

# Holy Saturday, April 15

Written by the Reverend Dr. Mark Harris

*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone. —Matthew 27:57-66*

For us Christians this Holy Saturday, caught between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, is the day that affirms the terrible reality of Jesus as human. Good Friday confirms his death on the cross, and today he is truly dead, at "rest" as they say, and with the spirits of the dead. There is no celebration of the triumph over death on this day, no celebration of sacraments, no hopes beyond the judgment and mercy of God. Everything is still.

Today we remember what it would be like if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, but rather remembered in death. Today we remember that Jesus lay in death as all of us will lay in death. It feels as if those who die abandon us and are also abandoned by us. We do after all leave the grave and go back to our lives. We leave the dead behind in their death and we get on with life.

For just this one day the Church remembers death and abandonment. The body of Jesus has been prepared for burial and entombed and left guarded until an opportune time for continued preparation and final burial. The tomb is shut. No one is with Jesus, only the guards are there and they are outside.

And what of his friends? The proper liturgy on Holy Saturday directs us to use the anthem "in the midst of life" appointed for the burial of the dead. It begins,

"In the midst of life we are in death;  
from whom can we seek help?  
From you alone, O Lord,  
who by our sins are justly angered.

*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,  
Holy and merciful Savior,  
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death."*

For this particular “time being”, when Jesus is dead but not yet raised, his friends and we both recognize that in death we cast all our need for deliverance on God, who we hope will respond with justice and mercy both.

Holy Saturday is a raw day. Unlike Good Friday, a day of great drama or Easter Day, explosive in its revelation, this day is the rainy-day blue-day when all we know is death in the midst of life.

And yet it is Holy, for in the blue laments we sing this day there is the strange hint of some other story yet to come. The conversations go on this day. Jesus’s friends and we, even after all these years, can wonder at the events of the past days and the Crucifixion and death. We wonder and talk together in the quiet and in that wonder we hope.

And hope is a beginning.

# Good Friday, April 14

Written by the Reverend Ray Michener

*And carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.*

*Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

*Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced." –John 19:17-37*

Why "Good" Friday? How about "Love" Friday? Perhaps, "Be Whole" Friday? Better yet, what about "Be Free and Empowered" Friday?

Growing up as an only child, and pietistic Lutheran next to a good Irish Catholic family with ten children, I learned to dread "Good" Friday. Don't get me wrong; it had nothing to do with dark clouds and no sun from 12 to 3 in the afternoon, nor the gloomy Bach chorale hymns bemoaning my worm-like nature and the impending doom of all humanity that refused to love Jesus in the "correct" way. (Don't ask, I still don't know the answer to that one) No, it wasn't those things at all: it was being told that we were not allowed to talk or run around and play for those three hours, (Jesus on the cross and all) AND that I was assuredly (none of us knew that word then) going straight to Hell because I was a Protestant! To this day, I'm not sure which bothered me the most, (being quiet, going to hell, or being Protestant) but I suspect it was having to keep my mouth shut for 3 full hours.

Years later - and no thanks to a fine seminary education - I discovered what was “good” about that day was and still is: our Lord, even in the midst of betrayal, torture, humiliation, and impending death speaks words which empower us to understand forgiveness; words which call us to be so whole that we can give ourselves away for others so that others may understand also. \*Jesus is dying, and yet calls for us to live life in all its fullness — not out of moral perfection, nor even overcoming sin — but in the freedom of God’s love to be everything that we are called and able to be in life.

**Prayer.** So, I say after whatever reverent and proper devotions are made, in the end we should shout and offer our thanksgivings to God for the gift of Jesus, who demonstrates the absolute fullness of God’s love which, even in the silence and gloom of this Friday, gives us a glimpse of the Good that is ours through this Messiah. May we always share that love as best we can with all whom we meet. Amen.

*\*This is a paraphrase of the words of Bishop John Shelby Spong in The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic (2013)*

# Maundy Thursday, April 13

Written by the Reverend Larry Hofer

*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

—John 13:1-17, 31b-35

*"We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and made free." --Galatians 6:14*

On Maundy Thursday we enter the most intense three days of the church year. These days include the institution of The Lord's Supper, The Eucharist; the Crucifixion of our Lord and his resurrection - The great central events of our faith. These are days when we are called to hang out in the church and gather frequently for prayer, scripture and Eucharist.

On Maundy Thursday we share in the drama of our salvation. It is a drama in three scenes.

**Scene I.** And so, we come to this mandatum, which means commandment. There are lots of commands in our readings for this evening. Moses and Aaron are commanded to celebrate the Passover. As children of Israel, we gather liturgically with the Hebrew people to claim our freedom from the bondage of Egypt. The lamb is offered, the doorposts marked, the meal is made, the unleavened bread is eaten by the people with their sandals on, ready to go.

**Scene II.** We are with our Lord and his disciples and Christ blesses and breaks the Bread giving it a new meaning "This is my Body" and takes the cup and proclaims "This is my Blood." Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, Christ is the celebrant. He is with us again. "For as often as you eat this bread

and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." And so, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

**Scene III.** We are in the room with Jesus and his disciples when all of a sudden Jesus puts a towel on and washes the disciples feet giving them the commandment to wash one another's feet. Our Lord takes the form of a servant and calls us to be servants of each other.

Remembering the passover, armed with The Lord's presence in the Eucharist and accepting our servanthood we are ready to stand at the foot of the cross and worship The Crucified One and participate in His resurrection.

**Prayer.** O Lord make us attentive during these days of your passion that we may be fired with your love and renewed in our devotion to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

# Wednesday of Holy Week, April 12

Written by the Rev. E. Perren Hayes

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

—John 13:21-32

It is always difficult to begin an important statement, when you do not know what it was that troubled Jesus. In this instance, I believe this is very important to know: so here it is: "From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that "I AM." Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send, receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." in the Fourth Gospel John the story of Jesus is quite different from what it is in the synoptic Gupta Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus is fully aware of who he is, where he came from, what is going to happen to him, and how it will all work out in the end. And while this is not a story most of us remember from our childhood, it is the story that we are most familiar with.

There is debate among the scholars as to whether or not the words that follow have to do with the Passover meal or whether they have to do with the institution of the Eucharist. most commentators, from the earliest days, to the present, find it difficult to believe that Judas received the precious body and blood of Jesus. Judas is a perpetrator of the greatest sin the world has known – lies behind all this. All of this is further intensified by the fact that no one really knows who "Judas Iscariot" really is. There are half a dozen or more definitions of Iscariot -- none of them satisfactory. And Judas, a.k.a. Jude, is the name of one of the sons of Abraham/Isaac, and the head of one of the Twelve Tribes and are part of the two tribe group that is in charge of Jerusalem. In the general context of John's Gospel, this makes the horror of the betrayal even greater. And that is clear from the words in the passage for today: "and it was night." Utter darkness. But it is part of God's plan, and Judas/Jude is playing his part. He leaves Jesus and the others -- and shows by his actions that he makes it possible for the death of Jesus to happen, and that THIS IS GOD'S PLAN. And now that the plan of God has been activated, Jesus, the Son of God, will die and release the Spirit within him to enrich the whole body of humanity. And the Glory of God will be released -- and God's grace will flow freely throughout all the places where Jesus is proclaimed. RIGHT NOW.

**Prayer.** Let us pray:

The royal banners forward go, the cross shines forth in mystic glow  
where he through whom our flesh was made, in that same flesh our ransom paid.

Fulfilled is all that David told, in true prophetic song of old  
how God the nations King should be, for God is reigning from the tree.

O tree of beauty, tree most fair, ordained those holy limbs to bear:  
gone is your shame, each crimsoned bough proclaims the King of glory now.  
Blest tree, your chosen branches bore the wealth that did the world restore,  
the price which none but he could pay to spoil the spoiler of his prey.

O cross, our one reliance hail! Still may your power with us avail  
to save us sinners from our sin, God's righteousness for us all to win.

To you, eternal Three in One let homage meet by all be done;  
as by the cross you do restore so rule and guide us evermore.

