

Lenten Reflections



ST GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL
KINGSTON



LENTEN REFLECTIONS

Edited by Phil Rogers

This series of reflections is meant to accompany your own daily meditations on the 40 weekdays and 6 Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter, 2023. The Reflections vary greatly in both length and substance. Some writers have elected to concentrate on just one of the readings; others have written about more than one, and still others have written not so much on the readings as on their own thoughts in response to the readings. Editing has been severely minimal, and almost exclusively confined to matters of grammar and punctuation. In most cases quotations from the Bible are accompanied by a parenthetical note indicating which translation is used. All readers will decide for themselves how best to use the Reflections in relation to their own Lenten reflections.

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Wednesday 22 February Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17, Psalm 51:1-17, 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10,
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

THE VERY REVEREND DOUGLAS MICHAEL, DEAN

Amongst the oldest human stories-- cutting across all cultures and stretching back thousands upon thousands of years--are the stories of the sun: that great, intense and mysterious ball of flame that arcs slowly across the sky, day by day. Every morning it is born in splendour, rising in the east, only to die again each night in the distant west. From fire to ash, until the new day dawns and it is born in fire again. And in the world of ancient Israel the ash of the snuffed out fire became a sign of death, of mourning, of repentance . . . and of the hope that life would be renewed.

On Ash Wednesday we mark ourselves with the burned remains of our previous year's palm crosses in a bittersweet reminder of that same hope. On the one hand we find ourselves inspired by all the best that Palm Sunday represents: the people of God joyfully welcoming the Christ; cries of Hosanna filling our hearts and mouths; celebrating all the best that we hope to offer God on the very best of our days: genuinely desiring to live with compassion; and to be kind and gentle with each other; and to love and respect all people; and to leave the world a better, more godly, place than we found it. We remember that the fire of God's spirit, the zeal of the Lord, really does burn in each of our souls.

But then we remember, on the other hand, that those "best intentions" don't always set the world alight in the ways we might have hoped. People are fractious, ourselves included. We get angry. We become prideful. We see and set our own desires before the needs of others. On its worst days, the world is a place of brokenness and hurt and betrayal; marked by dust, and ashes, and mourning; and on our worst days, we helped to make the world that way!

And so today - Ash Wednesday - we stand in the gap, trying to hold together, and make sense of, those two truths: that we are children of the light, and bearers of brokenness, together! We remember that the power of God within us can work through us infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; and we lament how often that inspired imagination seems to get pushed aside - lost to the demands of life in a confusing and contradictory world.

Ash Wednesday - continued

And standing in that gap, between 'what could be' and 'what is', we discover ourselves, and the God who stands there with us. Because we are both together – children of light, and travellers on a journey which is not yet complete. And on that journey it is God who will be our guide, and Christ we are seeking to be like. We remember that the journey is one which continues every day, and that each step is marked by the facing of mistakes and past hurts, so that there can be acknowledgement, and forgiveness, and repentance - and ultimately, new life again.

“Rend your hearts, and not your clothing,” Joel reminds us, for God is “gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2: 12-13 NRSV)



THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY

PSALM 51, JONAH 3:1-10, ROMANS 1:1-7

Megan Bruce

I recall a sermon at the Cathedral, delivered years ago, when the preacher opined that perhaps it was better to believe in order to see, rather than see in order to believe.

Imagine being a Ninevite, a citizen of one of the largest and most important cities in the region, and hearing Jonah's message; that you, everyone you know and your whole city are going to be destroyed if you don't change your ways. Imagine being the King, and literally having the fear of God put in you. What would you do? Of course you'd do everything you could to save yourself and your people. Don that sackcloth! Fast as long as you can! Truly repent of your ways, and maybe your actions will save you. You believe in order to see.

If you read the Jonah passage first, follow it up with Psalm 51 and lament the total agony of the Psalmist--someone who knows they've sinned, caused offence, and who can fix the ache. "Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night." (NLB) Or, as the choir sings, "wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and forgive me all my sin. For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me."

What a fitting passage of repentance to follow up the story of Nineveh.

How many times did Paul read Psalm 51? Paul, who persecuted Christians heavily, searching them out to kill them for their beliefs. Paul, who was blinded in meeting Christ on his way to carry out his persecution in Jerusalem. Paul, who then needed to believe in order to see.

And Paul, who went on to repent and become one of the most prolific apostles of the era. Paul, who spread the word through Asia Minor and Europe. Paul, who was restored to the joy of salvation, and made willing to obey, who taught God's ways to the Gentiles, who joyfully sang of God's forgiveness. Whose lips were opened, so that his mouth could show forth God's praise. (Ps 51:12-15)

We are all that Psalmist, in need of God's mercy. We all have that broken and repentant heart. And we can all change our ways and be restored to glory. We can all believe, in order to see God's grace. Thanks be to God!



Friday 24 February St Mathias

Psalm 51, Jonah 4: 1-11, Romans 1: 8-17

JANE KIRKPATRICK

Paul is writing to the Christian Church in Rome. It is a community he has not yet visited, one he does not know personally. These verses follow a fulsome introduction of himself (1:1-7) to this unknown community, and the passage for today is the introduction to the rest of his letter in which he uses his apostolic gifts to expound on faith and salvation, to reconcile the Jewish laws with the new Christianity, a movement which includes Gentiles.

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.” Gratitude for a community, a community of individuals, Jews and Greeks, who have come in faith to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I cannot help but think of us here at St. George’s as that community of diverse people, all of us coming together in faith to live out our mission in our city. Whether it be through the good work of Lunch by George, or the Refugee Committee; the guilds that serve in the Lord’s house, or the welcoming of parishioners and visitors at the great doors; the camaraderie of shared meals and care of shut-ins and the ill; every day in a multitude of ways our faith community proclaims the Gospel through our actions. Our faith is lived out in our works and our works strengthen our faith.

Paul later says that he wants to come to Rome “so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” As St. George’s moves forward on its new path may we all be strengthened by our faith in the Holy Spirit to express God’s will for us, and may we be encouraged and sustained by all those who share with us the life and witness of St. George’s.

SATURDAY 25 FEBRUARY

PSALM 51, ISAIAH 58:1-12, MATTHEW 18:1-12

James Anderson

In Matthew 18 verse 1 the disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus has a child stand in front of them and says "unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (NRSV) Unless you change, and become like children stands out for me as a big challenge. It seems that many of the conflicts in our world, in our communities and in our families are a result of change. We like to keep things the way they were. We believe, the way they were was correct and the only way they should be. For hundreds of years the prophets like Moses, Isaiah and John the Baptist predicted that a king would come and bring a big change to the world. Things changed when Jesus started his ministry. So why did Jesus answer the disciples question by using a child to explain the difference between the greatest in the kingdom and a child?

I understand we are children of God, "Father God" as he is called. I believe Jesus is showing the disciples that being the greatest in this new kingdom is not quite what the prophets of the past predicted or expected. They were great leaders and teachers, but now we have a caring, forgiving king to follow. There is a new way to live; things have changed. We are not to trample over others to become the greatest. We now have an incentive to serve others and not just strive to be the greatest in this new kingdom.

Like a good father's or mother's, Jesus' message is teaching us how to live in peace. Not being the greatest depends on what we do with the knowledge we have learned. Since childhood we have been learning what today's world deems important. Many of our civil laws are really about treating others the way we want to be treated. Jesus wants us to be humble and to filter what we say and do based on the new law or commandment: Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus goes on to say "whoever welcomes a child in my name welcomes me." Jesus also reminds us that a good shepherd will go after that one lost sheep. I don't think this only applies to welcoming children into our congregation. Welcoming an old person strayed from the faith is just as important. Welcoming young families into our congregation is as Jesus said, welcoming him. I understand that welcoming people into the faith, as Jesus said, "into the Kingdom of God," is bringing people into a joyful Kingdom with simple rules: "love God with all your heart and mind and treat your neighbour as yourself." All this is led by a loving, forgiving God. It is not easy to live our lives keeping these simple rules. But, like children, I believe, we must continue to have open minds, ready to change, growing up in the faith day by day. By our influence in our work place, in our neighbourhoods, in our clubs, we can help change people's lives. We can help them live more peacefully in the wonderful mystery of creation.

All of us, for the most part, live happy, joyful lives. We are fortunate to live in a community that is mostly peaceful. In our modern society there are so many fun activities to enjoy. In our pursuit of happiness, we can easily forget our spiritual connection to the Father. I believe when we make prayerful decisions filtered through Jesus' message we will be inspired to evaluate and possibly change how we use our time in outreach to our community. There are many people suffering many kinds of distress. We can help them bring change to their lives. As we seek consensus in using our gifts in developing, and participating in Cathedral outreach mission projects, we will feel the loving presence of God in our lives. As we are able to change, we will enjoy spiritual happiness as we have been welcomed into the new kingdom. I believe when we use our gifts/talents in this way we will feel the God-given joy of a smile. Being a humble active Christian is a joyful way to live our lives. Thanks be to God.



Sunday 26 February

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11.

THE REVEREND CANON BARBARA STEWART

All of us have to make decisions. Sometimes it is a real struggle to make a good decision. We can, at times, be overwhelmed by the choices set before us and would just rather walk away and not make a decision at all! The word "wilderness" is a good way to describe how we sometimes feel when we are faced with serious choices and decisions. All signposts seem to be missing and we don't really know which way to go. Our choices may have serious consequences of which we are unaware. We know there are no perfect choices, but we sure would like some direction from someone or something, somehow!

Jesus faced such times of struggle. When he went into the wilderness after he was baptised he struggled mightily. He had to face the difficult task of deciding how he was going to live out his ministry of making the vision of God's kingdom a reality. We hear in scripture that the devil offered Jesus three ways of building that kingdom of God.

The first was to be relevant--to turn stones into bread. To be able to say "Hey, look what I can do!".

The second was to be spectacular--to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple and have God send angels to save him. That's how to get noticed and be famous!

The third was to be powerful--to be the king of all the kingdoms on earth. To have total power over everything.

To each of these offers, these temptations, Jesus said "NO". He saw that the devil was trying to appeal to his ego and the human longing for position and power. Jesus knew that to build his ministry on his own ego would be a betrayal of himself and of God. It would even be a betrayal of those who became his followers. So, Jesus made a completely different choice. He called people to follow him not for what they could get from Jesus but for what they could give to one another and to the world around them.

When we wander in the wilderness of decision-making and choice, we need to be clear about how and why we make our choice. Do we want to make ourselves look important and powerful? Are we looking for just a little bit of fame? If so, I expect we have left Jesus out of the decision-making process. When we find ourselves facing decisions, we can ask Jesus for direction to make the right choice. He has been in the same position and knows our temptations. Jesus tells us to look outward from self, to God's people and God's world. Choose to be Jesus' love in the world!

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY

GEORGE HERBERT: PSALM 32; 1 KINGS 19:1-8; HEBREWS 2:10-18

Eric Friesen



George Herbert at Bemerton, by William Dyce, showing the poet in his rectory garden with the spire of Salisbury Cathedral in the background.

This is the day we honour the memory and gifts of George Herbert (1593-1633), priest and metaphysical poet, a day in which our lectionary also calls for discipline and self-denial. In his collection of poems, *The Temple*, Herbert included a tribute to this season of Lent: "Welcome dear feast of Lent," he writes, who loves not Thee, he loves not Temperance or Authority," and he goes on to praise the "cleanness of sweet abstinence" and for these forty days at least try our best to be "as holy" as Our Lord.

Fasting in the religious sense, as opposed to dieting, is not in much favour these days. In addition to the embarrassment of having a cross of ashes smudge on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, we have to explain about no alcohol or any number of foregone pleasures, to our secular friends during these 40 days. So in my own life of Lenten seasons past, I have to admit I have found it hard to stick to a promise of fasting. I have found it to be more a regimen of denial, rather than a place that brings me to another level of consciousness in my faith and in my relationship to Our Lord.

But recently I found a Lenten Fasting recommendation from the late Terry Finlay, former Archbishop of Toronto, which moves us beyond just giving up Scotch and desserts, and focuses on a much more wholistic and positive approach to a Lenten attitude.

Fast from excess and feast on simplicity,
Fast from negatives and feast on alternatives,
Fast from discontent and feast on gratitude,
Fast from gossip and feast on silence,
Fast from self-concern and feast on compassion,
Fast from anxiety and feast on faith.

To which I can only say, Amen!

