



Stay with Me

Remain Here with Me

Watch and Pray

Watch and Pray



Lent 2015

The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church

www.nyapc.org

2015 Lenten Calendar
(Sunday Services at 8:45 and 11:00)

Wednesday, February 18	Ash Wednesday Service, 7:00 pm, Sanctuary, Supper-PMH, 6-6:45 pm
Sunday, February 22	First Sunday in Lent, Selections from Hadyn's <i>Creation</i> CE class (youth-adult) – "Faith and Fiction" 10am Annual Congregational Meeting, Pt2
Saturday, February 28	In-Town Solitude Retreat, 8:30am- 12:30pm (meditation, labyrinth)
Sunday, March 1	Second Sunday in Lent, Communion CE class – "Faith and Fiction" 10am
Sunday, March 8	Third Sunday in Lent CE class – "Faith and Fiction" 10am
Sunday, March 15	Fourth Sunday in Lent CE class – "Faith and Fiction" 10am
Wednesday, March 18	Taize service, 6:30pm, Lincoln Chapel
Sunday, March 22	Fifth Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 29	Palm Sunday Congregational Sunday (inter- generational activities, 10am, PMH)
Thursday, April 2	Maundy Thursday Service 7 pm, Sanctuary (Communion), light Supper, 6 pm, PMH
Friday, April 3	Good Friday Service, 12 noon, Sanctuary
Saturday, April 4	Easter Vigil, Chapel, 9am
Sunday, April 5	Easter Sunday, Communion 7:15 am Sunrise Service 7:45 am Breakfast (\$7) 8:45 am Worship Service 9:45 am Breakfast (\$7) 10:40 am Special Music 11:00 am Worship Service





The Act of Praying

Ash Wednesday February 18, 2015

Matt. 6:1-6,16-21; 2 Cor. 5:20b-6:10; Joel 2:1-2, 12-17a; "Whenever you pray, go to your room and shut the door." (Matthew 6:5); "Return to me with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12)

For the past few years, I have taken several courses in world "religions" at the George Washington University, although I have learned the term *religion* applies primarily to the Western world. While Asians would define Buddhism or Daoism more as philosophies than religions, we are more familiar with a monotheistic God concept as it appears in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Nevertheless, I believe that the act of prayer to some extent fits into all of these paradigms. The how, when, why, and where of praying varies greatly throughout the world, but the essence of human nature seems to include the need for humbling oneself before a greater Being. The passages for today focus on the "how" of praying.

Jesus instructs us to pray secretly, to not be like the "hypocrites" who pray in the synagogues. Does this suggest that praying aloud in public means that people are not genuine? "Real" prayer, then, can only take place within the confines of a room where others would not observe you? This dichotomous understanding implies that public prayer smacks of insincerity while private prayer reaps rewards. How do we interpret the Muslim who stops five times a day to pray in public, or praying in a class, such as the one Miriam Dewhurst has been conducting, each Sunday? The Book of *Joel* does not differentiate between public/private prayer, but rather encourages us to pour out our emotions as we pray. Some of us might be more comfortable doing this privately, while many traditions seem to uphold speaking in tongues, weeping and wailing, and boisterous sounds. Jesus certainly wanted us to be sincere but the text leaves out too much information to lead us to a conclusion that the Jews failed to understand how to pray properly. We all go through rituals and rites that include prayer in which we might participate without really thinking about what we are doing. Buddhists and Hindus often flock to temples to offer up various foods and spices to the spirits in order to have good health and fortune for their families. We as Christians go through baptisms and funerals both of which include prayer. How can we ever differentiate genuine prayer from insincere prayer for another person?

I take my indoor cats outside a couple of times a day and let them chew on the grass or gaze at the squirrels. During this time, I attempt to connect with God by using a variety of tools that I have learned in my religion classes. The Daoist believes in emptying the mind in order to merge with the Dao or Way, so I try to clear my mind of worries and resentments. Sometimes I will ask God to take away unwanted thoughts, but that often seems to be like swimming directly against a rip tide. Other days I might ask for support from God to help me deal directly with an issue, rather than begging for it to disappear. Often my spiritual life seems to be mired in doubt. Should I take action or let things resolve on their own? Do I share my struggles with others or speak directly to God in the privacy of my own back yard? There seem to be no easy answers. Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days and encountered real challenges. Today we begin that journey. Together or separately, we must find our own path of prayer.

Elizabeth Young, eryoung@gwu.edu

GOD'S GIFT TO ALL PEOPLE

February 19

Luke 18: 9-14

On a memorable hot August day in 1968 SCLC members and friends filled a Memphis Baptist Church beyond capacity, we sat moving humid air with church fans advertising a local funeral parlor. Our clothes were damp, sweat streamed down our faces but if there had been a cool breeze and ice cold drinks just outside the church doors not a soul in that congregation would have moved from their seat. The Rev. C. L. Franklin was preaching and what a dynamic, extraordinary preacher he was. Aretha sings almost as good as her daddy preached. Rev. Franklin's text was from the book of Ezekiel, he spoke of wheels within wheels, worlds within worlds. Rev. Franklin's sermon came to mind as I read the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

The parable begins, "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt"

The pages of history tell the story of people who believe themselves righteous and regard others with contempt: American Indian nations were destroyed, an economic system based on the enslavement of others was established, and in my lifetime righteous Nazi's murdered those they held in contempt, the disabled, gypsies, homosexuals and Jews. Today's newspapers tell the story of the acts of those who believe themselves righteous.

I thank you God that I'm not like those rich people who've never done a hard days work in their lives

I thank you God that I am not like those welfare people who've never had to work in their lives

I thank you God that I am a Christian not a Muslim

I thank you God that I am not a homosexual

I thank you God that I am an American not a North Korean Communist

I thank you God that I am not an alcoholic

I thank you God that I am not an illegal immigrant

I than you God I am not a criminal

I thank you God that my skin is white

I thank you God that I am not like those other people

"O God, I thank you that I am like the rest of humankind. I thank you that, like everyone else, I too have been shaped in Your image, with a mind to know and a heart to love. I thank you that, like everyone else, I too, was embraced by the crucified arms of Your Son. . . I thank You that You judge me, like everyone else, not by my brains or beauty, my skin tone or muscle power, my clothes or my color... but by the love that is Your gift to me... I thank you that, for all our thousand differences, I am so remarkable, like the people around me." Jesuit Father Walter Burghardt Elie Robins

Forever, Finite, and Springsteen

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Luke 9:57-62

Titus 2:1-15

February 27

I read an interview with Bruce Springsteen recently in *The New York Times*. Springsteen said, "It was very exciting for me, being in this place of my life, to go back to those forms which are filled with that sense of forever and put finiteness in it."

Springsteen was speaking of musical forms. The forms I continually go back to and wrestle with are spiritual forms.

Today's passage in Luke interweaves foreverness and finiteness. Three would-be disciples interact with Jesus. The first voluntarily steps up to Jesus and says, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus responds by saying that he has no place to call home, no place to sit down at the end of the day to eat and rest, no place to sleep at night. There is silence in the Bible after Jesus' comment. Presumably the would-be disciple is rethinking her impetuous enthusiasm.

Jesus says to another, "Follow me." This would-be disciple says, "Okay, but first I have to go home for my dad's funeral." Jesus presumably moves on ---and the would-be disciple presumably moves back into the routine of his life.

A third would-be disciple volunteers, saying, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say goodbye to my family." Jesus presumably moves on and comments that "[n]o one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This is the intersection where forever and finite meet for each of us.

When we hear Jesus' voice ---often felt through a tug at the heart or a stinging of unbidden tears--- we may be moved to volunteer, to jump in with both feet. We are moved by the forever moment to forget about the finite, but the finite isn't easily forgotten.

The finite is what and who we are. The finite is what and who we struggle against as we seek to be fit for and help bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

The three people in today's passage in Luke are people like me. They want to say yes, but they want to say it with qualifiers. Or maybe they want to ask questions and get answers before they commit further.

None of the three want to go back and do evil deeds or turn their backs on Jesus' way of life. All struggle with the reality of Jesus' way of life and of Jesus' expectations. "Sleeping on the desert floor with no supper and no shower or coffee the next morning is way outside my comfort zone. I just can't do that." "I have obligations I've already made to my family." "They'll worry about me if I just leave and don't say goodbye." Each of us can add to the list of "I'm coming, but . . ."

Lent is the time for each of us to think prayerfully about Jesus' call on our lives and his steadfast love for us. It is the time for us to confront our comfort zones, to discard the inappropriate things that keep us from following, and to begin to formulate our response to Jesus as we move toward Easter. Maybe before we encounter the resurrected Christ on Easter morning, we must first encounter ourselves at our deepest levels. Or maybe it is only by encountering Christ on his way to the cross that we encounter ourselves at our deepest levels and ask what it is that keeps us from following Jesus.

---Bonnie Davis

Nehemiah 2: 1-20
Luke 4: 1-8
Titus 3: 1-15

Saturday, February 21, 2015

A Christian's Use of Authority

In Luke's story of Christ's temptation by the Devil soon after the beginning of Christ's ministry, the Devil appears to Jesus and offers Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of the world. Wow! The quid pro quo is that Jesus worship the Devil. Jesus of course does not even consider the offer, saying:

It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

The preceding part of the story gives further context: the Devil tauntingly challenges Jesus to prove his power by turning a stone into bread. After all, Jesus is very hungry after 40 days praying in the wilderness, but he does not take up the Devil's challenge.

Jesus does not take up the Devil's offer to *display* power (transforming stone) nor to *take over* ruling power (over all the world's kingdoms). He just does not embrace the Devil's definition of power, and you might say he rejects our typical human power-definition also. Jesus has his own, more complex definition of power, which we spend our lives trying to learn.

As a 21st century Christian, I want to embrace Jesus' definition of power, i.e. the power of love (that active verb of love) like making moral decisions, promoting justice, loving my neighbor as myself, and loving myself too. But I *do* want to have authority too. Not authority over all the kingdoms of the world, mind you, but authority as a tool for making change in the world. This feels like it's part of taking responsibility for living a fully moral life. The challenge, I suppose, is to earn the right to that authority through the exercise of love, and not through a deal with the Devil. If only I can always figure out where the Devil lies ...

Prayer: God, help me not just to avoid the Devil by hiding out in safe territory, but to wrestle with the responsibilities of an active Christian in this world, while holding on to Jesus' alternative definition of power.

Martha Davis

God's Covenant with Noah and the Beginning of the Ministry of Jesus

Gen. 9:8-17
Psalm 149
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

Sunday, February 22, 2015

The Genesis passage reports the receding of the waters after the Great Flood and the return to dry land of Noah's family and all of the animals in the Ark. God establishes a covenant with Noah and his descendants that never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. God states that the sign of this covenant will be the bow (rainbow) he has placed in the clouds. When he brings clouds over the earth and the rainbow is seen in the clouds, God will be reminded of his covenant with every living creature on the earth.

Psalm 149 offers praise for God's Goodness to Israel, to be marked by the children of Zion dancing and making melody to him with tambourine and lyre. Reflecting that not all the creatures on earth are faithful and deserving of God's Goodness, recipients of God's Goodness should let high praises be in their throats while two-edged swords are in their hands to execute vengeance on the nations and people of the earth not deserving of praise.

