



Lenten Meditations 2010

First Trinity Lutheran Church
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Lent 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

We celebrate the mission and ministry our congregations share. We have been blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit that each congregation brings for ministry in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our congregations have a long history of celebrating Lent together. We now begin our second Lenten journey gathered together in the same place. Members of our congregations have collaborated to offer a Lenten Meditation for each day in the Lenten Season. It is wonderful to think of the people of our congregations spread throughout Washington, DC and the DC Metropolitan Area, at work and at home, using these devotions and:

reflecting on being a disciple of Jesus;

growing in understanding of being baptized into Christ's death and resurrection;

sharing this faith with those who do not know the joy of belonging to Jesus

Reflecting, growing, sharing is an ancient pattern of Lent. In the early church those who sought to be baptized at the Easter Vigil were brought together with other catechumens for a 40 day period of study and *reflection* on the Christian life in Christ. During that time they *grew* in their belief leading them to the waters of baptism. When they were baptized at Easter they joined the church to *share* with the world that "Jesus is Lord." We are blessed this year to be walking with 3 baptismal candidates - Sarah, Aya and Tala - toward baptism. Please hold them and their family in prayers during our Lenten journey.

The Lenten Journey has begun! But like any journey that lasts 40 days we need "bread for the journey." Our sustenance takes many forms: the fullness of Sunday morning worship- the hearing God's word and receiving Holy Communion; Wednesday evening spiritual gifts study; Thursday night Evening Prayer, and this Lenten Meditation Booklet. We pray that these will sustain you in your Lenten Journey of *reflecting*, *growing*, and *sharing* the faith of Jesus Christ.

Pastors Wendy Moen, Tom Knoll and Phil Huber

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Psalm 51:1-17

1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Lent is the season of repentance. We can do this as we spend this Ash Wednesday and every day of Lent reflecting on our activities over the past year. Have we been truly obedient to God's commands? For what must we as individuals repent? This is, of course, based on personal assessments. But we too often respond to enticements in the world around us which is sin in any case. Sin not only hurts us, but it probably has hurt others, whether we are aware of it or not, and certainly damages our relationship with God.

The Psalmist suggests that we ask for God's mercy because He is compassionate and will blot out our transgressions and purify us. When God's grace is bestowed upon us, we can rejoice, realizing that He does not hold our sins against us. When He forgives us and grants us salvation, we can be even more determined to obey Him.

Now is the appropriate time to return to the Lord so that we can be beneficiaries of His forgiveness and mercy. This is the bright and even happy aspect of the Lenten season, for with sincere repentance always comes forgiveness. God has a merciful and forgiving way of dealing with us. We will feel His powerful and sustaining presence once we return to the fold. Therein lies the great joy of repentance.

Ken and Mazie Wilson



Eternal Father, create in us clean hearts, and renew a right spirit within us. As we undergo true repentance, we can expect acceptance into your presence and will sustain our efforts to practice obedience just as our Lord Jesus Christ did when He gave His life on the cross. Amen.

Thursday, February 18

Habbakuk 3:1-18

Habbakuk is speaking to the people of the Southern kingdom of Judah. A time Babylon is about to destroy Judah. Knowing that Judah will be facing devastation, Habbakuk had his heart, mind, and eyes set on God and not the circumstance. He hears his heart pounding, feels his lips quivering, and his legs trembling. Staying focused, he tells himself, he will choose to be patient. He will choose to rejoice even when disaster comes. Having this perspective on life and faith in God, he continues to glorify the Sovereign Lord that gives him strength. In our life, we sometimes have to make choices that contradict what we see. When the situation gets tough or if it looks bad, we need to remind ourselves, as Habbakuk did himself, to stay patient and rejoice in the Lord. We need to constantly remind ourselves that God is in control. Remember we can always choose to trust God. By making this choice, we will discover who gives us strength, the God Almighty!

How would this passage read if you wrote the phrases in terms of your life?

Martine Joseph



My Beautiful God who gives us strength and courage, at a time when people are suffering, repressed, tired, and hungry I ask that you continue to be our hope and courage. My God, help us to stand firm on your word and have patience in our circumstances. Most importantly may we rejoice in You, O Lord, throughout our difficult experiences. I lift up everyone that has been affected by the earthquake in Haiti and all of the Caribbean. I thank you for our president and ask that he and his officials make decisions that will benefit all people. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday, February 19
Philippians 4:1-9

Philippians 4:6-7. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

During this Lenten Season, we again concentrate on the loving sacrifice God has made for us in offering his only Son to suffer on the Cross and die in our place. Therefore, in grateful thanks, we must work with fellow believers to spread the news of this sacrifice of love for all. As Paul tries to tell the Philippians, we must not worry, but instead pray, giving the Lord our concerns. So, rejoice in the Lord and give thanks for He is always with us. Let our prayers be in all truth and we will have that peace that goes beyond our own wisdom and understanding, which will keep us ever close to you.

Ruth Beaver



Savior, Lord, take over our hearts and minds that we may be one with you in all that we say and do, not only during this time of our own sacrifice, but throughout the year. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Saturday, February 20
John 17:20-26

²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

This is about unity. Jesus is praying, his last act before being betrayed and crucified. He prays for himself, his disciples, and lastly for all those who come to believe because of the works of the disciples. Even as he heads to his death, he seeks to impart a final message about the importance of union with one another.

As our region was pummeled by record-setting snows this month, I was struck by the notion that, for most intents and purposes, we were completely cut off from the rest of the world. Yes, we could call or email (assuming the utility lines had not fallen), but airports and rail stations were closed, and it was even illegal to be on the streets in some cases.

Yet through it all, there were amazing stories of people coming together to help each other out; digging out cars, bringing food to those who needed it, opening up their apartments for others to have hot showers and internet access when necessary. Despite our isolation, there were many cases where people came together and functioned as a community. These were acts not done out of obligation, but rather acts done out of love and dedication to our fellow human beings. In short, the type of unity and love that Jesus prayed for.

Amanda Wahlig



Dear God, we know that we often fall short of the unity that you desire for your creation. May we work harder to look past our own lives and find ways to love and serve others in a way that glorifies you. Give us the strength and courage to do this, even when it may be more convenient to go our own way, so that we may continue to strive for the unity you truly wish for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Monday, February 22
1 Corinthians 1:1-19; Mark 1:1-13

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ! Cor Vs. 18

Although we are all different, this passage calls on us to remember what brings us together, it calls on us to put aside those things that cause division among us so that we may always be united. The cross of Christ unites us. We are called to remember that we have been baptized in Christ and to live our lives in a manner that represents the entire body of teachings that we have gained thus far.