Tuesday 28 February

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

BRIAN HINCHEY

In 1960, I was a boy chorister in St George's Cathedral Choir. Boy choristers rehearsed Tuesday night, Friday night, Saturday morning, and sang three services on Sunday. The pews were full. Competition for congregation was minimal as everything but the churches was closed on Sundays. TV was black and white on 3 channels. It was a different world, but the Cathedral still lives on in much the same way.

So I was well and truly indoctrinated early into the Anglican Faith, and it seems to have held, as I'm still here. But what about potential new parishioners who walk through the door?

Our Sunday readings and psalms are often perplexing, mystifying or bewildering. Everyone knows that the Bible has been translated many and many times, likely by poorly educated monks. Our readings are usually preceded by minutes of dead air as the reader walks a hundred feet and then gets comfortable at the lectern. Then, depending on how microphone savvy the reader is, the message may or may not be audible.

Can readings not be chosen to be inspirational, uplifting and relevant to modern society? Today's psalm reading is fairly upbeat, as I read it from yet another translation, the "Good News Bible". However, the Genesis reading contains bloody fratricide by Cain and more mystery of bizarre moral reckoning. One shouldn't need to be a Bible scholar to benefit from readings at any service. I cringe every time I hear "Circumcision" in church.

It's hard enough to get bodies into pews these days without confusing them or just boring people to death.

After all, it's not 1960.

WEDNESDAY 1 MARCH

ST DAVID PSALM 32; EXODUS 34:1-9, 27-28; MATTHEW 18:10-14

Reagan Gale

In my work as a psychologist, I often meet with people who struggle with issues of guilt and shame. At times, individuals make a considerable effort trying not to think about what they've done, as a way of avoiding painful feelings. At other times, people have the opposite reaction: they get "stuck" on their wrongdoing(s) and cannot seem to escape from the distress and anguish they feel. No matter how we respond to our wrongdoings, I have seen firsthand how guilt and shame can affect individuals and families (see Exodus 43:7, as well as the literature on adverse childhood experiences and epigenetic trauma). In today's readings, the Psalmist writes about the toxic, harmful effect of guilt: "While I kept silent, my body wasted away . . . my strength was dried up" (Psalm 32: 3-4, NRSVE); "When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words began daylong groans. The pressure never let up" (ibid; The Message).

We hear repeatedly in today's readings about the transformational, curative power of God's forgiveness. The author in Exodus tells us that the LORD forgives immoral and unfair behavior, rebellion, and sin (34:7). The Psalmist describes the process of acknowledging their guilt to themselves and to God, and the subsequent relief, succor, and comfort they experience: "Then I let it all out. I said, 'I'll come clean about my failures to God'. Suddenly the pressure was gone – my guilt dissolved, my sin disappeared" (32:5, The Message).

The process of acknowledging our guilt before God requires courage; the courage to look inwards and admit to ourselves where we have behaved poorly, injuring others and going against the will of God. Sometimes, however, in the process of reflecting on our guilt, we may also come to understand that we are less responsible for events than we first believed. This is common in psychotherapy, especially with children, who will often internalize guilt and blame for events that are beyond their control. The process of taking responsibility for our actions, and seeking forgiveness, as well as the process of letting go of inappropriate, misplaced guilt, are gifts from a God who calls us back to a loving and full relationship with Him.

God calls us to reflect on our actions and inactions. Whatever the reason for our guilt, whether it is justified or not--He challenges us to take commensurate responsibility and relieves our suffering when we do. He offers us comfort, peace, and steadfast love (Psalm 32:10, NRSVE).

Thanks be to God!

Thursday 2 March

St Chad: Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; and Timothy 1:3-7

GUNNAR HEISLER

I have been brought up to believe that Christ's triumphant and very public pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the subsequent downfall, torture, condemnation, and execution at the hand of the establishment, and then, the miraculous resurrection together with the rapture to heaven in the presence of only 11 Disciples is absolutely correct as described in the bible. Relating that series of events to the three scriptural readings in the context of Lent is not readily obvious, if not impossible.

It was given that all events as presented are absolutely correct facts as described in the bible, and any questioning was deemed to be due to lack of faith, or worse, blasphemy. The scare of ending up in hell brainwashed any doubt from the boy, but age and education, together with experiencing life, have eased the fear, in exchange of doubt.

Psalm 121 is an assurance that there is a Lord (God) that will look out for my physical being and my soul without any conditions.

Isaiah 51: 1-3 is re-assurance that the Lord (God) will deliver, and to look for evidence in the Lord's (God's) past actions. Again, this is offered without conditions. However, verse 4 made it obvious that conditions such as laws and punishments are invoked. Perhaps it would be more relevant if this scripture element were to include verse 4?

Timothy 1: 3 is a warning of trends that put Christ's message of love (social conscience, respect for others, sharing, etc.) into question. It also warns of the existence of members that would spread untruths.

Considering all, I have come to conclude that there is relevance. False facts and news have been around for a long time, and moreover, to suspect that the purveyors could come from the inside circle. I am responsible to satisfy myself for the validity of information and news. Certainly, I am responsible for the correctness of anything that I convey.

Believing that the resurrection of Christ happened is fundamental to Christianity, and believing this in the age of reality can be a stretch, particularly as it was witnessed by only 11 people who happen to be the surviving Disciples. In this "Age of Reason" the story that Christ disappeared in some form of a fog is not believable. However, as Christ made good on his promise with the deliverance of Pentecost on the 40th day of his disappearance, and as the band of Disciples survived, there is reasons for me to be satisfied that these events happened in some form.

The three pieces of scripture have done little to ease the doubt, but rather have given me an impetus to search for the truth, whatever is presented.

It is my view that the church is failing in relating current affairs solely to the bible, and not reinforcing it with science based facts

FRIDAY 3 MARCH

BL. JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY: PSALM 121, MICAH 7: 18-20, ROMANS 3: 21-31

Brad Barbeau

If there were a prize for "Psalm of the Year" in 2022 the contest would be quite different than in earlier years. Usually a safe bet would be the 23rd psalm, but not last year. No, last year the award went to something different, something perhaps even unexpected: Psalm 121. The reason for this was that Psalm 121 was a favourite of our late Queen, Elizabeth II. In the weeks after her death, worldwide audiences heard not only the choir of Westminster Abbey sing this psalm but also the choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor, for the committal. Choirs across the Commonwealth, and around the world, sang this psalm at memorial services. At St George's Kingston, our choir sang it twice, once in the very well-known setting by the Sir Henry Walford Davies (Master of the King's Music 1934-41), but also a very different, modern, setting by Barry Rose (music director, serially, of Guildford Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral and St Alban's Cathedral).

The traditional title for this psalm, *Levavi oculus*, just itself inspires further investigation (unlike some others that are, to many 21st century eyes, just strange Latin words) to really understand the eight short verses.

To me, this psalm is ultimately about God's protection and care. When viewed through that lens, it has seemed clear to me how it could have been a favourite of the late Queen's, as these were, broadly, topics that I felt were frequently alluded to in her Christmas messages, for example. The psalm begins with the words, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help?" The psalmist recognizes that their help and protection comes from God and not from any earthly source, which is an interesting statement for a monarch to contemplate.

The psalm then goes on to describe the extent of God's protection, saying, "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." God never rests and is always watching over and caring for his people. The psalmist expresses trust in God's ability to protect humanity from any danger or harm that may come its way.

The psalm concludes with the declaration, "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, for evermore." The psalmist is confident that God will protect us for all time, no matter where we go or what we do. This psalm is a reminder that God is always present and always watching over us, and that we can trust in his protection and care.

Put simply, psalm 121 encourages us to lift our eyes to God and trust in his care, no matter what challenges we may face in life. All of us, even monarchs, can put our trust in God's care.



Saturday 4 March

Psalm 121, Isaiah 51: 4-8, Luke 3: 1-10

PHIL ROGERS

It almost seems that there are two readings from Isaiah today, for the opening of Chapter 3 of Luke's gospel contains a long quotation from the Hebrew prophetic book. And what a quotation it is! (Most people, like me, will hear in their mind's ear Handel's setting of the words as the opening tenor aria of Messiah.) Luke's placement of the ancient prophecy gives it new urgency. The prophecy speaks of a transformation of the world order which the Messiah will bring; everything will be changed, "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The position of the quotation is everything. Luke puts the words into John's mouth immediately after a long periodic sentence lists the rulers of Judea; Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas; all here and now will be subject to the new order. The metaphor is topographical—mountains will be levelled, valleys will be filled in, every crooked way will become straight. We translate this to mean that the world's injustice will be righted, the oppressed will be set free. As the Blessed Virgin Mary says in the gospel's first chapter, the mighty will be brought low, the humble and meek exalted, the hungry sated. This is the promise of God.

The reading from the ancient book itself is from the second part (chapters 40-55), the work of a prophet follower of Isaiah ben Amoz, writing much later, during or soon after the Babylonian captivity of Israel. He offers hope to Israel and a promise of a better life to come. In writings filled with confidence in God's message of consolation, he urges trust in God's promises and teaching. The work opens (in chapter 40) with God saying "Comfort, O comfort my people" (more Handel), and the quotation that Luke uses comes immediately after. God promises an end to Israel's life of tribulation. Then, in today's reading God addresses us directly: listen to me "you who seek the Lord" (v 1). Listen and heed, for the Lord brings law and justice. God says that everything in heaven and earth will change, "the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats," but "my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended." (NRSV) This is the promise of God.

Psalm 121 is one of the "Songs of Ascent," a group of 15 poems in the psalter so labeled. They may have been songs that the temple singers sang on the steps to the temple (so "gradual psalms"), or that pilgrims sang on their way to Jerusalem to attend major feasts, or on their way home. This psalm is a dialogue: in verses 1-2 a speaker who is implicitly concerned about all the physical and spiritual dangers of this world asks, "where may I find security?" The questioner may be intended to be not an individual, but a metonymy for Israel, as verse 4 suggests. This figure is like those who seek after righteousness whom Isaiah addresses. His eyes are fixed on mountain heights, where divinities are traditionally to be found. The remaining verses of the psalm provide the response; security resides in God the creator, your constant guardian, who protects you from any harm, whose watchfulness is forever. It's a song of absolute assurance to the questioner. God offers protection from "all evil": "he will keep your life." And the protection of God will last "from this time on and for evermore." (NRSV) This is the promise of God.

SUNDAY 5 MARCH

MARCH, LENT II: GENESIS 12: 1-4A, PSALM 121, ROMANS 4: 1-5, 13-17, MATTHEW 17: 1-9

Lieutenant Colonel the Reverend Canon Catherine Askew

"I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?"

Over the nearly twenty-five years that I have been ordained, I have often stood in a church, or a grassy field, or in a community centre and I have repeated these words of the Psalmist. As I stood in those many diverse places, I have been in front of families who grieve. And between them and myself lay the coffin of someone they dearly loved.

In their grief, they were laid low. In grief, in my life, I have also been laid low. And as I have sat in my depths, I have looked up; simply because sometimes there was nowhere further I could look down.

In first few years of my ordained ministry, I served a parish in the Fraser Canyon in British Columbia. Lytton was the site of one of the most notorious of the Anglican Indian Residential Schools. It is a place that has seen so much suffering yet it is a place of immense beauty. It is there that the slow-moving waters of the Thompson River swirl into the fast-moving Fraser River as it cuts its way through the canyon. The hills are dry and covered with sagebrush and wild roses. And above those hills the mountains rise to meet an immense sky with rarely any clouds.

Yet the true beauty of Lytton is in the survivors of the Residential School abuses, the survivors of racism, in the community members who have survived rock slides, and wildfires, and mill closures. For generations now, the people there, led so often by the grandmothers of the community, sat in their grief and they looked up. They sat and they looked beyond the twisted tissue damp with tears in their hands. They looked beyond themselves and saw one another. In the people around them they saw the people who would lead them up out of the depths, up the hills, up the mountains, up into God's creation.

As I drive to work in the mornings out here in Victoria, BC, I pass by gorges with water cascading through. I see tree covered mountains and bright green moss softening the hard edges of rocks, and trees, and even buildings. And as I park my car near the shipyard, I see the mighty Pacific Ocean before me.

Despite all that beauty though, when I think of lifting my eyes to the hills, it is not actually of hills. It is of loving communities who become that help that comes from the Lord. It is of people like those who work tirelessly at Lunch by George. It is of volunteers in the church and community. It is of people who hear God's call and lift up the broken hearted.

Monday 6 March

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

DOUGLAS J.FEAR

Good Friday morning 13 years ago I lost the love of my life. She was young, pretty, a mum to two great children, kind and loved by anyone whose life she had touched. She was just fifty-four. It was sudden. At the time and for several years afterward, I harboured much anger at God about her loss. It seemed so unjustified and unfair.

