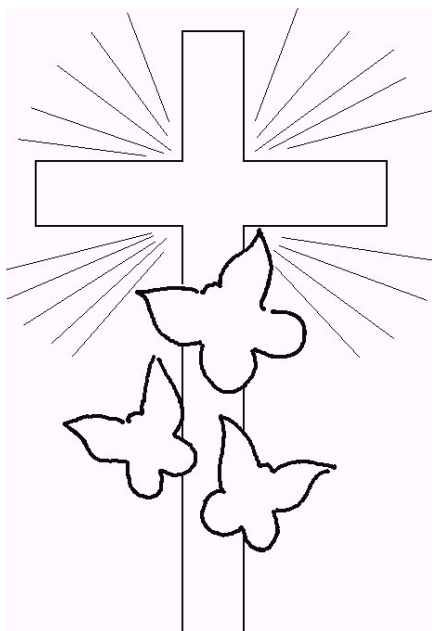


Lenten Devotional Booklet



Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

2010

Introduction

During Lent, we take time to study and meditate on our Christian faith. Historically it was a time to prepare for baptism on Easter. In these days, we may renew the commitment of baptism as we deepen and grow our faith.

In this Lenten devotional guide you will hear from forty members of our congregation representing various age groups, interests, and gifts. Each has contributed meditations on one of three lectionary passages for each day. Special thanks to May Belle Rauch, Anita Iyengar, Phoebe Sheftel, and Rev. Elizabeth Lovell for their leadership in preparing this devotional.

We hope and pray that the reflections presented here help you grow closer to God.

Mary Ledwith, Chair
Worship Committee

*For more information about Lent and the lectionary passages,
please refer to the Presbyterian Church (USA) website:
<http://www.pcusa.org>*



If you are interested in participating in writing a devotion for next year's Lenten Devotional Booklet, please contact May Belle Rauch at mbsrauch@comcast.net .

Lenten Worship, Study, and Musical Offerings

Ash Wednesday Services ~ Wednesday, February 17

5:30 pm ~ Family Candlelight service in the Chapel, designed with children in mind, featuring songs, short readings and a brief explanation of the symbols of Ash Wednesday.

6:00 pm ~ Simple supper (soup & pizza). Reserve by Feb. 15th at childrensandfamily@bmpc.org. Suggested donation \$5/\$15 per person/family and a gift of dry or canned goods for area food pantries.

7:30 pm ~ Worship in the Chapel ~ Imposition of ashes and Youth Chorale sings

Lenten Study with Dr. Carter

Wednesdays, February 24 – March 24

5:30 ~ Informal dinner in Congregational Hall

6:30 ~ Program led by Dr. James L. Carter, Congregational Hall

7:40 ~ *Compline* meditative worship in the Sanctuary until 8 pm

Musical Offerings

Sunday, February 21, 4:00 pm, Sanctuary Ringing Reflections: A Lenten Handbell Vespers

Featuring handbell ringers of all ages, congregational singing, and a 49-bell carillon. A reception following the concert honors the performers and showcases the photographic artwork of Bill Kemmerer. Free will offering.

Sunday, March 14, 4:00 pm, Sanctuary 37th Anniversary Concert

Featuring the Senior Choir and the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia performing Paul Winter's jazz choral work *Missa Gaia*, an exuberant and moving work which combines singing and improvisation with visual multimedia and recorded sounds of animals in nature. A reception following the concert honors the performers and celebrates the opening of a new art exhibit called "The Essential Experience."

Tickets: \$10 for adults; children under 18 free.

Holy Week Services

Maundy Thursday, April 1

7:30 pm ~ Communion by intinction in the Chapel with foot-washing



Good Friday, Friday, April 2

Noon ~ Experience the meaning of Good Friday in a youth-led service in the Sanctuary.

8:00 pm in the Chapel ~ Featuring organist Jeffrey Brillhart performing Marcel Dupré's *Stations of the Cross*, along with dramatic readings of poetry by Paul Claudel. *Free admission.*



Easter Sunday. Sunday, April 4

6:30 am ~ Sunrise service on the lawn, sponsored by Family Ministries. Begin your joyful celebration of Christ's resurrection as you watch the sun rise, enjoy fellowship and food following.

8:00 am, 9:30am, & 11:00am ~ Morning worship with sermon by Dr. Carter, Senior Choir, and Easter Brass.