The passage from First Peter is part of a larger passage stating that it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. Christ also suffered for sins in order to bring all to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. While God waited patiently in the days of Noah during the building of the Ark, eight persons were saved through water. Baptism, which this prefigured, now saves the people to whom Peter spoke, not as a physical cleansing of the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who now sits in heaven at the right hand of God.

Finally, Mark reports the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan, when a voice comes from heaven proclaiming "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." This is followed by forty days in the wilderness, then a return to Galilee after John is arrested and the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

Prayer: Creator God, keep us mindful of the history, trials and perseverance of those who preceded us in earlier faith communities before and after the time Jesus spent on earth as we look forward to the celebration of his resurrection. Amen

Robert L. Doan

THE TEMPTATION OF INVINCIBILITY

Nehemiah 4:1-23
1 Peter 2:20-25
Luke 4:9-15

Monday, February 23

“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Luke 4:12

Between his baptism by John and the beginning of his ministry, Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, spends 40 days fasting in the wilderness. The dove from heaven has just identified Jesus as Son of God. The devil tempts him.

The devil's first try plays on Jesus' famished condition urging Jesus to prove he is the Son of God by commanding a stone to become a loaf of bread. Read more broadly this is the temptation of material goods. Why not use godly power to acquire the riches of this world? Think of all the good that can be done in the world with control of unlimited material abundance. Poverty of goods could be relieved, but not poverty of the spirit. Houses could be built, but real homes not created. Medicine could be provided, but not loving care. Jesus' response: “Man does not live by bread alone.”

The second temptation is political power. The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world saying it is all yours if you will worship me. This is temptation that sells in Washington. Think of the good that can be accomplished with absolute political power. Evil can be stamped out. Crime rooted out. Naysayers silenced. Worry about alliance with the devil later. Jesus' response: “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

For his third try the devil takes Jesus to the top of the temple saying if you are the Son of God jump and be protected by angelic bungee cords. Read more broadly this might be called the temptation of invincibility, a temptation that doesn't get enough press. It's easy to understand the temptations of material goods and Faustian political bargains. These are garden variety temptations. But what about the temptation of invincibility, the feeling that because God is on our side we can leap off the metaphorical cliff? Isn't this temptation being played out as war in Iraq is being planned? Part of this temptation is the conviction that our answers are the right answers and that all questions have been answered by our right answers. Another part is believing that for every threat we know the proper response. We are tempted by dreams of living in a risk-free world. Jesus' response: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

God, we are tempted to use you like a rabbit's foot. We want your loving arms to hold us up even when we willingly leap into a void. Help us to use your gifts of intelligence, courage and strength without taking precipitous action that will surely put you to the test. Lord, hear our prayer.

(This meditation was written by Bruce Davie, the late husband of Rev. Ann Davie, in 2003.)

Lenten Hope

Nehemiah 5:1-19
Romans 5: 1-8
Luke 4: 16-21

February 24, 2015

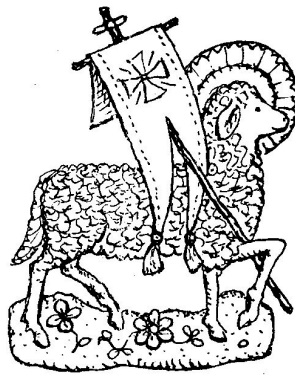
I spent 40 years of my life working on the budget for a major Federal agency. Budgeting, by definition, is the equitable allocation of inadequate resources to the needs identified by the society. At least in my experience, the problems are always bigger than the resources available to address them. This demands that those resources which are available be used fairly and efficiently. I was blessed during my career to work with many Federal officials who tried to live up to that standard.

So imagine my reaction to today's reading in Nehemiah. What I see there is a description of economic slavery imposed by those in charge on the "ordinary people" of Jerusalem. The irony is that they are all Jews, but those Jews who have power have chosen to use that power to sustain a rich life style at the expense of their "brothers". There is no economic fairness in Jerusalem. Nehemiah, with the spirit of God and the writ of the king on his side, steps in to remedy the situation.

Where are today's Nehemiahs? In a democracy, no one person has the power to simply decree an end to the economic injustice we see around us. We need a lot of Nehemiahs working at every level of society. Some may work in a big picture sense to change policies which create injustice. Others may work in small ways to try to alleviate or remedy the problems one small step at a time.

One benefit we have which Nehemiah did not have is the New Testament. In today's readings Jesus announces that he has come to bring good news to the poor and Paul notes that "perseverance brings hope." NYA has many Nehemiahs. The work needs to continue, and expand, and always exhibit perseverance and hope.

Steve Dewhurst



Do you ever feel like you're seeking to do the Lord's work, but face opposition? You're in good company—with Nehemiah, Luke, and Paul. How should we respond? With prayer.

Nehemiah prayed to God, and felt that God had put it into his heart to do something for Jews who survived Babylonian exile, and for Jerusalem. He led them back to Jerusalem, and organized them to begin rebuilding the walls of the Temple, which had been destroyed. Soon, they faced opposition from local authorities who felt threatened. Nehemiah was faced with three attempts to interrupt his what he believed was his God-given mission. These three attempts represented a temptation for Nehemiah to abandon the mission he believed God had given him. Nehemiah stopped, prayed to God for strength, discerned that God's call had not changed, and carried on to finish the task. Faithfully relying on God's guidance is as important as the task.

Jesus, too, resisted temptation to depart from his reliance on God, and his call to carry out God's will. After he was baptized, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Jesus resisted each temptation. Then Jesus was tempted again when he returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. When on the Sabbath day he went into His home synagogue. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. When He told the people the scripture was fulfilled that day in their hearing, they were shocked and angry. They drove Him out of town, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him off a cliff. Unfazed, He walked right through the crowd and went on his way. The Spirit prevails.

Disagreements about what God calls us to do can arise even within the church. Paul's letter to encourage the churches of Galatia exposed disagreements between them and him about God's call. He knew his message would not be popular, but he said he wasn't trying to please men, but Christ. He reminded them that they had not received the Spirit by works of the law, but by believing what they had heard. He urged them to continue what they had begun by means of the Spirit, rather than by means of flesh. It is God's will and work we seek to do, not our own.

Whenever we face doubt or opposition as we seek to follow God's call, we are invited to pray. I leave you with this invitation in song to prayer, and a song for you to use to pray without ceasing today. The invitation is from the hymn "What A Friend We Have in Jesus":

"Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In his arms he'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there."

And here is a prayer for today, in the form of a song from the Radcliffe Room:
"In my life Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In my life Lord, be glorified, today.
In Your church Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In Your church Lord, be glorified, today."

Karen Mills

Thursday, Feb. 26
Nehemiah 8:1-18
Matthew 5:17-26
Galatians 3:10-18



MUSINGS ON LAWS, RULES & REGULATIONS

“You’re not the boss of me!” The toddler stamped her foot, defying the adult towering over her. We humans don’t like to be told what to do or what not to do.

All three scriptures today deal with God’s laws:

Nehemiah gives instructions for a holy day. “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink the sweet.” Now that’s a rule I’d enjoy following.

In Matthew Jesus says, “I come not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil.” The numerous Old Testament Laws are intricate and demanding.

On the other hand, in Galatians I read, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.” Hmm. That seems to contradict the Matthew quote.

Our society today has fewer rules than in the past.

When I was in university we had strict dormitory curfews. We weren’t allowed to wear slacks. Males were not allowed above the lobby of the women’s dorms. Primarily, any young woman caught drinking was kicked out of school. What old-fashioned rules! We complained and laughed at their rigidity, but, for the most part, adhered to them.

Today university restrictions are few. Yet we read of recent tragedies exacerbated by the excess use of alcohol. I understand some fraternities may be putting new rules in place.

When my husband, David, was in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia, he asked an Armenian girl to a movie. Their societal rules were firm. Going along on the date were her mother and brother. As lovely as the girl was, David couldn’t afford to date her. That one evening used up almost a month’s subsistence allowance! Well, I’m just as glad as it helped keep David single a bit longer!

There are good rules and bad rules, sensible rules and excessively silly or complicated rules. In Luke Jesus says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” Ultimately, the choice is ours

Helen Williams

EXCLUSIVE—INCLUSIVE?

Nehemiah 9:1-15
Matthew 5:27-37
Romans 4:1-8

Friday, Feb. 27, 2015

Nehemiah 9:2

Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners

Some 70 years ago, a Roman Catholic friend of mine told me this story:

A group newly arrived in heaven were given a tour by St. Peter. As they went from area to area, Peter told them what was going on. In the first area, there was a lot of noisy splashing. Peter told the group that it was the Baptists celebrating. In the next area, loud singing was heard. Peter said that it was the Methodist area. Next, they heard several people calmly exchanging views on what God was really like. "They", Peter said, "were the Presbyterians." As they approached the next section, Peter asked them to please walk on tip-toe and keep very quiet. "This is the Catholic area", he said, "and they think they are the only ones here.

It is perhaps very easy to think that we are the only true children of God, that we have the TRUTH, and the beliefs of others are full of errors. It seems that Ezra and Nehemiah, the leaders of the exiles returning from Babylon, were among those. They had reason. The best biblical scholars had been exiled. While in Babylon, they put together much of the Old Testament as we know it today. Those who had been left behind in Israel had perhaps developed their own systems of belief. They were considered "foreigners" and had to be kept separate from the true returning Israelites.

I happen to believe that I do not know all the truth about God. God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. He can choose to reveal himself as He wishes to populations around the earth. Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, can all only have a partial view of God.

So I believe what I can, and try to remain open to the views of others, in the hope that my faith will continue to grow.

Prayer *"O Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief."*

Phil Hanna

Nehemiah 9:16-25
Matthew 8:22-30
Romans 4:9-15

Saturday, February 28, 2015

Faith, humility and patience are the three words that these passages conveyed to me. First, in Nehemiah, we are reminded that it is so easy to "stiffen our necks" and "fail to remember the miracles" that God performs for us. In Romans we remember that faith isn't a given - it isn't something we inherit but rather we must develop our own faith through which we can inherit the world. And in Matthew we learn that sometimes we must be patient, think before we speak and listen for the larger plans that God has for us.

Humility, faith and patience are all virtues we all have to work at and there are times when those virtues seem very hard - if not impossible to embody. I know I certainly am guilty of getting too wrapped up in the business of life and take for granted the comfort and safety God provides for me and my family. We often are so busy getting through the daily tasks of our lives that faith isn't always top of mind, and patience often runs short. Lent is a time to slow down, and make sure we are on track in developing our faith, practicing humility and having patience to take the path that God calls us to take, rather than blindly taking the closest path to hand. Hopefully in doing this during Lent, we can teach ourselves to live these virtues every day.

Stacey Gagosian



Moments of Fear

Genesis 17:1-19,
Psalm 150
Mark 8:31-38,
Romans 4:16-25

Sunday, March 1, 2015

Abram is called away from his homeland, away from his extended family and all that he is familiar with. He is called to follow, but given no road map, no security plan. He and his family become homeless wanderers in a series of hostile lands. The Lord's promise is that he will make Abram's family into a great nation some day.

Today's passage (Gen. 17) catches up with Abram 25 years later; he is now 100 and Sarai is 90. They have no hope of conceiving a child; they have waited 25 years and nothing has happened. I imagine at this point there is a great amount of fear in their hearts. They have no homeland, no security, no son to carry on the family, nothing solid to hold onto. Death and oblivion seem to be the end of all their faithful following.