Numbers 21, verses 4-9 speaks of railing against God and the serpents loosed among us. The loss of Ella was my serpent. I cried out to God for deliverance from the grief and anguish, asking why he set this serpent upon me. Verse 9 speaks of a poisonous serpent of bronze set upon the pole by Moses. Today that bronze serpent represents the calling of healing and health. God knows the doctors did everything in their power to keep her with us, acting with the utmost skill, knowledge and care bestowed upon them through their dedication and training.

So how are these events tied together for me? The serpent, Ella's illness, was a plague upon my house and my soul. But how do I reconcile her loss through this passage?

I too was bitten by the serpent. I spoke against the Lord God, questioning his works asking what sense the death of my beloved Eleanor made. The healing powers of the bronze serpent were for nought. But the bronze serpent also represents our faith in the healing powers of God, not in our own faith but in the call to put our trust in Him. Through discernment and my eventual return to the Church, I heard Christ speaking to me through the words of others, saying "Her work is done here. I have called her home."

Psalm 128 speaks of fearing the Lord, walking in His ways and eating the fruits of our labours. I, like many of us, have indeed laboured and with it has come happiness and contentment. With my beloved Ella I had realized the fruit of the vine. With her loss, work became my solace. Using the talents given me by God I continue to use them in the best ways I can to please the Lord, dedicating my work to Him, giving thanks for my abilities. Through these things I have realized joy and contentment, reconciling the loss of my love in the fruits of my labours and once again feeling blessed, contributing in my small way to the prosperity of my community.

Finally, Hebrews 3, v.1-6, reconciles my challenge to God some years ago. I once again hold firm to my faith in Christ and in all God's house through the words "we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope" Hope, after all, is the anticipation of our dreams through the trust we place in God.

TUESDAY 7 MARCH

PERPETUA: PSALM 128, ISAIAH 65: 17-25, ROMANS 4: 6-13

Theo Bruce

God is telling us that he is going to create a new world for us. In this day and age we see the damage we as humans have done to the environment; all the promises of climate change that have been predicted for decades are coming true. In doing so they have wreaked havoc on many parts of the world. In addition we have massive unrest and protests around the world, an unjust war in the Ukraine, caused by a bully who wanted to conquer extra territory, rampant violence and people starving around the world. It doesn't seem that our world is in good shape at all.

In the middle ages people could cut trees for heat, hunt for food and live simpler lives. But after the industrial revolution things changed. Populations increased and so did expectations, leading to a point where an overpopulated world could no longer support the way of life that we all felt we deserved. In the poorer countries this has resulted in their becoming even poorer, more people are starving or homeless. But that didn't stop the richer countries from still expecting a high standard of living. Now we are paying the price. But God is intervening, to create a new world. A world where people work together to ameliorate the effects of our rampant overuse of resources. In this world he is promising that those who follow him and do his will will flourish.

God is always there for those who choose to follow him. But following him does not mean getting all the material things we want, but rather serving him and our fellow humans, supporting those who need it and spreading God's word to those who have not heard it. For God's new creation to become a reality we have to put others first, and humble ourselves. Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God . (Micah 6:8)

Wednesday 8 March

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

LINDA MORGAN

The psalmist proclaims, "blessed is everyone who fears the Lord and walks in his ways" and then goes on to detail the blessings that can be expected. A rather happy little piece.

Ezekiel is (as usual) not quite so happy. Yahweh is going to bring the House of Israel home, cleanse them, return their lands to them, BUT not because of their own merit or for their sake but the sake of his holy name. They should be ashamed; they should loathe themselves. A proper parental scolding.

In John's gospel we have the story of the adulterous women caught and brought for punishment (stoning). The scribes and Pharisees are out to trap Jesus and ask him what should be done with her. In the end the message is that he who is without sin should cast the first stone, and they all go away. To the woman he says go and sin no more.

We can get the thread of justice and reward through the pieces as well as the contrast of a stern deity versus a kinder gentler one. Perhaps it is worth pausing and reflecting on how we behave and how we judge others. Upstairs in the Great Hall there is a Community Program which serves meals to those who need them. (5 days a week; I would like it open 7 days). We (the congregation) periodically get asked for contributions of food, clothing and money to support this effort and we respond as we are able. We volunteer to prepare the meals and to distribute them. We are proud of what we have done. But what happens when we encounter one of the clients of that program on the street, panhandling, pushing a cart full of "everything they own," in the library warming up on a bitterly cold day. How do we view them? They may not be clean, or smell particularly good; they may behave in peculiar ways. They are the "others," not one of us. They did something to get themselves in this mess. They should be able to get themselves together, clean up their act. Am I too harsh? Maybe. How about "there but for the grace of God go I"; or you or your child or grandchild.

We are too ready to complain about the money spent on heating the church, the lack of space for our organization, the hymns; the floors, the size of the print in the leaflet, the newsletter, parking. We are being the stern parent, but there are many more important things we need to focus on. Societal Justice for the poor, the unhoused, the disenfranchised. The "others."

Wednesday 8 March continued

Now relating that to the readings. We are blessed (we are lucky); parental scoldings really don't fix much. We can blame others, but we are part of the problem—and the solution if we want to be, if we don't look away. Would I want the church open as a warming centre ? Yes. Would I want people to be able to come in and sit and have a coffee and read or put a puzzle together or play cards or rest for the day? Yes; and a whole bunch of other things . Our church membership is shrinking. (God said feed my sheep, not count them.). Do we drag our heels and try to keep things as they are? Or do we , like the Sisters of Providence , recognise what is coming and begin the process of turning into something different.?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
Micah 6:8 (KJV)

THURSDAY 9 MARCH

PSALM 95, EXODUS 16: 1-8, COLOSSIANS 1: 15-23

Geoff Pratt

Is there one God or are there many Gods? Does it matter? Let us consider this question in the passages of scripture to be reflected on today.

Psalm 95 is mostly a very happy, joyous psalm. "Let us raise a joyful song to the Lord." "Sing psalms of triumph." "He is a great King above all Gods." "He is our God!" In those days many other Gods were worshipped, causing much conflict. The Hebrews claimed that their God was Number One and superior to all other Gods. Apparently no one doubted the existence of more than one God. Could it be that the followers of all these Gods were following the same God in different ways? If it is one God that created all things and creatures, why should it not be so, one God clothed differently for different people? Thus the one God cannot be exclusively Hebrew. God is universal. Humankind got it wrong.

In Exodus 16, 1-8 the Israelites complained because the wilderness they were passing through after leaving Egypt was unpleasant compared to the fleshpots of Egypt they had enjoyed. In response God sent food from heaven to test them to see if they would live according to his teachings or not. My point here is that other Gods are alleged to have performed similar miracles and thus could be the same God that performed this miracle. This is probably a stretch but necessary for this reflection!

When Paul writes to the Colossians, Jesus has arrived. "He is the image of the invisible God." He has primacy over all creation. "The whole universe has been created through him." This is one of the mystical passages about Jesus. It places him on a pedestal. This makes it difficult to bring him down to earth where he most definitely was and still is according to many of us Christians. But maybe we still have him on a pedestal. He is the Cosmic Christ who is here, there and everywhere. In fact, according to this view he dwells within all of us humans as well as everywhere else. How mystical can you get? It is difficult to imagine him in all the billions of people around the world, good and bad and in between!

The exclusiveness of Jesus [we maintain he was the son of God born of a virgin and maybe God himself} makes it difficult to sustain the position that all the other gods around are the same god in different disguises. But consider this, do you think that worshippers in the different denominations are worshipping the same God? Or how about other religions? Are the Hindus worshipping the same God as the Muslims? How about the Mormons and Buddhists? I have heard that some Jews maintain we are worshipping three Gods: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

THURSDAY 9 MARCH CONTINUED

What does it matter? Well, it matters because religion has been the cause of much suffering over the centuries and until we can accept that we are all one despite our differences, the situation will stay the same. But is it possible that humankind in all its variety can accept that we are all interconnected and one? We must downplay our way of seeing things in duality terms, an us and them mentality. Julian of Norwich came up with the word Oneing to describe the need for us to come to a non-duality way of expressing ourselves. Meister Eckhart encourages us to “separate ourselves from all twoness.” He also says that in breakthrough, “I learn that God and I are one,” which means to me that all of us and God are one.

In conclusion, I prefer to think there is one God with many faces. The face of God for us is Jesus and what a wonderful face of God Jesus is. His greatest teaching for me is about love, a teaching that is also upheld in many religions. The teaching is the fundamental call—law if you will—to love God and one another as oneself in a way that causes action in the care of the earth, its creatures and all humankind. Without love, there is no life worth living and little chance of reconciliation among all peoples, little chance of avoiding the extinction of humankind.

Lord have mercy!

Friday 10 March

Exodus 16:1-21, Psalm 95, Ephesians 2:11-22

CAROLYN PRATT

When reading these scripture passages I found what stood out was the theme of peace, of "peaceful unity with God." Our world is not a peaceful place at this time in history. There has been the natural disaster of an earthquake in Turkey, a human-made disaster of war in the Ukraine, an increase of shootings throughout the United States and an increase of violence in our own country, to name a few situations. Was the world ever at peace? Perhaps that is why the theme of peace drew my attention.

In the Exodus story of God's people wandering in the desert, complaining of hunger and feeling abandoned, God hears their complaint and gives them food, enough for their needs. No more, no less. There was sufficient food, which they called "manna," for everyone for the day. It was a gift from God to bring peace to the people and to bring the people closer to God. The gift was accepted and once again they were in "peaceful unity with God." God the creator heard the complaint and provided what was needed to bring peace.

Psalm 95 is a joyous and beautiful psalm reminding us to praise and thank God the creator of all for what we have. The psalm also warns us not to repeat the mistakes of the past. The reference to Meribah and Manassah is to a time when the people rebelled against God, resulting in their 40 years of wandering in the desert. God in anger swore "they shall not enter my rest." This was not a time of "peaceful unity with God".

Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians tells the Gentiles that now that they know Jesus they can come closer to God by following Jesus' example. Jesus encouraged the tearing down of the walls that hinder our ability to know, understand and accept each other. Jesus lived in peaceful unity with God and was showing us the value of that peace. It gave Jesus confidence to face difficulties. It gave Jesus strength to carry out his ministry. It is that "peace that passes all understanding."

For me that "peace which passes all understanding" creates the space for a clear mind to come to informed decisions. Through contemplative prayer (centering prayer) there is a time of resting in the presence and peace of Christ and the love of God. Trusting in God's love for all creation not only brings peace but also brings a willingness to look for peaceful solutions. We will encounter difficulties. There will be disasters and hardships in the world which will disturb and sadden us. These we can meet with calmness and care through "peaceful unity with God."

SATURDAY 11 MARCH

PSALM 95; EXODUS 16: 27-35; JOHN 4: 1-6

Marie and Chris McElvaine

Psalm 95 is probably familiar and better known as the *Venite* included in Morning Prayer. It is a joyous song of thanksgiving for all that we enjoy. After years of following man-made rules, the Psalmist feeds us this clear re-evaluation of how to enjoy the gifts of life. This psalm guides us to be thankful and acknowledge our God who created us for a purpose—take extra time to examine our actions daily, and quiet time to listen to the Spirit.

In today's Exodus reading we hear that the "manna" provided by God to the Israelites should be gathered and stored so that future generations might benefit and understand what God had provided to their ancestors. The "manna" referred to here could well be interpreted as the spiritual values which we hold and try to pass on to our family and friends. There is a great concern that these may be lost if we are not diligent in holding them and passing them on to other generations.

John's rendition of the time Jesus requested a drink of water from a Samaritan woman is a clear message against discrimination and an admonishment to honour the teachings of God. We need to be reminded that even here in Kingston there is evident discrimination. The homeless, the hungry, those of other faiths and members of the LGBTQ community need to be supported and treated fairly.

All these readings cause us to stop and reflect on what we have and enjoy, and they remind us to be thankful and to be mindful and generous to all those in need.

Sunday 12 March

Lent III: Exodus 17: 1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5: 1-11, John 4: 5-12

THE VENERABLE BOB HALES

I grew up attending a little rural Anglican church. In those days, it was the custom in many Anglican churches, large or small, to have Holy Communion once a month. For us at my family church, it was a necessity because our worship most times was led by a Lay Reader or, in summer and sometimes during the winter months as well, by a student from one of the two Anglican seminaries in Toronto. Once such student was Gordon Hendra whom some will recall as a priest of this diocese and who, in retirement and health permitted, attended St. George's.