When we feel frustration as if we are wandering in the dark, know that the Lord has already provided the perfect guide for our lives. We have a mighty power in God. We can accomplish many things through the Savior's guidance. Let us remember not to be foolish in our ways and assist others in their quest for the gift that we have been given. As long as we continually study the word of God and pray for help and be thankful we will succeed.

God of grace, we thank you and praise you for the love and power you have shown us. We ask that you continue to shine your light on us and guide us on our way. Amen.

And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Mark Vs. 11

Jesus gives us many examples as to how we are to live our lives. Throughout our lives we are tempted to do many things that are not good for us or for society. Often we are influenced by friends, movies, television, books, magazines, advertisements, etc., in a negative manner. The only way we can defeat negative influences is to continue on our path in the way of the Lord.

As we struggle to make good decisions in our lives, we have an opportunity to witness our faith as we look for answers. If the decision is one that must not be made immediately, we may have time to prayerfully study the Bible and search for answers. After a decision has been made, do we believe that God will say he is well pleased with us? If that is not the case, we can continue to live secure in the fact that God is a forgiving God, and repentance is always available to us – none of us is perfect.

All knowing God, accept our gratitude as you continually forgive us of our sins. Help us to make good decisions that are based on your teachings and guide us into your kingdom. Amen.

Glorious Broughton

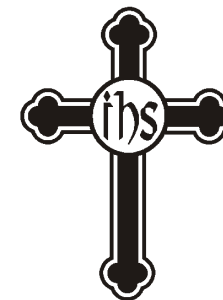
Tuesday, February 23
Genesis 37:12-24

Joseph became a person with no family after being sold. Today we see the same thing happening in our lives. We have sold ourselves to material things. But with God's help we can become a member of a family that can help one another in all things.

Don Reinard



Heavenly Father, help us to become one family as we will be united as one. Amen.



Wednesday, February 24

¹When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. – I Corinthians 2:1-3

The chairperson of a call committee began the meeting by reading a letter from a prospective pastor. It said, “Dear Committee Members: I am an older male. I have never stayed in a community longer than a year while serving a congregation—sometimes only staying a few months. Most would say that my preaching is pretty poor and not very elegant. Many times my preaching has caused great discord within the communities I serve, and one time caused a riot. In many of the congregations I have served, there has been significant conflict and I find that I am often at loggerheads with the leadership. My health is not good and the doctors aren’t able to diagnosis what the problem is. It often gets in the way of ministry but I find I can persevere. I love the Lord and enjoy telling others about Jesus. I am happy to submit my name to become your next pastor, if you would be so gracious as to have me.” When the committee chair stopped one of the members of the committee said with great indignation, “Who in the world would have the audacity to submit their name to us with a resume like that!?” The committee chair looked up and said with a smile, “It’s signed—the Apostle Paul.”

I can’t think of any congregation I know that would call St. Paul as their pastor based on his resume. On the basis of his resume he is a very “weak” candidate. Rather than hide his weaknesses, St. Paul goes to great lengths to boast of them. For St. Paul, his weaknesses were, in God’s hands, a demonstration of power. His lack of elegance in speech became a demonstration of the power of God’s word. His weakness left no doubt for others that it was not him, not his wisdom, not his power—but God’s presence, God’s wisdom, God’s power.

God chooses what is weak, what is small, what is insignificant, and what is at the margins to demonstrate the saving power of God in lives of humans. St. Paul decided to know nothing among us but Jesus Christ and him crucified—not his resurrection, not his miracles, not his great parables, not his fancy footwork in the political arena—but only the cross. It’s a scandal—the preferred means of execution in Jesus’ time. Yet through the cross-- the power of God—the salvation of the world—power for life made perfect in weakness—the saving grace of God for you and me. Thanks be to God.

Pastor Phil Huber

We glory in your cross, O Lord, and we praise your holy resurrection, for by your cross joy has come into the world. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. By your holy cross you have redeemed the world. Amen.

--from the ELW Good Friday Liturgy

Thursday, February 25

Mark 2:1-12

The healing of the paralytic has been one of my favorite Bible stories since childhood. The biggest impression it made on me was the love the paralytic’s friends showed in bringing him to Jesus, and then getting him to Jesus. Faced with a large crowd they could not maneuver their friend and pallet through, they found an unique approach to Jesus through the roof. It is the love and concern Jesus sees in the friends that causes him to heal the paralytic. After seeing the faith of the friends and their willingness to step outside the boundaries to get their friend to Jesus, Jesus pronounced the paralytic’s sins forgiven and healed him. Of course Jesus saying he forgave sins opened up another conversation, but to me, this story remains a story of friendship and love and reminds me to be willing to be a servant and support to others so they, too, can see Jesus.

Kimberly Orr



Dear Father, Help me to be grateful for those who have helped me to see You, and give me the strength to help carry others to You so they may know healing and forgiveness. Amen.

Friday, February 26

Mark 2: 13-22

“He went out again beside the sea; and all the crowd gathered about him, and he taught them. And as he passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” and when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins.”

Jesus has chosen his disciples and has begun his ministry of teaching and healing. After he healed the paralytic, the people were amazed and gathered as a crowd to follow him. When he entered the house of the tax collector, sat down with his disciples and ate with sinners and tax collectors, he was asked why he did so. His reply is the first lesson for us in this text. While it is easy for us as Christians enjoying the blessings God has given us to speak to others in like circumstances, we need to minister to those who are in need and share God’s blessings with them. This is often hard to do.

In verses 18 through 22, Jesus is criticized for not observing the fast. He explained that while he, the bridegroom, was with his disciples and others, they should feast for he would not be with them for a long time. He also refers to himself as an unshrunk cloth and new wine. To me, Jesus is saying he did not come to be just the fulfillment of the prophesied Messiah, but he came to bring a new message of God’s love for all people to be reflected by loving one another.

Richard Drechsler



Saturday, February 27

Mark 2:23-3:6

Today’s reading contains a pair of stories in which Jesus is challenged over what he and his disciples do on the Sabbath. The Jewish observance of the Sabbath forbade work of any kind, in keeping with the third commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.” But here were the disciples, walking on the Sabbath through the fields and picking grain to eat. This was considered a Sabbath violation. So the Pharisees watched Jesus to see what he would do – would Jesus go so far as to break the commandment and heal on the Sabbath? Healing, even if sacred work, *was* work – and thus forbidden.

Jesus responded to this challenge by changing the terms of the debate. His opponents focused on what was written in the law, but Jesus went beyond those words, to God’s purpose in giving them: to do good rather than harm, to save life rather than to kill. The Sabbath was intended to serve the well-being of humankind. If the Sabbath instead was standing in the way of life and wholeness, Jesus seems to say, then the Sabbath observance can and must be set aside. Jesus’ radical approach to the law, our reading says, caused the Pharisees and Herodians to conspire for his death.