A similar cause for despair hits Peter when he hears Jesus describe his own death. Jesus bluntly tells Peter that soon he, Jesus, will be rejected by all, killed and somehow "rise again." This news is too bleak for Peter who refuses to accept it. He doesn't want to be left behind, to lose his spiritual guide, to lose his Christ just as he had found him.

Both these stories deal with the conflict of faith with fear, fears of oblivion, of a meaningless life, of being lost without a guide. Both texts point to the daily conflict between faith and the world's fears. And Jesus' difficult advice is "Don't be afraid, just believe."

This is a daily challenge. Fear is a corrosive, withering, deadly force. Spread over a whole country, it can grow, deepen, be one of the roots of war. Jesus teaches us not to succumb to such fear, for even if you "gain the whole world, you will have lost your soul."

Jesus cautions Peter that faith strengthened by overcoming the world's fear, even fear of death, was the way to "save his soul." Faith is a great, limitless resource if we have the courage to use it. Looking for a modern example of this faith, President Kennedy's words come to mind. "However close we sometimes seem to that dark and final abyss, let no man of peace and freedom despair." "The making of peace is the noblest work of God-fearing men." And his praise for the United Nations as "our last, best, hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace." And "Now the trumpet summons us again – not as a call to bear arms...but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, 'rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation' – a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself."

Lord, give us faith, it is mightier than we can ever imagine.

An Eye for An Eye?

Nehemiah 9:26-38
Matthew 5:38-48

Monday, March 2, 2015

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:43-45)

Today, as I’m writing this, we have just learned that Kayla Mueller, a young American woman who went to Syria to help refugees from the Syrian civil war, has been killed while in the hands of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. This news follows last week’s report of the immolation of the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kaseasbeh by ISIS. I have on occasion prayed for the leaders of ISIS. I haven’t felt much like doing that lately. I think of what the last minutes of the captives’ lives were like and of the chasm that has opened in the hearts of those who loved them. I imagine how I would feel if it were one of my beloved sons who had been kidnapped and killed. It’s fine with me that God causes the sun to rise on these people and sends them rain, but mostly I confess that if an American or Jordanian bomb sends them to hell, that’s fine with me, too.

That reaction, the seeking of revenge, an eye for an eye, is as old as humankind. We think that by inflicting horrific pain on those we deem evil, our own pain will be alleviated or our demand for justice satisfied. Somehow a sorrowful sigh or shake of the head doesn’t quite do it when we are forced to contemplate such brutality.

But. God loves them. As much as God loves Kayla and Muath. As much as God loves me and those I love. As much as God loves you. So, what does God do with people like this, people who seem to delight in their power to cause suffering and death? And what about us? We have plenty of our own stuff to answer for: suffering we have caused, directly and indirectly; injustice we have countenanced or participated in. What does God do with us? God forgives. God reconciles.

The group that meets on the second and fourth Thursday mornings in the Docherty Center (all are welcome, 10-11am) has been reading a very fine book by Sharon L. Baker, entitled Razing Hell: Rethinking Everything You’ve Been Taught About God’s Wrath and Judgment. Baker takes a careful and thorough look at what we have been taught about God’s wrath and judgment, and presents an alternative metaphor. I can’t do it justice here – really, go read the book – but she offers the metaphor of God as a fire we will all experience. In God’s fire everyone will experience God’s overwhelming love and forgiveness and will be called to account for what we’ve done. Our attention is drawn to those we’ve wronged and we have the opportunity to seek forgiveness, to be reconciled to them and to God. Christians have Jesus standing in the fire with them, but we’re all there. The vision Baker offers goes a long way toward providing an answer that is consistent with what we know of God and of ourselves. In the meantime ...

Prayer: Gracious God, help us not to be consumed by hate or fear or rage. Help us to somehow, somehow love our enemies. We ask you not only to stay the hands of ISIS and all who are drawn to cruelty, but also to forgive them and to bring peace and forgiveness to the hearts of their victims. Amen.

Miriam Dewhurst

Are You Fulfilling Your Destiny?

Nehemiah 12: 27-30
Matthew 6: 1-6
Hebrews 11: 8-12

Tuesday
March 3, 2015

Are you fulfilling your destiny?

This question intrigues all of us and perhaps threatens some of us, at least on those occasions when we feel like the answer may be no.

Of course, the question is really difficult to answer in a rational, objective way, for most of us are “feeling our way” along life’s journey, seeking to discover our destiny as life unfolds. Today’s scripture passages provide guidelines for helping us discern God’s will for our lives (which is the theological terminology for asking the secular, philosophical question about our destiny). And isn’t that our constant prayer: *God, help me discern your will for my life this day, in my attitudes, in my behavior and even in my imagination about the future that You would help me create. In other words, God, what is my destiny, and am I now acting to fulfill it?*

All three passages imply or directly state that the actors have an intentional, personal relationship with God and have sought to act in accord with God’s perceived guidance or direction. Indeed, “By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out without knowing where he was going.” (Hebrews 11:8 CEB) Matthew reminds us that we are called to establish meaningful relationships with even those unlike ourselves – the poor - and maintain a prayerful relationship with God, not to demonstrate publicly our piety, but in order to have a genuine personal relationship with God (or to manifest Abraham’s and Sarah’s faith that God acts to fulfill God’s promises for each of us). And Governor Nehemiah reports on his detailed plan to celebrate the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, as he understood that he had been directed to do. That celebration is a worship service, expressing gratitude for the successful completion of a massive building project that had taken years to accomplish.

At first blush, “destiny” is too abstract, too uncertain, too risky a concept for us to spend much time pondering it. Yet, whenever we contemplate the big decisions in life, *what career to choose and how to manage the career we have chosen – or to change it midstream; whether to marry – and to whom; whether to become a parent – and if so, how to relate to (and in the early years, raise) the child or children we are blessed to create or adopt; whether to retire from a long career – and if so, to what purpose*, we are contemplating our destiny and how to fulfill it.

Are you fulfilling your destiny?

Prayer: Loving God who has made and keeps promises, enable me to discern your will for my life this day. Help me to fulfill the destiny You call me to enjoy. Amen.

--John H. Quinn, Jr.

THY KINGDOM CAME

Nehemiah 13:4-22
Matthew 6:7-15
Hebrews 11:13-19.

Wednesday, March 4

How fortunate for me that these readings contain images of heaven, since I am still struggling with this concept. The latest insights come from Christopher Morse in “The Difference Heaven Makes: Rehearing the Gospel as News.” Morse, who holds the Dietrich Bonhoeffer chair at Union Theological Seminary, seems to be writing for Th.D. candidates with his dense text and references, but I will try and distill some of his insights for us.

Morse cautions against “cosmic spectatorship”; in other words, he recommends that we stop looking up in the sky for God or heaven. When Jesus said that we should pray “Our Father who art *in* heaven, He was asking us to make our home in God. Heaven is not a place; it is our faith in God.

Morse postulates that we do not go to heaven, but that heaven comes to us. “Thy kingdom come.” In fact, Jesus and His kingdom have already come to us. The kingdom is *now*—when we invite Christ into our hearts—not in the past or in the far future, but now.

Finally, Morse believes that heaven neither begins nor ends with death. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that his ethical responsibility was derived from his “current reality of heaven.” St. Augustine said, “we are participating in eternity.”

Chapter 11 of Hebrews sums up the faith stories of many of our spiritual ancestors. This beautiful passage says,

“They [ancestors] confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland...they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” (vv. 13b-16, NRSV)

Prayer: Loving God, please help us to remember that You are with us always, and that we are members of your kingdom now. We thank you for the great cloud of witnesses that came before us.

Ella Cleveland

God's Judgment

Jeremiah 22: 13-22

Matthew 21: 12-22

1 Corinthians 2: 1-9

March 5, 2015

In the first reading, Jeremiah is pronouncing judgment on the kings of Judah—the sons of Josiah, who was killed in 610 B.C. in a battle with Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. Josiah's son Shallum rose to the throne, but within three months he was captured by Necho and taken as a prisoner. His brother Jehoiakim succeeded him. It is the rule of these two brothers that Jeremiah condemns. The international situation is difficult for the small kingdom of Judah, squeezed between competing giant empires. Having seen their kinsmen to the north in Israel destroyed by the Assyrians, and their father (the good king) killed, the sons of Josiah try to survive by the practical approaches of forming alliances and paying tributes. But depleting the royal treasury makes it difficult to pay workers for their toil. Taxes are increased, and hardships are not borne equally. God is displeased when the kings ignore God's commands about treatment of the weakest and least powerful, even when the national economy is challenged. One might be sympathetic to the kings' plight, but God seems to have little patience with those who choose pragmatism and self-interest over faith and obedience.

In Matthew 21, Jesus is hungry, but when he finds an unlucky fig tree without fruit (as it was not the season for figs, see Mark 11:13), he curses the barren fig tree and causes it to wither and die. Then to make matters worse, he brags about his vengeance to his disciples, and encourages them to strive for similar apparently arbitrary acts as an exercise of their faith, such as forcing a mountain to cast itself into the sea. This cringe-worthy scene seems so out of character for Jesus that we hardly know what to make of it. The traditional interpretation is that the withered fig tree represents God's condemnation and judgment against Israel. But why wouldn't the compassionate, magnanimous Jesus of the loaves and fishes use his miraculous powers to cause the tree to bear fruit out of season, rather than permanently destroying it as punishment? At least in Luke, the fig tree is given a year's probation to try to bear some fruit. (Luke 13:6-9). In some ways this seems like Jesus channeling his fully human and fully divine nature simultaneously—the human tendency toward impatience, petulance, and self-aggrandizement, combined with the divine ability to perform miracles and pronounce eternal judgment. One commentator, William Barclay, characterizes this as, “without exception, the most difficult story in the Gospel narrative.”

Perhaps the third reading in Corinthians provides a theme underlying the two prior passages. Paul explains that he came, in fear and trembling, preaching the mystery of God, not with lofty words or wisdom, but instead knowing only Christ and his crucifixion (elsewhere described as folly to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Gentiles). God's wisdom is “not of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to perish.” Thus Paul emphasizes that the message itself must be our transcendent focus, rather than the human messenger. Paul, like Kierkegaard centuries later, reminds us of the limitations of human wisdom, particularly when it comes to understanding the mysteries of God. By human standards, condemnation of the pragmatic, self-interested kings of Judah may not seem much less extreme than condemnation of the “innocent” fig tree. But human standards are not God's standards.

Lord, infuse us with the wisdom of your spirit, and the humility and faith to accept the mysteries we cannot understand.

Betsy Merritt & Jim Bird

1 Corinthians 2:10-16, from The Message

March 6, 2015

10-13 The Spirit, not content to flit around on the surface, dives into the depths of God, and brings out what God planned all along. Who ever knows what you're thinking and planning except you yourself? The same with God—except that he not only knows what he's thinking, but he lets *us* in on it. God offers a full report on the gifts of life and salvation that he is giving us. We don't have to rely on the world's guesses and opinions. We didn't learn this by reading books or going to school; we learned it from God, who taught us person-to-person through Jesus, and we're passing it on to you in the same firsthand, personal way.

14-16 The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit—God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion. Spiritually alive, we have access to everything God's Spirit is doing, and can't be judged by unspiritual critics. Isaiah's question, "Is there anyone around who knows God's Spirit, anyone who knows what he is doing?" has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ's Spirit.