Although that little parish of 4 churches is always close to my heart and mind, the Psalm (95) for this Sunday's readings brought it further forward. This psalm is known by most of us with Anglican blood running in our veins as the Venite. In the 16th century when Cranmer's first edition of the Book of Common Prayer came into being and in most if not all the subsequent Prayer Books, the first Psalm to be said or, in larger churches, sung, in our Morning Prayer Service was this one which invited us to "Come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation." Psalm 95:1.

I cannot recall any time when Psalm 95 particularly comforted or inspired me but taken as a part of the whole, it and other parts of our services formed me and established the roots of a faith that has sustained me ever since.

Going back to the church, by the time I was 12, I first learned and later memorized all the parts of Morning or Evening Prayer. It was also in that church and at about that same age that I not only fired up the wood furnace but also read and even led in worship and, until a vacuum motor became available, hand-pumped the bellows on the organ.

The summer when I was 15, our Lay Reader soon to become our first parish priest in years, said to me that he was going on holidays for a week, and I would do the services in each of the 4 churches of parish. By the 4th church, I was feeling teenage confident when I walked out to start the service and there looking back at me were several cottagers including 4 men wearing clerical collars. In 1954, clergy wore their collars to church. I survived my fright even though my teenage cockiness left me. These clergy (one the Dean of the Cathedral in Toronto and one a professor at Wycliffe College) were far more complimentary about my sermon than was my brother-in-law. His comments may have been because he drove me around and listened to it 3 times.

We all have faith journeys and memories of how they were by the grace of God and locations. Psalm 95 led to sharing a few of mine.

This Lent, David the psalmist invites us to "come and kneel before the Lord our maker."
(Psalm 95: 7)

MONDAY 13 MARCH

PSALM 81, GENESIS 24: 1-27, JOHN 1: 1-9 (SUBSTITUTED FOR 2 JOHN 1: 1-13)

Larry Norman

After reviewing today's readings, I focused on John's Gospel. This reading, "In the beginning was the word" is familiar to each of us. As I read the first thirteen verses I noticed that the word "light" appeared six times. We are told that Jesus came to be the light of the world. I leave the reflection of this reading to those with more capacity than I. I would like to reflect on the word "light".

Light has been used throughout the ages to suggest "good" while darkness is used to suggest evil.

Jesus spent most of his life making changes to the society of his day. I consider Jesus to be a significant change agent. Jesus used stories and parables to shed light on the issues of his day. I ask each of you to reflect upon your favorite gospel story or parable and see how Jesus focuses light on a particular situation. Also ask yourself if that light could or should still shine today.

If you accept that Jesus was a change agent and we are His followers I wonder why we have such a difficult time accepting change. Resistance to change both in my working life and in the church has always mystified me. Do we not shine the light in an appropriate manner?

Our cathedral is undertaking a visioning exercise. These exercises are useful but the movement towards the vision, step by step, will require each of us to accept some level of change in all we do. We will need to shine the light on areas that may be uncomfortable to some but that is the nature of change. I feel too often that we are a church with roots in the past struggling to live in the present. We need to become a church with roots in the past living very much in the present while leading to the future. We have examples of, living in the present in Lunch by George and our support of refugee families.

In conclusion I'd like to share a couple of my favorite lines containing the notion of light. The first is Leonard Cohen's poem/song "Anthem"

there is a crack, a crack in everything ,/That's how the light gets in

The second is Amanda Gorman's poem that she read at President Biden's inauguration, from which the last two lines are:

For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.

Tuesday 14 March

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

JANE BALDWIN

One can't help but notice that there are themes in the Old Testament that persist down through the ages to this day. Genesis 29: 1-14 speaks to us about relationships and reconciliation, messages that today resonate from the pulpit and the front steps of the Cathedral on a weekly basis. John sums it up in Chapter 13:34-35, when Christ admonishes us to love one another, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Such a simple concept but so difficult to live out in today's world.

Lent gives us a time for reflection about our relationship with God and how we might, on a personal level, live out our Christian faith. We are bombarded in the media with the ongoing strife in the wider world where instances of hatred, anger and power struggles dominate. Examples of human kindness, relationship building, and reconciliation are sometimes hard to find. In Canada, our first nations peoples have had an immense struggle to regain their territories and their culture and reconciliation with these peoples has been hard to come by. So it brings up the question, what can I do to make a difference and live out the life that Christ has asked of me?

Genesis 29: 1-14 reminds us that these very human concepts of relationship-building and reconciliation develop at home with our family and our neighbours. As children, we develop relationships with our parents and our siblings. As we become older and more independent, we learn to negotiate the world by using the relationship skills we have learned to make our way. Are there squabbles? You bet, and we learn forgiveness and reconciliation through the mending of these disputes and restoring peace in our relationships. As Christians, we build relationships within our church community and outside of our church community. It is in the living out of one's Christian faith and the developing of these loving relationships that we let our neighbours and friends know about the Good News of our faith.

WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH

PSALM 81; JEREMIAH 2: 4 – 13; JOHN 7: 14 – 31, 37 – 39

Peter Gower

At a time when pews and seats are emptying, these readings remind those who remain why we continue to attend services or worship in our own way. "Sing with joy to God our strength and raise a loud shout to the God of Jacob. Raise a song and sound the timbrel, the merry harp and the lyre" (Psalm 81:1--2, BAS) And God answered the psalmist "You called on me in trouble and I saved you." When we are in trial or tribulation, there is hope and help: "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." Psalm 81:11)

Years later, Jeremiah writes on God's exhortations for His people to listen to Him: "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? . . . For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2: 4-13). Empty pews indeed; people who once had faith and devotion, and now have only faith." "[T]hy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God" (Jer. 2.19). When our faith wanders and rambles, we receive these harsh words from our God.

Many years later, an adult Jesus, speaking in the Temple, was asked where he got so much wisdom. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his [God's] will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7: 16--17). This obviously was difficult for the listeners to accept, and perhaps difficult for some of us. But St John notes that the crowd could not expect a Messiah to give more miraculous signs than Jesus had done. (John 8: 31)

Doubt has always been a part of the human condition, and some are more doubting than others, and allow their uncertainty to dominate their lives. St John knew this and reported "Jesus . . . cried . . . If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7: 37--38), and John explained that by living waters Jesus meant the Holy Spirit. I hope that today's readings can be seen in a positive light, reminding us of how we should be. Though our world is very different from when Jesus was with us, the lessons, warnings and encouragements are the same.

Thursday 16 March

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

DOREEN WHATLEY

I am writing this after coming in from a lovely, snowy walk through Lemoine Point Conservation Area. Psalm 23 is in harmony with the way I feel. It provides a sense of peace and comfort and it is no surprise it is such a popular and beloved Psalm. The Psalm's first three verses speak about the tranquility that the Lord provides to his followers. Like a shepherd he cares for our needs and restores us. He provides the guidance we need by teaching us the right paths. Verses four to six give assurance and peace. As our shepherd he never fails us along life's journey. The knowledge of God's protection and presence are a great comfort. We have peace in life and in death. There is the element of celebration in the preparation of a table and the anointment of oil with God as the host. The Psalm provides the assurance through our life and after that he is with us.

The reading from 1 Samuel is a complete change from Psalm 23. The first verses describe Samuel's direction to King Saul to obey God's clear command to destroy Amalek for attacking Israel. That attack on Israel is described in Deuteronomy 25: 17-19: "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on the journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (NIV)

God's command was to destroy all that the Amalekites had and not to spare them—total judgement. It was a test of obedience. King Saul attacked the Amalekites, destroying all the people but he took their King Agag alive and the soldiers took the best of the sheep, and oxen (all that was of value). Everything that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed. King Saul had partially or selectively obeyed God. In his position he set an example by taking King Agag alive and his soldiers followed his example by selecting and taking good livestock. He returned triumphant, even setting up a monument to himself, seeking his own honour and gains. King Saul made excuses for not obeying God trying to justify his actions and escape judgement.

Reading through the verses of the letter to the Ephesians in January, which is the time of year to make changes or resolutions, I find the message is one of making changes—changes of behaviour that reflect our Christian beliefs. What the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians applies to today. He is telling them to stop lying and speak truthfully to their neighbours, for all are of one community. He recognizes that anger is an emotion but that going forward you need to deal with the anger and control reactions. "Do not let the sun go down while you are angry".

Paul speaks directly to thieves: you must no longer steal but work for what you need and share with others what you can. He says, you must no longer let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs. This reminds me of something my Father-in-law always said, "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything."

Verses 31 and 32 are instructions that perhaps are needed even more today than in Paul's time, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you."

FRIDAY 17 MARCH

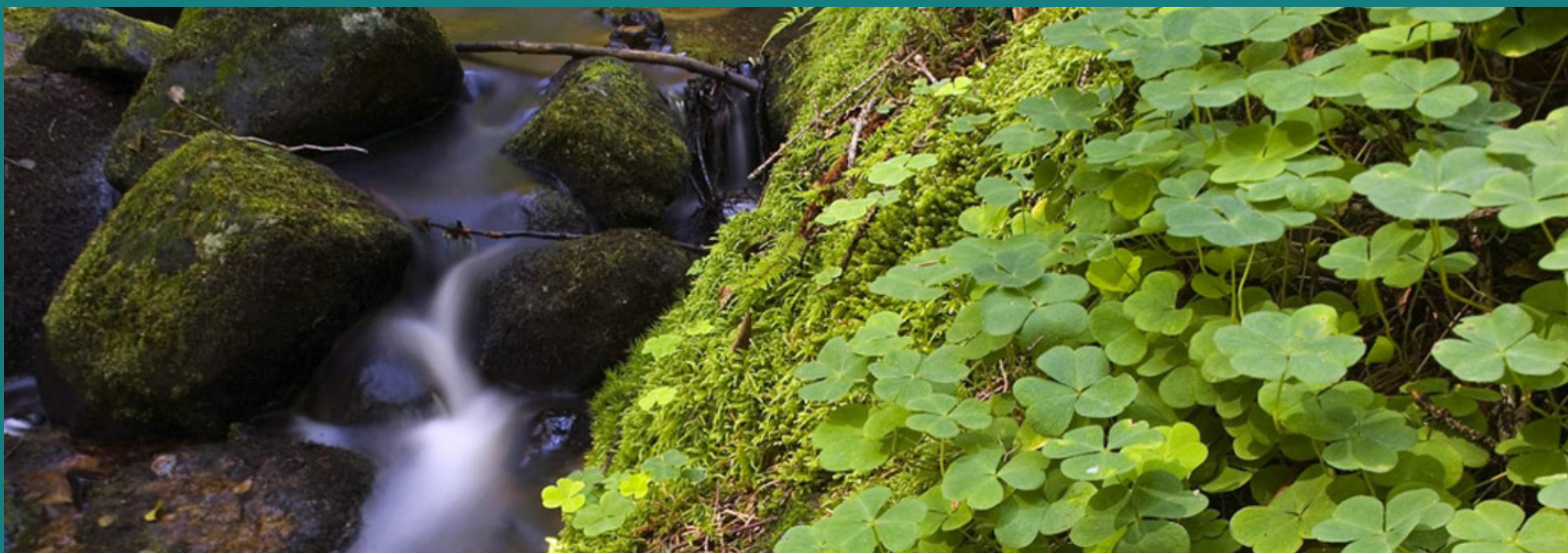
PSALM 23; 1 SAMUEL 15:22-31; EPHESIANS 5:1-9

Doug Green

The readings for today invite us to consider our own personal Christian journey. Paul's appeal in Ephesians lays out a convincing "format" for Christian living, presenting arguments and prescriptions, as well as obligations, which we are expected to live by. The thrust of Paul's appeal is that Christians should live out God's plan through a "oneness" with Christ. During this Lenten period especially, we may wish to consider how close to this mark our own Christian life may be!

In Samuel we have a window on some of the turmoil evident during the selection of Saul as King of Israel. (Remember, Saul was the first king of united Israel, the one before David!) It appears that Saul is having a tough time, or if expressed in today's terms, he is failing the "selection process". His shortcomings are evident, including dubious behaviour, pride, lack of faith, and above all, disobedience towards God. He thinks that he is better than everyone else, and yet he is not even aware of it. Later on as the story goes, he does make the grade and he lands the job. Perhaps the point is that all of us, even kings-in-waiting, have to deal with limitations and flaws. Sounds familiar, eh? Sin is a feature of the human condition! So, during this Lenten period, considering both Paul's "list" and Saul's quest, let's consider our own story, whatever that may be. The lesson presented in these readings is that all of us from all walks of life should endeavor to live under the sovereignty and judgement of God. And perhaps Lent may be an appropriate time to consider such a self-exploration exercise.