We as Lutheran Christians have many practices and traditions that have been life-giving through the generations. But is it possible that some of these ways of being Christian have become barriers, separating people from the abundant life God desires for us all? It is perhaps no less radical an idea than it was in Jesus’ day.

May God bless us with the humility and courage to seek what is life-giving and healing for God’s beloved world today, even when it is along a path that seems strange, new, and counter to the ways we have known to be faithful in the past. For Jesus walks with us, guiding us, leading us to the abundant life for which he lived and died.

Ruth Worman



Direct us, Lord God, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and extend to us your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*)

Monday, March 1

Gen. 41:46-57 Mark 3:7-19a 1 Cor. 4: 8-21

“He doesn’t know how to set boundaries.” “She hasn’t a clue what boundaries mean.” No doubt you’ve heard these comments referring to people who can’t say “no” or who don’t know how to handle complex situations. Boundaries are defined as limits, confines, or restraints. How do we respond to boundaries real or imagined? How important is it to respect them?

In the Old Testament (Deut. 32:8), God warns that cursed be him who moves his neighbor’s boundary. Such biblical references refer to land demarcations. But there are other boundaries.

In the readings for today’s meditation we learn that during seven years of plenty, Joseph faithfully stored grain. Then during seven years of famine, he opened his storehouses not just to Egypt but to the whole world of that time. In another instance of boundary breaking (Mark 3:7-19a), Jesus draws people of many backgrounds to the sea. Jesus then appoints the 12 apostles in an act of love in which He shares his power to proclaim, to assume power, and to have authority to cast out demons. In this sharing with his disciples, Jesus breaks the boundary of His power.

Finally, Paul encourages the Corinthians to follow his Christ-centered way of relating with the larger Roman imperial society. In this manner, the Corinthians could reach beyond themselves with the hope of crossing political boundaries and unifying.

Some boundaries can and even should be broken thus opening our lives to newness and unity. Crossing boundaries takes strength, commitment, and love. During this season of Lent, I am making a personal commitment to ponder the boundaries I perceive in my life and to make appropriate changes.

Jessie Roderick



God of love and power, grant us guidance in discerning appropriate responses to boundaries we perceive and actually experience in our lives. Amen.

Tuesday, March 2

Mark 3:19b-35

23So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? **24**If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. **25**If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

In reading this passage for the first time I am reminded of a scene from the movie *Soul Food*, where the matriarch of the family interrupts an argument with a similar parable. “One finger won’t make an impact, but you ball all those fingers into a fist, and you can strike a mighty blow. Now, this family has got to be that fist.”

A kingdom or a family that is divided against itself will not last. It is easy for things to fall apart, especially in these tough times, when jobs are being lost and the health care system is in disarray. We have to come together and remember what is most important. This passage reminds me not to take for granted what I have in my family. We are united by the love we share for one another. I feel blessed knowing that I come from a family that lives by these words.

Danielle Brewer



Lord, we thank you for the gift of family. I pray that even in those times of great strife and grief, people will value this gift and continue to give thanks for the blessings You continually bestow upon us. Continue to unite us in love. Amen

Wednesday, March 3

Genesis 42:18-28; 1 Cor 6:12-30; Mark 4:1-20

The three readings for today talk about very different topics. In the old testament reading we are visiting hot, dusty Egypt where Joseph encounters the brothers that have sold him into slavery and gives them kindness in return. In the new testament reading, Paul entreats the believers in Corinth to keep themselves pure and not enter into lawsuits against each other. In the Gospel lesson, Mark relates the parable of the sower and Jesus' private interpretation of the story given to the disciples.

Despite the different locations, contexts and story lines, one common theme does emerge - preparing ourselves for the Good News. We are called to be the "good soil" that yields thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold the seed that is sown. Jesus defines this type of soil as the people that hear the word and accept it. Paul calls us to clean out the "old yeast" so that we can celebrate the Good News with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Joseph listens to his brother's repentance of their past deeds (even though they don't know he can understand them) and gives them the food they need and their money back. He is helping them redeem themselves to get rid of the old and start a new relationship.

This "spring cleaning" of the soul is important in the Lenten season. It allows us to take stock of our thoughts, fears, hopes and dreams. What do we want to keep to celebrate on Easter Sunday and all year long? What is weighing us down and preventing us from being the "good soil" that can multiply our talents and gifts? What do we need to repent of and let go so we can begin our relationship with God anew?

Sara Speckhard and Adriano Ayres



Living God, remember us who seek wisdom in your words. Help us see that life is not just about being good, but becoming better. It is not just offering gifts, but also giving thanks. It is not only living our lives, but also sharing all our thoughts, fears, hopes and dreams with you. May your words transform the lives of those who listen and love your teachings. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 4

¹⁰On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to

a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.¹²The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place."¹³But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each."¹⁵They did so and made them all sit down.¹⁶And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.¹⁷And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. —Luke 9:10-17

Multiplication of the Loaves

Jesus was showing to his disciples and the crowd that he is the son of God. He also showed the power of prayer by looking up to Heaven and pronouncing a blessing over the food. Jesus demonstrated to his disciples and the crowd that faith and prayer can get people through anything. This passage shows that the entire crowd of 5,000 people, which was far from town and without provisions, was fed as a result of Jesus' prayer to God. We can believe in Him and praise Him and believe that he will provide "our daily bread."

Daniel Mjema



Heavenly Father, continue to give us the bread that only Jesus can give. Through your bounty may we come to know that your provide enough for all to eat. Help us work for justice that all may be fed. Amen.

Friday, March 5
Mark 5:35-41

Interpretation: Jesus performs another yet another miracle. Jesus is speaking to Jarius, the synagogue ruler, when they are interrupted by a few men who announce that his (Jarius') daughter is dead. Jesus tells the man to not fear but simply to believe. He takes Peter, James and John to Jarius' daughter and simply tells her to wake up. She is alive and well.

Meditation: Whether we are dealing with the loss of a loved one, confused on where our lives are taking us or simply stressed from the matters of our daily lives, Jesus tells us "Don't be afraid; just believe". While these 5 words are simply written and stated, it is at times very hard to not be afraid and to not worry. But if we truly believe and truly let Jesus take over and lead the way, he will guide us and perform miracles right before our eyes.

Katie Anderson



Dear Lord, we come before you as beggars at your feet. We ask for your forgiveness when we don't have the faith to believe and when we don't let you take the lead. We praise you and thank you for the times that you have carried us through tough and stressful times as well as when you have walked beside us in joyful and happy moments. We pray that we can let go of whatever binds us and to not be afraid but to truly believe. Amen.

Saturday, March 6
Mark 5:1-20. Jesus and the man from the tombs.

