remembrance that our Savior is with us, He loves us, and that He is always with us even if we feel we are in Hell itself, are these following: "The Lord is my Shepherd," and "Jesus saves me now!" Emphasize each word as you say it, reflect on what it really means for God Himself to be our Shepherd, for Jesus to save us daily from all things that besail us so long as we trust in Him! Be of good cheer, for our God not only will save us, He IS saving us now!

**Monday, 24 March**

**Whit Rayner**

*“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God... Why, my soul, are you downcast?... Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God.” Psalm 42:1-5 (excerpts)*

When choosing between the various assigned readings for Lenten meditations, as a chorister, I frequently am drawn to the Psalm. We “sing” Psalms every Sunday, and the lyrics to many of our anthems and hymns are taken directly from Psalms. My choice this year is no exception.

Today’s Psalm is a favorite of mine. You will recognize today’s reading as a Psalm frequently chanted in our services. It serves as the text for several favorite anthems sung by our choir (one even in Latin!) and is the text for one of my top five Cursillo songs of all time.

Why does this Psalm strike a chord (pardon the pun) with me? Like the flowers of the field and birds of the air, deer are totally reliant on God to provide food, water and sustenance. And the Psalmist equates himself to a deer, likewise totally dependent on God for his survival. But in this instance, the Psalmist, and all of us, are seeking spiritual sustenance—the imagery of our souls literally panting, is overwhelming. And despite the plaintive tone of the Psalm, we realize “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Put your hope in God...”

As is written in Psalm 34, “Oh taste and see, how gracious the Lord is. Blessed is the man, that trusteth in Him.” So, let not your hearts be troubled.

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.*

*I do not see the road ahead of me.*

*I cannot know for certain where it will end.*

*nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.*

*But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.*

*And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*

*And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.*

*I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

*-Prayer of Thomas Merton, from Thoughts in Solitude*

Tuesday, 25 March  
Tommy Roberson

*“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, with the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And behold thou shall conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man. The angel answered and said unto her. The holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” Luke 1: 26-38*

#### The Promise of Mary’s Miracle

This passage from Luke is the story of the greatest miracle of all. It shows the awesome power of God and how he can use it in our lives, but we must believe in Him and let Him work. Stop and think about what has happened to Mary.

- She is expecting a baby and isn’t married
- Jewish culture at that time, women were seen as being no better than property
- Mary knew her life would not be what she expected it to be BUT she still offered herself to God

God chose Mary to give birth to his Son but she also had to bear the public shame of people not understanding what God was doing.

One day God will ask us to trust Him for something extraordinary. Will we be ready to say YES to God even when what he is asking seems impossible? If God can do such a miraculous thing in the life of Mary, just think what he can do in our own lives. We must have faith and trust the plan for our life.

**Wednesday, 26 March**

**Lisa Stutzman-Graves**

*“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” Deuteronomy 4:1-2 NKJV*

*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:17-20 NKJV*

How many of us have felt that nudge from God and yet maybe we obeyed it halfway or not at all? I know I have and how does it make us feel when we obey completely? Does it bring us back to school days when we worked so hard for a certain grade or project? I can remember in 4th grade we had a multiplication contest...who could learn their multiplication tables the fastest won a whole bag of M&M's plus the chance to grade all those papers. Guess who won, yours truly. Another time when I played softball, I was told there were no left-handed catchers. Well, I worked really hard and guess what I was? A left-handed catcher who guarded that plate like a mother hen. When we tried to take short cuts with God, how did that make us feel....sheepish, guilty, remorse or more? I remember when I was a teenager my parents would give you a long leash, but when you messed up, they would tighten that leash so fast and tight you would think you never had any privileges. They did this because they loved me and I know God loves us even more. When I get into these latter feelings of guilt and remorse I have to ask myself, does God want me to feel like this? Absolutely not. Our God is a God of excellence and in my experience he is all too ready to step in when we have tried everything we know to do. But when short cuts are involved, maybe not so. Blind ignoring, I'm certain God is not happy with that at all. Just like my parents were so tough when I was a teenager, sometimes God has to be this way with us, for our betterment. God wants us to share our praiseworthy moments to next generations to give them hope and inspiration during the really tough times in life.

*Lord help to hear and obey the gentle nudges of your Holy Spirit and to know you are giving us these nudges for our good and future generations.*

**Thursday, 27 March**

**Suzie Webb**

*“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, a house divided against itself will fall.” Luke 11:17*

I've always considered meetings as a “necessary evil”. I'm not sure exactly why. Maybe it's because very few meetings that I have attended involve participants who are actively listening instead of formulating what they will say next. A lot of times this leads to contention, needless bickering and the meeting ends with no obvious conclusion. It usually results in a feeling of time wasted and some hurt feelings.