Now that the heart is beating, read Psalm 23 and welcome to this "zone of comfort." It is my favorite Psalm. I used to teach Project Management at RMC and one early lesson underscored the importance of a project "charter," an initial and concise concept paper intended to describe the planned direction and outcome of the project and to give a brief idea on how we are going to get to the end of our efforts. I consider Psalm 23 as God's "charter" for our Christian journey. In a few beautiful words, it addresses a purpose, a direction and an end-state. Our Christian project is that journey to the Kingdom of God. I would guess that many of us know this Psalm by heart, many enjoy reciting or singing it, and most times it gives us a feeling of comfort and confidence. So, as we finish today's readings via the 23rd psalm, we may ask ourselves if we fit the "framework" described earlier in Ephesians, and/or consider that we are not dissimilar to Saul during his dilemma. Blessings, as you reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus and prepare your hearts and minds for the celebration of Easter.



Saturday 18 March

Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 15: 32-34, John 1: 1-9

BRITTANY FRIESEN

Before starting my travels to Saskatchewan for the winter break, I spent an evening in Toronto with a dear friend. We stumbled upon a yellow-wall-papered coffee shop near the University and, looking through the glass onto the darkening street, began to talk about vocation. We have both found ourselves drawn to the intimate care of others; she is pursuing training as a psychotherapist, while I continue to work as a hospital nurse.

I shared with her my heaviness of spirit: the health care system is fracturing. I show up to my shifts and see newly graduated nurses struggling to keep up with the overwhelming patient load. I feel the exhaustion of the seasoned nurses who slowly slip away into non-hospital work. I bear the frustration of my patients as they wait longer for hurried, distracted care. I see the suffering of my patients, the distress of my colleagues, and feel my heart grow weary.

She responded by sharing a phrase she had heard from another counselor at her work: Valley walker. It describes those who share in the suffering of another person, and she suggested its relevance both for counsellors and nurses. That phrase has rooted in my heart. It reminds me that what I see in my weariness is the shadows.

Psalm 23 depicts the tender care of God towards David. God accompanies him through places of darkness and suffering, while also remembering his human heart's need to dwell in places of restoration, stillness, and joy.

That same companionship is promised to me. God joins me in the hospital wards, seeing everything that I see and caring profoundly for each person. He also leads me to places of rest in horse-filled paddocks, brumal lakeshore trails and early morning breakfasts; each one tending to my soul.

Thanks be to God.

SUNDAY 19 MARCH

LENT IV: (GOSPEL FOR HOLY EUCHARIST) JOHN 9: 1-41

The Venerable John M. Robertson

Almost all the really worthwhile insights in life occur gradually. Even when they seem to be there suddenly, we spend the rest of our lives finding out what they really mean (what it really means to respect and appreciate a new friend, for example, discovered in an entirely new cultural setting miles away from familiar surroundings). In our relationship with our Lord, things are no different. We may have discovered him quite suddenly, a moment in worship, a weekend on retreat, a conversation with a new friend. It could have been in a most ordinary and unpromising place. In my own faith journey, I am grateful for the privilege of growing up in a committed Episcopalian family in a university setting (Rutgers University in the City of New Brunswick), son of Canadian parents, participating for as long as I can remember at historic Christ Church, a wonderful, active parish known for its fine liturgies with great music). In retrospect, my insights and discoveries were very gradual and, while fulfilling, were not particularly remarkable. That is, until I spent a summer in 1964 in several First Nations communities not far from Prince Rupert, British Columbia, fulfilling a summer field-work assignment requirement of Trinity College, Toronto. Bishop Eric Munn of Caledonia invited me to serve as a student in the Mission of Christ the King, serving a number of Tsimshian and Nishga Anglican reserves in the western part of this vast northern diocese. In my first week I met, interestingly, a blind youth in his late teens and immediately thought of this Gospel passage. Frank had been born blind, a very friendly, outgoing son of a Tsimshian Elder who guided me patiently as I came to understand and appreciate the cultural ways and traditions of the communities we were assigned to serve. The clergy posted at the Mission travelled to various villages for days on end, returning to the Mission House for community-building, services and preparation for the next round of visits. Much of the ministry centred around pastoral care and teaching. Frank frequently travelled with us to several of these very Anglican reserves –I don't know how we would have been able to be helpful without his thoughtful guidance and enthusiasm. I have been so very fortunate in having met Frank and other members of his extended family who to this day have kept in touch with me. Frank and his highly committed family members have deepened and extended my faith. Looking back over the years, I realise I have spent a lifetime learning what knowing our Lord means, and am reassured that it is through relationships and a sense of community that my journey continues to develop.

SUNDAY 19 MARCH CONTINUED

Our Gospel passage says that Jesus gave sight to the blind youth. People who had known him blind were so astonished, they thought at first it was a look-alike (v. 9). They then brought some prominent people, some Pharisees, who seemed blind to the reality of what had happened. All they could see was that Jesus had acted on the Sabbath day and was breaking the Law. It followed that Jesus was a sinner, so he could not have been a healer! They simply could not admit that the youth had been healed. They called his parents. Was this their son whom everyone knew had been blind? Of course it was. The leaders turned again to the youth. He stuck to his story. It is interesting to see how the tough questioning affects the youth. It makes him even more aware of what he owes to Jesus, and more aware that Jesus embodies a power and a love and a grace that these people around him, for all their influence, do not have. In the end the group contemptuously dismisses him. Jesus encounters him again and the youth recognizes an even greater authority that calls for his allegiance. This story is about a person who came to see more and more clearly while other people became more and more blind to the same reality. Life is like that. There are those who recognize the power and love of our Lord, like my friend Frank and his family, and there are those completely unable and unwilling to do so. In this story the Pharisees assumed certain things, such as the law about the Sabbath, not only to be true (which it was) but to be the boundaries of truth (which it was not). Today we can make assumptions that healing happens only in certain technical and scientific ways, all of which are valid. But we can also be blind to the hidden ways in which our Lord can heal through our memories, our thinking, or emotions, and our relationships with others, if we are prepared to be opened to his healing love. Sometimes it is through a friend, sometimes it will be through a professional counsellor, sometimes a doctor. Sometimes, quite often in my view, from a parish church perspective, our Lord has many ways to reach us as we give thought to our own personal and corporate sense of mission, ministry and purpose. I often think of Helen Keller, blind and deaf since age two, and her famous quotation, "Worse than being blind is to see and have no vision."

Monday 20 March

St. Cuthbert, the Celtic Abbot of the “Holy Isle” of Lindisfarne : Psalm 146, Isaiah 59: 9-19 , Acts 9: 1-20

LEIGH SMITH

The psalmist praises the Lord, in whom he/she puts their full trust. We are reminded that God created everything and is also the source of all the many acts of social justice that we should perform.

Isaiah writes of the human condition utterly devoid of hope, following persistent denial of the Lord by selfish and sinful action. In response, God is described as an avenger. Verse 20, however, states that God will come to Zion as a Redeemer for those who turn from such transgressions.

In Acts we are introduced to Saul, an agent of the chief priests of the temple, who was resolute in locating disciples of Jesus to imprison them. He had been present at and had consented to the stoning of Stephen. He went to the high priest to ask for letters to the Damascus synagogues allowing him to continue this obsession. Coming near the city, he was suddenly blinded by heavenly light and heard Jesus' voice. He was led into the city. A Damascus disciple of Jesus, Ananias, who knew of Saul's brutal actions, learned of his presence. In a vision he was told to find Saul and restore his sight. Ananias bravely entered the house, prayed and Saul saw clearly, was converted in faith and baptized. From then on, he travelled widely, proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God.

TUESDAY 21 MARCH

BL. THOMAS KEN: PSALM 146, ISAIAH 42: 14-21, COLOSSIANS 1: 9-14

Vanessa Michael

I have always found reading the letters of Paul to be a hard task. I find them dense and in places difficult to piece together. There seem to be so many important ideas that Paul is trying to explain that I tend to get lost in the weeds. This passage from Colossians is another such thicket for me. However, there are a few key ideas that stand out that I have found valuable.

It is useful to remember that Colossians is written to a very new Christian community with all the zeal and promise of new converts. This passage forms part of a prayer celebrating this. It then points the way to developing maturity in faith. Paul prays for a growth in the knowledge of God, not the speculative knowledge so prized by the philosophers, but the practical knowledge of loving God by loving other people. Paul prays that they will know God by bearing fruit in every good work. This implies that the Colossians live out their new zeal and grow through being a loving part of a community.

This leads us into a paradox, if we follow the way Paul lays out for the Colossians we arrive at a place where we are already part of the Kingdom of God. It is a place where we are surrounded by the fruits of the Spirit pouring out of our own lives and out of the lives of others. However, this is not the full reality; we remain surrounded by a broken humanity. We also have to acknowledge that our own brokenness often prevents the full joy of the Spirit flowing through us and into the world. We are already living in the Kingdom and not yet living in the Kingdom.

When I read these prayers of Paul peppered throughout his letters, I think he is praying not only for those young Christians but also for me. There are many times in my day when I am not filled with the gifts of the Spirit. I can get very comfortable in my little corner of the Kingdom. I spend time thinking about loving God but not doing a lot to love the people with whom God surrounds me. Yet Paul urges me, through this prayer, to keep growing, to keep reaching out and to keep believing that every small act of love is a reflection of God's love.

To me it seems a great encouragement, especially during Lent, that I am part of two Kingdoms and that through diligently practicing acts of love, the Kingdom of the Beloved grows while the other gets pushed back. I fail often in this duty to love, this call to allow the Spirit to flow through me freely and unimpeded. However, the challenge is always to ask, with great determination, for forgiveness, pick myself up and begin again to love.



Wednesday 22 March

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

KEN WHATLEY

Psalm 146 begins a series of five final songs in the book of Psalms, and the five are known as the Hallelujah Psalms. The theme of this Psalm is praise. "Praise the Lord who is everlasting". Do not put your faith in any person for they are mortal and will die. I cannot help but stop and think of all those Russian citizens who are putting their faith in President Putin. This war in the Ukraine is truly history repeating itself in the worst way. There is no positive outlook in Russia's future even if Putin's reign ends. This Psalm literally tells us that only the Lord reigns forever. We should always put our faith in God.

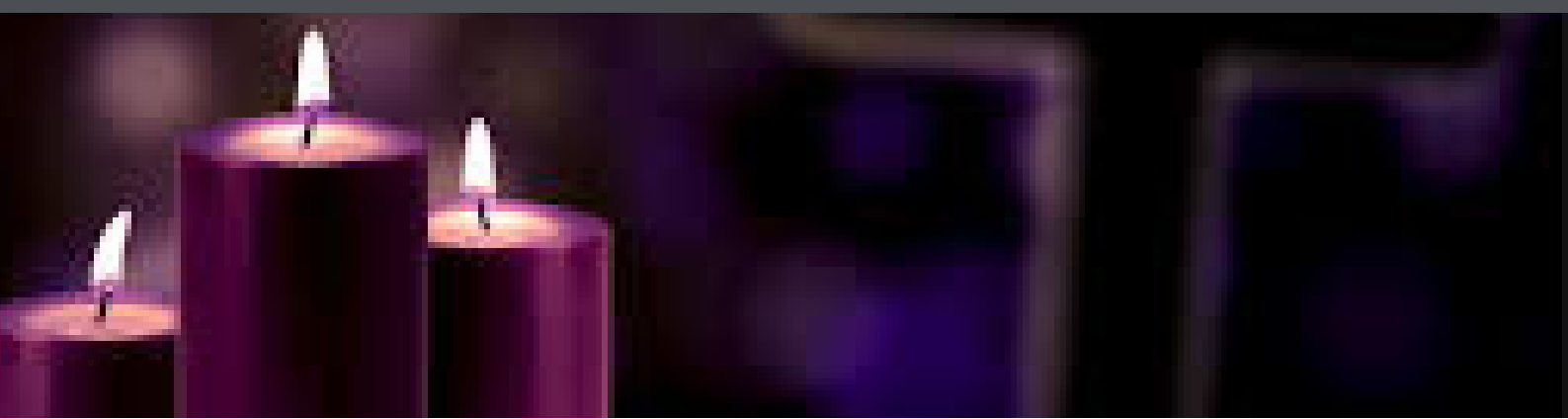
The theme in the reading from Isaiah chapter 60 is to "Arise and shine , lift up your eyes and see all around" (NEB) by trusting in God. He promised the people a new Jerusalem with peace and prosperity in every aspect of life. In these particular verses God will give Jerusalem only the best, no hand-me-downs, only peace and righteousness in the land. "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory." (NIV). Praising the Lord is also emphasized in these verses.

