



Get Grounded!
Lenten Daily Devotional
March 1-April 14, 2017—Year A



Trinity Presbyterian Church
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Introduction

This devotional is a labor of love. Gifted to Trinity Presbyterian Church by those who love this community of faith. We have submissions from our youngest members through our oldest members. It is truly inter-generational. Art work citations are on the last page if you'd like to see who the artist is for each graphic.

As you journey through each day of Lent, read as much or as little as you feel the spirit lead you. There is no right or wrong answer to these scriptural interpretations. Each day brings you into the life of a fellow follower. I ask that you respect each contribution for the blessings in which it is given. I hope that we each have an opportunity to broaden our spiritual horizons and enjoy the gifts God has given to each of us!

Thank you to the community of faith that has joined together to create this personalized devotional. I hope we continue to help each other grow in our faith through other projects such as this. It has been a pleasure to work with you!

Blessings as you journey towards the Cross and Resurrection,
Terri Engle



Ash Wednesday

March 1, 2017

Jon Gaska

Isaiah 58:1-12

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ 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: 6-7 NRSV

Devotion

During Lent, as a sacred discipline, we usually sacrifice or give up something: chocolate, or pizza, or consider some other kind of “fast.” Traditionally, we do it to become more aware of our compulsions while allowing our hunger to be nurtured by God’s presence. When I was growing up I gave up meat on Fridays and as I became an adult there were some years when I fasted once a week during Lent. I usually felt like I was doing my Christian duty, but the practice did bring an awareness of God’s presence that I had taken for granted. Some of us may have done something similar over the years.



But Isaiah has a different kind of fasting in mind. It is sobering to think of our spiritual disciplines as empty practices from God’s perspective if we are not working toward justice, feeding the hungry, and making room for the homeless. Our “kin” in this passage is every sister and brother who we see during our days—many who have hidden inner stories of injustice and burdens no person could handle alone. Imagine how far a small kernel of kindness can go.

Perhaps as we step into Lent this year, pondering what discipline will bring us closer to God, we consider fasting according to Isaiah terms? What would it look like for us to fast in a way that stood in solidarity with those who were starving for justice and love?

Thursday, March 2, 2017

Boni Quandt

Psalm 51:1-17

Psalm 51:9-10

*“Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities,
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit
within me.”*
—Psalm 51:9-10 NRSV

Devotion

Psalm 51 is a song written by King David; a confession of his terrible sin against Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. David wrote it after God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David and reveal the painful truth of the consequences of his sin. *(2 Samuel 12) David decided the seriousness of his moral failure was deserving of a death penalty. But, God chose instead to change him.*

Although I have never murdered a man, I have sinned against God. In my “seven years unchurched” I did things that God said not to do. I hid my sin. I prayed about others, but I never prayed about myself. Then, I stepped into Faith Presbyterian Church in Franklin, Wisconsin, and during worship I prayed these words:

**“Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.”**

God used this generic confession to confront my sins, convict me of my disobedience, and change my heart. Confession lifted me out of darkness and into light. I was transformed into a Godly woman. God wants to blot out all our iniquities and create in us clean hearts and right spirits. Lent is the right time to let God do it.



Friday, March 3, 2017

Laura Rose

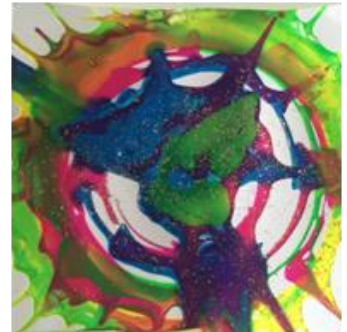
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 6 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

—2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2 NRSV

Devotion

Paul is pleading with us to remain faithful allowing our Light to continue to shine in the midst of hardship. He gives himself as an example and reminds us that we are ambassadors of Love and Grace. This speaks to my heart, that no matter what I may face, what I may endure, what others think or believe about me, the positives, the negatives, the joys and sorrows that life may bring, I can rest within my salvation. This I know, I am right with God. I am accepted. I am loved and not by my own doing but by His goodness and Grace alone. I have found strength through salvation. My relationship with Spirit has held me, as I experienced the turbulence of being rejected and cast out of a church. It has held me as I experienced the darkness of a blood clot in my brain and the diagnosis of cancer for the second time. My personal connection and Oneness with Spirit has kept me anchored as I began to shuffle through scripture, questioning everything and detangling from false teachings. Being able to sit and be still entering into the wondrous space of infinite Grace, Love and Light sustains my spirit and comforts my soul.



This knowing that I am righteous through Christ alone gives me hope within my faith journey to continue to live boldly. The Holy Spirit is always here with me, Now. I am thankful and pray that this Light of Salvation that I draw upon shines forth from me, encouraging others to do the same. As Paul says, don't let this gift of Grace be in vain. I agree, and agree that what we have In Christ and within eternity far outweighs anything that this life may offer. All that God is and has is with us Now and for eternity. My hope for you is that no matter what you may be facing, you will draw upon your salvation; connecting and being One with Spirit to give you strength and peace through each day.

Saturday, March 4, 2017

Boni Quandt

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

¹Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

—Matthew 6:1 NRSV

Devotion

Jesus taught his disciples that our motive for what we do means everything about what we do in God's name. My parents believed today's passage asked them to practice Jesus' instruction by always praying and reading Scripture alone, away from anyone seeing their piety. Their giving to the church was always in cash, never to be recorded or reported to the IRS as a charitable donation. They never wanted another person to know what they gave to God. All they cared about was God's approval. They hoped for God's reward. Their piety added treasures in heaven.

I grew up with this practice, but chose a different way. Jesus also said to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's." I believe Jesus would not disapprove of charitable donations being recorded and reported. He just doesn't want me going around bragging about it. And I believe reading the Bible on the ride to work on a transit bus just might open a conversation about Jesus and my faith in him. But I won't talk about this making me holy.

Laying up treasures in heaven include being salt and light in the world. And putting God first in all we do. Remember, God knows our motives. Lent is the right time to know them as well.



Monday, March 6, 2017

Robert Alford

Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18

1 Kings 19: 1-8 NIV

19 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. **2** So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." **3** Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, **4** while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." **5** Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." **6** He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. **7** The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." **8** So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

Devotion

I lay in the dark, completely and utterly devastated.