We live in a time where divisiveness and hatred surrounds us - country vs country, Democrats vs Republicans, brother vs brother. What I hear a lot of is “I'm right and you are wrong!” without giving anyone a chance to be heard and possibly see another side of the story. It wears me down as I'm sure it does many. Jesus says that a kingdom divided against itself will be ruined. I see this happening in our country, in our state and in our homes. I believe that He is calling us to unity: to come together and find the solutions to the problems that we are all facing today. He wants us to listen to others and see the other side of things instead of proclaiming our need to be right. Love is the great unifier and as long as love of our fellow man is in the forefront, then we should be able to look past our differences and come up with a way to live together in peace. Our common purpose should be Jesus's greatest commandment, to love our neighbors.

*Heavenly Father, you have called us in the Body of your Son Jesus Christ to continue his work of reconciliation and reveal you to the world; forgive us the sins which tear us apart; give us the courage to overcome our fears and to seek that unity which is your gift and your will; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Friday, 28 March

Bob Williams

*Hear me, my people, and I will warn you— if you would only listen to me, Israel!*

*You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not worship any god other than me.*

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.*

*“But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me.*

*So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.*

*“If my people would only listen to me, if Israel would only follow my ways,*

*how quickly I would subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! Psalm 81:8-14*

Psalm 81:8-14 essentially says that God is calling out to His people, pleading with them to listen to Him and obey his commands; He reminds them that He is their God who rescued them from Egypt, and if they remain faithful, He will continue to provide for them and protect them from their enemies, but if they turn away from Him, they will face the consequences of their disobedience and will not experience His blessings.

For me, I think God is saying: Come to the place of worship, my beloved Chapel of the Cross, remember all that God has done for me, and return to him with my whole heart .

Over the years when there have been trying times, the loss of my parents, job changes, money worries, and health scares, I have felt anger and turned from my God. Then I would remember it is the path in life He was and is setting for me. To teach me, to make me a better Christian and to put my full trust in him as he knows best.

*Dear God help us to live differently. Help us to live with devotion to You, in worship of You, with longing for You. Amen*

Saturday, 29 March

The Reverend Will Compton

*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." Luke 18:9-14*

“To focus too much on our sins is in itself sinful.” I remember we were discussing Lent when my liturgics professor said this and it stuck with me. To focus too much on our sinfulness does not leave room for God’s overwhelming grace. Even the Prodigal Son in all of the horrible ways he treated his father accepted his father’s invitation to be the guest of honor at a party and have the fatted calf killed for him when he returned home.

There is no sin for which God will refuse to extend his grace. There is no sin for which God will not throw a party for us and kill the fatted calf when we repent and return to Him.

And speaking of repentance, that same professor said that our repentance, even in Lent, should be joyful. I guess that in the same way God loves a cheerful giver, perhaps He loves a cheerful repenter as well. Therefore, confess your sins unlike the Pharisee, but cut yourself some slack unlike the tax collector. Be joyful in your repentance. God created you and called you good, and like the artist or craftsman, God hates nothing He has made. Leave room for God’s grace. After all, ‘tis grace that leads us home.

*The Collect of the Day*

*O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **Monday, 31 March**

### **Margaret Roberson**

#### ***John 4: 43-54***

John tells us in Chapter 4, verses 43-54 of the dilemma Jesus was facing at this time in his ministry. The problem is spoken of when Jesus goes back to his hometown of Galilee. John states prophets are not usually welcome in their home countries, and yet the people of Galilee did welcome Jesus. Was the welcome genuine or superficial? Jesus felt the people wanted a Messiah who would perform miracles, such as turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. The miracles they witnessed were intended to lead his followers to a greater understanding of the Word of God. Jesus felt they wanted miracles more or less “on demand”.

While in Galilee, Jesus was approached by a royal official. The man had come from Capernaum to ask Jesus to come with him to heal his dying son. Note the man did not send a messenger, he came himself.

“Off you go!” Jesus said to the man, “Your son will live!”

The man did not beg for Jesus to come with him, he simply turned and set off for home. The next day, as he walked down the road, he met his slaves. They told him his son was alive and well. The official asked at what time his son began to get well. The slave replied, “The fever left him yesterday, about one o’clock.”

The official knew this was the exact time that Jesus had said, “Your son will live!” The official did not have to see the miracle, because he truly heard the Word of Jesus and believed. This is the response Jesus wanted then and now.

Ask God to help you hear and believe the Word of our Messiah, and to follow his Word as the official did in Gallilee. Seeing is not always necessary for believing.