Interpretation:

A man possessed and self-destructing, upon seeing Jesus, immediately runs to and worships Him. Jesus told these unclean spirits to leave this man's unstable mind; the spirits obeyed. Jesus permitted the spirits to enter swine, and when they did, the swine ran and fell into the sea. But, the man was now changed and in a secure mind. The people were afraid of this man's dramatic change and wanted Jesus to leave them. As Jesus departed, the new man wanted to follow Him. But, Jesus told him to stay and tell what great things the Lord had done for him. The man proclaimed his story and all marveled at it.

Meditation:

This is a story of miracles--Jesus Saves! He saved this man from the destruction of his own hands and mind. How similar we are to this man in need! Over this Lenten season can we, each of us individually, allow Jesus into our hearts and minds, our very being?

Kent Forde



Lord God Almighty, we humbly come before you. During both secure times and in unstable periods, we ask for your forgiveness and daily touch on our lives. We worship you and ask you to move us today spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. Guide us this day...as we are Yours, children of God. We allow You into our hearts, our minds, our very being and ask that you release our unclean spirits into the sea. Amen.

Monday, March 8

**"Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself because you, the judge, are doing the very same thing."
Romans 2:1**

Many Christians during Lent try to give up or take up something that will help them improve their moral and spiritual lives.

St. Paul is warning us to be careful about making moral judgments, or snap judgments about other people's character or actions when we may be guilty of the same things.

At some time or another, most of us will pass judgment on an act, without knowing much about the person or circumstances.

I would like to suggest that a good spiritual exercise for Lent may help to safeguard against the sin of judgmentalness.

God alone know the secrets of the heart. It is for us to use great caution, much patience and charity, as we pass judgment on another. Luther, speaking about the Lord's command against false witness, says that we must be vigilant not to slander anyone, but apologize for him, speak well of him, and put the most charitable construction on all that one does." And doesn't Jesus say something about the beam in our own eye, and the speck in our brother's eye?

Pastor Sam Goers



Dear Lord, I confess my failure to apply to myself the standards of conduct I expect of others. Forgive me, O Lord, and help me. Let my life today be the channel through which some little portion of divine love and pity may reach the lives of all with whom I interact today. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 9
Romans 2: 12-16**

If we traveled around the world, we would find evidence of God's moral law in every society and culture. For example, all cultures prohibit murder, and yet, in all societies that law has been broken. We belong to a stubborn race. We know what's right, but we insist on doing what's wrong. It is not enough to know what's right; we must also *do it*. We must all admit to ourselves and to God that we fit the human pattern and frequently fail to live up to our own standards, let alone God's standards. This is the first step to forgiveness and healing.

Furthermore, sin means refusing to do God's will and failing to do all that God wants. Since Adam's rebellion against God, our nature is to disobey him. Our sin cuts us off from God. Sin causes us to want to live our own way rather than God's way. Because God is morally perfect, just, and fair, he is right to condemn sin.

Each of us has sinned, either by rebelling against God or by ignoring his will. No matter what our background or how hard we try to live good and moral lives, we cannot earn salvation or remove our sin. Only Christ can save us.

Stacey Loen



Dear God, have mercy on us. Grant us the courage and strength to turn once again to you. Thank you for your son, Jesus. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 10
Luke 13:18-21**

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

The disciples are having trouble understanding the nature of the Kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming. They have little understanding of the true nature of the Kingdom of God of which they are ambassadors-in-training.

Jesus searches for a comparison to help them understand, and so given two brief and familiar parables: the Parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven (or Yeast).

A mustard seed was considered by the Jews as the smallest of seeds. You probably remember when Jesus used the mustard seed to describe the tiniest amount of faith (Luke 17:6). Mustard is usually identified as that which grows to a shrub about 4 Feet high, but occasionally can grow to 15 feet high, and would qualify as a "tree". Jesus mentions the growth, but the main emphasis seems to be on the beginning (very small) and the end (very large). The fact that birds of the air perched in the branches probably means that the tree was large enough to support wildlife.

The other comparison that Jesus used to explain the Kingdom of God was a small lump of yeasty dough that is kneaded into a large amount of flour until it is homogenized. In Jesus' day they would save a little bit of one day's dough to mix into the dough for tomorrow's bread.

If you've never baked a loaf of bread you may not understand the radical difference that yeast makes. As the yeast begins to metabolize the size of the dough increases many fold.

What's the point of the parable? A small amount of yeast will leaven a large amount of dough. Small beginnings yield large endings.

If you are like me, sometimes you get discouraged. What you've worked on hard to do seems so small and insignificant, so hopeless, so tiny. The disciples may have felt that way about the Kingdom of God. Just because the Kingdom didn't seem very great as yet, doesn't mean that it will stay small. Mustard seeds vs. trees, tiny leaven-lumps vs. large loaves, fresh and fragrant from rising, and ready for the oven.

Edna Hicks



Gracious God, when, the mountain seems insurmountable, help me remember the true and old saying, "Little is much if God is in it". Amen.

Thursday, March 11

Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5; Mark 6:30-46

As I write this, like most of you, I am sitting in a quiet snowbound house. I spent much of last night worrying about whether the power would go out today or some other household calamity that would result from the pending blizzard. Bert is out of town and it is up to the boys and me to "hold down the fort". I am anxious yet I am warm and fed unlike many people left out in the cold by the recent historic snowfall. Just two days ago I was making plans to get my gray hair colored today and purchase some fancy eye cream to improve the recent creases added to my already lined eyes. Mother nature had other ideas. What is a devotion without honesty? Unshowered but with coffee in hand and a coffee cake baking, I begin.

Admittedly, it has been a while since I read Joshua. It took me a bit to imagine carrying the Ark of the Covenant across the River Jordan when I can't even get out of my driveway. In my life at this moment, the simple act of carrying trash to the trash can takes some forethought since the trash cans are barely visible and the path is not yet shoveled from this second round of snow. To be an Israelite making the exodus on foot, on faith in God's promise to deliver His people, and be responsible for transporting the Ark of the Covenant seems unimaginable. Yet that is exactly what the Israelites were doing. Of course, once the river is crossed God asks one more thing of the Israelites lest they forget what they accomplished with God's help. He asks them to build a memorial. Is their safety not enough of a testament to God's divine help? No, a memorial must be built on the riverbank with 12 stones representing each of the tribes. As usual, God is inclusive. If any of you have ever tried to get your children to work together, this is no small feat. I wonder if it is not the memorial itself that is really important but the act of working together to build it? This requires someone from each tribe to reflect on what they just accomplished with God's help and each tribe to wait while the memorial gets built. No one gets ahead by leaving the others behind. While the Israelites are of this world, there is now lasting physical proof of God's goodness and mercy. No one else can rightly take the credit.