If you're anything like me, you've gotten altogether too busy, forcing you to move at a break-neck pace through this life. You've got family, and friends, and work or school, and church, and volunteer work, and the gym, and maybe a dog and/or a house, and all of that was quite enough, thankyouverymuch, before Netflix and Pinterest and Twitter and Facebook started gobbling up the moments between. I know I'm not the only one, because a New York City public radio program is collaborating on a project called Bored and Brilliant, encouraging listeners to see what happens when they put down their smartphones and allow their minds to wander. We've not only over-scheduled our time, we've over-programmed our brains and hearts and yes, our spirits. When we take a hard look at our days, we realize we've left no time at all to just be.

It seems like there ought to be enough time to do it all, but it never quite works that way. In project management, there's a concept called a "spring-loaded schedule" - it means that, on paper, all the planned activities fit in the planned schedule, but they're packed in so tightly that with one false move SPROING! the spring gives way and the whole schedule is blown. You have to leave a little space for life to happen, for challenges to pop up and opportunities to arise. Similarly, our spirits need space. It's not just about the minutes on the clock - it's about the space you make in your heart and your spirit for a relationship. Paul knew it when he wrote to the Corinthians; "spirit can only be known by spirit". Simone Weil knew it when she wrote, "Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it". We have to make time, yes, but more than that, we have to make room. To experience the bounty of the gifts of the spirit, we have to open ourselves to receive them.

This year for Lent, I'm taking on less, so that I can be open to receiving more.

A prayer from Peter Marshall:

In the name of Jesus Christ, who was never in a hurry, we pray, O God, that You will slow us down, for we know that we live too fast. With all of eternity before us, make us take time to live - time to get acquainted with You, time to enjoy Your blessings, and time to know each other.

Michele Holland

Saturday, March 7

Jeremiah 23:9-15

Mark 11:1-19

2 Corinthians 13:2-9

When I cracked open my Bible to read today's scripture passages, I did so with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation. Would the words spur some deep, wonderful thoughts? Or would I be grasping at straws to find some meaning for a devotional?

My initial reaction to the passage in Jeremiah was to immediately turn to the New Testament readings. (If I'm honest—this is my reaction to many Old Testament scriptures. They are—admittedly—a hole in my spiritual development and study.) The Mark passage primarily surrounds Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the subsequent cleansing of the temple. Familiar stories to many of us. I began to get worried...what can I say about either of these?

Then I read 2 Corinthians 2: 2 – 9. Oh boy. The last verse states, "For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that we may become perfect." It's that last word that gets me—and many of us—into trouble. Perfect. The quest for perfection is a demon for many people, including me. It makes me fearful and tentative and judgmental and I've spent a lot of time learning how to not worry about being perfect. So how am I to reconcile Paul's words?

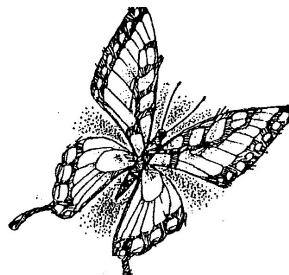
I read the passage again. This time, I'm struck by the fifth verse, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed, you fail to meet the test!"

This verse was oddly comforting, especially the question—do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? It reminds me of one of my favorite Bible verses, Philippians 4:13. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I can be strong and weak at the same time. I can test my own assumptions about faith and spirituality. I can be perfect without being "perfect."

Lent is indeed a time for us to test ourselves. We reexamine our faith and our hearts and often find cracks and holes created by ourselves, by others, by the sin that lives in each of us. But Christ lives in us too. God fills those cracks and holes with glorious love and light. And then we can truly rejoice that "we are weak and you are strong." We are not meant to be perfect in the traditional sense of the word. But we are truly made perfectly whole by God's love.

Blessings to each of us in our Lenten journey.

Shared with love,
Whitney McColley



How do we forgive?

What are we to do with these outbreaks of cruelty and violence in the name of religion? Isn't this a perversion of religion as we understand it? Our God is one of steadfast love and forgiveness, and so we implore God to "forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors." Forgiving is not easy but we try to cultivate a "forgiving mind." But how do we understand or even forgive atrocities?

I don't know. All I can do is to prayerfully put the matter in God's hands. Pray for the victims, their families, their societies. (Are the perpetrators victims? I don't know.) Hope that justice and compassion will win out. And believe that God's goodness and mercy will endure forever, while evil and violence sow seeds of outrage, chaos and their own destruction. I don't know if this is good theology, but I do take comfort in the prerogative that "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." And I firmly believe that in these violent times we need to hold onto our best hopes, beliefs and to remain faithful in the midst of these ordeals.

Psalm 103 contains a faith-filled vision of forgiveness:

O my soul, be wild for the Source of Wonder;
Let my heart praise His Holy Name.

O my soul, be wild for the Source of Wonder;
and never forget all His loving kindness.

The One who forgives all my mistakes,
Who heals my sins and brokenness
Who rescues me from the recesses of death...

Who crowns me with love and compassion,
So that my spirit soars like a young eagle.

You make harmony, restore peace,
Bringing justice to all the oppressed...
You are merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.
You do not hold onto a quarrel forever,
Nor remember our faults for all time...
For as the heavens tower above the earth,
So is Your love upon those who hold You in awe.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far do You remove our sins from us.
Just as a mother has compassion for all her children,
So do you care for all who hold You in awe.
For You know us and remember we are dust...
For Your love lasts from everlasting to everlasting.
Setting on those who hold You in awe.
Your guidance can be found everywhere we look,
Your teachings will guide us through the confusion...
Bless the LORD, all his works,
Let all creation praise You,
Let each patch of earth declare Your power,
From holy ground to holy ground.
O my soul, be wild for the Source of Wonder!

(paraphrase from Pamela Greenberg's complete Psalms)

Prayer: O Lord, give us the strength to forgive.

Tom Dunlap

March 9, 2015

Jeremiah 23: 16-24

Mark 12: 38-44

Romans 8:18-15

False Prophets, Poor Widows ... and Hope

False prophets take center stage today. Jeremiah decries feel-good prophets who tell the people of Jerusalem that all will be well, even as little Judah teeters on the edge of Babylonian destruction. In Mark, Jesus paints a near-comical picture of scribes “who like to walk around in long robes.” I can almost see them—their noses in the air. But this is no joking matter. These scribes “devour widow’s houses,” taking advantage of the weakest in society.

It’s in this false-prophet context that we meet, once again, the poor widow plunking her last two coins into the temple’s coffers. And once again, I sigh a little, knowing that I am never going to give as much as that poor widow. I am one of the people Jesus points to who gives out of abundance, making sure to have enough for college funds, retirement accounts, new clothes and vacations. But today, with the widow surrounded by false prophets, her example is about more than our individual giving habits—it’s about how our world has allowed a widow to come to this point, giving her last coins to a temple full of corrupt scribes, where, just a few verses earlier, Jesus has turned over the money changers’ tables.*

Jesus isn’t pointing out this widow as a simplistic example of what we should do. Instead, this widow is a foil for the scribes, for the false prophets that we fall prey to, telling us all is well.

So what feel-good prophets do I listen to? What smug figures in long robes do I turn to, looking past the widow with two coins to her name? Aargh. I’m afraid there are many. Yes, I hear the bad news about ice caps melting, about wars and starving children. But I confess that Jeremiah grows hoarse trying to be heard over the feel-good messages I’d rather listen to.

Jeremiah, I might ask. What do I do? I can’t live without some hope. Is there any hope? And Jeremiah does offer hope ... just not in the passage for today. But he offers hope that understands the realities of the power of Babylon. Paul offers hope today as well, but as with Jeremiah, this is not some greeting card sentiment in fancy typeface. Paul writes of a challenging hope, an active hope that includes groaning and labor pains. There should be another word for this kind of hope.

What would it mean to make this kind of hope a part of my life? Jesus pointing out the widow and Jeremiah reacting to the political realities of his day remind me to pay attention to what’s really happening around me. And Paul reminds me that I don’t need false prophets or corrupt scribes to make me feel better, that none of “the sufferings of this present day” should eclipse my hope in God’s vision for the world: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Dear God, Help me to see the world the way You do, in all its sinfulness, but help me turn away from despair or denial and toward an active hope, grounded in the power of your love. Amen

Meg Hanna House

* Daniel P Horan, “Missing the Point of the Widow’s Mite,” *Dating God: Franciscan Spirituality for the 21st Century*, Blog, Nov. 11, 2012.

March 10, 2015

Jeremiah 23:25-32; Luke 12:1-10; and Romans 8:31-39

As a marriage and family therapist, I tend to look at all human behavior in terms of *relationships*. People are relational by nature, and they are affected from birth by their relationships with family, community, and God. Each person's reality at any given moment reflects the impacts of those relationships, and in turn, the person acts in ways that affect all those around her/him. The strength and quality of these relationships is reflected in one's value-based concept of self, the past, the present, and the future.

We can become stuck in a frame of mind devoid of meaningful relationships. However, as people of God, we are given much poetic, narrative, and historical guidance in the Bible to center us and assist us as we develop and grow in our relationships, and of course, who we are. Jeremiah was active during a very tough time of civil and political strife, a time when Babylon cruelly took and ruled Jerusalem. Here the prophet suggests that the failure and loss of Jerusalem was bound to happen if they listened to people's dreams (false prophecies) rather than God's true prophets. He asks them to rely upon God's teachings and law rather than some spectacular unbalanced vision. From a psychotherapeutic perspective, it is possible that many people were in panic and trauma, trying to figure out why their homes (communities) and future were in ruin. They were full of anxiety and perhaps reacted well outside of what we would call *balanced* coping skills! Perhaps Jeremiah the "life coach" is trying to center his followers by bringing them back to their relationship with God, a God that was becoming less and less angry and more loving.

Luke tells the story of Jesus' rebuke of those who speak from their fears and quest for power (an unbalanced behavior). He points to the simple truth that all acts of lies and hypocrisy eventually become transparent, and that those with strong relationships with God will be heard. He also attempts to calm fears and anxieties with the famous admonition that it is not God's promise that should be feared, but rather the one (evil) who can cast us into hell. Then Jesus gives us that blessed assurance that even the hairs of our heads are important to God. As always, Jesus adds that all may have a beautiful relationship with the angels and with God.

We can take comfort that Paul, an adult man without relationships in his life as Saul, finally found the ultimate personal relationship with God. He proclaims to the Romans: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In this season, it is good to reflect on our relationships, to talk with one another (and our children) about our values, and to discover new relational meanings in our oneness with God and all things.

Eric Slaughter

March 11, 2015

Jeremiah 24:1-10; Luke 12:11-21; and Colossians 3:1-17.

Colossians 3: 5, 8-14

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ... 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, 13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Jeremiah 24: 4-7

5 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chalde'ans. 6 I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them. 7 I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

Devotion:

Paul's letter to the Colossians is good advice, and it causes me to consider the word "remember," and what it literally means: "to re-member." Paul is literally calling us to re-bind ourselves to the body of Christ. Fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness—all of these things are idolatry because they cut us off from the body of Christ and one another. In these acts, we essentially put ourselves at the center of the universe—or at least our own world—and effectively dis-member the body of Christ.

The metaphor of the figs as reflected in Jeremiah comes to this same conclusion: "I will build them up and not tear them down....I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God..."