**Tuesday, 1 April**

***Archived Meditation***

*I love you, O Lord, my strength.*

*The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,*

*my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,*

*my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

*I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,*

*so I shall be saved from my enemies.*

*The cords of death encompassed me;*

*the torrents of perdition assailed me;*

*the cords of Sheol entangled me;*

*the snares of death confronted me.*

*In my distress I called upon the Lord;*

*to my God I cried for help.*

*From his temple he heard my voice,*

*and my cry to him reached his ears.*

*Psalms 18 (1-7)*

We may not face the challenges that David had, but in truth, all of us face difficult times. They will vary for each of us – death, divorce, bankruptcy, abuse, neglect, illness, family or work conflicts, abandonment, fear, and the list goes on. What we learn today from David is that God is strong and faithful beyond anything we can ever imagine no matter what we may face. God’s strength knows no bounds. In God’s presence, we find safety and security, and shelter from the dangers that threaten to overwhelm us. God’s unchanging nature reassures us of His grace and protection, even in the midst of life’s greatest challenges. And in a world filled with uncertainty and turmoil, it’s comforting to declare with certainty that God is our rock in whom we take refuge.

As we journey through these last days of Lent, let us hold on to the truth of God’s steadfast love and unlimited strength. May we find peace in knowing that God is our rock, our fortress, and our deliverer, guiding us through every trial and triumph and proclaim, “I love you, Lord, my strength.”

Wednesday, 2 April

Jennifer Eckerson

*"This is what the LORD says: 'In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' 'They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.*

*Isaiah 49:8-9 (NIV)*

Isaiah 49:8 reminds us that God's plans unfold in His perfect timing. It is an assurance that even when circumstances seem bleak, He is at work, bringing restoration and renewal. To those who feel lost, broken, or burdened by life, this passage is a promise that God reclaims what seems ruined and brings light into the darkest places.

This verse also calls us to reflect on our role in God's mission. Just as the Servant in Isaiah was a covenant for the people, we too are called to be ambassadors of God's restoration, pointing others toward His salvation.

I recall a Sunday sermon given by an eloquently spoken Vietnam veteran. One line from his message has remained with me over the years:

**"My sins are my own, and I won't focus on the sins I have committed, but on the redemption God has provided, because focusing on my sins would distract from the beauty of God's grace and His purpose." That statement resonated deeply. Here was a man who had endured struggles beyond what I could imagine, yet he humbly stood before God, sharing his faith in His grace in a small Southern Episcopal church.**

The love of God is a consistent thread throughout Scripture. Psalm 145:14 tells us, "The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down." He does not leave us in our weakness but actively supports and restores us when we stumble. This promise sustains me when life feels overwhelming—when burdens seem too heavy to carry. In those moments, God provides the strength to press on navigating the challenges that this life presents.

Like that Vietnam veteran, I have learned that if we focus solely on our struggles, we risk missing God's perfect timing. It is in the struggle itself that we often find growth, strength, and a deeper understanding of His grace. While the journey may be difficult, the beauty lies in persevering through faith. And though we may not always receive the answer we had hoped for, we can trust that God's plan is far greater than anything we could ever imagine.

**Dear God, during this Lenten season, may we commit to embracing each day with a renewed focus—seeking joy in the intricate beauty of God's plan. Growing in the freedom of His grace. Finding joy in serving Him wholeheartedly. Cherishing the joy found in my family, friends, and work. We stumble, and we fall short. May we humbly request that through God's grace and the faith we place in Him, we are one body—restored, redeemed, and called to serve His greater purpose.**

## Thursday, 3 April

### Martha Rayner Seals

*And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! Exodus 32: 7-8*

In Exodus 32, we read about the Israelites making and worshipping the golden calf, breaking their covenant with the Lord. They became impatient and unfaithful to the Lord, turning to things of this world instead. Psalm 106 points us back to Exodus, describing that "they exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt" (Psalm 106: 19-20). Although the people are unfaithful, Psalm 106 both opens and concludes with Lord's faithfulness. Even after they turned from the Lord, "for their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Psalm 106: 44-45).

As we can see with the Israelites and ourselves, idolatry stems from the heart--what we long for, we make into an idol. Our world makes it so easy to create idols in our lives that consume our thoughts or actions. I pray that our idols are revealed to us so that we may instead turn towards the Lord. We so often, like the Israelites, forget all that the Lord has done for us and "exchange the glory of God" (Psalm 106: 19) for worldly things. Let us draw near to the Lord, remembering all He has done for His children. "Praise to the Lord! Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 106: 1).