The second reading found in 2nd Corinthians hit directly at my heart. Paul tells us "to not lose heart". "While our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed." How wonderful! While my gray hair prospers and wrinkles appear, my soul is being renewed in preparation for everlasting life. With life's increasingly fast paced changes, we are reminded in this reading, that we can't hold on to this life for it is transient. Trying to do so is futile. This is true freedom in God's word. We all need to let the anxiety go.

The last reading is found in the Gospel Mark. We are all familiar with story where Jesus feeds 5000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. The disciples wanted Jesus to send the masses away to find their own food. Instead, Jesus miraculously feeds the five thousand and has the disciples serve them. All were fed and satisfied. It is not always easy to trust in God's goodness in our daily life. In fact, it is downright difficult. One of my dearest friends and I frequently remind each other "we are trusting." Just the act of openly confessing our trust reinforces the truth and keeps the devil and his doubt at bay. **My prayer for all of us this Lenten season is that we do not forget God's promise but boldly go forth trusting in God's goodness and mercy. Amen.**

Cindy Knotts



Friday, March 12

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say

“Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

–1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

Variety and Unity

“It is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as He wills.” Our gifts and talents differ greatly, yet these gifts come from one source: God. This passage teaches us respect for one another’s gifts. It also teaches us to perform according to what God has chosen us to do and not to believe one gift is better than another. God’s spirit works among all of us. We need to do what we have been called to do by using our gifts.

Daniel Mjema



God of gifts, we give you thanks that you have given each of us a gift of your Spirit. Help us discern what you have uniquely given to us and show us how to use our gifts to build up and bless the community in which we live. Amen.

**Saturday, March 13
1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

As Christians we have been promised all of the gifts that come from believing in a being that is larger than ourselves. These gifts include peace, love, and contentment. However, God does not promise us a trial free life. We are bound to run into situations that challenge us and may cause us to turn away from God. In this way, with the great power that comes from the receiving the gifts of God, comes a great responsibility of being accountable. We as human beings are given free choice and this passage discusses the dangers of choosing idolatry and immoral behavior.

On the other hand, we also know that you need not fear these situations in which you are tested. God will not give you a burden, which you cannot handle. He will be there for you when the road gets difficult to follow. So even though we are burdened with free choice, we are blessed with God in our lives.

Callie Thomas, Lutheran Volunteer Corps Member 2009-2010

Dear God, we know that we are tempted to sin in this world. Forgive us for our sins and thank you for promising to not turn away. Amen.

**Monday, March 15
Mark 7: 24-37**

And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a

house, and would not be hid. But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her, “Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs. But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” And he said to her, “For this saying you may go on your way; the demon has left your daughter.” And she went home, and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.”

“Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere,” is Jesus’ command to us all. In Mark 7: 24-37, Jesus sets out on a journey to a foreign land to show us, by example, how we are to follow His command. Prior to this journey, Jesus’ public ministry had been contained to Jews (like Himself). Now Jesus set out on a journey of inclusiveness, to an area inhabited by the Gentiles. He crossed racial, cultural, and economic barriers to spread the Good News.

Just as Jesus reached out to people different from Himself, He challenges us to reach out beyond our personal comfort zones and the safety of the church, to people different from ourselves.

Karen Sellars

Lord Jesus, continue to inspire us and stir in us the Holy Spirit, that we may daily be challenged to go out into the world and spread the Good News to all. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 16
Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10; Mark 8:1-10**

The people ran out of food again. Jesus called his disciples and told them, “I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat.”

When you've heard the same story told many times, it's easy to stop really hearing it at all. I find that often happens with me and Bible stories, like this story of the feeding of the four thousand.

Having tried to really listen to this story again, I did notice a couple of new details. First, the crowd had been listening to Jesus teach for three days. Imagine: three days! They must have been starving for something that they knew Jesus could provide, and they were so ravenous for his teaching that they sat rapt for days, not realizing their food was running out. The second thing I observed is when the disciples reveal that they are “in the wilderness” (v. 4). So this crowd had followed Jesus into a barren, lonely place, hungry for his teaching, and had stayed there for three days. Finally, I noticed that after feeding the crowd, Jesus sends them home. After three days of teaching, of following, of hunger, of wilderness, Jesus feeds them with physical food, and sends them home, as if the three days of his teaching had been made complete in the passing of bread.

In Lent we too have followed Jesus out into the wilderness, hungry for what he can provide. Hungry for meaning, hungry for truth, hungry for peace. And in the desolate wilderness, Jesus *does* provide us food: in his words and in his body. And having received them, we too can go home, like the crowd, renewed and forgiven, healed and blessed. We go home, after this long wilderness of Lent, to the resurrection of Easter where our salvation is made complete.

Chris Orvin



Loving Jesus, you provide food to your people. Your words are bread and your body is bread. Bless us as we receive your bread on our journeys through the wilderness of our lives and the wilderness of Lent. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 17
2 Kings 4:1-7**

¹Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves.” ²Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” She answered, “Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil.” ³He said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not just a few.” ⁴Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside.” ⁵So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. ⁶When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” But he said to her, “There are no more.” Then the oil stopped flowing. ⁷She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest.” –2 Kings 4:1-7

A Widow’s Oil

The widow felt desperate. Her husband, a God-fearing man, had died without having paid a creditor. The creditor demanded that the widow give up her two children to become his slaves. She approached Elisha about the situation and told him that her family had nothing in their house of value, no means to disentangle themselves from the situation. She then followed Elisha’s guidance -- to sell oil stored in a jug by pouring it into smaller vessels. “Then the oil stopped.” One can interpret this to mean that the oil had kept flowing into the vessels by the grace of God. Since the widow knew that she had one jug, she could have sold that one jug in its entirety. But since Elisha was a man of a God, a prophet, she followed his guidance. Once she began pouring the oil from the jug into vessels, the oil continued to flow. God replenished the oil in the jug. Because of her faith and her husband having been a servant of God, there was a solution to her problem. When the oil stopped flowing from the jug, Elisha advised the widow to sell the oil-filled vessels to pay off the creditor. Elisha also foresaw that enough profit would remain for the widow and her children to use for living expenses. The lesson for us today is that if we believe in God, our problems, no matter their size, are manageable and solvable.

Daniel Mjema



Gracious God, help us to see in the difficulties of life, that you remain present in our lives. Be with us to guide and direct lives and give us faith to believe that with you nothing is impossible. Amen.

Thursday, March 18

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. – Mark 8:32

If you were in Peter’s place, would you rebuke Jesus? In Mark’s gospel, the disciples frequently represent a place for the audience to enter into the story, so it’s an interesting question to ask. Having just proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, if he began to speak of his death, could you sit quietly? Think of it from Peter’s view. He’s just agreed this man is the Messiah, but who’s going to follow a leader who is announcing that he is going to suffer and die? What sort of a conquering king is that? It says Peter took him aside. In my mind I see Peter casually slinging his arm around Jesus, “you know Lord, could you maybe lay off the persecution and death part, just a little bit, you know, just until we get a few more followers, until people are a little more used to you.”