During this time of Lent, for the first time I am considering "dis-memberment" and "re-memberment". Instead of thinking of what to "give up," I am considering how to re-center. What are the things that are at the center of my life, which effectively crowd out the Holy Spirit?

Prayer:

"Lord, give me discernment and eyes to see the things which are centered in my life that are not of your choosing. Help me to re-member, to remove those things which separate and put you at the center."

Laura Asiala

Faith and Outlet Malls

Jeremiah 25:8-17
Luke 12:22-31
1 Peter 2:4-10

Thursday
March 12, 2015

"And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." Luke 12:29-31

We are certainly a city and a nation of strivers, people who enjoy consuming the fruits of our strivings in up-scale restaurants and displaying the degree of our success in the clothes we wear.

Who of us would cease striving, let go and have faith?

I recall an NYAPC Session meeting several years ago when the Elder offering the opening meditation asked each of us what we would do with an extra hour each week, one more than our current 168 hours, of 24 hours for each of 7 days. Not surprisingly, for Elders at a Session meeting, each of us intoned about using our extra hour in several different pious, spiritual activities--prayerful reflection, bible reading, hymn singing, and so forth. Toward the end of the circle, an Elder, who was an economist (and better with numbers than most), noted that an extra hour each week added only about one half of one percent more time to our lives, a very small addition. Given that the additional time was so small, and the spiritual activity clearly so important to each of us, what was keeping us from freeing up the extra time in our current schedules?

Ah, what a good question.

I don't think Jesus in Luke is importuning us to become itinerant monks or street preachers who rely on God to guide and provide for their lives--though He would certainly not oppose such a path for a person if that is the direction that their faith led them ultimately.

I think Jesus is drawing our attention to where we put the focus of our lives. Striving for the fruits of the world around us can consume easily all 168 hours each week. How each of us strives for God's kingdom is the sum and substance of our personal faith journey and therefore up to each of us to work out with God. Jesus just wants to make sure that we are staying on the main road of our faith journey and not being overly distracted by the roadside attractions at the outlets malls of life.

Paul Gebhard

For Where Your Treasure is ...

Jeremiah 25:30-38

Luke 12:32-40

1 Peter 2:11-17

Friday, March 13th, 2015

On this new day, as we pass the halfway mark of Lent, let us be mindful of the importance of this liturgical season. Lent is a time of reorientation, of renewal, of reaffirming who are and who we are called to be. For many of us, this has been a period of repentance, of letting go of the past, and of looking forward to a life anew. For others, it has been an opportunity to recall our baptisms, to live more fully into our faith, and to follow intentionally the words and ways of Jesus. During our Lenten journey, some of us have given up material goods and harmful practices while others of us have added prayer or reverent rituals to our mundane and daily lives.

And, during this season of Lent, we have walked together as community with Jesus towards Jerusalem. Although we know the story and we know the outcome, we need to be reminded of it each and every year. For we live in a world that too often values self-centeredness, materialism, and manipulation. We live in a world where it is too easy to look inward rather than outward, to privilege some individuals at the expense of others, and to seek our own profit while overlooking neighbors and strangers in our midst. And we live in a world, where it is too easy to forget that we all are broken, and that, yet despite this, we all are loved.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus offers his disciples, and us, important words of wisdom. We are to orient ourselves to God and to the beloved community, the new heaven and new earth. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* When we reorient ourselves to God and towards the beloved community, we find ourselves living a life reprioritized. We find ourselves asking, “What really matters?” And the liturgical season of Lent is a perfect time for us to remember this, to reclaim it, to embody it.

“A Brief Statement of Faith”, one of the important confessions that we Presbyterians affirm, commences with nine simple words. *In life and in death we belong to God.* These nine simple words make a powerful declaration to be sure. These nine simple words are perhaps a bit radical as well. *In life and in death we belong to God.*

As we continue during this season on the long road to Jerusalem, let us be ever mindful of these nine simple words. Let us reorient ourselves towards them remembering that “for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And, then in doing so, let us also be ever mindful of the Great Commandment; the commandment that emphatically states “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

Loving and compassionate God. During this season of Lent, let us joyfully lift up our treasure to you for, indeed, it does come from our hearts. Let us recommit ourselves to you for in life and in death it is you to whom we belong. And, let us have the courage to follow your will and to act with mercy, justice, and steadfast love towards others and towards your creation this day and beyond. Amen.

Mark A. Zaineddin

REPENT!

Jeremiah 26:1-16
Luke 12:57-13:5
Ephesians 1:15-2:3

Saturday, March 14, 2015

These passages are really hard reading. Dealing with repentance is difficult because the first thing is admitting that I have sinned. This requires serious examination of motives and actions. Then I have to tell God I'm sorry, and I won't do it again. Worst of all I need to embrace a life style and/or thinking that allows me to keep my promise. Oh dear, now this is complicated.

I suspect many of the readers of this devotion have worked with these issues and may be just as frustrated and discouraged as I am. But this is okay, and here is why: It keeps us humble. We can't go around bragging about how good we are or feeling sorry for—or looking down on—those miserable sinners. Because we are all in the same boat!

So what are we to do? I believe that God loves us every day of our lives. Then God sent his son to die for our sins. And Jesus even conquered death. Remarkable!

And so, sinners that we are, God takes us right where we are and asks us to live our lives being grateful for this love and forgiveness. And just as important, being willing and eager to share that love with others.

What a gift we have been given. Praise the Lord!

Jenean McKay



Those That Persecute You

March 15, 2015

2 Chronicles 36:14-23; Psalm 34: John 3:14-21; and Ephesians 2:4-10

When I was in college I learned a motet written by Ralph Vaughn Williams based on Psalm 34: 8, one of the verses from today's lessons.

Oh taste and see
How gracious the Lord is
Blessed is the man
That trusteth in him

It's haunting, and beautiful, and there is an minor chord in the middle that reflects my confusion, the muddying of thought. It aches. The world's evidence suggests that things are getting worse, moving in the wrong direction, scarier than ever.

Psalm 34 reflects something profound. It suggests we believe that God is good, that the universe is not an amoral swirl of people simply maximizing their own utility, but that even now God works among us, and through us, to create the place that God intends.

This is the a radical thing we can do, every day: acknowledge that, in fact, God wants for the world to be good, to be right, for people to be cherished and well-fed and to feel beloved. A second, radical thing: we can trust that this is something that God can achieve.

And in fact the people who seem profoundly evil – the people who burn human beings in cages, who post beheadings on the internet – restoring these people makes this possible. God loves these people, his creation, as he loves us. They are love-able, creatures made in God's own image.

And God, like we, mourns their radical departure from what God intends. I know God feels the crush of their despair even as he comforts those they kill. God feels the anguish and abandonment of people who perpetrate these horrible acts. God walked with the people who persecuted Jesus, who crucified God's own self.

We should pray for them, because they are in the most desperate despair and broken place. The acts they commit destroy them. They believe that these acts are what the world requires. They have already stepped into hell.

And I know that even these people can be restored; that they, like we, can become whole. I don't know how this works. It strikes me that this must be the "grace" part. Thich Nhat Hanh talks about a necessary step of right thinking.

If we believe that Jesus did come to set the captives free, then he can release them from the clouded thinking that binds them, from believing that the world is full of people who wish them death. We must advocate for policy, and thinking, and words that help them come to this right thinking conclusion. God can create the servants that will set about doing God's work.

Lord, save those who are crushed in spirit. Amen.

Rebecca Davis

Lamenting During Lent

•Lamentations 1:1-13

Monday, March 16, 2015

*“How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the cities has become a vassal.”
(Lamentations 1:1)*

Today, we mark the mid-point of Lent. And I suspect that like many of you, our efforts are flagging at this point in our 40-day journey. I remember starting Lent, marked by Ash Wednesday, with great intensity and piety. Now, I cannot wait until Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Sabado Gloria – and finally, Easter.

But today's reading reminds us that we should not flag in our efforts when we reach the mid-point. We should continue to lament during Lent.

The book of Lamentations is a set of five sorrowful poems attributed to the prophet Jeremiah. The poems express the raw emotions of Jeremiah over the destruction of Jerusalem. The Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, invaded and laid waste to the golden city. The first temple, built by King Solomon, is sacked. Dead people are everywhere. Those who survived had no food; many were forced into exile.

Yet in the middle of these five poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem, comes an affirmation of God's love for us despite our sins: *“The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my inheritance; therefore I hope in him'. The Lord is good to those who depend on him to those who search for him.”* (Lamentations 3:22-25).

Put yourself in the shoes of Jeremiah today. We may not mourn the cities where we live; but we must mourn the destruction that our sins have brought into our lives.

In our difficult journeys through Lent, the poems of Lamentations reminds us that amid all the darkness there is hope. It reminds us, especially at the mid-point of our journey, that we must always ask God for forgiveness for our sins.

God who created me, You offer me new life through your Son and through the gift of your sacraments. While I see new life all around me, I don't always recognize the new life you offer me. Help me to grow this Lent in an awareness of the gifts you place in my life and in a greater appreciation for your care. Give me the courage to ask for help. May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen. (Daily Lent Prayer, Creighton University)

Adlai J. Amor

Waiting On God

Tuesday, March 17

Lamentations 1:14-22

John 8:31-38

1 Peter 3:8-12

“People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me.....May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me.

Lamentations 1:21

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

John 8:31-32, 36

All of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.....On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:8-9

I'm one of the people who believe in predestination. I believe God has planned major events of my life. When I look back, what has happened in my life, Predestination makes perfect sense. No doubt, God has planned Major events of my life even before I was born. And it is fascinating to find out that God wants his children to submit to him in every issue, Big or small, and waiting upon him.

Becoming a member of NYAPC and serve my church is one of the plans that God had for me. In Dec 2008, one Sunday morning I was on my way to join a big Presbyterian church, where I could be invisible, among the crowd. For some reason I was confused, got off the train at the wrong stop. My destination was Tenleytown, but I got off the Red Line at Metro Center, and asked for a direction for a Presbyterian church, found NYAPC. God worked through my weakness - mistake & confusion.

Recently, I have realized that our Church needs \$30,000 per week income to stay where we are, keep things the way they are now. I usually go to church once a week, occasionally twice a week. From this week visit to my next visit, \$30,000 expenses will occur during that period of time. Financial deficit really worries me. I have started a few projects with committee members to help address the big challenge that we are facing. It is really scary to think, what if none of this is enough. Now what I can do is practice “Obey God, leave the Consequences to him”.

Prayer: Omniscient God, thanks for the great gifts and blessings that I have received. So many times you have proved that I do not have to worry, just follow the guidance. Help me not to act behind or ahead of your time, waiting upon you, in the meantime serve you wherever, whenever I can.

ShuXian McKenna

Lamentations 2:1-6
John 9:1-7
1 Peter 3:13-22

March 18, 2015

God Trying To Get Your Attention

Today's readings brought to mind a song by one of my favorite contemporary blues artists, Keb' Mo'. It is entitled "God Trying to Get Your Attention." The point of the song is that God might be trying to get your attention, but you have to be on the lookout for it, or you might just miss it. Keb' Mo' makes this point in several humorous stanzas, for example:

Well, you might be saved, you might be reborn
You might own a car with a big, loud horn
Maybe it's just news on your television
Or it might be God trying to get your attention

In the story from John, Jesus brings sight to a blind man by spitting in some mud and rubbing it in the man's eyes. The reaction is interesting. The disciples have assumed that the man is blind because either he or his parents have sinned. But Jesus says that the man is blind "so that God's works might be revealed in him." John 9:3. The man leaves to wash the mud out of his eyes, as Jesus has instructed, and then returns with his sight restored. Upon the man's return, the reaction of the crowd is split. "The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.'" John 9:8-9.