Everything I had dreamed and worked for all my life was headed south. I was working two extra jobs just to be able to pay unforeseen debts. Crisis required that our dream home be put on the market. Separated, I had agreed to my wife's request for custody of the children. Teaching fourth grade in the midst of family drama had proven overwhelming and I had transferred to a new middle school where I was starting all over again. Except for the kindness of a friend, I could be sleeping in the car.

Everything was botched beyond repair. I prayed to die.

But the sun did rise again the next day, and somehow, God gathered just enough grace and strength for me to make it just one more day, and then another...

Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for being there with us when we are alone in the dark. And thank you for bringing us light to continue when we are overwhelmed.
Amen.



Tuesday, March 7, 2017

Jeanne Patterson

Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Psalm 32: 6-10

Therefore, let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

—Psalm 32:6 NRSV

Devotion

The box wasn't heavy-but it was big...awkward to carry as I walked from the parking lot to the shipping center. As I approached the door, I wondered how I could open it-then I realized a woman was going up to the door to open it for me...and she was not even coming inside. Then as I waited my turn, shifting this box I could not get my arms around, the man in front offered for me to place the box on the counter as he completed his paperwork. Two simple gestures, by strangers -yet they made a big difference to me. I felt a great sense of relief. Suddenly, as I realized that burden was lifted, I was aware that some other worries I had been carrying around could be lifted as well.

As the Psalmist stated: "You are a hiding place for me, you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance." I walked away with a smile and a sense of gratitude for all that God has given me.

Prayer



Gracious God. Forgive me for needless worrying. Thank you for the promise that "your steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord." Amen

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Cindy Bodenheimer

Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

Psalm 32

When you're "all up in your own head," get OUT! Get IT out! Even though God knows your heart and your thoughts, it is important to speak, even if it is just you and God. Trying to hide from God because of shame only makes you sicker (*v. 3 While I refused to speak, my body wasted away*). When we can share our sad and shameful secrets with God we can begin to heal. God is a refuge for me from _____ so that _____ cannot touch me.

Exodus 34: 1-9, 27-28

Put yourself in Moses's place. Pretend you are taking dictation from God over 40 days and nights. What would God ask you to put on your own personal tablet (besides another App)?

Matthew 18: 10-14

You are but one sheep in the flock and when one of your "flockmates" goes astray, God provides a way back to the comfort of the fold. It is done for all, including people we don't agree with or despise. "Those" people are in the same flock as you are, being tended by the same caring, watchful Shepherd. That Shepherd desires that cranky bigoted sheep to be in the field with you no more or less than you are desired. Imagine grazing in that field with that rude disagreeable sheep while in the Shepherd's care.



Thursday, March 9, 2017

Katherine Sobie

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Isaiah 51:1-3 NRSV

Devotion

In this passage Isaiah is speaking to Israel to bring comfort and hope as they struggle to recover from mass exile. Isaiah tells Israel to look to the rock and to Abraham that represent the firm presence of God. In contrast, the quarry (or pit) and Sarah's womb represent emptiness, the absence of God. I know there have been times in my life when I felt that God was absent. Instead of feeling filled with the spirit, I felt hollow like the pit. Living in those empty places is hard and can feel as though it is never ending. Then eventually I would hear a sermon, or listen to a song, or have a meaningful conversation with a friend and a seed of hope would be planted and begin to grow.

As Christians we have the opportunity to share God's love with others. And you never know, you may even be planting a seed of hope in someone. God can do miraculous things in those empty places. For from Sarah's empty womb, a great nation was born.

One of my favorite songs written by Chuck Brodsky sums it up well:

Now go answer your calling
Go and fill somebody's cup
And if you see an angel falling
Won't you stop and help them up

We are each other's angels
And we meet when it is time
We keep each other going
And we show each other signs.



Friday, March 10, 2017

Khelen Kuzmovich

Psalm 121; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31

Micah 7:18-20 NRSV

In this Micah text, we learn that God delights in showing clemency. Isn't that a relief? God not only pardons our sins, casting them into the depths of the sea but also delights in doing so. The other day I was watching two 2-year-olds play. One of them (let's just pretend that she was not my child) was consistently stealing toys from the other one. After quite some time of this, the other toddler was getting upset. Then, however, the toy taker picked up a fun toy and gave it her friend, and this little girl got so excited. She said "Thank You" and initiated a hug as she began playing with the toy. She was full of joy, quick to easily forgive her friend. Here was a real life example of delighting in showing clemency (and it was, of course, done by a child).

Kids mess up All. The. Time. Spilling cups, ripping paper, knocking things over, putting dirty hands on your clean shirt, your clean dishes, your clean everything. While I may say, "It's okay" or "It was an accident. Let's try better next time" when these things happen, I wonder how often those words sound hollow, even to a 2 year old. I'm pretty sure I've never delighted in showing forgiveness but rather have usually sighed and started picking up whatever mess was made. I wonder what difference it would make to delight in forgiving my kid in these moments? To take joy in offering the kind of forgiveness God gives and the kind that I would love to receive? I have a feeling it will help her and me, feel a glimpse of God's love.



Saturday, March 11, 2017

Jeanne Patterson

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10

Isaiah 51: 4-8

⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be for ever, and my salvation to all generations. —Isaiah 51: 6, 8 NRSV

Devotion

Walking up the wooded path, climbing, watching for rocks, searching for wild flowers, turning again and again on switchbacks, always upward, stopping to breathe, barely able to see the sky for all the trees. Sometimes life is like that mountain path requiring our total attention to avoid a fall, straining to move forward, unable to see the destination.



And finally we reach the top... suddenly we can see all around...far away to the valley, and far across to other mountain ranges. Refreshed by the breeze, energized by a chance to sit and take in the peaceful beauty, we are reminded by the words of Isaiah 51:6a, 8b NRSV

Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look to the earth beneath..my salvation will be forever and my deliverance will never be ended.

In this time of Lent, of searching for deliverance, of struggling with life's challenges, we can be reminded of God's presence with us every step of the way.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for your promises to be with us as we journey through this life and look forward to eternal life with you.
Amen

Monday, March 13, 2017

Allen Brown

Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6

Devotion

Moses holds a very special place in the scriptures. The final chapter of Deuteronomy recognizes him as a truly singular prophet, who knew (or was known by) the Lord “face to face” - a fact that seems of particular interest to the author of Hebrews. One example of this intimacy between Moses and the Lord is revealed in our passage in Numbers, and its set-up is all too familiar: the people cry out to the Lord; the Lord delivers them; the people complain/forget/curse the Lord; the Lord punishes them; the people cry out to the Lord...