Sometimes the paths Jesus leads us on seem crazy. You want me to go where, Lord? You want me to talk to who? Do what? OK, that’s an interesting idea but, how about something a little easier, more expected, more normal? What will my friends think? Or my family? Or my co-workers? Jesus does not lay an easy path for the disciples, and he does not always lay easy paths for us. But we do not walk these paths alone. This difficult reading from Mark is paired with a section from Isaiah, where God promises to walk beside us. “When you pass through the waters I will be with you...For I am the Lord your God.”

Kjersten Priddy, LSTC Seminarian



Surprising God, your ways are not our ways. Help us to trust that your paths, however convoluted, will always lead us back to you. Amen.

Friday, March 19

Mark 9:2-13

“Peter said to Jesus. Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one of Elijah.”

This passage comes from the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. It must have been an awesome sight. Standing there watching Jesus be transformed and knowing that you are in the presence of God. It was so awesome, so glorious, that Peter wanted to stay in this place and make it their new home. He wanted to make it a shrine. And why not, life was wonderful, no problems, no worries, no cares. But Jesus knew that their work was not on the mountain but in the valley.

Often when I am in a favorite place, hiking in the mountains, sitting in the sand of a warm beach, or reading a good book by the fire, I want that moment to never end. Yet we all know that those great moments in our life come to an end and the realities of life hit us straight in the face. We can be thankful for memories.

Is the presence of Jesus in our lives transforming us from desiring great and awesome things to focusing on our love, service and devotion to God? That certainly is a question we could ask ourselves this Lent. We all want good things whatever they maybe, but does our desire for the good life get in the way of our devotion to God? Each of us must answer that question for ourselves. But whatever the answer, God is continually calling us back through Jesus who left the mountain to suffer in the valley and even die. Overcoming that death by the resurrection gives us the freedom to love and to serve no matter what the situation or location maybe.

Pastor Tom Knoll



O Lord, help us overcome our selfish desires and rededicate our lives to love and serve you, no matter what the situation or the location. Amen.

Saturday, March 20

Notes from Exodus 11:21-28 :The Israelites are saved at the time of the Passover in Egypt by the sacrificial blood of a lamb applied to their doorposts. We are saved by the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the cross.

Notes from Corinthians 13:This famous chapter about the central importance of love is mostly about the need for us to live in love but, connected with the first reading, reminds me of the centrality of God’s love—love that allowed him to send his son to become the Lamb of God and shed his blood on the cross for me.

We cannot completely understand God’s love because “our knowledge is imperfect”.

Notes from John 11:45-57: After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, his fame spread, causing great concern among the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who were worried that everyone would believe in Jesus and that also the Romans would come and take over their temple and nation. They were willing to sacrifice Jesus for what they perceived as the good of Israel.

Blood is essential to human life. Blood courses through the body bringing oxygen and nutrition to cells and carrying away waste products. If we are badly wounded and lose too much blood, we die quickly. Blood was essential to the Israelites during the Passover. If they followed God’s command and applied lamb’s blood to their doorposts, the Angel of Death would pass over their house (recognizing that believers lived there, if not, the eldest son would die quickly. Blood was essential to life!

After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, his fame spread, causing great concern among the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who were worried that everyone would believe in Jesus and their religious beliefs would end and also that the Romans would come and take over their temple and nation. They were willing to sacrifice Jesus for what they perceived as the good of Israel. Jesus knew this, even as he traveled back to Jerusalem. He recognized that as the Lamb of God, the sacrifice of his blood was necessary to rescue us from sin and damnation. His blood was essential to **our** life!

Why was Jesus able to fulfill God’s assignment? Our reading in Corinthians 13 tells us it was out of love; God the Father’s love to send Jesus, Jesus’ love to follow through on his assignment, even when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane and asked whether there was another way. We cannot fully understand God’s love because our own love is imperfect, but we can continue to reach out to others and tell them of God’s love.

John and Bonnie Priebe



Just As I Am, without One Plea Hymn #592

Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd’st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Monday, March 22

Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, of his flesh), ...

The ark of the covenant. Whenever we hear the words, mystery arises in our minds. Mystery, in part, from the origins of the ritual surrounding the ark first described in Exodus 40. The ark, as God tells Moses, is to be placed behind a shroud – a curtain – within a sanctuary blessed and anointed, and only attended to by the High Priest Aaron and his sons and descendants. The common person would never see the ark – only be consecrated through the priest who tended the ark.

What a gift, then, that Christ has given us as described by the letter to the Hebrews. Through Jesus, we do not need intermediaries to communicate with God. Through Jesus, we can approach God with a true heart in a direct relationship without mystery, without shrouds, without sanctuaries. And most importantly, since we can have this direct relationship with God through Jesus, we can then turn God’s grace of love and good deeds to our neighbors.

Dave Rhodes



Dear Heavenly Father – Help us to come to you, unsullied by word or deed, to sweet refreshing solace in Jesus’ presence as you create with each of us a relationship of love. Forgive us where we have sinned and help us do better tomorrow. May our thoughts and your grace be with our family and neighbors. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23

Mark 9:43-48

This passage from Mark has always made me recoil. Even though I’m pretty sure that Jesus doesn’t literally want his disciples to chop off their hands and feet, it sounds gruesome and harsh. Jesus is saying that it's better to be physically maimed than spiritually compromised. But barring amputation, how do I actually apply that to my life?

Well, it turns out I’ve had the experience of being severed, rather unwillingly. This Christmas, my laptop decided to die. My laptop is definitely something that I depend on, almost to the point of being physically attached. It got me through college, held a lot of my work and most importantly, represented my primary link to most of my friends. When it croaked, I lost photos, correspondence, the ability to access the internet and it felt like I’d lost a hand or a foot.

Thinking about Jesus' instructions and my computer’s failure, I realized that there are plenty of non-physical appendages in my life that could maybe use some amputation. While my computer wasn't exactly leading me into sin, it often distracted me from other things that I say I value: keeping in touch with friends, spending time with my housemates, and getting my work done well, to name a few.

My computer habits may not be shared by everyone, but how many other "things" are like that--so important to our lives that we need them like a foot or hand--and yet so quick to distract us from more important things? What would it mean to cut off a cell phone, a car, even a career, if we thought that it was tempting us to sin?

Christina Koch, Lutheran Volunteer Corps Member 2009-2010



Dear Lord, help us to leave behind whatever burdens our walk with you. Grant us grace to remain in faith and fellowship with you and our fellow believers. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 24
Habakkuk 3:2-15**

As I read about the Prophet Habakkuk he foresaw the coming of the Lord.