We all get so busy in our lives that we forget to stop and look around at all the wonderful world God has created for us. We seem to need a constant reminder to lift up our eyes and see those wonders.

The theme in Matthew 9 is all about Jesus ministry in Galilee. These verses specifically deal with the healing of two blind men and one possessed man. Jesus asks, " Do you believe I have the power to do what you want?" before healing them. Jesus emphasizes that faith in Him is the key to the healing. I believe the significance of these verses is that Jesus forgives sin, gives new life and new direction in life.

I truly believe it is a small miracle that I have been able to live the last 17 years after my stage 4 cancer diagnosis. My blood cancers are incurable but are in remission after treatment. Over those years I have had the joy of spending time with 8 wonderful grandchildren.

Obviously God has more for me to do on this earth. I try to see the wonders of this world every day of my life and thank God for this time.



THURSDAY 23 MARCH

PSALM 130, EZEKIEL 1:1 AND 2: 8-33, REVELATION 10: 1-11

Laurel Dempsey

To begin, the Collect from the second Sunday of Advent, written by Thomas Cranmer for the Prayer Book of 1549: Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read mark learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It had been less than ten years that the Bible was available in English in the parish churches when Cranmer wrote this, and when every Parish church was to read the scriptures aloud every Sunday, getting through all of the Psalms every month, even as we do. It is the importance of the word that ties these readings together.

The psalmist cries out of the depths: We cry out to the Lord from the place of our misery, that place wherein we hold our sins close, waiting on the Lord's forgiveness and for the Word of the Lord. He says the soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen who wait for the morning. How often do we lie awake at night, waiting for the morning, knowing that there is hope in a new day and in the Lord's word?

The Word of the Lord: Ezekial saw visions of God on a day when he was thirty years old. And he was shown a scroll with the words of lamentation and mourning, and woe. He was instructed to eat it. He did. And the taste of the word was sweet in his mouth. Sounds very odd to us in our time and place. No one of us is likely to eat a page of scripture, although Molly the dog has thoughtfully chewed on a BAS and a Greek New Testament. She seems no better for it. As a metaphor for us to become more intimately aware of the Word of God, though, inwardly digesting is a strong one.

It happens in Revelation again that the writer is tasked with eating a little book of the Word. And he does. I always find Revelation difficult and rather strange. I can't help but think all the visions--Angels, Demons and succubi-- are the product of a fevered imagination, and it is hard to find a relevant message or comfort in the way that one can in the Psalms.

But the thread of consuming God's word to quell a deep spiritual hunger runs through these passages even where the action of actually eating it is very odd to us.

Read, Mark, Learn and inwardly Digest.

Friday 24 March

St Gabriel the Archangel: Psalm 130, Ezekiel 33: 10-16, Revelation 11: 15-19

GORDON GWYNNE-TIMOTHY

Of today's three readings the psalm speaks to me most. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive . . . If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning" (KJV)

My uncle recently died at age 97. From my perspective, my uncle seemed like the person in Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly . . . But his delight is in the law of the Lord . . . And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." My uncle struck me as steady, strong and unshakeable in his faith and Christian values. Whatever storms he must have weathered in his life never seemed to disturb the cheerful and kindly face he presented to me. My father had the same quality, and his example in life and speech is for me a model which expressed his underlying faith and certainty that perseverance and staunch commitment to basic tenets will help a person weather pretty much anything.

By contrast, my mother was quick to express her emotions or voice her doubts and questions about theology or the church's slowness to embrace the need for moral reform. I associate her questioning and lively spirit with the gut-wrenching and "untutored" cry of Psalm 130: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee."

Christ's teaching for me is like nourishment for the tree of psalm 1. But reading Psalm 130 helps me connect with the more basic, unchurched human spirit that knows terror, pain, suffering, and shame.

The solution to life's ills according to Psalm 130 is "forgiveness" (v 4). Whatever your cries might have been, forgiveness is the answer. Forgiveness is also the theme of the second reading today. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they may turn from their wickedness, and "walk in the statutes of life." (Ezekiel 33:11, 15)

Many lessons can be taken from these words, but one life-giving approach I have found is to seek to live in a state of forgiveness both to oneself and to others. This strikes me as avoiding the tiresome cycle of sin and repentance, seeking instead to substitute a state of love for oneself and others that focuses more on the person's endeavour--which way are they headed; what principles are they trying to adhere to--and focusing less on the particular detail of the act or omission (since of course we all make mistakes; that is to be expected).

The calling of Lent in my view is to recommit to basic principles, in an attempt to live more continually in God's presence, in all our relationships and inner dealings.

SATURDAY 25 MARCH

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD : ISAIAH 7: 10 -14, PSALM 45, HEBREWS 10:4-10, LUKE 1:26-38

Ruth Oliver

This is a great day to listen to, read or sing the *Magnificat*, a wonderful hymn of acceptance from Mary after the Angel has visited her with the news that she will bear a son. She is understandably puzzled and “deeply troubled” and asks the Angel, “how can this be since I’m not married?” The Angel answers, saying that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and that her son will be great, his name will be Jesus, the Son of the Most High and descended from David and Jacob. Also, in case she’s still wondering how this can be, her cousin Elizabeth is pregnant though she is well past child-bearing age. Mary no doubt knows the scriptures and the passage in Isaiah that says, “a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name “Immanuel.” So although she still doesn’t fully understand, she says “yes” to the Angel and he leaves her.

Naturally she wants to share this news and see what is happening with her cousin, so she hurries to find Elizabeth and learns that she is indeed pregnant (with John the Baptist). She is thrilled that both she and Elizabeth are pregnant also. At this point Mary seems to accept more fully the vocation that has been given to her and she responds with the lovely hymn of praise that we know as the *Magnificat*.

The response of Mary and Elizabeth--of two earthly and physical being-- to the heavenly and spiritual summons is there for us all. It is a call to vocation and the question is whether we will accept it. How do we recognize this in our own lives as each one of us is called to our unique vocation? The psalm for today and the Mary’s response to the angel show us that it is all right to ask questions. What we are called to do is often not what we had in mind and often shakes us out of our comfort zone. Like Moses, we make excuses: I’m too old, I haven’t the skills, so-and-so would be a better choice, what about a burnt offering instead? Many of us are retired and past thinking of a career or “vocation.” |I would suggest that we can be called in many different ways, not necessarily as a career path but in our daily lives, in how we choose to use our time and talents, in how we respond to the needs of those around us.

In our cathedral life what is our vocation as a church/parish? The old order is breaking down, just as it was when God said that burned sacrifices were not required in order to do God’s will. What are we called to do and to be, individually and collectively in this day and age? We all have gifts to offer and can listen to the prompting of our conscience (aka the Holy Spirit). The gospel tells us that we are not too old (Elizabeth) or too young and inexperienced (Mary) to say, “Here I am. Be it unto me according to your word.”

Sunday 26 March

Ezekiel 37: 1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8: 6-11; John 11: 1-45

THE REVEREND CANON PETER CASE

Dem Bones

I don't know if it is the passage of another year or the number of friends who have recently had joints replaced, but Ezekiel's vision of a valley filled with dry bones struck a chord with me. Ezekiel's vision is a visual metaphor for the people of Israel in exile. The dry bones represent the people who were feeling devastated and cut off from their homeland and from their God. They felt like their bones had dried up and they had lost hope.

Notwithstanding the fact that the people's circumstances were of their own making, God's message is that there is still hope. He will knit their bones back together and breathe life back into them. God still claims them as his people and he will restore them. It is a prophecy not just of a return from exile, but also of a resurrected relationship with God. The pairing in our lectionary of this reading from Ezekiel with the story in John's gospel of Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus should reinforce for us the message that God is capable of restoring his people to life.

I suspect that many of us, at times, go through periods of spiritual dryness. Like the Israelites', it may be of our own making. Perhaps we have become too busy or allowed our values to be influenced too much by a materialistic, consumer-oriented society. Perhaps we have simply become a little lazy and neglected to spend time in prayer and the reading of God's word. It is also possible that we have encountered genuine hardship, of a health, financial, work or relationship nature that has ground us down. Whatever the cause, many of us have encountered times when we feel lost--disconnected from our purpose and mission. It may feel like God is a long way off.

Whatever the cause, Lent is an opportunity to address that spiritual dryness – to let God breathe new life into us. The message of Ezekiel's vision is that we are still, and always will be, God's precious people. Let us then take the time to read again the stories of God's great love and to prayerfully wait for him to make his presence known.

“God of breath, You promised new life to your people in exile by breathing into a valley of dry bones. Breathe new life into us that we may live passionately for you.”
(Brent A. Strawn, Professor of Old Testament, Duke University Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina)

MONDAY 27 MARCH

PSALM 14, 1 KINGS 17: 17-24, ACTS 20: 7-12

Susan Everett

A fox has moved into our neighbourhood. I haven't seen the fox, but I know it is there because tiny paw prints can be seen along the sidewalk and up the driveway. Then the paw prints disappear. But I know it is there because the usual backyard creatures have also vanished. The squirrels and winter birds will be back when the fox moves on to another neighbourhood.

Although winter can hide the fullness of nature, it can also reveal stories of the creatures who inhabit the world with us. Just as paw prints are imprinted on the snow and reveal the hidden world around us, God's presence is revealed when we ask for help and when we reach out to others. As David cries, "I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land." God's response is revealed in the gift of faith and spiritual sustenance. The parched soul is rescued by the loving God that David turns to, asking God to "Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul." It is not just Kings like David who are sustained by prayer and faith. The poorest of people are rewarded with the loving hand of God. Elijah turned to a poor Gentile widow for bread even though she had just enough for herself and her son. The flour did not run out and oil flowed. Bread sustained them for many days. And yet, there was a greater trial. The widow's son, her hope for the future, died. Elijah's faith did not waver, and God answered his pleas to return life to the boy. The widow said to Elijah, "Now I know you are a man of God." What sign of God's presence could be more potent? The widow selflessly served Elijah and had confidence that God would replenish the flour and oil. Her faith sustained her and her son.

From Kings and Prophets, we learn about the power of faith yet again when Paul celebrated a meal with followers in Troas. There was an urgency to Paul's message and he wanted his followers to hear all that he had to say. But the hour was late, and sleep overcame a young man called Eutychus. Falling asleep, he tumbled from a third storey window and died. Just as Elijah pleaded for the life of the young boy, Paul sensed the presence of God in the young man and the restoration of life, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him."

These stories of revival tell us that God can bring us back to life when we lose heart spiritually. Serving others, prayer, and living a life of faith and service give us the strength to help others find the sustenance they need as they journey with us.

So, will I ever see the little fox? Probably not, because the paw prints reveal a nighttime of wandering. But I know the fox is there. I know that God is also there because every time I feel that I've used up what nourishes me or I drift away spiritually, God responds to prayer and lifts me up. I can go on. So can you. Maybe we will do it together in faith.

Tuesday 28 March

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

LYNN WILSON

An odd group of readings! The psalmist prays that God helps him to keep his foot on the right path. The pastiche of tales from the Hebrew Bible centred around Elisha, a prophet and man of God (also an activist and a revolutionary), demonstrates altruistic behaviours in three unrelated circumstances, echoes of which are seen in Jesus's miracles in the Christian Bible. And finally, we have Ephesians with Paul welcoming Gentiles into the Christian fold.

What they have in common is how they reflect the basic theme of the entire Bible, relationality, and relationships; in the Psalm, right relationship between the individual and God, in the passage from Kings, right relationship between the power of a prophet and those who need his gifts, and, in Ephesians, right relationship with "other." When we are in right relationship with each other, in any arena in which we find ourselves, we also approach right relationship with God.

Right relationship needs work. The ancient tradition of hospitality is key to right relationship. The ancient concept is far wider than how this is understood today. We think of it as basically light social chatting over coffee or having company for dinner. It has moved away from the broader cultural practices of respect for and kindness to guests and strangers beyond food and lodging to include time, attention, and help in particular to those at disadvantage. Its real basic expression begins with Rabbi Hillel's injunction not to do that which is hateful but extends to the full expression of service to others advocated and enacted by Jesus Christ.

A rich culture of hospitality is an essential characteristic of Christian belief and practice. Louis B. Weeks in his book *All for God's Glory: Redeeming Church Scutwork* discusses the various factors that have had a dampening effect on how hospitality is understood and practiced in a busy, increasingly-secularizing, consumer-orientated society. The Bible sets a kind of gold standard for us in this connection. We are human beings, and we inevitably fall short. The real threat is our indifference to the importance of hospitality and being in right relationship with our fellow human beings, and so, with God.