# Tuesday of Holy Week, April 11

From [www.stpaulsivy.org](http://www.stpaulsivy.org)

*Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor." John 12:20-26*

The Gospel According to John is often quite a mystery. And this passage is no exception. Scholars believe this incident occurred between the time Jesus entered Jerusalem and the Last Supper. Greeks, who many believed had converted to Judaism (or believed in the Hebrew god), wanted to converse with the rumored Messiah.

Jesus knows that men are coming for him. Many scholars say that Jesus anticipates this as the time he fully reveals his divineness through suffering, death, and resurrection; that he spreads God's grace by falling and coming back to life more fully like a sprouting seed; that clinging to an empty life is meaningless without God.

I like to absorb this passage on a more personal level. It is so easy to get caught up in life's demands and noise. In fact, life's stresses can be overwhelming. Jesus shows us that if we try and take on all of life's challenges alone, we cannot grow or get ahead. By taking up the nourishment God offers us in the soil, we can sprout and grow and be strong. We ultimately lose our life without God, but more fully live and learn to be happy with the grace that God is always offering us.

**Prayer.** Gracious and loving God, we cannot face the challenges of life alone, nor can we grow and get ahead without you. Grant us your grace and love to get over all of the little bumps in the road and to treasure everything that you have given us and all things yet to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# Monday of Holy Week, April 10

Written by the Reverend E. Perren Hayes

*Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. –John 12:1-11*

The Fourth Gospel according to John, in the form in which we have it, dates from into the second century – 100s A.D./CE. Yet, there are also reasons why large sections of it not only predate the destruction of Jerusalem in the 60's, but also might be closely related to Paul. Essential to this, is the conviction, expressed by Martha in chapter 11, when Jesus says to the grieving Martha "You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?" And Martha responds "Yes, master. All along I have believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."

In today's assignment, chapter 12:1-11, we begin to see what really was happening in chapter 11. It is the living presence of Jesus – alive in the faithful through the power of the Paraclete – that is crucial. And it needs to be noted that the "living presence of Jesus" is not singular, or individualized. The living presence of Jesus – in John's Gospel – argues that there is no institution, no structure that supplies Jesus's presence. This will be/ is the reality of his Resurrection life! Indeed – as noted in chapter 11 – Jesus himself says, "I am, right now, both Resurrection and Life!" That's why Lazarus can be untied and set free for his new life.

That's why, six days before Passover, when Jesus returns again to the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus – Mary instantly perceives the presence. It is her perception that releases (as it were) a beauty like very expensive oils – which fill the air with beauty, justice, peace, joy, and sharing. And it is this perception that drives away the evil pursuit of money and power – identified as Judas Iscariot. For it is *now* that the end is getting closer. Many people are beginning to see the importance, the NEED, for Resurrection and Life. For the "perception," the formation of the "new community" exists anywhere, and everywhere. And so Mary anoints Jesus feet, to bring the beauty of resurrection life to the entire world – through the drifting of the wondrous, thrilling, exciting, invisible life as beauty is inhaled – because it is so easy to become part of the new

community – initiated by Jesus from the cross. Jesus says to his mother “Dear one, see your rich life, your child;” and to the Beloved Disciple, “Look, here is your life-giver.” The death on the cross brings the richness of the ointment to anyone who chooses to inhale the breath of the life of God.

**Prayer.** O Lord, hear our prayer. Let us pray: Glory be to God and honor in the highest as is meet. To the Son and to the Father, and th’eternal Paraclete theirs is boundless praise and glory through the ages infinite. Amen!

# Palm Sunday, April 9

Written by the Rev. Jay Walton

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

—John 11:45-53

The Passion narrative might be one of the most known sections of the Bible. Ask anyone and they can probably tell you how the story goes. Yet, as I read and reflected on the Matthean version of the passion narrative for this reflection, I noticed something that I had never seen before. In this entire narrative, Jesus is almost silent. He only speaks two times and both times are very short. To me, Jesus silence speaks volumes. In the face of certain death, Jesus stays silent. Rather than bargaining for his life, Jesus expresses his concern and accepts his fate with honor and respect. This is an important lesson for all of us to learn. Jesus accepted what God had planned, knowing that as St. Paul says in Romans 8:28 "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Jesus loved God and trusted God so Jesus understood what needed to be done and did it. How often do we bargain with God when things are not going as planned? When was the last time we prayed, "If you give me \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_?" (you fill in the blanks) I believe we need to follow the example of Jesus in the passion narrative and express our feelings to God but ultimately remain silent while allowing God to work according to God's purpose no matter how difficult that may be.

**Prayer.** Loving God, Thank you for your power in our lives. Help us to understand you are greater than we will ever comprehend. Yet, sometimes our hubris allows us to feel like your equal giving us the power to bargain with you. As those who love you, give us the strength to trust your work in our lives. Help us to understand that it is always for the good and that when we feel alone and forgotten you are present in our lives. Amen.

# April 8

Posted on *Our Daily Bread* ([www.oddb.org](http://www.oddb.org))

*God . . . has been my shepherd all my life to this day.* --Genesis 48:15

When my son changed grades in school he cried, "I want my teacher for life!" We had to help him realize that changing teachers is a part of life. We may wonder: Is there any relationship that can last a lifetime?

Jacob, the patriarch, found out there is one. After living through many dramatic changes and losing loved ones along the way, he realized there had been a constant presence in his life. He prayed, "May the God . . . who has been my shepherd all my life to this day . . . bless these boys" (Gen. 48:15–16).

*God . . . has been my shepherd all my life to this day.* --Genesis 48:15

Jacob had been a shepherd, so he compared his relationship to God as that of a shepherd and his sheep. From the time a sheep is born through its growth to old age the shepherd cares for it day and night. He guides it during the day and protects it during the night. David, also a shepherd, had the same conviction, but he highlighted the eternal dimension to it when he said, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6).

Changing teachers is a part of life. But how good it is to know that we can have a relationship for life. The Shepherd has promised to be with us every day of our earthly existence (Matt. 28:20). And when life here ends, we will be closer to Him than ever.

**Prayer.** Father, I thank You for being the Shepherd of my life. I praise Your faithfulness. Amen.

# April 7

Written by PG Somerset

*The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there. —John 10:31-42-*

I love the logic of the mob in this passage. Jesus says: if A equals B, and B equals C, then C must equal A. And the mob response: 'Shut up! We've these stones and we're going to use them! Don't try to get out of this by confusing us with truth and logic.'

We've all be there, haven't we? We've been Jesus stating the obvious to a group that will not listen, and we've been in the mob wanting our agenda to be right even when it's obviously wrong. How often have we used the, 'Because I said so,' clause in our Parenting Contract? How often do we say, 'Do it, because I'm the boss!'? Are we really the Parent or the Boss at that moment?

How does it feel when you keep doing good things and yet are hunted for it? I can imagine Jesus getting tired of this. I imagine his diary read would have read something like: 'Wednesday: healed people, exorcised demons, almost got stoned, fled for my life.', 'Thursday: healed people, did minor miracle, almost got stoned, fled for my life.', 'Friday: more of the same, this time got chased across the Jordan. Need new sandals.'

The thing is that all of this is about to change. The crowds with rocks feel they are winning, as so often they do. Jesus is being pushed further and further away; but look out! Palm Sunday is coming and Jesus will be back, and then (*spoiler alert*) Easter! The more the bullies attack the more resistance is built up against them. The more we love, the more support we garnish. As we approach the end of Lent, look inward and see how much stronger you have become. Feel that joy and love bubbling away inside you. As you have given and loved, see how much more you have become. Even if you feel you've been driven to the other side of the Jordan, trust in what is about to happen.

**Prayer.** In the dark times, Lord I believe you are with me. When I am forced to flee, you lead me. When I stand on foreign shores and look homeward, you stand with me. You are in my heart when all of this occurs. Rejoice! Because of you I still stand and through my faith help others to see your greatness. Amen.