Come celebrate Christ's resurrection!

Communion service by intinction, only at 8:00 am in the Sanctuary.

Wednesday, February 17

Scripture reading: *Amos 5:6-15*

Additional readings: *Hebrews 12:1-15 & Luke 18:9-14*

Seek good, not evil, that you may live.

Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.

(Amos 5:14)

As we enter cautiously into the bleakness of Lent, we are often drawn to the stark simplicity of the Old Testament prophets. This passage describes harsh destruction and punishment of those who fail to seek the Lord and instead cast aside justice and trample on the unfortunate.

The Prophet admonishes the prudent man to reject the evil of those ways and to instead seek the good and maintain justice. The Lord will perhaps have mercy.

The beginning of Lent is equally gloomy. We are haunted by the trials and temptations that we know Jesus must endure. Yet, we also know that at the end of his journey, Jesus triumphs over evil so that all of us may live. The Lord God Almighty *will* have mercy and be with us forever through his Son in the triumph of the Resurrection.

Bob Holmes

Prayer: Lord, once again on this holiest of dark and reflective days, let us be with Jesus as he goes into the Wilderness. Give us the same faith that sustained him, against all odds, and give us that same strength to move forward with him toward Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Thursday, February 18

Scripture reading: *John* 17:1-8

Additional readings: *Habakkuk* 3:1-10 (11-15) 16-18 & *Philippians* 3:12-21

In his 'Prayer of Consecration', Jesus calls out to God asking him to 'glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee'. Jesus also speaks to God of having finished his work here on earth, having shared with his fellow men and women God's message in ways that those who received it would truly believe that Jesus was God's 'only begotten son.' And what a message it was - overflowing with insights and directives on how we should be conducting our lives while, at the same time, recognizing that we are so very far from perfect! Thanks be to God for not only sending us Jesus to be our beacon and teacher but also for reaching out His hand of forgiveness to us.

Horace L. Kephart

Prayer: Dear God, We pray that we may live our lives ever faithfully to our Christian beliefs and morals. This, we all know, is easier to do at certain times than at others. But in Jesus we have a model who has taught us enduring principles about how to live our lives even during the more demanding ebb and flow of what seems to be life's unwelcome twists. Remind us that the coveted characteristic of serenity, reflected by saints who have gone before us, can be ours when we faithfully follow our Christian calling. (Lore Kephart 'Paths to Prayer, A Little Book of New Testament Devotions')

Friday, February 19

Scripture reading: *Philippians* 4:1-9

Additional Readings; *Ezekiel* 18:1-4 & *John* 17:9-19

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (*Philippians* 4:4-6)

This biblical passage gives exhortations:

Be joyful in the Lord.
Draw close to Him.
Have a heart filled with thanksgiving.
Lead a prayerful life.
Trust in the Lord.

This one small passage is a recipe for a more complete, richer living experience of one turning toward God our Father and His resurrected Son.

Within the context of Lent, may this day be an opportunity to try one or more of these while pausing on your life’s journey.

John Heard

For today: “Finally, [sisters and] brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (*Philippians* 4:8)

Saturday, February 20

Scripture reading: *John* 17: 20-26

Additional readings: *Ezekiel* 39:21-29 & *Philippians* 4:10-20

I was surprised to learn about the relationship of this passage in John and the corresponding last prayer of Jesus as reported in the synoptic gospels. In the others, Jesus prays to his Father in anguish that the cup of his passion might be removed: “in his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood.” (Luke 22: 44) In John, Jesus’ prayer before His arrest is serene. Jesus reflects upon his work in the world with confidence that it has been accomplished, that his passion and resurrection will produce the benefit to humanity that the Father intended and that future generations will know God, and be accepted into unity with God.

The verses for today focus on this relationship between God and his future church, the church universal. The revelation of God’s glory, through Jesus, allows us the knowledge of God’s love and the unity that he seeks for us. This has three consequences. First, it is the clearest expression of how much God loves us, and God’s deep need to be in relationship with us. Second, it provides a charge for the work of the church – that the world will “know us by our love,” providing evidence for God’s message and calling others to that love. Third, it completes the transition between the old and the new covenant.

The Old Testament reading for today (*Ezekiel* 39: 21-29) presents the hope that a savior would arise to lead the people of Israel to a New Jerusalem. In the passage in John, the concept of a God concerned with geopolitical survival for a chosen people is transformed to God the lover, calling all peoples, all of creation to himself.