Fearing God he asked God to have mercy on his people as he punishes his children. I imagine his presence represented a radiating energy that was powerful and yet non threatening. The influence of evil left as if by his presence. God surveyed the land and then created the mountains, hills and valleys to last forever. The prophet sees fear in God's children and because of their actions asks the Lord if he is angry.

Gods children were readied for war as he moved heaven and earth. The earth, sun and moon feared the Lord as if children and were shamed by their father as if a parent looking scornfully at his children . Because of the fighting the Lord showed displeasure: you could say he had a tantrum . God went to save all his people including those already saved. He destroyed evil from its foundation, fighting the enemy with their own weapons. The enemy came out guns a blazing but their celebration was minimal. God's showed his strength and greatness.

Tammy Greene



Lord Almighty, remember us in your mercy as you survey your creation. I stand in awe of your work. Grant us peace and quiet. Amen.

**Thursday, March 25
Mark 10:17-31**

As I read this passage, I thought to myself “how fitting for me to be assigned this text during my year of Lutheran Volunteer Corps!” As part of LVC, I have committed (along with 100 other individuals) to a year of social justice, community, and simplicity. “Simplicity” encompasses many disciplines but includes simplicity of money/possessions. I am amazed that even as I have made such a commitment for just one year, and even as I am surrounded by a community dedicated to supporting me and challenging me in this practice, I *still* struggle as much as the man in the text to give up my worldly possessions. I still have a closet full of more clothes than I need, more clothes than many of my clients own. This past week, in the midst of D.C.’s crazy snowstorms, I finally realized I should probably own a pair of boots. As I have trekked through the snowy streets, unsuccessfully looking for a sturdy winter boot, I have multiple times had to tear myself away from something else in the store – a sweater I don’t need, or another pair of pants. How quickly and easily I am distracted, pulled into the consumerism around me!

And yet, even as I continually fall short of my simplicity goals, Jesus reassures me: “for mortals it [being saved] is impossible, but not for God; for God *all things are possible.*” Lent seems the perfect time to re-commit oneself to giving up material things in an attempt to focus on what is *really* important. Even with continual failures, Jesus assures us that God’s power and grace will overcome.

Jenny Terrell, Lutheran Volunteer Corps Member 2009-2010



Dear Lord, Help us, especially during this Lenten season, to keep the focus on you and your work. We live in a society that places such high value on material possessions; even as you tell us “the first shall be last and the last shall be first,” we can be so quick to forget. Strengthen our resolve to commit our lives to your work, even as that may mean giving up material comforts. Thank you for your amazing grace, which recognizes our struggle, and through which all things are possible. In your name, Amen.

Friday, March 26
Isaiah 54:9-10

I am sure many of you have all seen an infomercial at some point. I shall review some of the highlight phrases often found in them:

-You will NEVER have to worry about _____ again...

-We guarantee you would love this product, or we will give you your money back!

In a world filled with many promises using strong words like, NEVER, ALWAYS, PROMISE, GUARENTEE, it is hard to really understand and process the grace given to us without even asking or requesting it. Grace can be defined in a variety of different ways, but the simple definition I was taught years ago in confirmation is as follows: God's never ending love. The passage above reminds us all of Gods love and grace which serves as an important reminder during this Lenten season.

Britta Jean Gall, Lutheran Volunteer Corps Member 2009-2010



Dear Lord, As we await the celebration of Easter coming please remind us of your grace and never ending love. Amen

"Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me". Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me". Jesus stopped and said, "Call him". So they called the blind man. "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you". Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go", said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

What a wonderful example of prayer! Bartimaeus is humble, penitent, respectful ("Rabbi), confident, and persistent. And, when Jesus asked him what he wanted, his simple petition to fix an extremely difficult problem was, "I want to see". Jesus told him to go, that his faith had healed him, and immediately he could see. We are told Bartimaeus followed Jesus along the road, obviously praising and thanking Him for what He had done. They were about 15 miles from Jerusalem

Jesus was nearing the end of His earthly ministry. He was on the way to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of His final week of suffering and death. He had been preaching and performing miracles for three years and the blind beggar had obviously heard about Jesus and His remarkable deeds. We can only imagine his feelings as he no doubt joined the crowd shouting Hosannas along the streets of Jerusalem.

Mark and Jean Raabe



Dear Lord, help us to pray like the blind beggar, knowing that sometimes your response may be less direct, but knowing always, that your will be done. And, dear Lord, as we are about to begin Holy Week, we give thanks and praise for our salvation, and for all the many gifts you provide daily. Amen

Saturday, March 27
Mark 10: 46-52:

Monday in Holy Week, March 29

John 12:1-11 Mary Anoints Jesus

At this point in our Lenten journey, Jesus is a mere five days from dying on the cross. He spends this day at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha and sups with them. Mary then anoints Jesus with an expensive oil that costs almost a year's salary. She is rebuked by Judas who says she should have sold the oil and given the money to the poor. Judas served as the treasurer for Jesus and the disciples. Jesus has the last word and says, "***You always have the poor with you but you do not always have me with you***".

Jesus had spoken of late to his disciples about his time being close at hand. Mary was one of the few to realize that Jesus would die very soon. She felt called by God to help prepare Jesus for his death. To Mary, Jesus was the most important person in the world, truly the Messiah and Son of God. He had saved her and now it was her turn to show her love for the Lord by giving him her very best. She spent all she had on the best oil to anoint and bless him for his final journey. She did this with all the love in her heart.

As we approach Easter, let us ponder on how we can be like Mary and give our very best to the Lord. Spend a few minutes and chat with the Lord this day and tell him.

Fran Knoll



Lord, help us to respond to your love and in turn share that love with those around us. Amen.

Tuesday in Holy Week, March 30 Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

We learn in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that the message of the cross is foolishness. And that is most certainly true, as our dear reformer Martin Luther would say. The story of Christ is... a bit confusing, to say the least. The life Christ lived on this earth was exactly the opposite of what one would expect. His life made no sense to those living in Christ's time... and I'm not sure it makes much more sense to us living now. "*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are*" (1Cor.1:27-28).

As Christians we live in the paradox, we live in the tension between hope and fear. We live between understanding and foolishness. It is right in the midst of this paradox that we approach Christ in his final days. When we stop to ponder this time we find ourselves asking 'why?'... Why is our savior, our God in the flesh, the one with the ultimate power... why is Christ destined to hang on the cross?? And the answer? We may never know. "*For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart'*" (1Cor1:19).