Here, God was trying to get the attention of the crowd in a dramatic way. A man was blind just so that God's works could be revealed through him. By restoring sight to the blind man, Jesus could literally show that he was the light of the world. And just so the point wasn't lost on anyone, Jesus says this: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." John 9:5. Yet some in the crowd still wouldn't believe it. When the man returns, his sight restored, some say "no, it's not him" it has to be "someone like him."

I believe that God reaches out to us all the time in less dramatic ways. Have you come across people who seem to be in touch with God's presence in a compelling way? Their faith feels alive, and you can see it in the expressions of their hearts and minds. I believe that there are many people in our church like that. Could such a vital faith be the result of being attentive to God's presence frequently throughout daily life?

Keb' Mo' ends his song with exhortations to attentiveness: "Listen to the birds, listen to the trees, listen to the river, listen to the sea . . . listen to the rain, listen to the wind, listen to your mind, then listen all over again . . ." Lent is a time to be more attentive to God's presence in our busy world. Is God trying to get your attention to radically change or inspire you?

Adam Bain

March 19, 2015

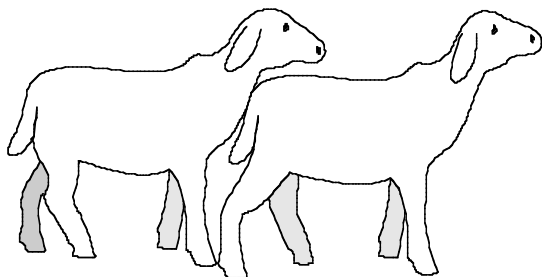
Today's meditation focuses on three scriptures: the Old Testament passage Lamentations 2:7-16, and two New Testament passages, John 10:1-6 and 1 Peter 4.

Lamentations lives up to its name in this passage; things are pretty dire for the Israelites. Here, we see God's just punishment for the Israelites - but there is no relief in sight.

What a contrast with the New Testament passages! Because of Christ, the shepherd John speaks of, we are able to live according to God's will, as Peter discusses. The Israelites only had God's law. When they inevitably broke the law, they felt their deserved punishment. Christ, however, takes that punishment on himself. As the good shepherd, Christ leads us, showing us how to live, how to abandon earthly desires. Because of Christ, we can live according to the will of God. That isn't to say that we won't feel the pull of earthy desires - we certainly will - but God in Christ enables us to be done with sin and live according to the spirit.

Prayer: Dear God, Please help us to live according to your spirit in all that we do, in all that we say, in all that we think. Thank you for the gift of Christ, our shepherd, who makes it possible for us to live according to your will.

Elisa Jillson



March 20, 2015

Lamentations 2: 17 – 22

John 11:55 – 12:8

Hebrews 2:10 – 18

It seems we live in a time of lamentation. We live in Old Testament days. People who try to do good are imprisoned, tortured, mutilated, murdered for the world to see. Young girls are captured, raped, married off. Countries take vengeance because they don't know what else to do, or they do nothing to stop the violence.

I read today's passage from Lamentations and I think of the Jordanian pilot burned alive; of the two Iraqi Al Qaeda prisoners on Jordan's death row, executed the next morning in retaliation. The world cried out at the barbaric murder of the pilot, but seemed to condone Jordan's swift revenge.

The language of Lamentations describes what's happening today: "There in the streets young men and old lie on the ground/My virgins and my young men have fallen by sword and by famine;/thou hast slain them in the day of thy anger,/ Slaughtered them without pity." The killers are not God, but men.

I look for some meaning in the senseless killings; for some reassurance that people cannot be as evil as the vengefulness we see now. The disconnect between my comfortable life, where I can laugh and eat and sing and walk in the woods without fear, and what's going on in the desert prisons and bombed cities, intrudes on my thoughts. These places exist in parallel with our lives. If I wanted, I could buy a ticket and fly to Syria or Iraq; I could go from one world to its opposite in twenty-four hours. I want to connect with it beyond the television, as the journalists and aid workers were drawn to do.

But what is best to do, for us here who must continue the lives we were given? We lament: we cry out, we weep torrents of tears, we ask God "Why?" and "Where were you?" I'm frustrated because there can be no answers to the "Why" and the "Where were you?" We can only continue. The writer of Hebrews assures us that we have a savior who has suffered as our victims have: "For since he himself has passed through the test of suffering, he is able to help those who are meeting their test now." Hebrews says, "It was clearly fitting that God for whom and through whom all things exist should, in bringing many sons to glory, make the leader who delivers them perfect through sufferings."

Hebrews' reminder of Jesus's human suffering provides some comfort. The lives of the journalists, the aid workers—their bravery in what seems like martyrdom—provide inspiration. Those young girls who were kidnapped and are surviving somewhere, somehow, connect us. They walk in Jesus' steps, in Mohammed's steps, surely. Surely we, going about our work every day, can look for our own ways to serve.

Lord, show us what we can do in response to injustice everywhere.

Amy Garrou

Memories

Lamentations 3:1-18
Hebrews 5:1-6
John 12:9-19

March 21, 2015

As I write these words, it is the day after President Obama's State of the Union address. Miriam and I watched the address mostly because we feel an obligation as citizens to hear what the President has to say. We find it to be a painful experience as half the audience claps and cheers and the other half sits stone-faced and motionless. This of course is not a new phenomenon, the past several Presidents have evoked these reactions which so much symbolize the divides in our country.

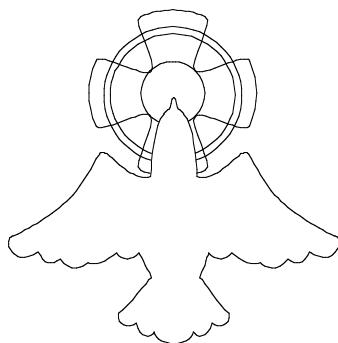
Today we have an abundance of commentary, pro and con. However, one fairly common strand seems to be that the President was too optimistic. According to the Washington Post, the President's key statement was that the "Shadow of crisis has passed". Observant people still see crises around the world, in our nation, in our neighborhood. Things are better than they were, but crises still abound.

Where does faith fit into this picture? The people in the Bible were no strangers to crises. Read the selection from Lamentations for today. Faith is there but so is despair. God seems to have turned God's back on the Israelites. The miracle of the exodus is a distant memory.

Contrast that reading to the reading from John's Gospel. Faith is there. It is enthusiastic. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. These people have seen a miracle. They think their troubles are over. But of course, their troubles are not over. The cross is looming. Memories of miracles may fade. Enthusiasm may become despair.

As we travel through Lent, we await the miracle of Easter. Is that miracle strong enough in our memory to sustain us through troubled times? Is it a present reality in our lives? Do we really see God's hand at work in the world? Do we have a basis for optimism? I hope and pray that we do.

Steve Dewhurst



Sunday, March 22

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:73-96; John 12:20-33; Hebrews 5:7-10

*I'm homesick—longing for your salvation;
I'm waiting for your word of hope.
My eyes grow heavy watching for some sign of your promise;
how long must I wait for your comfort?
-Psalm 119: 81-82 (The Message)*

*My soul languishes for your salvation;
I hope in your word.
My eyes fail with watching for your promise
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"
;-Psalm 119: 81-82 (NRSV)*

Lent is hard. For me, intellectually, I know Easter is coming. The darkness, the reflection, the somberness of those dark days in the winter—I know this story ends with the resurrection of our Lord and savior, a glorious thing to behold. I know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel. But that doesn't change how hard it can be to get there.

Sometimes I feel like I've been disconnected from God for the rest of the year, and in the stillness of the Lenten season, I try once again to re-find God. And what I find is that I miss—and I've missed—God, even while I know God is always there. As the translation in The Message puts it: "I'm homesick—longing for your salvation." The NRSV translation says, "my soul languishes for your salvation." There's something about homesickness that strikes a chord every time I read this.

I yearn for God's comfort, for God's voice in my ear to reassure me that I haven't lost my way, or at least not irreversibly. I suspect that many of us yearn for it, that comfort and assurance. In these verses, I find comfort, especially Psalm 119: 89-90: "The Lord exists forever; your word is firmly fixed in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast" (NRSV). The world may be spinning, but the Lord's "word is firmly fixed in heaven" and the earth, made by our Creator, stands fast. There is solid ground underneath our feet. God's faithfulness endures.

Two key concepts are woven throughout these scripture passages: enduring faithfulness ("endures to all generations," "exists forever," "stands fast,") and God's commandment ("law," "statutes," "precepts," "decrees of your mouth," "covenant," "your law is my delight"). In many ways, opposite sides of the same coin—God's love is unconditional, God will always be with us, and God has provided us with commandments to shape the way we live in the world God created for us. In what could feel punitive, but to me feels like an act of love, God said, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (NRSV). I love the idea that God has created a world "standing fast" for us and that God has inscribed us with God's commandments—a guide for how we can strive to carry out God's will here on Earth.

And, the most joyful of all, even in the midst of this somber season, we know that God has told us in Jeremiah: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Even when we feel disconnected, adrift, or "homesick": God is with us. I can't think of anything more reassuring.

Kristin Ford

Lament and Beyond

Lent is the season for lament. It is the season for humility as we hear the reminder on Ash Wednesday that we began as dust and will end as dust.

“We are rarely in doubt but often in error,” Ellen Langer, Harvard psychology professor and author, wrote in her book, *Mindfulness*. Lent can be a shocking and sobering experience when we open ourselves to the possibility that we may actually be in error much of the time---in our prejudices, our judgments, our intolerances.

We tend to think those things are character flaws in the other, not in us. And in that thinking lies the possibility for lament. In thinking of others as prejudiced, judgmental, and intolerant we expose those very afflictions in our own selves.

Lent is an excellent time to learn lament, to acknowledge our own afflictions and homelessness. It is in these humble moments that lament begins.

But the writer of today’s verses in Lamentations doesn’t sit forever in his sorry state. He consciously calls to mind the promise of God’s steadfast love and God’s mercies that are new every morning. My tendency is to continue to wallow in my own pig pen of distress. This writer’s decision to shift gears reminds me of the boot straps I was urged as a child to pull myself up by. Find the hope. Remember the promise. Get out of my own self and give over to God.

My favorite part of these verses though are those that remind me to “wait for [the Lord],” to “wait quietly for [the Lord],” to “sit alone in silence.” This call to silence is for me the best part of Lent.

May we each seek and find moments of silence in these waning weeks of Lent.

---Bonnie Davis

Lamentations 3:40-54
John 12:41-48
1 Peter 1:22--2:3

March 24, 2015

I hear raw emotion when Jesus “cried aloud” of coming “not to judge the world but to save the world.” (John 12:44) Jesus is offering a magnificent gift, but I sense pain in his recognizing that some may reject it, and there will be still be a judgment “on the last day.”

The quotation passages are certainly important -- when Jesus speaks with fewer metaphors and with more straightforward declarations about his mission.