# April 6

Written by Patti McEnergy

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

*out of the temple.*  
– John 8:51-59

What I find to be most powerful and compelling about this passage is Jesus using the expression, “I AM” to describe himself. While this phrase would have been shocking to the early Jews, it is a concise, beautiful, and dynamic way to think of our Lord. While we are so accustomed to hearing a qualifier of some type after the words, “I am” such as, “I am tall” or “I am a nurse,” Jesus needs no qualifiers, for he truly encompasses all. He is beyond age, beyond time, beyond any physical boundaries. To quote a term I read on [refergospel.blogspot.com](http://refergospel.blogspot.com), God is “*everlasting existence*.” He existed before time, and it gives me comfort to think that God will exist long after I do. God is always with me so I am never alone. This thought not only brings me joy, but also makes me better understand the awesome power of God.

The other quote from this passage that really struck me is when Jesus says, “*If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me . . .*” This quote recalls something I heard in a recent sermon: The priest was talking about how we all believe we can change our lives. That we have the power to control our tempers, lose weight, conquer addictions; but really, WE have no power at all. God has all the power, and we need to rely on God for our plans and prayers to change our lives. This was such a humbling idea for me as someone raised with the notion that I can achieve whatever I set my mind to. However, it is so true --- God is the one with the power, and it only with His help and love that we can change our lives and ourselves. Humility is often a discounted virtue in our “me-first” modern world, but as Jesus taught, self-praise is meaningless. There is a saying, “Humility is a quality of great leadership” and I can think of no greater leader for my life than Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to be humble, and to remember that you are always with us. You guide our steps and hold our hands. Your love is infinite and eternal, and through you, all things are possible. Amen.

# April 5

Written by PG Somerset

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.” They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.” –John 8:31-42

In Hebrew “I am” and “I speak on one’s behalf” have the same meaning. There is no concept of a proxy (a Middle English construct) in Jesus’ day. At the turn of the era, words—and not the speaker—held the power. This meant that the moment words were spoken, the messenger **became** the king, prince, or whomever. Because of this linguistic caveat, Jesus is able to speak of the Father, the Spirit, and **Himself** in a way that we are not able to do in English. What has not changed in the two thousand years since these words were spoken is the message: Salvation comes to those who act upon faith.

Years ago I listened to two people argue this pericope. The debate was about faith and acting within it. The nuances of both sides I will spare you, but at one point the expression, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating” was used to express that one has to have faith to take a bite. Odd this, I thought, because faith has little to do with the eating and everything to do with the making. If one strictly adheres to a badly written recipe, failure is inevitable. The chef’s ability is in her understanding of the craft and adjusting for the recipe. A skilled chef can spot a good recipe and thus will have faith in its outcome. Faith is in every part leading up to the moment of the tasting and not in the tasting itself. By the time of the tasting, one’s faith should not be in the pudding but in the chef.

In today’s reading, Christ requires us to have faith in him and in words we may not understand. He speaks as both Father and Son, telling us that if we are to live, we must have faith. Like a master chef he knows how the meal will turn out because the recipe is perfect. As we prepare ourselves we must have faith both **in** the Word and the Lord.

**Prayer.** Lord, for six weeks you have promised me something great. Help me to appreciate this time so that when the feast of unending life is presented I am ready. Help me to maintain my faith in you, and in your words of promise, until all that you have told me comes to pass.

# April 4

Posted on *Our Daily Bread* (odb.org)

*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped. —Psalm 63*

Dawson Trotman, a dynamic Christian leader of the mid-twentieth century and founder of The Navigators, emphasized the importance of the Bible in the life of every Christian. Trotman ended each day with a practice he called “His Word the last word.” Before going to sleep he meditated on a memorized Bible verse or passage, then prayed about its place and influence in his life. He wanted the last words he thought about each day to be God’s words.

The psalmist David wrote, “On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings” (Psalm 63:6–7). Whether we are in great difficulty or enjoying a time of peace, our last thought at night can ease our minds with the rest and comfort God gives. It may also set the tone for our first thought the next morning.

*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 63:7*

A friend and his wife conclude each day by reading aloud a Bible passage and daily devotional with their four children. They welcome questions and thoughts from each child and talk about what it means to follow Jesus at home and school. They call it their version of “His Word the last word” for each day.

What better way to end our day!

**Prayer.** Thank You Father, for Your Word in our hearts and our minds—our last thought at night as we rest securely in You. Amen.

# April 3

Written by Karen Fischer

*Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." –John 8:1-11*

I read the passage on John 8: 1-11 with some trepidation. I had always thought the passage was about "don't cast stones!" referring to "don't judge" or "let he who is without sin cast the first stone". After I read the passage many, many times, I wondered why the scribes and Pharisees had not included the man but focused on the woman only. The accusers had left the scene but the poor woman was publicly shamed by insensitive judges, who did not care about righteousness, but only wanted to trap Jesus to cast the first stone. The judges in this case were false because they did not recognize the sin in themselves and that Jesus's presence is to show us that we are all in need of his grace. It is my feeling that the only "sinless" person in the temple who may have cast the first stone at the woman showed her mercy. Jesus did not condemn the woman but wanted her to modify her behavior and sin no more. Jesus is telling us that we all sin, whether publicly or privately, and He loves us. We all are in need of his grace - "Neither do I condemn you – Go and sin no more." The passage tells us that we should not judge but restore one to good graces.

**Prayer.** Let us recognize the sin in ourselves, confess it, repent of it, and use the grace of Jesus Christ before we judge the acts of others. Give us the strength to practice not punishment but restoration of good graces. Amen.

# April 1

Written by Naomi Darville

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. – Colossians 3:12.*

Getting up in the morning and preparing ourselves to leave the house means we comb our hair, coordinate our outfit and accessorize with just the right scarf, earrings and jewelry.

Have I clothed myself and accessorized myself in the way that God wants me to be this day as well? Are the gifts that God has given me being used in fullness and love? Will I be the difference in someone's life today? Have I asked God to make my heart like His?

**Prayer.** As I pray for God's help, let me ask for generosity to others and a good and kind heart. Amen.

# March 31

Written by Alan Speaker, Jr.

*After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. —John 7:1-2,10,25-30*

The record begins with Jesus "with His brothers" in Galilee. That makes sense His family was from Galilee. It cannot be referred to "believing brothers" as we are called today because in the context it says the brothers also did not believe in Him. (John 7:5)

Note that the commentary insinuates that Jesus did not want to go to Judea because He was afraid to be killed. It never says that. Also note how "the brothers tried to goad Jesus into going to Jerusalem "openly". Sounds like the tempting of Satan doesn't it?

Jesus went to the festival first and foremost because it was the law and Jesus always did the Father's will. Also remember the reason for the festival: A renewal of fellowship with the Lord. Jesus Christ came to proclaim the Father, and reconcile us to the Father through Him (Jesus).

Jesus is the mediator, intercessor and propitiation for us between God and man. Jesus Christ the Righteous One. We now have perfect peace and fellowship with God because of what Jesus Christ did for us.

Thank you, God.

**Prayer.** Dear Heavenly Father, We thank you that in the spirit of the festival of booths which represented a restored fellowship with the Lord, that we believe and walk in the fellowship that we now have with you today, and every day, because of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

# March 30

Written by Tina Wical

*“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?” –John 5:30-47*

In **JOHN 5:30-47** we hear from Jesus, the Son, preaching that the Father sent him and he is here to do his Father’s work and to please Him, not man, to tell the people the truth, to judge with fairness, and to demonstrate good for others. The people chose not to believe Jesus. They were too consumed with believing in each other and themselves to accept Jesus and his Father’s teachings.

People are naturally skeptical and require evidence and proof to accept anything as fact. Skepticism can serve us well in our daily life, causing us to think before making a decision. However, it can also cause us to discount valuable evidence. There are plenty of reasons to support our belief in Christ and his role in our lives. We have the works of Jesus, the voice of our Father, and the scriptures. How often do we acknowledge our belief in Christ? Do we keep our faith a secret or do we share it and all the blessings we gain by our faith? Lent is an excellent time to consider these truths, to meditate upon our blessings from the Father and the Son, and to demonstrate good deeds for others.

**Prayer.** Dear Lord, during this Lenten season please help us to keep the word in our hearts and minds. Give us the strength to recognize our falsehoods and help us see that you are God and our guide in life. Help us to do good for others, to praise your name, to count our blessings, and to live our lives to impress you not our neighbors and friends. Amen.