The opening eleven chapters of Genesis explore the remove from perfect harmony and right relationship to God, with the earth, and with each other. We still live in the full flood of the turmoil of this post-lapsarian world. But, as the three readings for today make clear, right relationship with God remains an aspiration, as the prayer of the Psalmist, the actions of Elisha, and the testimony of Paul all attest. To be fully hospitable to God, to the earth, and to each other is the beginning.

WEDNESDAY 29 MARCH

BL JOHN KEBLE: PSALM 143, JEREMIAH 32:1-9, MATTHEW 22:23-33

Mary Ann Steen

The readings for today are somewhat lengthy in nature. When called upon to reflect upon them two words came to mind: hopeful and meaningful, as well as the need to be succinct.

Psalms 143 is one of the approximately seventy-five psalms that David wrote. This psalm scholars believe was written during one of his many troubling times, probably when his son Absalom led a revolt against him. The essence of the psalm is a plea to God for help and succour. He needs to know that God is there for him. In our own life's journey we too need that reassurance. We need to know that he is there for us. However, like David we must call upon Him. Hear my {our} prayer O! Lord. He is a living God, who listens. He is just a prayer away.

Keats wrote "A thing of beauty is a joy forever/Its loveliness increases, it will never/Pass into nothingness." The psalms in their beauty give us not only joy but meaningful life lessons and hope. It is interesting to note this psalm was sung in the early church on Ash Wednesdays and that it continues to be sung in services on Ash Wednesdays to this day.

Jeremiah was a prophet from an early age and he continued to prophesy for over forty years. He kept calling upon the people of Judah to leave their evil ways and come back to Jehovah. Even though the book of Jeremiah is filled with despondency, there is hope. Verse 38 of the reading says and they shall be my people and I will be their God. He is a living God. He will not forsake the people of Judah. It is a living promise.

I personally found the passage from Matthew very moving and difficult. In past readings I must have just skipped over this important section of the chapter and now it confronted me. The backdrop for the chapter is the temple in Jerusalem. It is here that the Pharisees and the Sadducees are confuting with Jesus. They want to discredit Him in front of the people. The Sadducees begin with a married woman. The woman is no more than a piece of chattel. Today many centuries later in many places and circumstances women are still regarded as chattel. Continuing endeavours are necessary to eradicate this wrong. My daughter made a comment about this woman--in death she had her freedom. The woman entered the kingdom of God where she was aligned with the angels. Jesus says God is not the god of the dead but of the living.

In the angst of these passages there is a message of hope. Our God is a living God. He is eternal. He has been there since the beginning. He is here now in the present. This thread of a living God binds our readings together. It is a meaningful thread of hope and solace. I want to leave this reflection for today on a joyful, hopeful and peaceful note.

What can I give him

Poor as I am/?

If I were a shepherd,

I would bring a lamb;

If I were a wise man,

I would do my part

Yet what I can I give him--

Give my heart. (From Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Mid-Winter")

Thursday 30 March

Bl. John Done: Psalm 31: 9-16, 1 Samuel 16: 11-13, Philippians 1: 1-11

ELEANOR ROGERS

The readings for today, short, seemingly random, selections from longer pieces, inspired me to read --and contemplate-- the full texts from which they were extracted. That exercise was intensely interesting and rewarding.

Today's Psalm excerpt exhorts us to trust in God's support; Paul's letter to the Philippians commends loyalty and faithfulness, even in a time of adversity. The Old Testament account of David's anointing leads us to think of God's generosity and mercy in the gift of Jesus. It was especially these 3 verses and the expanded history of David that had the most impact on me.

Although his appearance is predicted in Ruth (4:17), 1 Samuel 16:11-13 is the first time we see the physical David. In the verses preceding these, God has sent Samuel to choose among Jesse's sons a king who will replace the unsatisfactory Saul. Samuel has seen the first six tall, strong and handsome sons, and, surprisingly, God has not chosen among them. The ruddy though handsome David, who seems the most unlikely choice because he's the youngest and a shepherd, is summoned and immediately anointed, fulfilling earlier prophecy. We know the subsequent story well. Still a youth, David becomes an unexpected giant-killer. As a king's liege, he is loyal even in persecution and as a leader he excels as a warrior, freeing the Israelites from the Philistines, uniting the 12 tribes of Judah into a kingdom, establishing Jerusalem as its capital, enlarging that kingdom throughout his reign by defeating Israel's enemies. We also think of David as a skilled musician and poet, the compiler of the Psalms and composer of a number of them. As a king, he is fair and forgiving, a great man against whom all future kings of Israel would be measured. As a sinner, he is repentant and gains God's forgiveness, even though his crimes are heinous. And through it all, he trusted in God's goodness, especially His forgiveness. Truly, Yahweh found "a man after his own heart" (v 13).

But why is this passage important to the lectionary for a day in Lent, a time of contemplation, reflection, and, for some, repentance? A time of anticipation of the celebration of Christ's resurrection and the promise of new life for us?

David is not only the progenitor of Christ, "Great David's Greater Son"; he is also for many commentators a type of Christ, and his kingship a prefiguration of Christ as King of Kings. The parallels are many, although Christ is not an earthly king, but the lesson that David's story brings us for Easter is not about ideal leadership; it's about forgiveness. As God forgives David because of his recognition of his transgression and his repentance, so Christ brings us all redemption through his death and resurrection, an important miracle to remember in this season.

FRIDAY 31 MARCH

PSALM 31: 9-16, JOB 12: 13-19, PHILIPPIANS 1: 21-30

Holly Gwynne-Timothy

The readings for this day struck me initially as dry, impenetrable. So I decided to focus on Job, whose story is so rich and relatable when we are going through deep suffering and attempts therefrom to reach God. Yet here, in Job Chapter 13, verses 13-19, Job seems a far cry from me! He has friends who judge him for his suffering; they see it as a sign that God is punishing him and therefore they turn against him. I was clearly not raised in an age of viewing God as wrathful, punishing and potentially persecutory. It is hard to imagine being shunned by my whole social sphere for being punished by God. It is hard to imagine needing to find someone, a human, who would advocate on my behalf before God. I also have trouble, although less so, imagining feeling, as Job did, that if I didn't speak out about something I might actually die. Lastly, and more pressingly, I feel a kind of weakness in my own faith trying to imagine Job's experience and feeling as he says: "Though He [God] slay me, yet will I trust in him".

My mother passed away December 28, after a 3.5 year struggle with multiple myeloma. She had chosen palliative care at home with me and my 3 sisters and our 90 year-old father providing almost all of her care. In Prince Edward County, where she lived, we received only about 6 hours of in-home nursing care a week. We covered all the other hours, including overnights, among us. It was my first experience of "nursing" a person on their deathbed. It was a profound privilege, but also a shock to me to see the 24-hour viciousness of cancer, and the pain "biology" can inflict on a human being. Did her suffering, like Job's, come from God? Of course it did, in that all things come from God. But was it targeted, retaliatory, punishing or a meant as an exhortation to deeper faith? I am not so sure, and would far prefer to say no. But am I nursing anger at God for what He "did" to my mother? Am I avoiding making a disturbing connection here about God so as to stay in some safer, unexamined zone of belief?

My mother was a Jungian psychoanalyst, a person of deep faith and deep psychological searching. I believe she trusted in God right to her painful end. My mother loved the book of Job and Carl Jung's deeply personal writing, Answer to Job. She taught me that trying to look God in the eye was sometimes dangerous or arrogant. She helped me see that God in the person of Jesus was a gift to us, in that we can engage emotionally and deeply personally with Him if we allow ourselves to, and that we can receive much guidance and many signs from such engagement.

Job's story is moving, as his faith that all things come from God is exemplary; actually to me, it is kind of mind-boggling. But who am I, by contrast, to separate God from some forms of suffering, like cancer, while I seek God's meaning, selectively, in many other forms of suffering?

My prayer in the light of these reflections:

Lord, please help me develop my faith and spiritual strength such that I can keep God in sight in all arenas, not compartmentalizing his activity, not rationalizing Him out of the picture in the name of science. Help me also, not to internalize God's judgment and wrath, such that I feel the voice of Job's crowd within me--feeling that I am falling short of God when things aren't going well. Please help me to lean on Christ as intercessor, when needed, in my struggles, so that I might discern my path well and learn from my errors; and so that I do not have to fear public opinion nor squander my energies seeking spiritual approval from a crowd.

Please help me find peace with my mother's recent passing and prolonged suffering, and faith in the role her suffering played in upbuilding God's kingdom, even through me as a loving, though imperfect witness.

Saturday 1 April

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

HARLEY SMYTH

Although Psalm 31 both begins and ends with confident declarations of trust in God, today's verses record a disheartening interlude of dark spiritual eclipse. Hear the litany of this faithful writer's "trouble" and cry for help: heaviness, dimming vision, waxing old, mourning in bereavements, failing strength, neglect, avoidance by loved ones, forgetfulness and forgottenness ("out of mind"), abandonment and, finally, a descent into paranoia, a not uncommon extremity of involitional melancholy. We may gain empathy for those whose experience of ageing is also reflected here; but the psalter is balanced! My 91-year old grandfather's favourite memorized text was Psalm 103, verses 1-5, his "youth renewed as an eagle."

A very learned, revered and longtime fellow Anglican is now in his 102nd year. He refers to this day, the Eve of Holy Week, as the gate to Deep Lent! He is looking forward to the Divine Office of Tenebrae (shadows) in which the Lamentations of Jeremiah, chanted in plainsong, are interspersed with the recitation of the Messianic Psalms graphically depicting the crucifixion (for example, Psalms 29 and 69). Lamentations chapter 1 verse 12 reads: "Is it nothing to you all you who pass by? Look and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which was brought upon that pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger." These chapters paint dark scenes of wanton rapacious destruction, desecration, desolation, abandonment of the temple, the Holy City, and of her daughters and sons. Yet, verses 55-66 look forward to deliverance from oppression and to just retribution. In Tenebrae's choral Reproaches, we hear also a celestial echo: "Oh my people, what have I done to thee that thou shouldst give me vinegar to drink?" (See Psalm 69:21). Today's brief Gospel selection records our Lord's early warning of another ominous eclipse, abandonment and suffering. Though "amazed," "astonished," and "afraid," his closest followers were deaf to any meaning of his prediction. His subsequent arrest, captivity and condemnation by the priests, his scourging, mocking, spitting, and murder by the Romans, all took place on the surface of this earth in real time a few short days later. The mystery of our salvation far exceeds our own understanding, as it did theirs.

This week, behold the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world.

SUNDAY 2 APRIL

SUNDAY OF THE PASSION / PALM SUNDAY: PSALM 118: 1-2, 19-29; MATTHEW 21: 1-11; ISAIAH 50: 4-9; PSALM 31: 9-16; PHILIPPIANS 2: 5-LL; MATTHEW 26: 14-27.66

The Venerable David Selzer

All four Gospels tell the narrative of the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus. Each has its own story and point of view, each varies in the details and angle of the drama, and each, while describing the essence of what happened in Jesus' death, has its own bias in terms of who is responsible, or not. There clearly is not agreement (e.g., did the Last Supper happen as a Passover Seder, as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, or another kind of meal, as in John?) This year (Year A on the three-year liturgical cycle) the focus is on the Gospel of Matthew.

Ellis Rivkin, the Adolph S. Ochs Professor Emeritus of Jewish History at Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, OH, wrote a book entitled 'What Crucified Jesus?' (Union for Reformed Judaism, 1997). In this book, Rivkin's thesis states that it is not a matter of who killed Christ, although many Christians are quick to point to Jews. The crucifixion of Jesus was not done out of the hatred of the people but as the result of the political condition that had arisen between the occupying forces, the Roman armies and the high priests they had selected and put into position. There was a deep and pre-occupying concern about putting an end to those who might cause them trouble.

The background of the Crucifixion of Jesus is the Roman occupation and the collaboration of the Jewish religious officials with the occupying forces that conspired to do away with the person of Jesus as a trouble-maker who was stirring up the people, possibly leading to a revolt against the Roman Empire. There are clear references to exonerating the Roman Empire and subsequently blaming the Jewish people for Jesus' death, which have had horrendous ramifications for Jewish people and Judaism throughout the ages.

In reading the Passion narratives and living them out through our liturgies, we need to be very aware of the anti-Jewish biases they portray, and look at the political backgrounds they depict. The lessons of history from our understanding not only can help us comprehend the underlying conflicts but give insights into our own day and our issues of conflict in many areas.