*John 5: 30-47*

**Friday, 4 April**

***Archived Meditation***

***So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.***

***John 8: 51***

There's an old adage, "people with glass houses shouldn't throw stones". It's a wise commentary on how we must practice self-examination and self-awareness before we pass judgement on someone else. It can go too far, stopping us from saying anything at all.

It's one thing to keep our mouths shut to avoid passing judgement or "throwing stones," but it's something quite different to be the stone that has been thrown into the crowd. When Jesus Christ came into the world, he became the stone hurled into creation to disturb and discomfort. It's as though a stone was cast into the waters of creation and the ripples disturb what we have known.

Jesus didn't have to be hurled into a crowd as a stone cast into water. He simply needed to exist to cause discomfort. His words and teachings, while not necessarily something new, needed to be present in a room to create tension so dense that it could be cut with a butter knife.

Have you ever been in a room when, by their mere presence, a person causes the tension in the room to rise? Imagine being that person in a room, that by your presence, the atmosphere changes and the tension becomes palpable. For some people, this is an everyday occurrence. There are people that live within that tension, merely by existing and thriving as God desires.

Jesus was, and is, more than simply "brave." It takes courage to show up, to be vulnerable, and to be changed.

In this season, as we see the hope of resurrection in the distance, we are charged with more than practicing self-awareness so that we refrain from passing judgement. We are compelled to be the disturbers of the tranquil pond, as disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus showed up to risk his life for the sake of the world. As his disciples, we risk so little for the sake of forgiveness, life-giving ministry, mercy, and the courage to continue the work we've been given.

***O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen***

**Saturday, 5 April**

**Steve Middleton**

It seems to come upon us suddenly on the calendar. Unexpected and quiet. Many people wonder where I'm going with life's emergencies, phone calls, texts and endless emails. Church at noon on a Wednesday seems so out of place. Responsibilities are in no short supply. Life hinges on the timing, the meeting, the plan and the outcome. My burdens are many and so heavy. Worries fill my mind.

It is Ash Wednesday and Lent has begun. Anxiety of traffic and hoping it is light, the sound of gravel under my tires. The timelessness of the Chapel settles into my thoughts. Black robes and candles move toward the door as they have for over 200 years. Entering this quiet place, the liturgy, the prayers, the absence of bright colors lets you know that this day is different.....all is simple and dark. We are confronted with the ashes and the words, "Remember you are dust and to dust you will return".

In Jeremiah, it is revealed how wisdom gives us insight into the plot that deceives and tries to draw us in. For God is a righteous judge and protects his own. He is quick to stand before us and intervene.

Psalms 7 encourages us to be obedient to God, seek righteousness and to call upon the Lord our God for protection, for he loves an obedient child.

Finally in John 7, Christ calls for those who are "thirsty to come unto me". He gives the spirit of living water that comforts and fills the soul. What more can be given in such a world as protection and comfort of peace and security. We venture out as we test our wings and then we return home to that peaceful love.

*I pray for our journey. Your brother in Christ.*

***Jeremiah 11:13-20***

***John 7: 37-52***

***Psalms 7: 6-11***

Monday, 7 April

Allan Cooper

*“...but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” John 8:1-11 (NIV)*

I think John selected this event to add to his contrast of the life and teachings of Jesus to that of the Jewish leaders of his day. Those Pharisees were trying to use this woman as a pawn in their attempt to discredit Jesus and formulate a charge against him of violating either the law of Moses or the law of Rome.

But Jesus saw two things which the Pharisees did not see. First, he saw the Pharisees' hypocrisy, which he pointed out with “let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” Notice that it was the older men who left the mob first. Second, unlike the Pharisees, Jesus could see deeply into the woman's heart. He saw an opportunity for a new life for this woman.

Jesus seemed to know about the lives of many of the people with whom he had direct interactions and knew their true needs. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, (Luke 19) “I'm coming to your house today”. Zacchaeus started a new life. Two other women come to mind, one being his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:5-26. She was shocked that Jesus knew about her current man and her five previous husbands and Jesus knew what she truly needed wasn't just the water from the well and offered her the water of eternal life.

Another similar interaction was with the prostitute in Luke 7:36-50 who came to the Pharisee's home when Jesus visited and washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and perfume and Jesus forgave her sins. On that occasion he said to the crowd “her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little.” Forgiveness was what she truly needed for a new life.

John doesn't tell us anything about this adulteress. We don't know her circumstances, her life story leading up to this occasion, but Jesus knew. Jesus appears to have seen in this adulteress someone who didn't need his condemnation. He knew what this adulteress truly needed, so he offered her a new life

through repentance, the 180 degree turn we have been taught, as the doorway to a new life. “Go and leave your life of sin.”

What do you and I truly need from Jesus today?