# March 29

Written by John Mears

*Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. —John 5:19-29*

The author of the Gospel of John, in Chapter 5, verse 19 begins “ἀπεκρίνατο” (ap-ok-ree'-nom-ah-ee) which means literally to begin to answer a question previously raised, and Jesus responds with “οὐν” (oon) meaning then or consequently. The latest NRSV translation has “Jesus said to *them*, ‘very truly I tell you, ...’” (my italics) but many other translations, for various reasons, have used “the Jews” instead of the somewhat vague pronoun to tie what Jesus is saying to tie his words back to the context of to whom and where Jesus is speaking. In a very large part, the charge that the Gospel of John is (take your pick of adjectives) anti-Semitic seems, to me at least, from the difficulty of translating the Greek into comprehensible English and sometimes a predisposition of the translators to be anti-Semitic themselves. The “Jews” in the previous verses contextually I think should be read as, understood as, *us*. Me and you, not “the Jews” of the First Century – and certainly not of today.

John’s Gospel is often characterized as “the theologians’ Gospel” and few passages in John are as theologically densely rich as John 5:19-29. This is meaty, fat saturated, on the bone theology! Jesus begins “very truly, I tell you, the Son (Jesus, the Son of Man) can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing: for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.” (v.19). What Jesus is saying here to “them” - and saying to us now - is that he, the Son, and יהוה are an identical being, one and the same! For all who believe and struggle to obey the commandments of יהוה this was – and remains for us – the boldest statement any human, *and Jesus who was and remains fully human*, can make. יהוה is the tetragrammaton, YHWH, the four letters that are the name of God not to be spoken.

Jesus then goes (v. 22) on to state that “The Father judges no one but as given all judgment to the Son” - him, Jesus – (v. 23) “so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. (v. 24) Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” Here Jesus makes it clear to us that his authority (his, the WORD of God) is unconditional and non-provisional. Jesus – this same *person* – says (v. 24) “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me *has eternal life*, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

In verses 25 through 29 Jesus consoles and reassures us that both the living and the dead who have shown by their lives that they are and have been faithful – “those who have done good” (v.29) – will be resurrected to eternal life, while those who have *chosen* evil will not. This is NOT “pie in the sky by and by” theology by any means. Rather Jesus has made it dramatically, realistically clear to his hearers then – and to us now – that our striving, struggling to keep the faith has a point. The point is doing so *is* the – *our* – affirmative answer to Cain’s question. To live in true faith by word and deeds our only way to truly honor the Father.

**Prayer.** Lord, help us and guide us this and every day to look into the eyes of every sister and brother, especially those who are in need or suffer adversity of any kind, and answer “yes” with our mouths, hearts, and from the riches your providence and steadfast love gives us, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

# March 28

Written by PG Somerset

*After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk’?” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. – John 5:1-18*

Is Jesus God? He says so here, and yet— The Trinity is one of those doctrines that rub our souls the wrong way. This is one of the passages used to assert its existence. In this passage Jesus seems to be saying that he healed the man with his own power. He says I am the same as God. Then he calls into question the very basis of the universe by attesting that God is not resting on the seventh day, but is still working and creating. I don't think there is an equivalent heresy in our culture. Worst of all, Jesus was popular with people whom the powers-that-be have successfully kept under control. In Jesus' day Israel was maintaining a very unstable relationship with the Roman Empire. We know what will happen to Jerusalem a few decades after Jesus' death. Can you hear the fear in the Jews' voices? They know what the Romans can do and it is hideous. The only way they can keep the Romans at bay is by maintaining order without them. How order is maintained is by making sure the stricter Jewish law is rigorously followed. This is what Jesus threatens.

In the news daily we see and read all too often how people react to destabilizing forces. Unlike most others, Jesus was not destabilizing for the sake of a power grab. As we well know his intentions were wholly pure. Can we say the same for ourselves? When we care for or help others, are we always acting in their interest? Do we sometimes act out of a less-than-perfect love for our neighbor? Are there times when we let things slip past, not offer to help, because we think we know how destabilizing that action might be to our lives?

**Prayer.** Father, help me to be a better instrument of your will. When acting in the way you have shown and taught, Jesus please hold my hand. Please forgive me when I fail to understand you as the Holy Spirit, supplanting your plans with my own. God, you are the one true course of my life; help me to stay true. Amen.

# March 27

Written by George Rudgers

*When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee. —John 4:43-54*

Jesus was a healer, another other things. Many of his "patients" were poor and not able to access affordable care. Many of the people he cured suffered from pre-existing conditions. At that time, just hearing that a healer would be coming around drew a lot of attention.

Today we enjoy the finest of health care. We have our own personal network of specialists at our beck and call. If that is true, we are the privileged like the official in the fourth chapter of John. And yet, modern medicine does not always work. Even those of us who have strong faith fail to receive a cure. Perhaps we have not reconciled ourselves with the Love, the Light and the Way to eternal life. The human life of Christ, Himself was terminated unfairly, in our eyes, yet many of those we hold in judgment live on and on. Such are the mysteries of faith healing.

**Prayer.** Lord God, you sent your Son into the world that we be offered eternal life. Help us to understand that our afflictions are part of that life. Give us the strength to bear our sorrows and manage our grief. If it be your will remove those burdens. Our pain and suffering seem to be part of our human condition. May we look to Jesus as our ultimate healer. Help us have faith to walk the path to eternal life. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

# March 25

Posted on Our Daily Bread ([www.odb.org](http://www.odb.org)) ©

*Now when David settled in his house, David said to the prophet Nathan, "I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent." Nathan said to David, "Do all that you have in mind, for God is with you." But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: You shall not build me a house to live in. Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And even this was a small thing in your sight, O God; you have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come. You regard me as someone of high rank, O Lord God! And what more can David say to you for honoring your servant? You know your servant. For your servant's sake, O Lord, and according to your own heart, you have done all these great deeds, making known all these great things. There is no one like you, O Lord, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. Who is like your people Israel, one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making for yourself a name for great and terrible things, in driving out nations before your people whom you redeemed from Egypt? And you made your people Israel to be your people forever; and you, O Lord, became their God. "And now, O Lord, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, let it be established forever, and do as you have promised. Thus your name will be established and magnified forever in the saying, 'The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God'; and the house of your servant David will be established in your presence. For you, my God, have revealed to your servant that you will build a house for him; therefore your servant has found it possible to pray before you. –1 Chronicles 17:1-4, 16-25*

David had drawn up the plans. He designed the furniture. He collected the materials. He made all the arrangements (see 1 Chron. 28:11–19). But the first temple built in Jerusalem is known as Solomon's Temple, not David's. For God had said, "You are not the one" (1 Chron. 17:4). God had chosen David's son Solomon to build the temple.

David's response to this denial was exemplary. He focused on what God would do, instead of what he himself could not do (vv. 16–25). He maintained a thankful spirit. He did everything he could and rallied capable men to assist Solomon in building the temple (see 1 Chron. 22).

*Father, teach us to praise You when we are tempted to doubt Your goodness.*

Bible commentator J. G. McConville wrote: "Often we may have to accept that the work which we would dearly like to perform in terms of Christian service is not that for which we are best equipped, and not that to which God has in fact called us. It may be, like David's, a preparatory work, leading to something more obviously grand."

David sought God's glory, not his own. He faithfully did all he could for God's temple, laying a solid foundation for the one who would come after him to complete the work. May we, likewise, accept the tasks God has chosen for us to do and serve Him with a thankful heart! Our loving God is doing something "more obviously grand."

**Prayer.** Father, we want our hopes and dreams and our hearts to align with Yours. Teach us to praise You when we are tempted to doubt Your goodness.

God may conceal the purpose of His ways,  
but His ways are not without purpose.

# March 24

Written by Alicia Stack

*One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question. —Mark 12:28-34*

Today, more than ever, these words provide the direction for all Christians to follow. As an adult, I first heard this passage emphasized on very the first day I returned to church after an extended hiatus. The minister, also his first day, started with the rhetorical question to the congregation, "What does the Bible say are the two most important things that God wants from us?" To me, in my early 20s and given what had brought me back to the church, these words seemed a relief. 'Love God and love my neighbor as myself,' I thought, 'I can do *that*.' And so I stayed.