But, I was struck by the narrator’s verses, with observations about human nature:

Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. (41-43)

Sadly, believers in Jesus were hiding their faith from the “establishment” of their time. Even today, if one accepts the gift, there remains the matter of living, somehow, in secular society. Can we find a way to confess the lordship of Jesus even if it risks a loss of profit, stature or camaraderie? How can we focus on” the glory that comes from God?”

Sometimes, we appreciate glory, and are inspired by it, most effectively in the arts.

When Peter contrasted the human and the eternal, he also chose to hearken to the poetic words of Isaiah. (1 Peter 1: 24-25, referencing Isaiah 40-6-8).

Johannes Brahms selected those same verses from 1 Peter in crafting the second movement of Ein Deutsches Requiem.

Denn alles Fleisch ist wie Gras und alle
Herrlichkeit des Menschen wie des
Grases Blumen. Das Gras ist verdorret
und die Blume abgefallen.

Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in
Ewigkeit.

For all flesh is as grass, and all the
glory of man as the flower of grass.
The grass withereth, and the flower
thereof falleth away.

But the word of the Lord endureth for
ever.¹

The music is splendid. The second movement captures the burden of human experience (for about nine minutes) and then explodes gloriously. It can still bring tears.

The work was ground breaking as offering comfort for the living, rather than prayers for the dead -- using the German language, not Latin.²

You can hear/ watch the second movement at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vI6wtBtJnA8>

The entire work is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1w2DUM-3kU>

If you can spend a few minutes listening, to these or your personal favorite recording, you will be rewarded; maybe inspired

James Turner

¹ German text, and the King James Version translation from
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/SymCh/performances/S1995/text.html>.

² <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/18/111536889/appealing-to-the-masses-brahms-requiem>

Wednesday, March 25, 2015

Lamentations 3:55-66

John 12: 49-50

Romans 10:14-21

Untitled

I sit at the table and look around my dwelling place.
Fragments of pain and confusion flood my memory.
It has been a place of waiting and restlessness,
a place of questions and tears and, also - community, new life.

“Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!”
You came near when I called on you; you said “Do not fear!”

What is the movement from grief to hope?
Is it a voice gone out to all the earth, words to the end of the world?
What must I understand about my life?
Will you take up my cause, O Lord?

Somehow, I want to borrow a language – something to contain
and transform my 21st century, first world suffering.

Christ our Savior borrowed a language.
His Father/Mother gave Him what to say and what to speak.

Eternal Life.

“Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!”

I think you have taken up my cause, O Lord, and slowly I begin to understand...

You have redeemed my life.

Kathryn Sparks

March 26, 2015

Lamentations 4:1-10, Mark 13:1-13, Romans 11:1-12

Cannibalism, betrayal, jealousy. The overt themes in these scriptures are tough to align with the gospel story. I think, at the barest, here is what is left for me of these three passages: what do you become when things are horrible? And what do you become when things are perfect?

When life has moments of perfection, it is tempting for me to forget my need for God. I have my strong temple around me – my husband and my daughter, our home, our careers. When things are good, what need do I have of God?

When my life has moments of desperation or desolation, perhaps that is when it is easier to turn to God for some. Is it? For me, at times, it's easier to make these moments of pain their own temple, a place I visit, where I can hide in my sadness. Are those moments I encounter God? Or perhaps my sadness becomes a kind of temple, a reason to question his goodness or reject God altogether.

This is the question these passages offer us in total – where do we put our security and our hope? My responses to God in moments of pain and moments of joy demonstrate a lot about how I've ordered my life. I hope to grow into someone who holds both the beauty and the pain with open palms, asking that whatever comes my way, I will embrace the mystery of how the good and the bad transform us. Rather than build a temple of security in either my comfort or my sorrow, how do I see God as Mother Hen (Matthew 23:37), who will gather us under her wings, and use that picture as my best hiding place in sorrow and in joy?

In this last week or so of building up to Easter, I will be asking myself what magnificent buildings I have built myself for my own security, and how I can take them down, brick by brick, to find comfort in the grace and redemption of Christ.

A prayer for Guidance, from the Episcopal Tradition

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Kate Hays

Scriptural Struggles

Lamentations 4:11-22
Mark 13:14-27
Romans 11:13-24

March 27

There are a number of studies available that demonstrate the rise of secularism in the United States. Various reasons are suggested for why more people are listing “None” as their religious affiliation, but one of the reasons I have not seen mentioned is exposure to passages of scripture like those from Lamentations, Mark, and Romans that are listed at the top of this page.

Good heavens! Look at what we have to deal with:

The LORD has given full vent to his wrath;
he has poured out his fierce anger.
He kindled a fire in Zion
that consumed her foundations.

When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.

Our pursuers were swifter
than vultures in the sky;
they chased us over the mountains
and lay in wait for us in the desert.

I can begin to see why some people state that they are “spiritual, but not religious.” Dealing with passages such as these can be quite a struggle. I suppose it would be much easier just to pick words and ideas that satisfy us, make us happy, and provide us with comfort.

When I was the Organist of a church in Cleveland Park, there was a member who was not fond of Lent. He made it known that he came to church to sing joyful hymns and had no interest in singing the “depressing” hymns that were chosen (by me) during Lent. He was only interested in the celebration of the Resurrection and had no time for the introspection of the Passion.

Although it is sometimes a struggle to hear what scripture is saying to us, and it is sometimes difficult to sing those “depressing” Lenten hymns, we should welcome the diversity of the liturgical year and the full range of emotions that it offers to us.

Daniel A. Stokes

Lost and Found

Lamentations 5:1-22

Mark 13: 28-37

Romans 11: 25-36

March 28

Things could hardly have been worse for the writer of our *Lamentations* passage. Consider his word choices – disgrace, orphans, yoke, weary, peril – “The joy of our hearts has ceased”, and little wonder. Their city is in ruins, their Temple destroyed. And it will be more than 500 years before the Redeemer arrives, and when He does, according to Mark’s report of Jesus’ prophesy, “the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

By Paul’s time, the gift that was Salvation was raising among the Romans that very 21st-century question of “who’s in and who’s out?” If the Gentiles come in, does that mean the Jews are out? Paul tells the Romans that “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable”, once elect, always elect, “beloved for the sake of their forefathers.” He adds that, “God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.”

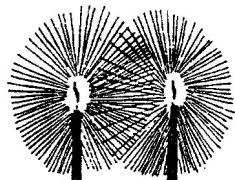
I’m not really sure how I react to that. Did I hope that my children would disobey in small ways, so that I might have the opportunity to correct, and protect them from messing up in big ones? Certainly I knew they needed to learn if they were to navigate their futures successfully, so perhaps I did. Did I want them to have the opportunity to get a little bit lost, so that they would learn not to stray? NEVER!

I got a little bit lost once, when I was still in diapers. I know it only from family lore. A woman who lived blocks from our home knocked on our door with me in tow, and turned me over to my grandmother, who did not even realize I had escaped. “Twas Grace that brought me safe...”

In so many ways, if we think of it, we are God’s foundlings, searching for our way home. At other times, we may be blessed with the opportunity to be that stranger, who knows where we belong and leads us there.

Loving God, *Thank you for knowing when we are lost, and helping us to find our way home to You. Thank you for the promise that your call is irrevocable, despite our wandering ways. Thank you for the Grace that will lead us home. Amen*

Mary Krug



Lent 2015 - March 29th - Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50: 4-9

Psalm 29

Mark 11: 1-11 **OR** Mark 14:1-15:47

Philippians 2: 5-11

The books of Mark 11 through 15 really cover a lot of ground don't they? Triumphant arrival though humiliation and execution. I admit when I was given the citations for this Palm Sunday meditation I was somewhat confounded by the choice between triumph and humiliating execution. I know it doesn't sound like much of a choice at first glance. Who wouldn't choose triumph even for merely contemplative purposes? I freely admit my momentary instinct to reject the dark for the light. There's a reason for this.

As a child I was schooled broadly in the scriptures. In my child's-eye view the betrayal and crucifixion were bad and unfair but I didn't make the connections that life experience has illuminated for me. But now I think of how often in my own life the waveform cycles of ups and downs have been interconnected. The extreme challenges of my adult life have led me to places my child's spirit would not go. Dark places. But, in honesty, I have been led to and almost forced into faith by the dark times. I've learned that I have to choose to accept as reality God's love for me. Even in the face of "evidence" to the contrary. To condemn in my spirit neither myself nor God.

Faith has given me the strength to surrender to God's will and live life. In Isaiah we read, "Morning by morning God wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught." God has "opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards." I am reminded that when necessary I can "set my face like flint" for "he who vindicates me is near".

I often refer to myself as a miracle, having survived for decades with extreme and complicated health and spiritual challenges for which there seemed no answers. When asked how I've managed this I say, "to God be the glory." Honestly I say this because there is no credit for me to take for myself. As Psalm 29 reads, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name", "the God of glory thunders...over mighty waters." "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty!". I have tried hard to follow the charge in Philippians to "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" and "being found in human form" to humble myself and become "obedient to the point of death" and to "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." A triumphant standpoint really from which to regard and meet the human body's certain betrayal and all the attending fear and stigma and seeming powerlessness.

"May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!"

-Psalm 29

To God be the Glory.

Nathan Moon

Isaiah 42:1-9
John 12:1-11
Hebrews 9:11-15

Monday, March 30, 2015

“You Always Have the Poor With You...”

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” John 12:1-8

This story is confusing to those of us who see lifting up the poor as something our faith calls us to do. Is Jesus saying that lavish rituals are more worthy of our funds than caring for the needy?! It is easy to sympathize with the sentiment Judas expresses, at least until we are told that he presumably would have skimmed from the 300 denarii.

A quick internet search reveals that this statement by Jesus is oft misrepresented. Some contemporary American politicians have a penchant for using it as a biblical justification for not worrying about eradicating poverty. But Jesus was assuming the listener would know that he was making a shorthand reference back to this passage:

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.” Deuteronomy 15:11

Rather than suggesting that money should not be given to the poor, Jesus reaffirms that we should give to those in need. Despite the reference to “but” in the verse, I suspect that Jesus is making a “both/and” statement that comes from an abundant perspective. This is in contrast to Judas, who frames the issue as an “either/or” choice based on scarcity. Jesus, in my words, is saying, “Yes, indeed you should care for the poor **and** you should also honor me and the sacrifice I am about to make. Do not criticize this woman for humbling herself on my behalf and recognizing my impending death.”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to see to the abundant means we have to honor your love for us and to care for our fellow creatures.

Laura West

I bought a new annual planner at a gas station in Ohio. We were driving through from Michigan, back to DC, and it looked so cute; I couldn't resist! One can never have enough planners, I thought. The best part was it came with little verse quips on each page. Like, 'There will be showers of blessing.' Ezekiel 34:26. I mean, who doesn't love a good little God pick-me-up when planning one's week?

This really threw me. I know you shouldn't read verses out of context. That it can flip, stretch, even break the meaning into something trivial, nasty, or just plain wrong. This all hit me as I read through the verses for this reflection. Check out below how my mind wandered...

...*The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me....*Isaiah 49: 1.

My first thought, "aw...isn't this nice. God calling us to be servants. I can do a lot with this reflection." Then I read on...

Isaiah 49: 5-6 *"And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength – he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* I know Isaiah can be a bit 'dramatic' and a bit 'all-over-the-place', but this seemed just a bit **too** much. How much servant are we talking here, Isaiah?