...and while much can be said about how many people were actually bit by the snakes, and whether or not God sent the snakes, or allowed the snakes to be sent, or was credited as responsible by the people being bitten by the snakes...the Lord delivers the people. With a bronze serpent. Which is a curious move, considering that the people in question have already established a propensity for worshiping metal idols. As Old Testament scholar John Goldingay reflects, though, God has a tendency for using physical means to achieve spiritual ends - which makes sense. We are, in fact, physical beings. Unfortunately, we're not always the best recipients of God's gifts.

To wit: (1) God delivers God's people out of bondage in Egypt; eventually the people rebel, upset with the plight in which (or food with which) God has left them. (2) God raises up the Bronze serpent and delivers the people from the snakes; abandoning the Lord, the people begin to worship the metal snake itself (2 Kings 18:4).

As a people we have a long history of accepting God's gifts to us, forgetting their origins, and turning them into self-serving idols. Our memories are often too short and our propensity for idolatry too high.

What gifts from God have I forgotten, and which have I turned into idols?

Lord, grant me the wisdom to turn away from my idolatry and employ your gifts for the deliverance of the people.

“May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life...Peace be upon Israel.”

—Psalm 128:5 NIV

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Sue Baker

Psalm 128; Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 4:6-13

Psalm 128

¹ Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in obedience to him.^{2b} blessings and prosperity will be yours—Psalm 128: 1, 2b NIV

Romans 4:6-13

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. —Romans 4:13 NIV

Devotion

In a recent conversation with a friend, she stated that maybe her husband's good works would help her get to Heaven. I knew she believed in Christ, but had not attended worship for years despite her children attending Catholic school and accompanying her husband to worship services.

In today's Old Testament reading, the psalmist writes "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to Him. ... Blessings and prosperity will be yours." In today's common usage fear means to be afraid of, but fear can also mean profound reverence and awe (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). So ... those who revere and obey God will be rewarded.

In the New Testament reading, Paul reminds us that God blesses those who are righteous (acting in accord with divine or moral law, from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary). He gives the example of Abraham who was rewarded by God because of his faith, not because of anything he did. For years, the faithful have debated faith vs. works, but this scripture seems to be clear that it is faith that God rewards. We do not earn our way or "borrow points" from someone who does good works. I like that idea because I try to walk with the LORD daily, I don't believe I could do enough good to earn my way to Heaven (even if God didn't subtract for the less than perfect things that I do). Thank goodness for grace!



Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Beth Harper

Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22-32; John 7:53-8:11
John 7:53-8:11

8³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”
—John 8:3-7 NRSV

Devotion

I can identify with so many of the characters in the story. I understand the Pharisees wanting to expose this new guy (Jesus) who has shown up out of nowhere and is threatening to cause real problems for their religion (Judaism). They want to pin him down, expose him, put him on the spot. I can relate to this—the desire to prove someone wrong who appears to be a threat. Let’s see if you can get out of this one, Jesus! I’ll teach you to meddle with my understanding of my religion!

I also feel for this woman who is exposed so inhumanely. What an injustice that whoever she was caught with was not brought before the crowd. SHE was made to be the face of sin. There’s no authenticity in the Pharisees’ concern about this sin—they are merely using her as a tool to prove Jesus wrong in public. I believe that her objectification is part of what Jesus rejects.

Jesus’ words ring true across time and space: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” The Pharisees seek to expose Jesus by exposing this woman, but in turn their hypocrisy is exposed. And as I read, mine is as well. The temptation to judge others is one way to avoid my own “stuff.” Maybe there’s a helpful Lenten discipline here: I’ll try to focus on my own sins/brokenness/wounds and see where I can find healing and growth. My hope is that the better healed I am, the better I can serve the other.



Thursday, March 16, 2017

Jon Gaska

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23

Colossians 1:15-23

¹⁵ *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all
ation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were* *cre-
ed...”* —Colossians 1: 15-16 NRSV

Devotion

If only there was some absolute way to know God is with us. Other than a few periscopes in the Old Testament—where God is dining with Abraham and Sarah, for example—we don’t get a clear picture of what God looks like. It is hard, and always has been, for God’s people to follow an invisible God.

Except we get a clear portrait of who God is in Christ. “He is the image of the invisible God,” the writer of Colossians confirms. Notice this statement is quite different than being created “in” the image of God, like the rest of humanity. He *is the image* and it is in him that all of creation was created. These are some heavy theological assertions which have given theologians headaches for centuries.

Many of us have heard the claim that it is important to be “like Christ.” Personally, I feel such a claim is impossible. After all, Christ sets the bar awfully high. But the point here isn’t that we are to be “like Christ,” but “in Christ.” It is a small, but important distinction. To be like the savior can bind us to an ideology, yet to be in Christ sets us up to live boldly, forgiven and set free. May it be so today.



Friday, March 17, 2017

Carol Kaylor

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:9-21; Ephesians 2:11-22
Ephesians 2:11-22

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

—Ephesians 2:14-16 ESV

Devotion

Walls have been built throughout history to separate people for a variety of reasons – ethnic, economic, racial, religious, geographic. The Temple in Jerusalem was itself made of a number of walls separating Jewish men, Jewish women, Gentiles, and priests. Jews and Gentiles who converted to Christianity were further separated by Jewish law, which Paul described in his letter to the Ephesians as a dividing wall of hostility. Assuring each that they have been reconciled with God through Jesus' death on the cross, Paul tells them that they are also reconciled with each other by the blood of Jesus. Christ's death on the cross became the bridge across which Jewish and Gentile Christians united and became one.

There are still walls that separate all of mankind. According to a study by political scientists Ron Hassner and Jason Wittenberg cited in *The Atlantic* (May 19, 2016), the building of walls is progressing at an unprecedented rate. Of the 51 fortified boundaries built between countries since the end of World War II, about half of them were constructed in the last 15 years. Globalization and cultural shifts have also created invisible walls that divide us, by religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, economic status, and others. Would that all of these walls could come crashing down.

In Acts 10:34-35, Peter says that "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." God is that bridge that connects people together ending hostilities and bringing about peace. With God's help we must, to paraphrase Isaac Newton, build fewer walls and more bridges.



Saturday, March 18, 2017

Terri Engle

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27-35; John 4:1-6

Psalm 95



¹ O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! ² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! ³ For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. ⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! ⁷ For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

—Psalm 95: 1-7 NRSV

Devotion

I have spent hours and hours working on Lenten scriptures. This passage has an uplifting aspect—not entirely comprised of the pain and suffering that I have seen through out my pre-Lenten scriptural journey. Psalm 95:1-7 is a breath of fresh air!