Knowing that we are accepted by God no matter where we are when we come to Him is both powerful and essential, though it also is something certainly much easier said than done. However, as with most of Jesus' words, there is more.

In His call to us, He uses love as a verb, not a noun. So we are not called to love God and others as ourselves placidly, easily and superficially, but deliberately, positively and actively. The challenge in seeking to understand a person who is different from ourselves, whether political views or background, work ethic or belief system, is real no matter which side we consider ourselves to be. While it is all too easy to be driven by fear or contempt, this passage reminds us that to truly love God we must move beyond these actions and treat all people with respect, dignity and consideration.

**Prayer.** God, in your call to me to open my heart to you, I pray that you open my heart to all. Amen.

# March 23

Written by Bob Howard

*Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. — Luke 11:14-23*

It is probably true that climate change is so much on my mind these days that I see references to our situation everywhere I look. In this passage, the crowds are demanding a sign from Jesus beyond his acts of driving out demons from those possessed. Then, in response to the charge that his miracles may be the work of the devil, he admonishes them with the familiar passage that a house divided cannot stand.

While it may not be exactly what Jesus had in mind, what this particular passage says to me about our generation and our failings has to do with our ignoring the signs provided by the warming of the earth and the resulting change in climate and sea levels. In this country at least, our society is pretty divided about what these signs mean and how we react to them. I have always been inspired by the beauty of nature and the wonders of creation. However in my lifetime I have witnessed how we are changing our environment. We have been given the earth as a gift from God and our responsibilities include our stewardship of that gift. We are currently failing in those responsibilities and although we have begun to realize the problem, we are still divided and slow to act.

What, you may ask, can I as an individual do? I think the answer is a lot; starting with the small things we control that multiplied by everyone could end up being significant. Next, we need to make ourselves heard so that others will wake up and our elected representatives understand that more than a few isolated individuals care. St. Peter's has adopted the Genesis Covenant and is helping to persuade the entire diocese to get on board. Learn about that and get involved. Join St. Peter's Green Team.

Our generation will probably not be directly impacted significantly by this problem. The birds that I enjoy watching at our feeder each day will probably not disappear, although the variety of species may change. We can adapt to the modest changes in sea level in the next several years. However, in more ways than just the use of carbon, we are borrowing from future generations and making them pay the price with interest. These are our children and their children etc. and we are failing our moral obligation to them when we don't address this issue.

**Prayer.** Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. -BCP Prayer 41

# March 22

Written by Christine A. Miller-Marcin

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. -Matthew 5:17-19*

The seventeenth verse of the fifth chapter is a part of the Sermon on the Mount. This is one of the most debated verses in the Gospel. It outlines the ethical principles of the truly religious. Martin Luther was highly critical of the catholic view, though Matthews’s sources are uncertain.

Jesus has come to fulfill the law, not destroy it. The Gospel teaches how to observe the law of God in such a way that this practice indicates in what its complete fulfillment consists. Matthew writes in order to help the communities of the converted Jews to overcome the criticism of the brothers of their own race who accused them saying: You are unfaithful to the Law of Moses.

The core argument is about relationships between the views attributed to Jesus, such as Gospel, Grace and the New Covenant. The laws of Christ and those attributed to Moses or Mosaic Law, hence the New Testament and Old Testament; it is the basis of Christian ethics.

Jesus does not abolish the law of the prophets, the biblical tradition, but seeks to implement God’s revealed saving will. Scripture has lasting authority, its smallest elements will not disappear, until the end of times, and God’s new creation and empire is established!

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

References: Robert H. Grundy Commentary on Literary and Theological Art  
The New Interpreter’s Study Bible (NIB)

# March 21

Written by Karen Way

*Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." -Matthew 18: 21-35*

**The parable of the unforgiving servant.** In today's lesson, Jesus tells a story to illustrate how important it is for us to be merciful and forgiving to all who've hurt us. He does not command us to forget, nor does he insist that we resume relationships with those who've wounded us. He reminds us, however, of the endless mercy we receive from Him, how we are loved unconditionally, no matter how often we turn away from Him or behave in ways that would grieve Him. He knows that when we hold onto our anger, it only hurts us more deeply while the object of our anger is unscathed.

We are called to love one another, and as Father Jeff often reminds us, that means EVERYONE; not just the people we like or those who agree with us! It is a challenge we can only attempt to succeed at, and is best accomplished on our knees as we cling to God's Hand!

**Prayer.** Gracious Lord Jesus, I cannot in my own strength forgive those who've wounded me, so I ask You to transform my heart to become more like Yours. Thank You for the incomparable gifts of Your unconditional love and mercy. I am deeply grateful. Amen.

# March 20

Written by Loretta Biehl Allen

*Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. – Luke 2:41-52*

Joseph and Mary took the Child Jesus to the festival in Jerusalem faithfully every year. When Jesus was around 12 years old, they were returning home in the usual manner among relatives and friends. Both Mary and Joseph imagined Jesus was within their group. When they gathered together they realized Jesus was missing. How quickly and thoroughly they began to search for the Child Jesus! For three days they were begging for any information concerning Jesus.

How could Mary and Joseph have lost Jesus? What anguish they felt? What fear? To be entrusted with Our Savior, their Savior!

How often do we lose sight of Jesus in our lives?

**Prayer.** Sweet Jesus, let me search for You everywhere, as Mary and Joseph searched for You in Jerusalem. Let me find my heart in You. Amen.

# March 18

Written by Debbie Chamberlain

*Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'" – Luke 15:11-32*

**The Prodigal Son** As the prodigal son left his family to pursue life in unfettered abandon, remind us of his fall. Sure it was fun for a while, til the money ran out. The thrills were great until they weren't. The new friends were exciting, until they moved on to greener pastures and abandoned him to the fate of his bad choices. He was highly respected until all that was left for him was to do the most vile repugnant work. The lowest of low with no way for him to work out of it by himself. Remind us that we can return to God to be forgiven of the mistakes we make.

The Prodigal brother's loving father reminds him that he already has every blessing that his father can give him. He will never want for anything. Dad reminds the brother that redemption of those who have fallen so far and come back virtually from the dead is a blessing that should be celebrated and encouraged. To celebrate and encourage those not quite as "good" as yourself truly costs one nothing and we have everything to gain from it. Redemption can be for everyone.

**Prayer.** Heavenly Father, Blessed Jesus and Sweet Holy Spirit help us to keep in control of our impatience and the siren call of everything that bombards our daily life. Help us also to understand the prodigal brother's unjustified jealousy and unwillingness to forgive. Remind us we all need redemption and forgiveness. Amen.

# March 17

Written by Hannah Hannon

*“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. –Matthew 21: 33-43*

When I first read this gospel, I got caught up in deciding who was the worst wronged party. The tenants did all the work ~ hot, exhausting toil, day in and day out for months ~ then the "greedy" landlord demanded all the profits. On the other hand, beating his servants and killing them, and killing his son, that's wrong on a whole different horrific scale, so the tenants lost my sympathy for their "innocence."

So, confused and challenged, wishing good and evil were still as simple as the bad cowboys wearing black hats, I reread what Jesus said to explain the parable, "...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

Then I read the preceding parable, Mt 21:28-32; it is also about what we do, vs what we say. One thing I know is true. It came to me in prayer one day ~ a rare "message." I heard no voice, I just knew, this was for me to hear and heed, " God loves action."

**Prayer.** Father, help us to become the people you want us to be. Amen.

# March 16

Posted by Today in the Word © ([todayintheword.org](http://todayintheword.org))

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. –1 John 4:7-12*

As jigsaw-puzzle enthusiasts can attest, few things are more frustrating than coming to the end of a challenging puzzle of hundreds or even thousands of pieces, only to discover that one piece is missing. Even though the rest of the picture may be beautiful, our eyes are immediately drawn to the empty space. The puzzle is incomplete.