David Callans

Prayer: Loving God, you are so far above us, and there is no way that we could ever understand your ways. How could it be that all you really want is to love us! We struggle in our disbelief, worried that this relationship must somehow be earned. Give us the faith that this love of each of us is your will and that what we must do is simply to give in to it entirely and believe.

Monday, February 22

Scripture Reading: *Mark 1:1-13*

Additional readings: *Genesis 37:1-11* & *I Corinthians 1:1-19*

Even in the most familiar of scripture readings there can be a contemporary message. Mark's opening comments create a bridge between the prophetic writings of Isaiah and the baptism of Jesus by his cousin John the Baptist. Immediately following the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the voice of God saying that he was well pleased with Jesus, the Holy Spirit drove Jesus from the site of baptism into the wilderness. In contemporary terms this could appear to be a major contradiction, as if to say, "You are a great kid but I am still throwing you under the bus."

Our Lent commemorates not the period prior to crucifixion and resurrection, but instead the very beginning of Christ's ministry. The wilderness experience of Jesus was anything but easy. He was isolated from others. This had to be a major challenge for Jesus who was a tradesman near his family. Surrounded by wild beasts, Jesus was tempted by Satan. Yet in the middle of this stark and lonely experience, Jesus was served by angels. Obviously, God sent his Son into spiritual boot camp to strengthen him for his upcoming ministry.

As contemporary Christians, we choose to send ourselves to spiritual boot camp by consciously being aware for God's direction for our lives during the Lenten season. From the example of Jesus we can know that the temptations of life will be a part of our journey, but God will be faithful to make certain that we are served by angels.

Susan Kersch

Prayer: Dear God, in the special days ahead help me to be aware of your direction in the face of difficult choices. Also, make me an angel to serve others in their special Lenten journeys. May Easter arrive with my renewed sense of purpose for the days and years ahead. May your perfect will be done in my life.

Tuesday, February 23

Scripture readings: *Genesis 37:12-24*, *1 Corinthians 1:20-31* & *Mark 1:14-28*

It is easy to be fearful today as our culture and the world seem to spin out of control. Yet we hear Jesus' words in the Bible and recognize, along with the great cloud of witnesses preceding us, he speaks with authority. We trust in the One who alone establishes all earthly authority and has promised not to forsake us on the way.

Today's three Scripture passages demonstrate God's sovereignty and grace. Though human corruption and sinfulness are apparent (Joseph's family in *Genesis 37*), Joseph is ultimately raised from humiliation to glory. The transformational power and compassion of Jesus Christ are riveting in the New Testament, with man's redemption the goal.

Mark 1 reveals that the work of the Servant is to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God, for Jesus came both to serve others and to call the lost (all of us) to repentance and belief. He first called twelve disciples to be fishers of men, and his call is no less insistent for us who hear his voice today. Step out of the crowd by loving and serving others wherever you are.

The message we are charged to carry is that of the cross of Christ, a message that should be visible in our own transformed lives, setting us apart as different from the surrounding world, both as a church and as individuals. For once your ears hear, your eyes see and you have asked the living Christ to lead you, the wisdom of this world truly is made foolish by God. As *First Corinthians 1* declares, the wise according to the flesh are not called, for they find the message of Christ crucified to be foolishness. But to the called, His power and authority over all creation are seen with growing clarity each day. If only we are willing to follow, God will lead us, providing the skills we need for representing Christ in a rebellious, struggling world.

Wendy M. Broomell

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for your loving presence that always surrounds us and most especially for your gift of salvation. Give us courage and faith to follow where you lead. Help us believe we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Wednesday, February 24

Scripture readings: *Genesis 37:25-36*, *1 Corinthians 2:1-13* & *Mark 1:29-45*

The three readings for this day all have remarkable things in common. Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen 37: 25-36,) is watched over by God, and filled with the Holy Spirit, and goes on to accomplish amazing things for his people. Jesus, working with his disciples (Mark 1:29-45), heals many who are sick, and moves on to a new place leaving the Holy Spirit behind to work among the people.

Paul tells the church at Corinth that it wasn't his speaking skills or superior education that helped him to establish the new outposts of Christianity. It was the Holy Spirit working through him and others who spread the word about the life of Christ.