It brings a lot of my favorite things together. God speaks to me through music. I love to sing, listen to a variety of musical genres, to sit in the quiet peacefulness of nature’s sounds—birds, wind, rain, thunder, the quietness of a starlit night...

I love ROCKS! I collect rocks. I use them in my healing ministry! How fitting that the Psalmist addresses God as “the rock of our salvation”. Rocks do have a voice if you take the time to listen...

I love the mountains and I especially love the sea! Both share the mystery of God in diverse ways. Both share a piece of my heart. Both give me a sense of majestic awe. Both expose me to their hidden secrets and at times the anticipation of the unknown.

Prayer

LORD, we bow down and worship You, remembering that we are your people and You are our rock and our redeemer! Amen.

Monday, March 20, 2017

Terri Engle

Psalm 81; Genesis 24:1-27; 2 John 1-13

2 John 1-13

4 I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. 5But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another. 6And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it. —2 John 4-6 NRSV

Devotion

Love one another! We are commanded to love one another and to walk according to his commandments. God says to Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk. It is not enough to do one or the other. We are commanded to do both.



These days it seems there is a focus on one or the other. I would hope though that if you do one, the other would come along naturally. But alas, it does not seem to be the case since it is repeatedly written to both love one another and live or walk as one who is with/in Christ.

Why is it so hard to love one another and live as God has commanded us to live? Do you think it is easier to do one or the other? Do you walk the walk? Do you talk the talk? What do you do to show others your love and ultimately the LOVE of God?

Prayer

Dear God, scripture tells us that you are LOVE and we are created in your image. Guide me towards living a life that reflects your love in all that I do and all that I am. Let me be the vessel that walks the walk AND talks the talk! To God be the glory and Thy will be done. Amen.

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

Margaret Elliott

Psalm 81; Genesis 29:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Genesis 29:1-14

29 Jacob traveled on, finally arriving in the land of the East. ² He saw in the distance three flocks of sheep lying beside a well in an open field, waiting to be watered. But a heavy stone covered the mouth of the well. ³ (The custom was that the stone was not removed until all the flocks were there. After watering them, the stone was rolled back over the mouth of the well again.)—Genesis 29:1-3 The Living Bible

Devotion

I've learned in studying this text that because water was scarce, it was the custom of shepherds, in biblical times, to wait until all shepherds and their flocks had arrived to the watering well. It took all the shepherds to move the heavy rock that covered the well.

It makes me think about the concepts of waiting and sharing. Wouldn't it be wonderful, for example, if we all waited until everyone in our community was adequately fed, made a living wage, had enough to cover their basic life needs, in other words?

At Crisis Control Ministry, we work each day with families who struggle to pay for basic needs such as housing, utilities, food and prescription medicine. For many of them, they never make it to the well. The rest of the community has gotten their water, and rolled the stone back over the well.

I think of the words of one of my favorite songs, "Until All are Fed", written by three wonderful Presbyterian friends, Sally Morris, Thomas Brown, and Bryan McFarland, from our Presbytery:



"Until all are fed, we cry out. Until all on earth have bread; Like the one who loves us, each and every one, we serve until all are fed."

I appreciate Trinity folks. I see you all serving and helping others all the time. You're the best. I love you all!

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Jon Gaska

Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39

Jeremiah 2:4-13

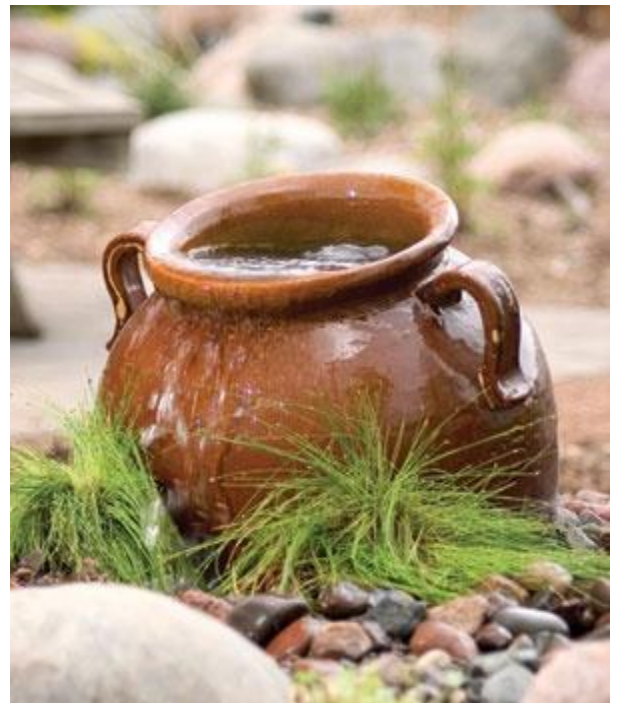
*¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, **cracked cisterns** that can hold no water. —Jeremiah 2:13 NRSV*

Devotion

I like to think I can do things on my own. I rarely read the instructions when piecing together new furniture or one of the kid's new toys because I "think" I'm smart enough to figure it out without directions. This ultimately ends up with me having to undo the entire project because I put it together backwards, or used the wrong piece in the wrong place. I'm embarrassed to say I end up unfolding the directions and using them *only after* I've wasted a lot of time and energy.

In the text for today, Israel thinks they can figure things out on their own. They stopped listening to God, believing they know better than their Creator. This way of thinking is "cracked" and gets them into a lot of trouble. They have used a lot of energy trying to do things for themselves, but at the end of the day it won't hold much water.

Perhaps it is human nature to learn the hard way. But, life eventually reminds us that our human efforts will leave us dry if we aren't listening to God or letting God's Living Water fill us up.



Thursday, March 23, 2017

Carol Kayler



**Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:10-21;
Ephesians 4:25-32**

Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³ he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

—Psalm 23: 1-4 NRSV

Devotion

It is not uncommon as a Christian to hear someone say, “God told me . . .” or “I heard God’s voice saying . . .” Whatever it was, they followed God’s call and their life changed. They were prevented from making a major mistake. Or they heard a soft voice and they were comforted.

I must confess that I have never heard God’s voice telling me what to do or where to go. This despite praying fervently for instructions. This despite pleading at times for comfort.