Many people feel incomplete without someone to love. In this letter, John writes the good news that God's love is made complete in us (1 John 4:12). What a wonderful truth: God's love for us is an intentional part of our design. We are intricately and wonderfully made, and God's love in us is that final piece that completes the puzzle. We are made to love and to be loved by our Creator.

The beginning of the passage focuses on the reason we love others. Scripture tells us that everyone who loves is born of God (vs. 7–8). When we act in love, we reflect God's image. These verses may be confusing. Aren't there people who love who are not born again? More accurately interpreted, John is saying that our own ability to love originates from God's design for us. While some may not believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, they, too, were created in His image. They too were designed to love and be loved.

While we often think about love as something we desire, God has already demonstrated His love for us by giving His Son to die for us on the Cross. We are made complete both by being loved by God and by giving love to others. Perhaps that is why Jesus said the two greatest commands are to love God with your whole heart, mind, and soul, and to love others as yourself (see Matt. 22:36–40).

**Prayer.** Heavenly Father, Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the goodness of our brothers and sisters. Help us to love one another as you love us. Amen.

# March 15

From Today in the Word © ([todayintheword.org](http://todayintheword.org))

*When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." -- John 11:17-44*

One of the shortest verses in Scripture is also one of the most poignant: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Jesus had been called to the home of His friends Mary and Martha with word that their brother, Lazarus, was ill. But seemingly without reason Jesus took His time traveling to their home in Bethany, and when He arrived four days later, Lazarus had died.

We are designed by God to grieve. And we know this because our Savior also grieved. Biblical scholars say that the act of weeping showed the humanity of Jesus, revealing His capacity to experience emotional pain. He was both God and human, and thus, like us, He felt the pain of separation and loss. Even earlier in the passage, in verse 33, Jesus was moved by the grief of others. Again in verse 38, it says that Jesus, "once more deeply moved," approached the tomb where Lazarus had been buried.

But Jesus was also fully divine and thus He had power over death. He miraculously commanded Lazarus to rise from the dead, challenging Martha to believe. He did this act of triumph over physical death so that many could believe (v. 42).

While Jesus had the power over death and could raise Lazarus from the grave, He also knew what it meant to feel the pain of separation and grief. Jesus wept in sympathy and in loss (v. 35). He was “a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (Isa. 53:3). We do not serve a God who does not understand our ability to grieve. But through His own death and resurrection, Jesus has conquered the grave and given us hope that extends beyond death. As Paul says in his letter to the Thessalonians, we do not “grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13).

**Prayer.** Dearest Lord, help us to always have faith and trust in you and what you have promised for us. We pray this in your name. Amen.

# March 14

Posted by Today in the Word © ([todayintheword.org](http://todayintheword.org))

*“A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.” Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying to us, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” They said, “What does he mean by this ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’? Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.*

–John 16:16-24

A 3-year-old Minnesota boy could not wait one more second. His mom had just returned from nine months of military service in Afghanistan and was standing in line with her fellow soldiers, waiting to be dismissed. While she was still standing at attention, her son broke free and rushed into her arms, a huge smile on his face. His unbridled act of joy melted the hearts of the crowd. One day we will experience this joy of reunion with our Creator. On earth, we experience happiness. But we are also designed to know joy.

Joy is not based on temporary things that bring us pleasure but on the deep assuredness of God’s love for us and the realization that we will be reunited with Him. In our reading today, Jesus knew His disciples would experience the devastating grief of separation. They would witness the execution of the One they faithfully followed.

They puzzled over His words, “In a little while you will see me no more” (v. 16). What could He mean? Jesus explained that they would indeed weep and mourn. But, they would also see their grief turn into joy. Both grief and joy would be present.

As Christians, we can experience joy, even during difficult circumstances, because we know what the future holds. Jesus compares this to a woman in labor. She endures incredible pain, but she knows the labor will result in great joy—the birth of her child. The pain is only temporary (v. 21).

We will also have joy that no one can take from us (v. 22). This joy comes from the assurance that Jesus did not stay in the grave but is raised from the dead. We, too, will see Him again, and when we do, our “joy will be complete” (v. 24).

**Prayer.** Dearest Jesus, Help us to have faith and believe in you. Help us to trust what you have told us and believe in your word. Allow us to walk by faith and not by sight. Amen..

# March 13

Written by Kay Wooten Schechinger

*“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” –Luke 6:27-38*

I believe that Luke is telling us that Jesus was teaching the people how to be in relationship with each other. Loving someone means sometimes we don't like what they do. However, when we love, we try to understand and try to keep the relationship open. To do that we have to trust that loving is more powerful than hate and anger. When we believe that, we can grow together with deepest meaning.

We have to look beyond the actions and see their fear, anger and hurt feelings. Jesus shows us that love is the strongest teacher. Depending on how deeply someone has been hurt or how little they have been given love, it can take effort and time.

When we feel God's love within us, we will have the motivation, power, time and energy to do what is needed. As parents we love our children and we show them love, forgiveness many times in our lives. Fortunately, we usually know about our children as much as possible. That is not always possible with our friends and neighbors. However, Christ, as Luke is describing in the reading, is showing us that loving others is what all relationships are about.

**Prayer.** Dear Lord,  
We pray that we don't underestimate how  
hard it is to be compassionate.  
We pray that we have the disposition to go  
with our friends, neighbors and family  
when we are weak, vulnerable, lonely and broken.  
Help us to be there and not fleeing  
from the suffering of ourselves and others.  
Help us to see your strength in us. Amen.

# March 11

From [www.trinitystudycenter.com](http://www.trinitystudycenter.com) ©

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." We are now at the last section that follows Jesus' statement that He has come to fulfill the law and the prophets. Throughout this long passage, Jesus has been expounding on what true righteousness, the righteousness that He fulfills, truly is. Jesus is revealing to us the righteousness that flows from God's heart, His character. In the previous section to what we are going to study now, Jesus tells His listeners that true righteousness involves a freedom to love and serve others regardless of their words or actions towards us. --Matthew 5:43-48*

This section is closely connected to the one right before it. These verses are also dealing with the freedom of true righteousness to love another without reference to whether or not they love or care for you. The truly righteous one relies on God's overflowing love and therefore can even move towards his/her enemy in loving service.

Jesus introduces this section, as with the previous five, with a saying that would be familiar to his audience, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." Unlike some of the previous sections, this quote does not come from the Old Testament. The Old Testament does, however, contain the idea that it is pious to hate God's enemies (Ps. 109:19-22). Praying for one's enemies did not generally characterize "even the most pious in the Old Testament"(The IVP Bible Background Commentary, p.61).

Wherever the saying came from, it must have been one that Jesus' listeners would have readily recognized and generally approved of. It was a generally accepted idea that we love those we consider to be like us, our neighbors, those that are "on our side" and we hate those whom we believe oppose us, are on "the other side," our enemies. In the previous section we give back to others according to what they give to us, tit for tat. Our action toward them is determined by their actions towards us. Here we have the same mindset. We love or hate others depending on whether they are for or against us. A friend is a friend and an enemy is an enemy--one is just reacting to what already is.

Jesus' definition of righteousness involves a freedom that enables us to move towards our enemies in a new and surprising way. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." Jesus is saying that the one who is righteous will treat his/her enemy with love, the same way he treats his neighbor. To deal righteously with those who persecute you is to bring them to the Father in prayer. This is true of Jesus, the One who fulfills all righteousness. He loves those who oppose him and prays for his persecutors. What amazing good news it is that Jesus does not allow his enemies to determine how he will treat them. Therefore, they do not need to remain his enemies. From Jesus' side, there is no reason for them to remain so.

This freedom is what Jesus shares with us in His fulfilling of God's will. His intent for us is to give us this same capacity to refuse to treat our enemies as enemies, but instead to extend God's love to them, to bring them before the Father in prayer with the hope that from their own side as well, we will not remain enemies.

Jesus goes on to clearly connect this righteousness with God's heart towards us. As we love and pray for our enemies, Jesus indicates that we are living as God's own children, mirroring the life and character of our heavenly Father. We share the family resemblance when we love in this way. At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares that the peacemakers are blessed because they shall be called the children of God. Peacemakers are those who offer God's shalom in the midst of conflict. God is the Peacemaker. He is the One, through and in His Son, who makes peace where there is no possibility of peace, provides forgiveness and healing in the face of evil and brokenness.