***Two Prayers*** - I expect this adulteress prayed two of the most well-known and well-used prayers of history, and although she didn't realize that deity stood before her, we can pray the same (I have many times). The first prayer is ***“Help me! Help me! Help me!”*** and the second is like unto it ***“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”***

Tuesday, 8 April

Debbie Sones

*“From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.’ Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpent from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.’ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.”*

As we are well into our journey through Lent, we too may have grown weary of the same routine day in and day out. Maybe you gave up your favorite food or drink or took on an exercise program that you now find too big of a commitment. Maybe you have grown tired of daily prayer, weekly worship or trying to faithfully follow Jesus.

In the scriptures given for today, God has punished the Israelites for their impatience and complaints of no food and water. He sent poisonous snakes to bite them and many of the Israelites died. But, God didn't send the Israelites into the wilderness to die. He did provide them with food and water. But, this was not enough for them to be satisfied on their journey. This punishment is not the end of the story. God has given them the antidote of a serpent made of bronze that, once bitten, they only need look upon the serpent, and they will be healed.

The serpent lifted up on that pole is a familiar symbol we see today worn on Paramedics uniforms as a symbol of healing. It is compared to Jesus being lifted up on the cross for all who have been bitten, not by a snake, but by sin. If we look to Jesus on the cross, he is the antidote for our sin.

I can see in these scriptures that God's patience is endless. His forgiveness is already given. Just as the prodigal son, before he could say anything to his father, he was already there to welcome him home, throw his arms around him and forgive him.

When I do grow impatient with circumstances in daily life, I look around me at the people of the Chapel of the Cross and realize I am not alone. I see God's work in each of us. He is not giving up on us. We are not to the promised land yet, but we are on our way. He guides us to worship, to eat and drink from his Body and Blood, to prayer, to service to all in our Chapel community and our surrounding communities and the world. I see his steadfast love in my daily life and my faith is fulfilled.

Wednesday, 9 April

Mac Brown

*This command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.*

*So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips. Jeremiah 7:23–28*

Obedience is full surrender. It is a demonstration of trust. I know this can be hard. Especially, in an unknown future where we want some sense of control and understanding. It's hard in a major life change, walking through fear or walking through something you know will be painful. Are we listening? Are we really surrendering or are we just trying? Sometimes I have to surrender the same thing over and over.

There is a quote by A.W. Tozer that states, "The child of God must be completely obedient to the word of the Lord. The driver on the highway is safe, not when he reads the signs; but when he obeys them"

Obedience to God cannot be based on what we feel. We might be scared, confused or doubtful. Those feelings change. Obedience to God has to be based on who HE is which does not change. If we live in the flesh we are separated from God. When we come to God and believe, we are alive in the spirit. Being obedient activates the Holy Spirit. Transformation happens and it opens the door for the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do. The Holy Spirit guides us when we are willing and when we surrender. Obedience can be easy for some and for others... it might be when they are depleted and broken.

Through this journey of life, we can look back and see how God has put people, events, places, heartache, joy, opportunities etc... in our path. We can see how they intertwine and work together for His plan. This is where we can get excited in obedience; even when it pulls us out of our comfort zone and even when it doesn't make sense. It unlocks understanding. It is the highest form of worship. We find out later what God had in mind as he prepared us for what He prepared for us. God sees our future when we can't. Our obedience is telling God that we trust Him.

*Lord, grant me the obedience to follow your voice. May my life be a testimony to the blessings and healing that come from obeying your commands. Amen*

*Jeremiah 7:23-28*

*Luke 11:14-23*

*Psalms 95:6-11*

**Thursday, 10 April**

**Karen Bonner**

In my adult life, I've had three dumb dogs and one really smart dog. The dumb dogs were Italian greyhounds, miniature versions of racing dogs. They are gorgeous, elegant, loving, and dumb as rocks. The smart dog was a miniature schnauzer. He was more intelligent than I am. With the greyhounds when I pointed to a dog toy across the room saying, "Go get it, Boy!" they would look expectantly back and forth from my hand to my face, tail wagging. When I did the same with Hugo (best name ever for a schnauzer), he looked from my face to my hand then to what I was pointing at—and he got it.

This Lenten Season, I commit to stop looking at the face of Jesus and the drama of the Passion. That's right—I said it. I commit to look at what Jesus' words, teaching, life example, and Passion point to. I believe Jesus is pointing to a deep, inner connection with the Source of Being, the Holy Within. Jesus says in Luke 17:21, "The kingdom of God is within you." The 'within' can also be translated as 'among.' Let's make a both/and out of that: The kingdom of God is within and among you. Sounds like a 12-step meeting. You know, Higher Power is found within, and support is found among fellow addicts. Wouldn't it be funny if Jesus came back now, and instead of manifesting as a baby in a manger in a stable, we found him hanging out in 12-step meetings, where people are honest and coming to terms with how they are not in control of everything?