That does not mean that God has withheld the guidance and comfort that I asked for. There were times when just as a door closed, another one opened. Times when imminent danger was averted. A time when I miraculously saw a series of rainbows during a particularly difficult period. Times when I could have fallen apart, but managed to keep it together. My God does not speak aloud, but he still gives me what I need. My God is more like a shepherd than a coach or a motivational speaker. The shepherd gently prods his sheep in the direction they should go, pulls them back when they have strayed too far, and drives away danger before they can be harmed. All without saying a word.

I have gone through a few dark valleys in my life. No, I did not hear a booming voice from above directing me. Not even a soft whisper of comfort. But every time I reached the green pastures and still waters on the other side of that dark time, I felt stronger, more whole, and more convinced that I did not cross that valley alone.

Friday, March 24, 2017

Heather Hosey

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9

Ephesians 5:1-9

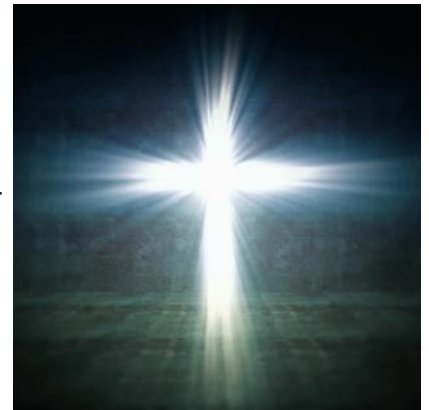
5¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

8For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. —Ephesians 5: 1, 8-9 NRSV

Devotion

What is Lent?

The word “Lent” comes from the old English word for “lengthen”, which simply means “SPRING” — when the days get longer, or lengthen, and new energy vaults alee. The timing of Easter and Spring and new life protruding from the dirt, is so miraculous to me!



These 40 days are a time for our souls to prepare for the defeat of the “light and life of Christ over the darkness of sin and death.” It is my wish, that as we venture from Ash Wednesday to Easter, we are reminded of the reality of this broken, messy world. The same broken and messy world Christ conquered through his crucifixion. Not hard, I know. All you have to do is read the paper, turn on social media, watch the news...it’s all very messy and broken right now. But as days grow longer, and brighter, I pray we experience God’s saving grace through it all. That grace is everywhere!

And so, as we prepare for all of the things this new season has to offer — like vacations, celebrations, glorious weather, Lent invites us to make our souls ready for remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because THIS is where our story really begins.

Annunciation of the Lord

Saturday, March 25, 2017

John Engle III

**Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 45 or Psalm 40:5-10;
Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38**

Luke 1:26-38

³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.' ³⁸Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

—Luke 1: 30-31; 34-35; 37-38 NRSV

Devotion

Do you believe in miracles? I do! I see active miracles in every-day life. In today's passage, the Angel Gabriel speaks to a young woman, Mary, and tells her a miracle is about to take place in her life. Even though this wonder is about to take place, she doubts the possibility of such a phenomenon. With reassurance from the Angel Gabriel, she turns her doubt into belief.

In 1999, I had a life altering work accident. It was questionable as to whether I would live or die in those first post accident hours. The next hurdle was gaining use of what was left of my left hand. With the power of prayer and the god-given gifts of a great surgeon, I overcame both of these challenges. In December our family experienced the miracle of birth with the arrival of granddaughter, Eliza—our fourth grandchild. These are just two examples of miracles in my life God used to affirm my faith that all things are possible.

Do you believe in miracles? What miracles do you see in your life? Have miracles effected how you live your life in Christ?



Monday, March 27, 2017

Katherine Sobie

Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

Acts 9:1-20 NRSV

Devotion

I admit I have struggled with Paul in the past. Growing up in a smallish town in the south, I was often quoted Paul's words in defense of church policies that excluded people from fully participating in the life of the church.

A favorite was "women should be silent in church." So I was reluctant about taking on this passage for reflection, but it kept bubbling up and I found I couldn't ignore it. I have heard the story of Saul's conversion to Paul many times. But reading it again in the context of our current society it took on new meaning. I found myself asking, "Where is the justice?" Saul participated in the violent persecution of Christians and was on his way to Damascus to seek out others. He believed what he was doing was just and lawful. He was not unlike many of the religious extremists of today.

But does God punish him? No, instead he transforms him. We often think of justice as retributive or concerned with the punishment of wrongdoing. But in this passage the risen Christ names and forgives Saul's wrongdoing. God's justice is restorative; an approach that focuses on restoring what is good and bringing the victim and wrongdoer together in reconciliation.



In our ever increasingly divisive world, it can be challenging to find ways to restore what is good, to find unity. But God challenges us to open our eyes to new ways of seeing; to name wrongdoing, but also to forgive.

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

Beth Harper



Psalm 146; Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14

³ Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. ⁴ When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. ⁵ Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, ⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
—Psalm 146:3-9 NRSV

¹⁴ For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant. ¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. ¹⁶ I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.

—Isaiah 42: 14-16a, b

¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

—Colossians 1: 11-12

Devotion

These Bible passages, written at different times, speak with one voice, and they speak to my life these days! Psalm 146 calls us to execute justice for the oppressed, give food to the hungry, set prisoners free, open the eyes of the blind, lift up those who are bowed down, love the righteous, watch over the stranger, uphold the widow and orphan. Boom—it's all there! I fail at this every day in my comfortable, privileged life, but I strive to remember every day that this is my calling. The psalmist provides direction.

I cry out like Isaiah these days—I have gasped and panted like a woman in labor (I appreciate the lady reference, Isaiah!) at the injustices in this world—while also participating in them. I'm humbled and inspired by the ways our congregation looks to “turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.” For me this looks like advocating for voting rights, supporting refugees, participating in racial reconciliation. May we continue to search these opportunities out and follow through. Isaiah expresses my heartache and frustration.

Colossians provides support and encouragement to be joyful and thankful along the way. And how about this amazing image: we get to share in the inheritance of the “saints in the light.” bringing back that image from Isaiah of turning the darkness to light.

Prayer

Lord, remind me that you call me to work with all those who are oppressed, that you are with me as I cry out in pain for the injustice in the world and my role in it, and that you encourage me toward joy and gratitude and my place with the saints in the light. Amen!