Furthermore, peace becomes possible when we love our enemies. Jesus goes on to point out that God "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." God pours out blessing on all, regardless of their present state of goodness or evil. God does not look to us to decide how to behave towards us. His love is not dependent on our behavior or our attitude towards him. He acts first, moving to love us, to bless us.

It is in receiving His love that we are freed and enabled to love our enemies. Our enemies cannot tell us who we are, they cannot give us our lives. We are not stuck, being able only to react to others. We have a mediator between us and others in Christ. Jesus does not leave us empty-handed or with a mere command to fulfill on our own power. It is in recognizing the true poverty of our souls, our real inability to love those we see as enemies, that we are able to receive the Father's deep love for us. And that's what we have to pass on to others.

It is clear that Jesus intends for us to go beyond what we could do on our own. After His description of the impartial grace of our heavenly Father, Jesus asks His listeners, "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? do not even the Gentiles do the same?" There is nothing surprising or unusual about loving those that treat you well and opposing those who don't. It is not a sign of anything extraordinary. We can do this without help. Jesus points out that even those who do not know or trust in God can manage this much.

But what about those times when we see or experience reconciliation between enemies? When Corrie Ten Boom, who spent several months in a German prison camp during World War II, met one of the soldiers from that same camp a few years after the war, she was able to forgive him. That is amazing! It takes our breath away to consider it. How can anger and hate be transformed to forgiveness and love? It seems truly impossible. I remember hearing of a man who traveled some distance to a prison in order to extend forgiveness to the man who murdered his wife. We all know stories like this. And they always thrill and baffle us. These stories give us hope that what is horribly broken can be changed, healed and made right. This hope extends really to all of our relationships. Who we recognize as our enemies can change. I don't think Jesus is just talking about national, political, family or clan enemies. Who we perceive to be our enemy can be any one who at this moment is opposing us, or not caring for us as we want and who we are tempted to treat us with anger and hurt. Sometimes when I am angry at someone I am close to, I don't see him/her clearly anymore. For that moment, he/she is my "enemy." Our enemies might be those we are supposed to get along with, someone in our extended family, our church, or at work, that we have great difficulty dealing well with.

In all of these various situations of conflict, we count on God's grace to transform our hearts. We are to bring our "enemies", and ourselves, to God in prayer for His intervention in our lives. Remembering the

truth of God's great love for us and His ability to work in the midst of our frailty can enable us to count on Him to change our hearts, to have hope that He can transform us to move forward in His love. And every time we see him change our hearts, it is a wonder and a miracle.

We can count on Him to transform our hearts because this is who God is. The gospel is the story of God wooing and loving us, His enemies. He cared for us before we even knew or cared that He existed. Transforming conflict into peace and well-being is at the heart of who He is. And His ability and desire to bring about reconciliation will never run out. His continuing work is to reconcile everything to Himself in Christ. It is God who continually accomplishes the impossible--of enabling me to love, when on my own I only experience anger and hate. God's will for us, Jesus' concludes, is that we will finally, in the end, be able to move towards others out of grace, love, and hope all the time, like God does. "You must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect." The Greek verb is future tense, so a more literal translation is "You will be perfect, as you heavenly father is perfect." God's desire for us is nothing less than for us to be as free from hate, anger, and brokenness as He is, that we become able to experience and live in His true love, a free giving and receiving that always blesses.

Jesus began this section telling His listeners that He fulfills God's will, that He is the righteous One. He is here to give us a share in that righteousness, that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees and is here described as being perfect or mature. The righteousness Christ is and shares with us is being in right relationship with God and therefore with all things created by God. God is ready to lead us to this perfection and He will not love us less than to make us truly His children.

I am so thankful that God loves us to perfection. There may be times when I think I want Him to love me less, to let me hold onto my petty thoughts of revenge, my hate and anger, but I see the foolishness of being left there. He works to bring us to our full completion in Him, to finally truly be who He created us to be. Hallelujah!

**Prayer.** Gracious God, help us to love one another as you love us. Amen.

# March 10

From Our Daily Bread (odb.org) ©

*When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me. --Psalm 86:7*

The international distress signal “Mayday” is always repeated three times in a row—“Mayday-Mayday-Mayday”—so the situation will be clearly understood as a life-threatening emergency. The word was created in 1923 by Frederick Stanley Mockford, a senior radio officer at London’s Croydon Airport. That now-closed facility once had many flights to and from Le Bourget Airport in Paris. According to the National Maritime Museum, Mockford coined Mayday from the French word *m’aidez*, which means, “help me.”

Throughout King David’s life, he faced life-threatening situations for which there seemed to be no way out. Yet, we read in Psalm 86 that during his darkest hours, David’s confidence was in the Lord. “Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy. When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me” (vv. 6–7).

David also saw beyond the immediate danger by asking God to lead his steps: “Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (v. 11). When the crisis was past, he wanted to keep walking with God.

The most difficult situations we face can become doorways to a deeper relationship with our Lord. This begins when we call on Him to help us in our trouble, and also to lead us each day in His way.

**Prayer.** Lord, even as we call to You for help today, please help us to keep walking with You when this crisis is over. Amen.

# March 9

Written by Lorri Camilleri

*“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. –Matthew 7:7-12*

One of my favorite hymns is *Seek Ye First*. The words from this hymn were taken from these verses written by Matthew and have always had great meaning for me and makes me think of my own father. When growing up, my dad and I had a close relationship. He was kind and loving and when I envision our heaven father, I often liken him to an older version of my dad. As an only child and one whose mother died when she was 11, I had a wonderful relationship with my father. We communicated well which afforded me great dialogue and an openness that we could talk about most things.

I think that is why prayer has always been somewhat easy for me. I have always been able to sit and ask God for the things I needed and knowing that if it was what he had in store for me, I would receive it. Going through struggles and hard times seemed to be lessened when I prayed. We all know the saying that when one door closes, another opens. And if we knock on a door and it doesn't open, it wasn't meant for us!

God the father, and Jesus, his son want us to ask for things. They want us to rely on them not just in times of trouble but in good times too! Don't be afraid to ask God to open your heart to the many miracles which he has in store for you. You may be very surprised by the outcome!

**Prayer.** Gracious God, let my heart and mind be open to you. Hear my prayer and fill me with your spirit and love now and always. Amen.

# March 8

Written by Bob Howard

*When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! –Luke 11:29-32*

One interpretation of the reference of Jesus to Jonah as a sign to the “wicked generation” is that Jesus is foretelling of his Crucifixion and Resurrection by comparing it to Jonah’s three days in the belly of the whale.

What this particular passage says to me about our generation and its wickedness has to do with how I feel about the warming of the earth and the resulting change in climate and sea levels. While we may not be asking for a sign, the earth is giving us one and it is up to each of us to help shape how we react to it. I have always been inspired by the beauty of nature and the wonders of creation. However in my lifetime I have witnessed how we are changing our environment. We have been given the earth as a gift from God and that includes our stewardship of that gift. We are currently failing in our responsibilities and although we have begun to realize the problem, we are slow to act.

What, you may ask, can I as an individual do? I think the answer is a lot. Starting with the small things we control that multiplied by everyone could end up being significant. Next, we need to make ourselves heard so that others will wake up and our elected representatives understand that more than a few isolated individuals care. St. Peter's has adopted the Genesis Covenant and is helping to persuade the entire diocese to get on board. Learn about that and get involved. Join St. Peter's Green Team.

Our generation will probably not be directly impacted significantly by this problem. The birds that I enjoy watching at our feeder each day will probably not disappear, although the variety of species may change. However, in more ways than just the use of carbon, we are borrowing from future generations and making them pay the price with interest. These are our children and their children etc. and we are failing our moral obligation to them when we don't address this issue.