How often do we forget that it is not our own strength that accomplishes things, but rather the God that is in us? When life seems overwhelming, the gifts of the Spirit are there to guide and assist us and God helps us to move on to a new place. The Spirit, working through all of us, accomplishes miracles every day.

Sue Gibbons

Prayer: Creator God, help us to be open to the Holy Spirit that you so graciously share with us. Through you, we know that we can move on to better places and accomplish things that are beyond our power alone.

Thursday, February 25

Scripture Reading: *Genesis 39: 1-23*

Additional Readings: *1 Corinthians 2: 14 – 3: 15 & Mark 2: 1-12*

Joseph *thought* he had a happy home in Canaan. His father Jacob had many wives and children, and so much property and livestock that the family lived quite well. Described in *Genesis 37* as a 17-year-old with vivid dreams that he believed were prophetic, Joseph was his father's favorite son. His brothers, full of jealousy and hatred, coldly sold him into slavery in Egypt, far away from his father and the home he loved.

But Joseph had another home; a spiritual home that provided the nurture and love he needed in order to overcome sibling betrayal, slavery, false accusations, and the loss of family and country. "The Lord was with Joseph," and Joseph was at home with the Lord. Whether in a pit or in prison, he made the best of his circumstances, and emerged from his trials more powerful, wise, successful, and kind, by remaining spiritually attuned to what God had in mind for his future. He actively listened for God's word and responded accordingly. He forgave his brothers, believing that, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good."

Jesus has prepared a spiritual home for each of us, just as he did for Joseph. When we inhabit this place of comfort and inspiration we are more at peace than in any home we could possibly construct of brick or stone.

Clare Mackie

Prayer: "How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!" (Psalm 84) "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord!" (Psalm 122)

Help us to feel the lovely comfort of the home we make with you here on earth. Show us how to be an inspiration to the others with whom we live. Make us hospitable to all of our neighbors. Remind us to be joyful, and glad with each homecoming that brings us closer to God and His plan for us.

Friday, February 26

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 3: 16 – 23

Additional Readings: *Genesis* 40:1-23 & *Mark* 2:13-22

As I read this passage, verses 18–19 – “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.” -- reminded me of a passage I read a few years ago in Frederick Buechner’s book, *Listening to Your Life*. On page 63, one of Buechner’s characters, Godric, a medieval monk, is speaking. In his memory, Godric has just blissfully submerged himself in the Jordan River and says:

“When I came up again, I cried like one gone daft for joy. ‘Be fools for Christ,’ said the Apostle Paul, and thus I was thy bearded Saxon fool and clown for sure. Nothing I ever knew before and nothing I have ever come to know from then till now can match the holy mirth and madness of that time. Many’s the sin I’ve clipped to since. Many’s the dark and savage night of doubt. Many’s the prayer I haven’t prayed, the friend I’ve hurt, the kindness left undone. But this I know. The Godric that waded out of Jordan soaked and dripping wet that day was not the Godric that went wading in.”

And Godric prays:

“O Thou that asketh much of him to whom thou givest much, have mercy. Remember me not for the ill I’ve done but for the good I’ve dreamed. Help me to be not just the old and foolish one thou seest now but once again a fool for thee. Help me to pray. Help me whatever way thou canst, dear Christ and Lord. Amen”

Mary Bassett

Saturday, February 27

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 4:1-7

Additional readings: *Genesis* 41:1-13 & *Mark* 2:23 - 3:6

In this letter to the factious, proud Corinthians, Paul exhorted them to focus on faithful service rather than on critical judgments. Instead of making a judgment which Paul himself left to God, he went and worked with the Corinthians, taking time to nurture them, thereby serving by example.

As Christians, we are called upon to participate with our talents and our gifts in the ministry of our church. There is no super-spiritual, exalted class of Christians. All of us are innately the same and are held the same in the eyes of God, although our responsibilities in God's work are different according to the abilities and capabilities with which we have been graced. To be judged by man is to be judged subjectively, with much bias, limited perspective and incomplete information. In fact, we have been admonished to 'judge not.' God is the only one qualified to make true judgments since only he knows the heart and intent of every human being.

In this regard, I am reminded of words attributed to Mother Theresa. "People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered: forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives: be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies: succeed anyway. If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you: be honest and frank anyway. What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight: build anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, people may be jealous: be happy anyway. The good that you do today, people will often forget tomorrow: do good anyway. Give the world the best that you have, and it may never be enough: give the world the best that you have anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; it was never between you and them anyway."