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

Cindy Bodenheimer

Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34

Psalm 146

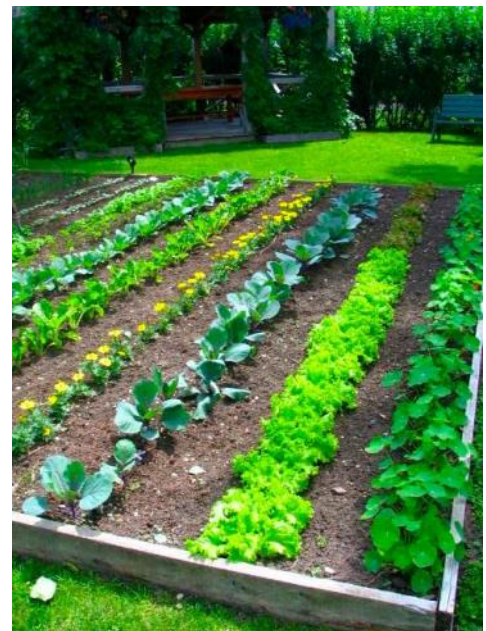
What fills your heart with the knowledge that God is ever present and powerful? Listen and/or watch the music video of Cold Play's "Up and Up"

Isaiah 60: 17-22

What is your "stone" that God turned into silver? What is your "timber" that God turned into gold? It is hard to see that everlasting light at night, in those dark times. You have been planted where you are at this moment by God.

Matthew 9: 27-34

We are disciples called by Jesus to labor in order to "harvest" the "harassed and the helpless". Think of one "row" of God's crop that you could harvest. It could be someone you know...or not. A child struggling in school? A family needing the basics? A friend who has experienced a loss? A loved one suffering from mental illness? There seem to be many ways to harvest as well...prayer, words, money, time, silence, touch, a smile.



Thursday, March 30, 2017

Khelen Kuzmovich

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

Psalm 130

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. —Psalm 130:5-6 NRSV

Revelation 10: 1-11

⁷but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets.'
—Revelation 10:7 NRSV



Devotion

The term “mystery of God” appears several times throughout Scripture. It seems to refer at times to a truth revealed by God (Dan 2:18-30) or God’s plan for all of creation (Eph 1:9). So this prophecy in Revelation could refer to a time in the future in which a big spiritual truth will be revealed or in which all of creation will come together. But wouldn’t it be nice if God’s mystery could be made plain now? Sometimes, when the world seems to be in pretty dire straits, I find it frustrating to wait for or believe in some sort of overall divine plan for the world.

I feel like since becoming a parent I have waited a lot. I remember waiting for 10 long days past my due date to meet my kid. I think of all the time I spend now waiting for her to get in her car seat, stand still for a diaper change, slowly drink one last sip of water before bedtime. During Lent we usually talk about giving something up, denying ourselves as a practice that brings us closer to God. Perhaps, though, we could *add* something to our time of waiting...a prayer for a friend, an intention to find something beautiful in the moment or to name something for which we are grateful. Rather than begrudging the long red light, the person ahead of us in line, the kid who puts on her socks painstakingly slowly, we could spend our waiting time adopting a simple practice that might bring us closer to God and others.

Friday, March 31, 2017

Terri Engle

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19

Revelation 11:19

¹⁹Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

—Revelation 11: 19 NRSV



Devotion

This passage reminds me of the moment Christ dies and the curtain in the Temple is torn in two—eliminating the barrier that stood between God and the chosen people of Israel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all speak of this phenomenon. God's Kingdom was opened up to humanity.

It seems to me that God uses drastic measures in order to bring God's messages to our attention. In verse 19 strong measures are taken to get God's message to us. We get a glimpse of God again opening up the Kingdom to humanity. The earth shifts, giving us the opportunity to come even closer to God.

As we travel towards the Cross, we are aware of the things of the past and the hope for the future. What measure is God using to open up the Kingdom of God in your life?

Prayer

Oh LORD, open my eyes and my heart to the glory of your Kingdom. Grant me the wisdom and the courage to draw closer to you. Surround me with the greatest love of all! Guide and protect me as I walk in that sacred space created by You, especially for me. Amen.

Saturday, April 1, 2017

Brenda Daniels

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53

Psalm 130: 1-8

¹From the depths of my despair I call to you, Lord. ²Hear my cry, O Lord; listen to my call for help! ³If you kept a record of our sins, who could escape being condemned? ⁴But you forgive us, so that we should stand in awe of you. ⁵I wait eagerly for the LORD'S help, and in his word I trust. ⁶I wait for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen wait for the dawn – than watchmen wait for the dawn.

—Psalm 130:1-6 The Good News Bible

Devotion

“It is always darkest just before dawn.” Who of us hasn’t had that thought as we suffer through a night with a sick child, longing for the hour to arrive when we can call the doctor’s office to get help. Or, we toss and turn all night wrestling with an issue at work – unable to take action until the day arrives. We are the watchmen, waiting and watching for those glimmers of God’s presence to help and comfort us. When I am on vacation at the beach I like to sleep in, but I always reserve one day to watch the dawn arrive. I go outside, under the enormous dome of stars, hearing the rhythmic crash of the waves, smelling the briny air and my coffee – I sit and wait. It is almost imperceptible at first – the thin line of slightly less dark sky on the horizon. Then, the beautiful miracle of a new day develops; the palette of colors washing the sky, the clouds in their infinite variety, the light on the water, and finally the rising sun – warm and triumphant. In the doubt and dark of the night it is hard to remember that God is with us, but the dawn always comes.



Monday, April 3, 2017

Janet Rolison

Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

Psalm 143: 1, 5, 8, 10 NRSV

¹ Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness.

⁵ I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. ⁶ I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

⁸ Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

Devotion

Last year, when Jon asked me to make some contemporary paraments for the sanctuary, my first task was to learn about the Christian calendar and the colors of the seasons: red for Pentecost, green for ordinary time, blue for Advent and purple for Lent.

My vision for the Lenten parament is to represent the diversity of our congregation by using many shades of purple.

The black cross reminds me of Jesus' crucifixion and the white cross reminds me of His Resurrection.

This Lenten season, I pray for guidance and comfort and trust God to provide them.



Tuesday, April 4, 2017

Joy Gaska

Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10

Ephesians 2:1-10 NRSV

Devotion

We have 2 marble jars. Not just any marble jars. Jars that fill and empty as consequences and rewards of our oldest 2 children. They work hard, following the rules, listening well, showing kindness to each other and the jar starts to fill. One clink at a time. Earn enough marbles and off we go to the store to pick out a new toy or prize. It is a positive reward, something earned. Imagine the pride, picking out that very special treasure, carrying it down the aisle, up to the cash register. It took work. A lot of hard work! Doesn't it feel good, satisfying, to achieve something you have worked for? Then what do we do with this text?