I digress. So how to connect with the Divine Within, the Higher Power? Jesus is pointing to the how. He withdraws to the desert for forty days and encounters his own human Shadow side. The three temptations offered by his own Shadow and Instant gratification (stones into bread), entitlement (expectation of rescue without consequence when something stupid has been done -like jumping off high building), and abuse of power (in therapy-speak, ego-inflation. Granny used to say, "you're getting a little too big for your britches, Missy!") Yes, we must come to terms with all of that in ourselves to shave down the big "I," with appropriate humility (Man, our culture seems to hate that word!) so that the connection with the Holy Within, the source of Being can be made conscious through us. The problem is, if approached properly, this is a damned painful business. Like a crucifixion. If, at any point, the thought occurs, "My God, my God, why...?" we may be on the right track. Not for the faint of heart.

My own spiritual discipline is dream work. I believe—I know—that the Holy Within is the playwright and stage manager for the dramas that unfold in my sleep. I've been shown the best and worst of myself in my dreams. I've told the story many times of the dream I had twenty-five years ago of being captured by Nazis. What a brilliant and horrifying picture of being captured by my own ego-inflated power drive!

I had to do something about that for my marriage to survive and to maintain any kind of relationship with my almost grown child. I had to sacrifice —crucify—that lovely puffed up, self-righteous power feeling and adopt a little humility and (ugh) tenderness. But that was my particular sin. Everyone has their favorite. The good news (Good News) is there's never a crucifixion without a resurrection—transformed. The not so good news is that these crucifixion and resurrections happen again and again throughout our lifetime if we're answering the call to follow Jesus. No rest for the wicked. Oh, but worth it to have life more abundantly, meaningful, and rich. More importantly, to express the meaningful, joyful, rich abundance into the world. That's why we have Easter every year.

## Friday, 11 April

### Mary Larkin Patton

*Again, His Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”*

*“We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”*

*Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods” ’? If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” Again, they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.*

*Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true.” And in that place many believed in Jesus.*

In this passage, we see Jesus’s Jewish opponents attempting to stone him for blasphemy. They believe he is a liar, harming religious tradition, and must be eliminated for the good of the church. They are angry at the sight of someone who is upsetting the age-old routine.

When faced with something so unorthodox and revolutionary as God’s love, we may not realize the similarities between us and the Jewish leaders— we like the constant, everyday flow to which we have become accustomed. It is predictable and well-known.

Why is it so hard for us to embrace God’s love? We dismiss it as blasphemy and try to avoid it because it seems too good to be true. His love is seen in action all the time, but we don’t take time to accept it or share it, and we are skeptical and doubtful. This Lent, it’s important to take time to recognize His love for us and not push it away— but to welcome it and share it with others.

*Dear God, throughout the season of Lent, reveal to us your unconditional love so that we may accept it and share it with others. Amen*

## Saturday, 12 April

### The Revered Tom Fanning

*47So 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. 48If 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.' 49But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! 50You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' 51He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, 52and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. 53So from that day on they planned to put him to death. John 11:47-53*

Years ago, a friend of mine introduced me to a folk singer named Chuck Brodsky. Chuck does a wonderful job of telling stories in his songs and speaks the truth in so many ways. One of his songs is *The Boys in the Backroom*. It is the story about how those in charge of the city only took care of themselves as they abused their privilege and authority. One verse of the song says: "The boys in the backroom - Sat on the commissions - That were supposed to regulate factory emissions - Toxins in the air Toxins in the water -These were our protectors they were sanctioning the slaughter."

The gospel passage for today tells us about the boys in the backroom. The powerful Jews who wanted more than anything to protect their authority and power. This passage takes place after Jesus had raised Lazareth from the dead. The good that Jesus was doing was beyond their human power and it threatened "the boys in the backroom." Caiaphas and the other men made the decision to begin the process on the worst thing humanity has ever done. But then as Paul Harvey would say, we know the rest of the story. We know that even after they beat our Lord and hung Him on a cross until he died, they didn't destroy him. The worst humanity has to offer wasn't the final word and will never have the final word over us.

We don't always agree with the decisions that are made in the backroom, but they don't have the final word because we have a Savior whose outstretched arms of love are always there for us.