We come into this holy week and we enter into the foolishness of the situation. And the questioning continues as we try to make sense of what is going on, why Christ is preparing for his death, why our God is so determined to save a lowly soul like my own... like your own. But we lean into God's understanding because it will never truly make sense to us, Paul reminds us again and I would add, "*For God's [apparent] foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's [apparent] weakness is stronger than human strength*" (1Cor.1:25). We know that the situation is bigger than all of us- that our God is bigger than the limits and language we use to describe God. So we trust... we have faith... we hold together... and we hope... so that we might see the miracle about to take place. So that we might awake on Easter morning and be reminded of how great our God is in the face of foolishness and in the face of death.

Christ "*became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (1Cor.1:30). And it is with our understanding of the body of Christ that in our daily lives- in our interactions with other people we are shown glimpses of that wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Luther reminds us that we cannot by our own understanding and strength believe in Christ... I believe it is in recognizing and leaning on the Christ in our neighbors that we have the strength to believe, to move forward, to wade into the foolishness and absurdity that is the amazing story of our God of love... it is through others- through the body of Christ that we are able to live into the paradox.

Kristen Hoyles, Lutheran Volunteer Corps Member, 2008-2009, 2009-2010

**Receive, O Lord, all my liberty.
Take my memory, my understanding, and my entire will.
Whatever I have or hold, You have given me;
I give it all back to You and surrender it
wholly to be governed by your will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
with these I will be rich enough,
and ask for nothing more.**

ignatius' suscipe - st. ignatius loyola - 16th century

Wednesday in Holy Week, Mar 31
Psalm 70, Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 70 asks God to deliver the writer without delay from those who delight in his hurt. The writer acknowledges our poverty before God, in terms of our lowliness and helplessness without God's salvation. During periods of sacrifice and repentance, as during Lent, we give up something we enjoy in order to turn towards God and remember our dependence on Him. When we are comfortable in life, it's easy to become complacent in our relationship with God, and times of trial remind us that we are indeed "poor and needy."

Dear God, please help me recognize situations and decisions that turn me away from You, so I will not forget that Your salvation is great. Amen.

Like Psalm 70, Isaiah 50 v4-9a also speaks of being disgraced or disparaged by others. Isaiah prophesies the coming of Jesus, who is shown contempt and yet knows He will not be put to shame and will be vindicated. Jesus would be an utterly faithful servant of God, unlike the Israelites who were rebellious. It is easy for me to be rebellious of God every day, and to be unfaithful in obedience to Him.

Dear Lord, I strive to listen to your word and to behave in accordance with your direction, yet I will not despair or refuse forgiveness for my sins. Amen.

Katherine Telleen



Maundy Thursday, April 1

Another Sacrament?

Do you know the two sacraments we celebrate as Lutherans? Yes, Baptism and Holy Communion. We consider these two sacraments because they each incorporate three essential ingredients. Sacraments are: (1) commanded by Christ, (2) involve "earthly elements," and (3) convey the promise of God's salvation.

Maundy Thursday is the night we remember the actions of Jesus culminating with the bread and cup of the new and everlasting covenant. At the table, "before the feast of Passover," Jesus established the Lord's Supper as the great and continuing feast of holy communion. And it is in the observance of this meal that Christ promises come to us. Bread and wine become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus for us in faith.

In John's gospel, you will read in vain searching for the familiar words of institution establishing the Lord's Supper. Matthew, Mark and Luke all include the formula--Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave the bread, His body, for all. Saint Paul passes on what he first received from others in this same formula. Yet the pattern of the meal is not included in John's gospel. However, in John you will find the first action of Jesus in the upper room. Jesus performs a task which is "sacramental" in nature--the Master takes a basin of water and a towel, and washes the feet of His followers. Was the foot washing envisioned in John's gospel equivalent to a sacrament as conveyed in the synoptic gospels? Washing feet in John is:

(1) commanded by Christ, (2) certainly involving earthly elements, and (3) linked to the mandate (*Maundate*) for receiving and offering love to one another (Jn 13:20 and 15:17).

Foot washing does not precisely fit as a sacrament in our practice. It does not convey the salvation offered in God as do Baptism and Holy Communion. But the actions of Jesus in the foot washing, and his command "do this" model the humility and mutual service that elevate every deed of mercy into a Christ-like action.

Chaplain Eric Wester, US Army Chaplain, National Defense University, Fort McNair



Lord Jesus, What a range of ideas, feelings and hopes converged that night when you hosted the disciples in the upper room. What marvelous deeds You performed in washing their feet, commanding sacrificial love, and promising to abide with them in Spirit. We gather around your Word and table, to receive Your promises anew. Infuse us with Your presence and power, that we may enter the feast that has no end. Amen.

Good Friday, April 2

John 18:1-19-19:42

"...Eveyone who belongs to the thruth listens to my voice." John 18:37b

“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” Jesus tells Pilate. It is a sweeping indictment of them all—his interrogators, the followers who are no longer with him, the soldiers, the temple authorities. None of them listens to him. “What is truth?” Pilate answers. Pilate knows the truth. He knows Jesus is innocent. He knows the truth, but he belongs to the emperor. So he signs Jesus’ death warrant.

We know the truth, too, we belong to God, yet we turn away. It is hard to look at the truth of Good Friday and the ways in which we crucify Jesus - our unforgiving or gossiping ways; the times when we know it would be better to just stay silent than let the tongue loose; when a cry for help goes unanswered; when prayer is displaced with tv, work or apathy; when professing you are a believer would cost you image and you stay silent...

Jesus speaks again in our reading for today: **"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."(John 19:26-27)** In spite of our sins, we belong to God. Just as Jesus' mother and disciple were given a new relationship, we all come into a new relationship with one another and God by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

Pastor Wendy Moen



God of life and death, thank you for giving your son that we might have life. Amen.

Holy Saturday, April 3, Easter Vigil

Romans 6:3-11 (New International Version)

³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,^[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

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From time to time we all go through what seems to be our darkest hour. Whether it’s the loss of a job, the disintegration of a relationship, or even the death of a family member or close friend, it is during those times that we must find a way to keep going. As we work through our sadness and despair, we can remain in the trenches of darkness or move forward and lift ourselves into the light and hope that God provides.

Where do we find this light and hope from God? Consider the amazing sacrifice Christ made for us. It is full of light and hope. After all, Jesus willingly went to the cross, taking on the sins of the entire world, and nailed them to the cross for our sake. While many might have thought Jesus’ death on the cross was the end of his life on this earth, he rose from the darkness of his tomb to live again freed from the bondage of earth. Similarly, our baptism grants us a new life in Christ saving us from the pitfalls of sin on earth.

Emily Oline



Everlasting God, we thank you for providing the light when we can’t seem to find it ourselves. In the amazing sacrifice of your death on the cross, in the gift of new life through baptism, and in the hope of the resurrection we find the assurance that you will carry us through this life and into the next no matter what life has in store. Amen.