By no works of our own are we saved. At first, if you are like me, we exhale and give thanks because we know we could not achieve this on our own. But on the other hand, it is absurd. We live in a society that respects sweat equity and skin in the game. Values showing up early and staying late, pulling up your boot straps and working hard to achieve your prize or goals. Then, I wonder, is a gift given not as valued in our society as one that is earned? I wonder then, do we take God's gift for granted? I invite you to reflect on that question today.

Take a moment and thank God for this beautiful and absurd gift. Take a moment to soak the gift in.... go into your day knowing you are loved and created for good works, not so that you are saved, that has already been given to you.

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

Margaret Elliott

Psalm 143; Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33

Psalm 143

***143** Hear my prayer, O Lord; answer my plea because you are faithful to your promises.*

***3** My enemies chased and caught me. They have knocked me to the ground. They force me to live in the darkness like those in the grave. **4** I am losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.*

***8** Let me see your kindness to me in the morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for my prayer is sincere.*

—Psalm 143: 1, 3-4, 8 *The Living Bible*

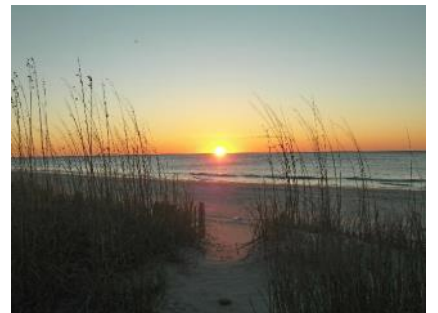
Devotion

This psalm is a prayer from David, who was in much distress and under persecution from Saul. I'm not a biblical scholar, but I love reading the Psalms, especially these prayers that so longingly and earnestly requests God's help and guidance.

I can relate. There have been times in my life when I just didn't know who I was. I worried so much about how others saw me. People who were friends all of a sudden seemed to knock me to the ground with their words and actions. It was hurtful. I was not sure if I would ever be my happy self again.

Verse 8 of this psalm reads: ***8 Let me see your kindness to me in the morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for my prayer is sincere.***

I am grateful that God is with me each and every day. If one morning is not so great, the next morning may be. It is hard to trust unconditionally, but I have learned that each day brings us the opportunity to serve God in new ways. Being faithful in times of distress is hard, but God's kindness can guide us through the hardest of times. Seems all we have to do is receive it.



Thursday, April 6, 2017

David Bathory

Psalm 31:9-16; 1 Samuel 16:11-13; Philippians 1:1-11

Psalm 31:9-16 NIV

⁹ Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.

¹⁰ My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. ¹¹ Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me. ¹² I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. ¹³ For I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side!” They conspire against me and plot to take my life.

¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD; I say, “You are my God.” ¹⁵ My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.

¹⁶ Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.



Devotion

This psalm is given to the director of music and of David. If music expresses our souls, this begins with torment, pain and suffering felt being cried out to God. I played trumpet for many years, and would bear my soul in its sorrow and nakedness, every time I began to improvise on my horn. Although, I did not believe in God at the time, I believe now, it was a prayer of anguish to my Creator. For many years it went unheard, perhaps not unheard but without a visible response that I could see or would acknowledge. I have been labeled, like the psalmist, as an outcast due to how I was created, and I have been scorned and ridiculed by others out of their fear and ignorance of difference, all of my life. But when I have reached my darkest hours, God has intervened, once bringing me back to life after taking my own life as a child, and at another when He reached down to remind me that I am not alone and bathed me in His light. Between these divine interventions, I have often felt despised, abandon, rejected, and unjustly treated, as I have been physically and mentally tortured on more than one occasion, and my abusers have never been brought to justice. Yet I, like the psalmist, have put my trust in God and His steadfast love (His covenant with each of us, to have faith that He is always there).

Friday, April 7, 2017

David Bathory

Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

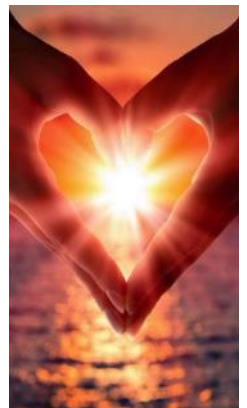
Philippians 1:21-30 NIV

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me. ²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Devotion

Paul reminds us from the confines of a prison cell, and his possible execution that faith lets us live here and now, and through our relationship with God, into eternity. How we live our lives and transpose our suffering is what makes us worthy followers of Christ.

I am a vessel for God to reach others. My ministry is not meant to be as pastor, but as a healer. I cannot stitch, remove, or medicate away the things I am asked to help heal because the wounds I work with are in the soul. They are the layers and years of suffering of individuals and of a world that continues to harm others. What God brings through me is the choice to change pain and suffering into wisdom, strength and life. Each night, I lay down to sleep with torn and jagged pieces of people's suffering and God comes and lifts this pain away. He brings me a new morning, where I am privileged to step again into watching Him provide a light out of the suffering and into seeing that beauty can exist in the most horrific spaces. It is when people's wounds are changed into badges of honor and integrity rather than being seen as rancid and festering pains of a broken soul that life is restored, and I know God is always here.



Saturday, April 8, 2017

Brenda Daniels

Psalm 31:9-16; Lamentations 3:55-66; Mark 10:32-34

Mark 10:32-34 The Good News Bible

³²Jesus and his disciples were now on the road going up to Jerusalem. Jesus was going ahead of the disciples, who were filled with alarm; the people who followed behind were afraid. Once again Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and spoke of the things that were going to happen to him. ³³“Listen,” he told them, “we are going up to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and then hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴who will make fun of him, spit on him, whip him, and kill him; but three days later he will rise to life.”



Devotion

This passage is hard for us to read; imagine how hard it was for the disciples to hear! To hear their beloved leader and teacher deliver this devastating news of his own impending humiliation and death. And Jesus, in such a matter of fact way, telling the bad news as bluntly as possible, almost as if the disciples had begged: “give it to us straight, we can handle the truth; no matter how bad it is, we have to know.” When my mother got sick with lung cancer, and none of her oncologists would tell me how bad it was or how long she might live, I asked my own kind and wise physician. He asked me to tell him what kind of cancer, what stage. I did, and he said: “She will not live longer than one month or so – try to spend all the time with her that you can right now.” Although this truth was very hard and devastating to hear, it had the silver lining of that month I got to be with my mother, the last month of her life. I was able to be with her when she died. Jesus delivers the hard and devastating truth, but with that last line – “three days later he will rise to life” – gives the disciples, and us, the ultimate silver lining, the ultimate ray of hope.