*Gracious and ever living God, we live in a world in this life where decisions are made that are not always the best for your people. Give us strength to always know that you are there for us in the challenges we face as we are empowered to always do your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen*

## Monday, 14 April

### Becky Herren

*“For the poor you always have with you but you do not always have me.” John 12:1-12*

Today is the Monday of Holy Week and the familiar passage is of Jesus gathering with His disciples at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, a small town outside of Jerusalem. Jesus’ approaching death must have been on His mind and yet His closest followers and friends did not comprehend what He was facing--- except maybe one, Mary. Jesus needs His followers to be unified and supportive of one another. Yet, as the world is plotting against Him, it seems that the meal at this home is tense.

Martha was distracted by her many tasks—cooking, serving, cleaning—and complained that Mary was not helping. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening and anointing His feet with expensive oil and wiping those feet with her hair. Judas is criticizing Mary for being wasteful and extravagant. “The money could have been given to the poor.” Jesus rebuked Judas with our scripture lesson for the day.

The art of listening is delicate but incredibly important and Mary gives us clues in how to do it well. Mary in the passage was extravagant and Jesus accepts her gift graciously. Yes, the money could have gone to the poor but Jesus tells us that the gift is good when used for God’s purposes. In pouring the oil on Jesus’ feet, she was pouring out her heart.

What can we learn here from this passage? Maybe it is that we need to be more like Mary—less busy, less critical, less talkative. As we go deeper into this week and come closer to the Cross, consider sitting and listening at the feet of Jesus and pouring out your heart.

*Dear Lord, bring me through darkness into light. Bring me through pain into peace. Bring me through death into life. Be with me wherever I go and with those I love. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen*

Tuesday, 15 April

Alex Kinney

*“ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘ Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’ 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, ‘ The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 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. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.’” John 1 2:20 -2 6*

In this passage, Jesus is anticipating his inevitable death on the cross. As a crowd forms to listen to him, Jesus proclaims, “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.” In this address, he relates himself to a grain of wheat. A single grain of wheat cannot live out its full purpose if it kept “safe” out of the ground, but if it is planted, it will sprout up and bear fruit. Its sacrifice allows for a much greater benefit to the larger world.

In this sense, Jesus is like a grain of wheat. By sacrificing himself for our sins, he benefits the larger world and saves humankind. Even though it means his demise, Jesus understands that his purpose is to die so that our sins may hold no power over us.

By giving this speech, Jesus is trying to prepare the people and let them know that his death is not a bad thing. It was always intentional that Jesus had to die for the greater good of humankind. We need to remember Jesus’ sacrifice and let it call us to go out and do the work that God has given us to do. Just like Jesus, we each have our own purpose and must fulfill it for the greater good of mankind.

*Heavenly Father, as this Lenten Season nears its end , please guide us towards our purpose in life . Help us serve You in whatever You have given us to do. In Your name we pray. Amen.*

Wednesday, 16 April

Suzanne Files

*“Little Children, I am with you only a little longer. 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.”*

*John 13: 21-38*

This passage in John describes the events leading up to Christ's journey to his Crucifixion; The Last Supper, washing of feet and Jesus's attempts to explain what will follow in the weeks ahead. The disciples did not understand that Judas would betray Jesus and Peter would deny him. They were like me when I sometimes read a scripture and I clearly do not get the message. Jesus was tired and worried and finally said, “Ok, here is what I want you to do when I am no longer here.”

Jesus continued with the scripture lesson, “Little Children, I am with you only a little longer. 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.”

I believe that those disciples and I would agree that loving those with whom we agree or are partial to is the easy part, but the rest of the folks? Well Jesus, that is hard, very, very hard. But John, in his old age, would remind those around him who would question why? His response was: “Because it is what our Lord commanded. If it is all you do, then it is enough.”

I am reminded of a sermon I ran across tucked in my Bible from Sewanee Theological Review long ago. “The waters of political life must be navigated, because the ship of the church has been launched by God in the midst of those waters, but that does not mean that they are not terribly difficult to navigate. But NO ONE enlisted in the culture wars died for your sins or rose for your Justification! We are accountable to God, first and last, to God, and to no court of opinion.”

*For Peace*

*Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and forever. Amen.*

## Thursday, 17 April

### Greg Crotty

*“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”*  
*John 13: 14*

Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday is the day we remember and celebrate the Last Supper and the washing of feet by Jesus.

Before their last meal together, Jesus rises from the table to wash the feet of his disciples. In those days it was hospitable to offer guests water to wash their feet but the physical act of washing feet was typically performed by a servant. Jesus demonstrates his love for his closest friends by humbling himself before them in service while struggling emotionally with His impending torture and death.

Humility has many aspects, one of which is not thinking we’re better than others. Another is the ability to accept situations without prejudice. To sequester our personal opinions while trusting in a higher purpose. Humility as it relates to life circumstances and the ability to allow our personal desires room for the unexpected.