I encourage you to consider the narratives and *now* we understand them in full context, viewing not only what is written but their background of faith and our contemporary understanding.



Monday 3 April

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

ANNE CASE

In today's gospel we find Jesus in Bethany, a short distance from Jerusalem. It is another story featuring Mary and Martha. Just as before, we find Martha bustling away in the kitchen, serving the group a meal. Mary, in contrast, is again at the feet of Jesus, typically the position of a disciple. On this occasion, she anoints his feet with a flask of nard, an extraordinarily expensive perfume. When Mary is rebuked by Judas for her act of extravagance Jesus comes to her defence, as he has before, knowing that Mary once again has her priorities straight.

What Mary demonstrates in this story is not only an unwavering devotion to Jesus but in contrast to the disciples, a keen insight into the events about to transpire. Her ministrations to Jesus seem to be acts of anticipatory grief for the impending loss. Jesus' comment to Judas that he won't always be with him validates Mary's sense of urgency and focus.

I have often struggled with the contrast between Mary and Martha. I believe there may be some of Mary and Martha in all of us, but through my type-A lens, I definitely identify more with Martha! For all of us, it is so easy to slip into Martha-mode, finding ourselves caught up in the commotion and busyness around us, adding tasks to our ever growing "To Do" list. It can distract us from focusing on the important things in our lives.

This Lenten season, with God's help, I will try to channel my "inner Mary" and spend time at the feet of Jesus, in reflection, reading and prayer. As in Psalm 36:9 (NIV) "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light, we see light."

TUESDAY 4 APRIL

ISAIAH 49: 1-7, PSALM 71: 1-14, 1 CORINTHIANS 1: 18-31, JOHN 12: 20-36

Marion McKeown

When I am following the list of daily readings, I have the habit of reading the Gospel first, to situate myself, and then using the other passages to bring out aspects of the text, and that is how I proceeded with today's readings.

The first verse in the passage from Saint John reads, "And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast." (KJV) Like many others, I am not as familiar with St John's Gospel as I am with the other three--I just know that it was written later than the others and focuses on interpretation, not biography--so I found myself reading around to orient myself. This incident does not appear in any other gospel and is introduced by John immediately after the occasion we celebrate as Palm Sunday, an event almost dismissed, in the middle of a chapter with three short verses of description and one of interpretation. Obviously, to Saint John, Palm Sunday is not the glorious occasion celebrated by Sunday school children, but a sober fulfilling of a prophecy, "the king cometh on an ass's colt." This reference to prophecy made me go back to Isaiah 49, and I saw a connection between verse 6, "and I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles," to St John's introduction of these "certain Greeks."

The earlier part of Chapter 12 also emphasizes the distrust and anger of the scribes and Pharisees and the plotting of the priests, undercutting any anticipation of a joyous general recognition of Jesus as the Messiah; it is full of menace and danger. It reminded me of the selection from Psalm 71 in which the psalmist, apparently surrounded by enemies, praises the Lord and prays that He "save me," "cause me to escape," and "deliver me . . . out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man."

The fear conveyed by the psalmist helped me understand the unusual reactions of the disciples to the Greeks who had come "to Philip." The narrative is strangely detailed, as then "Philip cometh and telleth Andrew, and again Philip and Andrew telleth Jesus." The layers of protection that are suddenly present, along with the intensity of the change from past to present tense, stress the tensions of this situation, so different from those earlier in the ministry when the people in a crowd would freely question the "rabbi." John has earlier emphasized that Jesus had chosen to stay outside Jerusalem before the feast and has added several times that Jesus had withdrawn from Jerusalem each night. From these details, I realized that other security measures had been put in place as the disciples recognized the dangers of their situation.

TUESDAY 4 APRIL CONTINUED

The portrayal of these tensions brings out the importance of Jesus's decision to face speak with the Greeks. Beginning at verse 23, John quotes Jesus answering the visitors in prophecy and parable, reiterating those points of his teaching that have helped arouse the wrath of the establishment. He asserts his identity as the son of God, foreshadows his death, and outlines the message of Christ crucified.

The appointed passage from Saint Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians almost serves as a commentary on this address to the Greeks which is condensed and paradoxical. Paul, of course, talks of preaching to the Jews and the Greeks, but he warns that his "Christ crucified" will be "a stumbling block" to the Jews, and "unto the Greeks a foolishness." "For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom." Paul says that what he preaches will seem "foolishness" to both.

Near the end of his address, at verse 27, Jesus says: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this came I unto this hour." At the next verse He adds "Father, glorify thy name." In these quotations, I am enabled to recognize and imagine the fears that would beset any human in such a terrifying situation, but Christ is able to steady Himself with His knowledge of His Father's plan. The voice that comes from heaven in the next few verses "came not because of me, but for your sakes." The others require a sign to steady their faith, as they do not have Jesus's insights.

The messages of these passages are many; a more complete explication would take many hours and several pages. What I am left with after my few explorations is a more empathetic understanding of the fears and tensions of the situation before the Passover, and a measure of comfort that, although we may live in troubled times, surrounded by menaces beyond our understanding, others through the ages, even our Lord, have lived with threats and fears, and maintained their course. "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be put to confusion." (Psalm 71:1)

Wednesday 5 April

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

CHRISTINA LORD

As a Roman Catholic growing up I understood Lent as a severe time of fasting and repentance with a whole lot of suffering dominating the discussions in Sunday school. I was upset with God for allowing Jesus to suffer. But as I got older and began to explore my faith and my relationship with God, I realized that the sacrifice of God's only son Jesus was the opportunity to participate in creating a new life that becomes available if we all focus on cooperating with God. I think of Jesus in that moment as he is nailed to the cross and is dying for us. The book of Hebrews 12:3 says, "Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners so that you may not grow weary or lose heart." I understood this to mean Jesus's sacrifice was the symbol of the strength we've been given to not grow weary or lose heart. It offers the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and/or to create a "new life." Resurrection means "To Rise Again." It is something we would all like to do. We would like to rise from pain, illness, fear, and death--to be born into a new life. Most of us believe we have to wait until the end of time for resurrection. But we rise each day with God and for that we are grateful. One of the most essential ways that we can cooperate with God is through healing of our spirit.

Lent is the period of repose and healing we need.

I invite each of you to reflect on the following: How can you begin to cooperate with God? How can you begin to heal your spirit?

THURSDAY 6 APRIL (I)

MAUNDY THURSDAY EXODUS 12: 1-4 (5-10), PSALM 116:1-10-17, 1 CORINTHIANS 11: 23-26, JOHN 13: 1-17, 31B-35

The Right Reverend George Bruce

I write this on the coldest day so far this year, impatiently waiting for Spring. As I begin to reflect it dawns on me that that day, that Thursday, the model for our liturgy we know as Maundy Thursday was probably the busiest day in Jesus' ministry. He begins it by telling the disciples to prepare for the Seder meal and where it will take place. He then gathers them together for the meal, despite Peter's objections washes their feet, then at the table with them He shares the great unveiling of the Eucharist. "Hoc est Corpus meum." Then follows the dramatic statement that he is to be betrayed, followed by the Commandment, the New Commandment, the mandate that they love one another as he has loved them. Following the meal they journey with him to Gethsemane where he is abandoned to pray alone, is arrested and taken in rapid succession to Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod and back to Pilate for judgement.

Everything just described is in accord with God's will for Jesus, "Greater love hath no one than this," Jesus tells the disciples. The struggle that he has in the garden, "Not my will but thy will be done," echoes the response of his mother to the angel Gabriel, "Be it unto me according to thy will." Jesus' sacrifice which we remember Sunday by Sunday in the Eucharist calls us to "show in our lives the fruits of his redemption." We do this by caring for others and drawing them into God's presence through the same Jesus "who gave his life and died for us."

The historical origins of the reigning monarch offering gifts to the poor and needy is a living out of Jesus' Command. Initially, the sovereign or the Lord High Almoner gave gifts of clothing, food and money. This has now evolved into the maundy money offered to as many people as the monarch is aged in years. It seems to me that that is a tradition which we can also become involved in through our association with "Lunch by George"

THURSDAY 6 APRIL (II)

MAUNDY THURSDAY EXODUS 12: 1-4 (5-10), PSALM 116:1-10-17, 1 CORINTHIANS 11: 23-26, JOHN 13: 1-17, 31B-35

Gill Cleghorn

As a retired nurse/midwife and especially as a teacher of prospective nurses who will frequently be called upon to perform distasteful tasks in the care of their patients, I find the New Testament reading for Maundy Thursday especially meaningful. It speaks not only to the value of service for the recipient but also to the value it is to the giver. The following passage from *In the Evening*, (Carol Cochrane, Lutterworth Press, 8th impression, 1941) presents for me an understanding of what that value is.

"The disciples, in spite of companionship with their Master, were still very ordinary men, each with a very strong sense of his personal rights and dignity. Not one of them was willing to do the servant's work and submerge his own personality in his thought for the others, for each was only too conscious of his own importance.

Until their Master rose and made them ashamed, stooping to wash their feet, and to show them that service is the highest expression of friendship. 'If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet.'

Thou who dost teach such ways of sacrifice
That we, ashamed, must own our selfishness,
Create in us the will to rise above
Our pride, our love of self, our carelessness.

When we see things that need to be done we are always to find excuses, and see reasons why we cannot be expected to do them. O, Thou who art perfect unselfishness and the fullness of compassion, make us so ashamed of our unwillingness that we may find it easier to stifle our selfish moods and serve Thee as we ought. Amen"



Friday 7 April Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Psalm 22, Hebrews 10: 16-25, John 18: 1-19:42

THE RIGHT REVEREND MICHAEL OULTON

The Cost of Love

One of my favourite courses of study through Lent that I have offered during my episcopacy is on the life, Christian witness and death of the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He lived through one of the darkest periods in recent world history, born in Germany in 1906 and dying at the hands of the Nazis in the waning days of World War 2. He was just 39 years old when he was executed at the Flossenbürg Concentration camp but oh, what a wealth of Christian theology and action was packed into those all too brief years.

The seminal work among his many published works is "The Cost of Discipleship," focusing on "The Sermon on the Mount" from Matthew 5-7. Bonhoeffer makes it crystal clear that, in order to fully live the Christian life, we must take seriously the words of Jesus in that sermon as he exhorted his followers to live fully into life that truly is life.

There is irony here and it is the irony that marks the Way of the Cross on Good Friday from the first Good Friday to this day. It underlines the cost that the Son of God was prepared to pay for all of humanity. It underscores the sacrifice that we are called to make as followers of Christ, children of grace, who are called to serve the world as Christ served us, all the way to the cross.

Bonhoeffer notes that "The cross is laid on every Christian." He goes on to state: "Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ." When we are called by Christ, Bonhoeffer says, we are bid to "come and die."

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the suffering servant, but even in the dark description related in chapters 52 and 53 we see the glimmer of light beyond the darkness, the grace that calls forth life from death. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5 RSV) May the promise of this grace inspire us to take up our cross and follow him as his servant Bonhoeffer so faithfully did.

SATURDAY 8 APRIL

HOLY SATURDAY: LAMENTATIONS 3:1-9, 19-24, PSALM 31:1-4, 15-16, 1 PETER 4:1-8,
MATTHEW 27:57-66

The Most Reverend Colin R. Johnson

"Death interrupts all that is mortal"-- these words are etched on the tombstone of Canadian author Mazo de la Roche.

We know the shock of hearing of a friend's sudden death. Even the expected news of the death of a long-ill beloved one brings shock, no matter how prepared we thought we were. We are hollowed out by the loss and left in a state of emptiness.

Today we have arrived at the shadowy, blinds-drawn-down day called Holy Saturday, an in-between day. The Church rests. There are no celebrations of the Eucharist today, and the sparsest of liturgical prayer. It is a day of emptiness and lament. It is a very important day.

Too often we Christians fail to adequately acknowledge that grief is a part of every life, whether experienced as blinding sorrow or bleak depression or a dull pain that saps our energy. We think we ought to skip from Good Friday to Easter, from death to resurrection, without a pause. No! Jesus died. He was buried. His distraught friends grieved. He was not yet raised. Holy Saturday is the Church's reminder that we must stop to grieve and lament. In fact we cannot truly celebrate unless we allow time for lamentation. We grieve because we love and are parted from sight, sound and touch of the beloved by death. Remember St Paul did not admonish Christians not to grieve; rather he said we should not grieve as those without hope! Resurrection will come, but for now death is real and interrupts all first.

We must grieve or we cease to be human.

My soul . . . is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. (Lam. 3)

Notes