**Prayer.** Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. –*BCP Prayer 41*

# March 7

Written by Mary Beth Palkon-Krytzer

*“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. –Matthew 6:7-15*

A common theme for me at St. Peter's has been by "invitation." I was first invited to attend the Art Show, then Service, ECW, and this latest; a email from Lorri inviting me to participate in the 2017 Lenten Devotion.....me? I quickly emailed her back saying "I think this email went to the wrong person".....her reply, "it was meant for you!" Lorri's instruction, pick out one of the numerous Eucharistic Gospel Readings and write a brief paragraph with a mediation.

Growing up when the play "Godspell" was popular based on the Gospel of St. Matthew, picking something from Matthew seemed like a no brainer. And, there is was, " The Lord's Prayer." A prayer we have all prayed, song, heard sermons on, prayed as a nation or as Carlyle would say have "pondered." One of the most powerful prayers I believe made known to us through the writings in the Bible. A prayer we can say so fast, yet, a prayer which each line becomes more powerful then the next. A prayer that has brought me to tears, and still continues to engulf many emotions within me.

This Lenten season, I now "invite" you to say The Lord's Prayer in wherever you find "quietness." Say this prayer slowly, become aware of the words.....listen. I truly believe no matter what age you are.. ...that this prayer or even a certain line from this prayer "will" take on a new meaning or, as cliché as it may sound, "bring you to your knees."

**Prayer.** Father, help me to accept, "Thy will be done" and **not my will**....and, to truly believe, You know my needs before I even ask. Amen.

# March 6

Written by Bob Wardwell

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” –Matthew 25:31-46*

The first half of this reading is what motivated me to train for hospital chaplaincy and helped sustain me in my actual career in Medicare and Medicaid. But I was never inspired by the closing verses that seemed to paint a picture of God that I did not know. A God who seems to point an accusing and condemning finger at those who turn from the path of servanthood and Jesus.

After meditating on this in bed one night I awoke from a dream in which I was following a series of small road signs along rural roads that said "Jesus this way" with an arrow. After many turns they led me not to a church or a mansion with many rooms but a state prison in Virginia I have visited.

I suddenly realized that when we turn away from the signs leading us to Jesus we are not condemned by a vengeful God but have chosen to separate ourselves from God and the Kingdom. God in Jesus is still waiting at the destination of those road signs with the same open and forgiving arms that greeted the Prodigal Son upon his return home.

**Prayer.** God, give me the wisdom and courage to follow the road signs to Jesus in my life and when I start to turn away please may I hear your words "do not be afraid" and choose to follow those signs to where I need to be. Amen.

# March 4

Written by Paul Somerset

*After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." –Luke 5:27-32*

Who are the sinners in this passage? I was always taught that the sinners were the tax-collectors. My education informed me that Jesus was explaining to his 'peers' why he chose to sit with those of a lesser social status. But what of the Pharisees and their scribes?

Hospitality is something with which we are all familiar. At Levi's party all of the guests were eating, but some of them moaning about the other guests. What if the tax-collectors were monopolising Jesus' time (after all, he was a celebrity)? Were the Pharisees maybe a bit bitter? We can assume so, but Luke does not actually tell us this. Instead he tells us that the party was not going well because there were factions within it. Was there sin abounding? Maybe everyone there was guilty of sins like inhospitality, one-upsmanship, snobbery, exclusivity, or maybe pride? That would mean that Jesus' comments were directed at one group while implicating another.

I think we all are too often guilty of this. We have pride in our achievements, our families, and our friends. This should be a good thing; as they are all gifts from God. It is when we turn them into walls, weapons, and war-wounds that they become something of a very different nature. None of us are so healthy that we need never fear becoming sick. Not one of us are so well fed that we will never feel hungry again. No one is so good that he or she does not need to ask for forgiveness. I have a feeling that is what Jesus is trying to tell everyone in Levi's house, and beyond. If you hear Christ saying this to you too, would you pray with me:

**Prayer.** Lord, while attending this feast in your name, this great feast called life, help me to be less ready to condemn others, at least for today. Amen.

# March 3

Written by the Rev. Dr. David Gleason

*And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." –Matthew 9:10-17*

In the verse preceding today's reading, we learn of our Lord's summons to a sinful tax collector to join in his holy enterprise. The gracious invitation to, "Follow me," is issued to Matthew and Matthew does. He walks away from a lucrative job ripping off his own people to take up with a wandering rabbi. Then at dinner with a collection of other sinners and outcasts (including some of Jesus' followers), self-righteous, narcissistic Pharisees are annoyed. They want to know how he can cavort with such a motley crew of sinners. Our Lord sees no need to defend himself but he is ever the teacher. He offers the Pharisees a simple explanation. "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick." A truly righteous person (if such a one exists) has no need of merciful redemption. Only a sinner does. It is those who are sick, sick with sin, spiritually diseased and ill, who need the Christ. And only a show of mercy can lead them to him. In such a compassionate way, Jesus invites the sinner to repentance and renewal.

Then, the followers of John, that desert radical who shunned conventional fashion and adopted the first all natural health food diet, want to know why Jesus' disciples do not fast as they do. Again, Jesus explains: there is no cause for mournful fasting but only a time for feasting. A new day has dawned and God is doing a new thing in Christ; something predicated on mercy and love, not law.

The Church of Jesus Christ is a community filled with the likes of Pharisees and the followers of John. We are a weak, sinful, and often hypocritical people. But the Church is precisely the community in which such people should be. So, round them up. Bring them in. We want every one of those people who will join us. Such weak, sinful, and hypocritical people, along with the likes of us, are the very ones an indiscriminately loving Lord mercifully calls and invites to follow him. We are the ones the grace of Christ summons and empowers to be useful to God. Amen.

**Prayer.** God of mercy, you chose a sinful tax collector, Matthew, to share the dignity of the apostles: Help us by his example readily to respond to the transforming call of your Son and to follow him in lives of compassionate service to you and to your people; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

# March 2

Written by Tracy Mulveny

*Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? –Luke 9:18-25*

Reading this part of Luke's gospel we get a sense of mounting excitement as Jesus and his disciples are traveling the country doing miraculous deeds and healing the sick. Jesus has granted his faithful disciples the power to do healing and they have been working diligently at this task. Still there are situations that are too much for them. We find them gathered together with Jesus after he miraculously fed multitudes with a few loaves and fishes. By this time the disciples are probably feeling pretty special and powerful.

While they might be expressing excitement about spreading the word, Jesus asks them exactly who they think he is. While other rumored possibilities are mentioned, Peter jumps right in to state absolutely that he believes Jesus to be "the Christ of God". Now Jesus cautions them that, by boasting of their powers and their close relationship with Him, they may be endangering their own souls.

We may be fortunate to have occasions where we feel pretty special about our talents and accomplishments. Jesus' words are a sharp reminder that it is through giving ourselves to God that we receive these blessings.

**Prayer.** Lord grant me the wisdom to recognize it is your power working within me that allows me to be useful in this world. Help me to remain aware of the needs of others and do what I can to help. Guide me with the awareness that it is your Spirit working in me that governs my accomplishments. Grant me the humility to listen to your voice and follow you. Amen.

# Ash Wednesday, March 1

Written by the Rev. Larry Hofer

*“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. –Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

Several years ago I was at a meeting to choose a theme for Lent. After considering several ideas, a woman suggested “From Ashes to Fire,” from the ashes of Ash Wednesday to the fire kindled at the Easter Vigil. We all thought this was a great idea.

One of the younger members of the committee stayed around after the meeting and with tears in her eyes said she loved the theme we had selected because it was the shape of her life. I knew that her husband had died within the last year, but she had not shared that her mother, who lived out of town, was ill and the prognosis was not promising. She felt burned out, but not abandoned for she knew that, while the ashes represent our lives they were not the last word. We begin Lent with the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We end Lent with the fire of the Easter Vigil and the words, “Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia.” It is not only Christ’s victory that we celebrate at Easter. It is our victory as well.

As we begin our Lenten journey it is with a clear vision of the victory that is ours in Christ. The Ash Wednesday Gospel calls us to pray, fast and do acts of charity and love. This is our Lenten plan as we make our Journey to Easter.

**Prayer.** O God our Maker and Redeemer, keep us mindful of your love for all your creatures and instill in us a growing sense of devotion during these days of Lent, that when we come to our Easter joy we may know you more fully and love you more deeply, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.