In John’s gospel we see Jesus humbling Himself physically among friends but also spiritually by accepting the uncomfortable role he is soon to play in God’s plan. **Humility comes before Honor (Proverbs 18:12)**, may suggest we can never truly submit to the Lord, His plans, our role, our purpose without humility. Society teaches success is a result of willful determination and NOT to accept circumstances but rather create them. It’s difficult to determine a healthy balance between self-will and God’s.

*Let us pray: Today while we visualize Jesus washing feet, we recognize acts of humility on many levels. Humility shown in service of others and humility shown in Christ’s acceptance of His role in God’s plan. We pray, like Jesus, we continue to serve others even when challenged, so we too may serve God with honor.*

**Friday, 18 April**

**Marshall Belaga-Price**

*For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53: 13*

A good friend of mine suggested I read a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer titled Life Together. It is billed as “The Classic Exploration of Christian Community”. I know my friend is concerned about my eternal salvation. I think he wants me to be in fellowship with followers of Christ. He worries that many who call themselves Christian do not understand how the intercession God provides for us through Jesus Christ is fundamental to salvation.

Before reading this book, I had a skewed idea of who Dr. Bonhoeffer was. I knew he was safe in America but determined he needed to return to Germany to fight the Nazi ideology. I knew he was part of the plot to kill Hitler. He was imprisoned and hanged on April 9, 1945. He was stripped naked as he was marched to the gallows; however, he reportedly knelt before the gallows, prayed, then confidently walked to his death.

Through his exploration of Christian Community, Dr Bonhoeffer clarified for me what it means to say we are one Body because we share one bread and one cup. I learned that it is only through Christ that we are bound.

Dr. Bonhoeffer goes on to say that we are brethren only through Christ. This is immeasurable. I had rested in the thought that it was my relationship with Christ in my heart and my sister's and brother's relationship in Christ in their heart that connected us.

Dr. Bonhoeffer showed me that without Christ as the intercessor between myself and my sisters and brothers in Christ, I could never learn of the magnitude of God's love for us.

My friend who suggested this book and I glibly say that there are no coincidences. We usually were talking about how some event in our lives showed God's presence for us. But step back. The events we share with our brethren in Christ is for all of us all the time.

We are not connected by anything we do. We are connected by the feeling we have of how Christ intercedes with us in everything we do. The certainty of this feeling is what I rely on to know where my eternal salvation lies.

My Lenten prayer, brothers and sisters, is that we know that we are brothers and sisters to each other only through Jesus Christ. That is, I am a brother to you through what Christ did for me. You are my sister and brother to me through what Christ did for you. On my own, I could not accomplish that love. Through your sharing your heart with me and my sharing my heart with you, we can feel the love God means for us through Christ. AMEN

**Saturday, 19 April**

**Holy Saturday**

**Chuck Barlow**

*Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. John 19: 38-40*

### **Darkness, Silence and Mystery**

Today's reading from John suspends us in deep mystery. Visualizing this scene, one can only imagine that after Joseph is given the body of Jesus by Pilate, all of the subsequent actions in this passage of scripture take place in complete silence. I wonder what thoughts went thru the minds of Joseph and Nicodemus as they performed the traditional Jewish burial rites for this man; a man unlike any they had ever known or met....

**Silence**..... in a dark, lamp-lit tomb of tan colored hewn stone.

*They have carried and are now preparing the dead body of God ... for burial. Has this thought fully formed in their minds yet? Each of these two men, for their own reasons and vulnerabilities, have been secret disciples of Jesus. It was He who said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." Did they know in some inexpressible way beyond words and thought that he spoke the truth eternal when he said these things? They must have known... to take this risk and to lavish so much care and provide this kind of burial.... but how could they be certain it was true? Nicodemus had brought a mixture of myrrh and aloe for the embalming, as was Jewish custom. 75 pounds of herbs - myrrh oil mixed with aloe - herbs known for their healing, antiseptic and aromatic qualities. What does their fragrance smell like? The brutally murdered body, tenderly and gently wrapped in linen, accompanied only by the sounds of the men's. breathing... the shuffling of leather sandals on the dirty stone floor of the tomb.... and the faint sounds of the linen shooshing as it is being wrapped around his embalmed body....*

In most religious traditions, "mysticism" refers to a direct, personal, inner experience of divine presence. Joseph and Nicodemus are not having an inner experience; this is an external moment – a direct encounter- with the dead body of the man who told them He was the Son of God. In three days, Jesus will be risen from the dead. At that moment, Joseph and Nicodemus will have their questions answered and all Christians will know - for all time - that death has been overcome by the Way and the Truth and the Life.