So next on to John 12 where Jesus gives a clue about his death. Verse 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."* He goes on to discuss a few logistics about how his death will occur even, which the crowd questions in verse 34, *"... We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"*

And Jesus answers (Verse 35-36), *"The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."*

And I think back to the Isaiah text...hmmm...light. Servant. Salvation reaching to the end of the earth. Maybe, just maybe Isaiah is talking about the Messiah in that text. And this John text is a clue into Jesus explaining he is fulfilling that scripture as the Messiah, even when the crowd questions him. It's different how people knew the Old Testament back then, much more than we know the Bible today. They would see the connection Jesus is revealing in John's text. It's not so obvious to our modern culture of learning verse by verse. Isaiah is talking about Jesus! And Jesus is talking about Isaiah. The real deal.

Hebrews really closes the deal, and brings home why these three selections are together, (verse 15) *"For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant."*

Jesus is the Messiah, grounded in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

APRIL 1, 2015

JEFF MOORE

Isaiah 50: 4-9a; John 13: 21-30; Hebrews 12: 1-3

In the Face of Fear

I know that I will be one of the last to submit my Lenten Devotional to Miriam. It's not that I haven't procrastinated. I have. It's not just that I have been busy with lots of other things. We all have. I think, in part, it has been because I have really wrestled with these texts. In short, they have made me feel pretty small.

Core to each of these passages, it seems to me, is a very basic message (and a pretty direct challenge) about how we deal with fear, adversity, and the very threat of death. Stand up! Move on! Keep your gaze fixed on the greater joy to come!

This is where I start to feel like I might not quite measure up.

Fifty years ago, a band of civil rights demonstrators, led by Dr. King, marched from Selma to Montgomery. They were met with dogs, clubs, and whips. As they marched, they sang, "Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on." As I watch the clips five decades later, their singular sense of determination and of direction seems almost other-worldly.

I have always come away from the John passage feeling somewhat the same – a sense that Jesus, in the face of betrayal and looming death, exudes a sense of control and assurance. He exhorts Judas to, "do this quickly," almost as if to say with impatience, "let's move on, because there is a plan." A larger joy awaits.

The ability to look into the very face of fear and to see through to the light on the other side is, for me, what defines faith. And, again, it is awfully easy to feel quite small. And alone. But here is where I start to take comfort in Hebrews, because it's about all of us. That is how I read this. It's because we are connected in a great cloud of witnesses that we can lay aside what holds us back. We can run the race with perseverance because we run together.

So back to my wrestling with the three texts. For the past week, I come again and again to the conclusion that it is by being part of a community that we (or at least I) can face fear and see, with faith and with clarity, what lies on the other side. But shouldn't I be able to do the same on my own? Isn't that the real test?

I don't have an answer. Thankfully, ours is a patient God! And I keep learning.
Maundy Thursday, April 2, 2015

The passages for today are: Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 69:1-15; Mark 14:12-26; and 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Throughout the Bible, blood seals covenants between God and people. From Old Testament to New, in this scripture from Exodus and the passage from Mark, the bodily fluid that signifies life cements the promises the Creator makes to and expects from human beings. So it is when Moses shares the words and the laws of the Lord with the Israelites at Mount Sinai and when Jesus shares his final Passover meal with the disciples in Jerusalem.

The people promise Moses that “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Moses takes the blood from sacrificed oxen, dashing half of it on the altar and the other half on the people, and in doing so says, “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Similarly, during the Passover meal, Jesus takes the cup, gives thanks, and drinks with the 12, saying, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” Jesus anticipates for his disciples the coming sacrifice—not of oxen or the Passover lamb—but of Christ himself. The wine is the symbol of Jesus’ blood which will soon be shed, forever binding God to mankind through this ultimate of sacrifices. As Paul later writes to the church at Corinth, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?”

On that Maundy Thursday, during that first Lord’s Supper and in the hours leading up to his arrest, Jesus repeatedly demonstrates both his divinity and his humanity. Christ knows what God has planned and strives to prepare his disciples. He tells Peter and John exactly where to go and what to do to prepare the Passover meal; the disciples go into the city, find the man carrying the jar of water, follow him into a house where they ask to use a guest room for meal, and discover the large upstairs room, furnished and ready. Jesus also sees the treachery about to befall him—“one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me”—but expresses sadness and compassion for this man—“It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” Perhaps the one surprise for Jesus is that Judas betrays him with a kiss.

At the same time, Jesus is never more human than when, following the Passover meal, he and his disciples go to the Mount of Olives where Christ warns them against temptation and faces it himself. There, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks God to spare him from what is to come. In his anguish, perhaps Christ prayed the words of Psalm 69, the prayer for deliverance from persecution: “With your faithful help, rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me.”

In the end, though, while Jesus asks that he not be the one sacrificed, he gives himself entirely to God’s purpose—from Luke 22:42: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” And so it is. When, led by Judas, the chief priests, the captains of the temple, the elders, and the crowd come for Jesus, it is too late. Christ has resisted the temptation to plead, to flee; he is firm in his covenant with God to embody our sins; and his blood redeems us with God’s forgiveness and grace.

A prayer:

“Dear God, help us to resist temptation. Strengthen us as you strengthened Jesus. Not our will but yours be done.”
~Edith Holmes Snyder

Crucify Him!

Good Friday

April 3, 2015

John 19

“When they saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’” John 19:6

I liked my 8th grade English teacher, Mrs. Shore. She was smart, both serious and funny and from every indication genuinely liked us – which is saying something for 8th graders. I remember one time she offhandedly remarked, “All my in-laws are outlaws,” and I thought it both a funny and human thing to say.

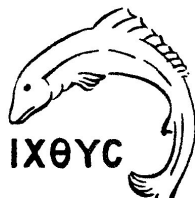
Now, I was in 8th grade many, many years ago – so long ago, in fact, that we still commemorated Easter with an assembly, and that in a public school. Our class practiced using the John text, and all of us were to say, loudly and with conviction, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Of course, our early efforts were tepid, though, with much practice we came to a crescendo of “Crucify him! Crucify him!” that sounded real and shattering. At that point – I still vividly remember -- with tears in her eyes, Mrs. Shore said, “That’s right!”

It’s incredible and horrible to think that my 8th grade class got right what so much of Christendom has not. How could so much anti-Semitism arise from a verse that, if it means anything, means that I, a white Anglo-Saxon protestant, am right there shouting with all my heart, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”? What can it mean other than that I, in Roger’s words, embrace “so many of the death-tending ways of the world”? “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Of course, but not at the foot of the cross. I am there, alternately, shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” or slinking in the shadows.

That’s why Good Friday – and Easter – are for me. Our God, in Christ, entered the great knowing of suffering and the great unknowing of death so that in life, with all its suffering and joys, and in death I can say, “I belong to God!”

“Upon the cross of Jesus mine eyes at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me; and from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess; the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.” Amen

Paul B. Dornan



April 4, 2015

Romans 6:3-11

“Dead to Sin and Alive to God”

One of the most beautiful baptisms I have ever witnessed was on Easter eve (this day) in 1977, some thirty-eight years ago when I worked as a Youth Director at a church in New Jersey. I took several of the high school students, who were interested to the Easter Vigil at Princeton Theological Seminary. It was an unusually warm April evening, the kind when you are expecting something – because you are so tired of cold dreary winter weather.

It was the most incredible four hour worship I have experienced; it was the telling of the whole story of salvation history by many groups of seminary students. We moved from the darkness of creation in the seminary chapel to the drama of the exodus on the quad to the Passover meal in the dining hall to the prophets preaching “to do justice” out dorm windows, then back to the chapel to celebrate the coming of Christ and the beginning of the church. On the chapel steps there was a young family, a pastor and an elder standing behind a large barrel full of water. After the traditional questions to the parents of the baby to be baptized and the parents and congregations affirmation of faith, the pastor took the baby, stark naked held him high and then moved quickly straight down and immersed the baby into the barrel of water – and just as quickly back up with a big splash! It was one of those epiphany moments when I was covered in goose flesh! Yes!

“...we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (vs. 4)

“...you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (vs.11)

This day, Easter eve in the early church was the day that all the new catechumens conclude their preparation for membership into the church with being baptized! So let us this day, remember our baptism. Let us image burying that which separates us from God in the deep waters of baptism:

- ...the mean spiritedness
- ...the judgment
- ...the name-calling
- ...the stubbornness
- ...the sarcasm and cynicism
- ...the unforgiving heart
- ...the self centered ways

Then rise – RISE “to walk in newness of life.”

Come to Easter Sunday open to hear anew the Word of resurrection. Let the splash of baptism water give way to a new beginning in God – giving, forgiving, loving and healing as Jesus showed us the way.

Come open to celebrate the unmistakable joy that death (of sin) does not have a hold on us, but new life in Christ is the power to redeem us and the world!

PRAYER: Resurrected Christ, united with You in baptism, we thank you for Your great sacrifice by which we discover a new way of life. Stir in us this day through the power of your Holy Spirit so we may be new bodies (“dead to sin”) for Your service for all our tomorrows (“alive to God”). Let Easter happen to us this year. Amen

Beth Braxton

“Journeying to Alleluia” from Alice Tewell based on John 20:1-18

My senior year in college was the first time I remembering experiencing the beautiful power of Easter. Perhaps it because we had a new campus chaplain who challenged us to be aware of the Lenten season and listen for God moving in the in-between space that we often don't notice but shapes so much of our lives. Perhaps it was because of the season of life contemplating and preparing to be launched into the 'real world' of new adventures and new consequences. Perhaps it was because it was all those questions that come bubbling up before a new thing. For me, it was a seemingly simple one - What is faith?

It was the first Easter that I was up at Sunrise. We drove to a nearby lake gathering at about 5 when it was still dark out waiting in the last moments of the Easter Vigil. As we gathered, we sung those words from the African American spiritual that we often hear sung with terrifying passion during Holy Week: *“Where you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed him to a tree? Where you there when they laid him in the tomb? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.....”* As the light began to dawn we walked in silence on a path to the lakefront. And then we began to sing our Alleluias – *“Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?”*

We gathered in the early recesses of the morning following after the path of Mary Magdalene. She had followed Jesus for years. We know her as the woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons, seven being the number meaning the total package. Whatever had been wrong with Mary, she suffered the worst a person could suffer. Perhaps she had made fatal errors in judgment, perhaps she had been born in the worst possible situation, perhaps she had some horrible moment in her past that no person could reasonably recover from. She was a woman sentenced to die by stoning. But Jesus saves her. He saves not only her physical body but also restored her inner spiritual soul. He sees her. He invites her to be his beloved.

I believe that love is what Mary was looking for when she came to the tomb so early that morning. It was a love that saw her in all of her brokenness. It was not a general idea of love, but rather a love very concretely embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

I believe she went to the tomb so early that morning not looking for truths that that would prove that the last few months she had experienced were real but rather looking for something she knew she could not yet understand. She sat in the dark silence of the Easter morn offering vigil to the God who had chosen her, who had blessed her, and had given her the power to believe that she too was beloved. It is a message we all need to hear. It is a message we are all called to pass on. It is a message we are all invited to experience. It is the message when the miracle begins to enfold. It is the miracle of faith. The tomb is empty. He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Amen.