Holy Week

Monday, April 10, 2017

Jon Gaska

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

John 12: 1-11

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of perfume...”
—John 12: 3, NRSV

Jesus’ journey to the cross is getting close now. So much so that everyone in the room can literally smell what is coming. Just one chapter earlier Jesus raised Mary and Martha’s beloved brother, Lazarus, from the tomb (John 11)--where death’s wretched stench once perforated the air, now Jesus’ death is being prepared for with a sweet-smelling perfume.

As I read the passage I began to wonder: does Mary wish to cover up death’s scent as our society so often tries to do? Or is Mary *blessing* Jesus’ death? It leads me to ponder how we could bless the inevitable transition into death through embracing it rather than rejecting or denying it?

Anne Lamott tells a story about a friend who is dying. A group of his closest friends send him off by having a Celebration of Life party with him. They sipped on his favorite scotch, shared his life stories, and listened to jazz albums on an old record player. There were tears and laughter; joy alongside sorrow. It is a potent example of how blessing death works: to fill the house with the fragrance of love.



Holy Week

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

Jill Crainshaw

**Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31;
John 12:20-36**

Devotion

Holy Week began this past Sunday, on Palm Sunday. What makes this particular version of Sunday through Saturday holier than other weeks of Sundays through Saturdays? Judging by recent news headlines, I think it is fair to say that human endeavors will not do much to create an ecology of particular or peculiar holiness during this week (though I suppose we can be on the look-out every week for those moments when human courage and faith ease or even transform some element of communal brokenness).



For me, worship—communal ritual practices—keep our feet on the ground when our thoughts roam without direction through complex ambiguities and when our feelings ebb and flow without rhyme or reason. When we cannot understand and face the barest bones of belief, our physical bones incarnate and carry out as best they can what we understand God to be in the midst of suffering. When we decide in spite of our lack of rhythm to keep on stumbling together along Holy Week pathways and let those pathways take us to streets where people are hungry or into neighborhoods where people have been forgotten, ignored or cast out, then we at least stumble together on holy ground.

How do our ritual actions during this week we call “holy” speak of God in and to communities crucified every day to appease the gods of discrimination or commerce or politics? What do our 21st century embodiments of Jesus’ story mean in a world where violence or racism or war destroy life and where too many of the wrong things and not enough of the right things are resurrected? These questions trouble my feet as I make my way in fits and starts along well-traveled Holy Week pathways.

—excerpts from In Our Bones Holy Week Reflections

Holy Week

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Joy Gaska

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

Hebrews 12:1-3 NRSV

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Devotion

Read the text a couple times. Try replacing "the sin that clings so closely" in the first verse with "anything that distracts us".

I would like us to spend this time today on reflecting on the first few words. "Since we are surrounded by so great cloud of witnesses". "Since" or because. Not maybe. Not if. SINCE we ARE surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. We are surrounded and we are surrounding others. Trinity is of the cloud. People before us and around us, also in the cloud of witness. Hallelujah! We are not alone on this race/ journey. We run together. We look to Jesus, the pioneer, as an example of how to live. We persevere together. Who is in your cloud?

I would like to invite you into a meditation/prayer today called Loving Kindness. This is a way to pray for your cloud of witnesses. Choose as many people as you like. Start by connecting with your breath. First send yourself loving kindness. For each breath, silently repeat:

May I know I am loved

May I be at peace

May I be filled with joy



You can replace the phrases with anything. Examples: may I be healthy, safe, secure, creative, courageous, compassionate, merciful, free. use what comes to mind. Go through the mantra 3-5 times. Then switch to someone(s) close to you in your life. Visualize them. Send them loving kindness. "May you.... ". Again go through the mantra 3-5 times, use the same phrases. Next, choose a mentor, send them loving kindness. Then choose an acquaintance, you may not even know their name, like your postal worker or the crossing guard, send them loving kindness. Finally, choose an enemy, or someone you may have a tense relationship with. Send them loving kindness.

Be the cloud of witness. Let us continue journeying together. Using Jesus' life as our example. Amen.

Holy Week

Maundy Thursday

April 13, 2017

John Engle III

**Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;
1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

Psalm 116:12-19

¹² What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

¹⁶O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. ¹⁸I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,

—Psalm 116: 12, 16, 18 NRSV

Devotion

In the past I was a volunteer firefighter and EMT. When we moved to NC, I donated funds to a variety of charities, but was not volunteering my time. A billboard on the side of the road changed all that in 2016.

Was that God's plan?, I don't know. That billboard had a profound life-changing affect on my life. The Church doesn't necessarily need only funds to operate, but needs additional things such and time and talents. It just so happens that one of my talents is an easy one,—hiking! I just didn't realize it at the time.

This talent has given me many opportunities to give of my time, and taken me out of my comfort zone. I believe that this was part of God's plan. Large groups of people or any type of public speaking is not my forte. When I became a hike leader, that all changed. I now speak in front of groups through my charity, but have also used this new talent in my business dealings.

We never know how God is going to use our gifts. I appreciate God's plan to use my hiking talent as a way to bring joy to children who daily suffer through illness and disease. Are there any hidden talents in your life ? How can God use them to glorify His name?



Holy Week
Good Friday
April 14, 2017
Terri Engle

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or
Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42**

John 18:1-19:42

25b Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' 27 Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

—John 19:25b-27 NRSV

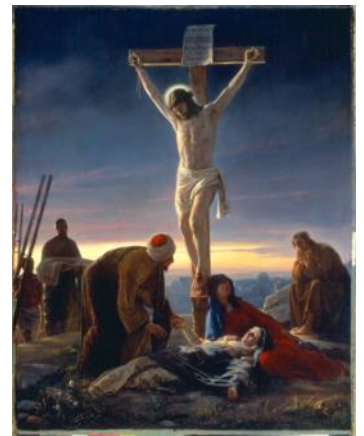
Devotion

As I travel along side people who are transitioning from earthly life to spiritual life, I appreciate the sacredness of space that surrounds those moments in time.

It's not easy to enter that sacred space with our loved ones. There may be fear for ourselves, fear for our loved ones, or fear of things not completed. And yet, we see a few of Jesus' loved ones brave enough to stand with him in his torment. They entered sacred space!

Many people are concerned with their loved ones well being both before and after death. Jesus shows us part of humanity when he gives the care of his mother over to his beloved disciple. This act enables him to take the next step in his journey.

We see one of the greatest gifts of love transpire in that sacred space—the love of a son and the love of family and friends. The Cross shows us that love conquers all!



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