Judith Ehrman

Prayer: Dear Lord, as your humble servants, we are thankful for all we have received as gifts of your grace. Help us to "do unto others as we would have them do unto us" and to "love our neighbor as ourselves." May our growth in our Christian faith, obedience and stewardship be pleasing in your sight.

Monday, March 1

Scripture reading 1 *Corinthians* 4: 8-21

Additional readings: *Genesis* 41:46-57 & *Mark* 3:7-19a

Paul writes to members of the church in Corinth, which according to the Good News edition of the Bible, was an affluent cosmopolitan Greek city and capital of its Roman province. He is writing to a demographic mix similar, perhaps, to our congregation.

He reports on the hardships of his ministry...being hungry, suffering beatings, and wearing rags. He says, when cursed "we bless, when persecuted endure, when insulted answer with kind words."

I think he is emphasizing the Christian way to react and possibly the difference between a comfortable life in Corinth and life on the missionary trail. He stresses the point of our religious life, a life with Jesus Christ as the centerpiece.

This man, whose letters make up a part of the New Testament, is the most wonderful example of being born again. After his traumatic experience on the way to Damascus, he became a man with a mission that he conducted with zeal, energy, spiritual insight, and humility -- a great subject for study any time of the year.

Mote Howard

Prayer: Lord, help us to absorb and understand the letters of Paul.

Tuesday, March 2

Scripture readings *Genesis* 42:1-17

Additional Reading: *Mark* 3:19b-35 & 1 *Corinthians* 5:1-8

The narrative of Joseph is one of the best-known stories in the Old Testament. Joseph's father, Jacob, is God's chosen. God walks with Jacob through much hardship, and tells him, "no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name... a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you." (Genesis 35:10-11)

Joseph and his brother Benjamin are Jacob's sons by Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. There is animosity between them and Joseph's ten other brothers. They want Joseph, who revels a bit too much in his father's favor and his own dreams of greatness, gone. They make it happen by selling Joseph to a traveling band of Midianite traders who take him to Egypt. After many adventures, Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream and predicts seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph's dream interpretation places him in a position of power.

Back in Canaan, during the time of want, Jacob says, "Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." Sometimes it is difficult to see the obvious. The brothers travel to Egypt where they meet with Joseph to request food, but they do not recognize him. Joseph tests his brothers.

We, a people of God, don't always respond to the obvious, set out on the journey, recognize who people are, see situations for what they are, or understand why things happen. Joseph said to his brothers, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." (Genesis 50:20) We are reassured that God is at work in all things, even when we can't see God's hand. Part of being a faithful people is trusting that God is journeying with us.

Courtenay Willcox

Prayer: God our loving parent, as we journey though this time of Lent, we invite you to walk with us. Help us to have confidence that, even when we don't see your hand or feel your presence, you are always here with us.

Wednesday, March 3

Scripture reading: *Mark 4:1-20*

Additional readings: *Genesis 42:18-28* & *1 Corinthians 5:9 - :11*,

“A sower went out to sow.” The story of the sower, the seed and the soil is told in the Book of Mark to proclaim the coming of God’s kingdom and its presence here on earth through Jesus of Nazareth. As Mark writes in 1:14-15, “...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.’”

Mark begins the recounting of this parable with a scene of crowds pressing close to Jesus at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. He climbed into a boat and began to speak to the people in terms that evoked experiences and events of everyday life that were immediately recognizable by the people of the 1st century.

A sower went out to sow and some seed fell on a well-trodden path and was quickly eaten by the birds. Other seed fell on rocky ground that had no depth of soil and drainage to put down roots. Some fell among weeds and thorns where it competed for soil, space and sun and yielded little. Some fell on fertile soil and produced an abundant harvest. These four examples of soil conditions represent the reception Jesus received from the different listeners he addressed. Jesus became all too familiar with these types of listeners and their responses to his message during his teachings. He recognized the shallow mind and emotion of those who dabbled in trivia; the rootless who lacked the depth of commitments; the overly involved whose life was crammed with this and that activity; and the listener who takes the message of God’s love to heart, nurtures it and accomplishes much. The abundant harvest from the fertile soil is the true focus of this parable. Yet, despite the lack of understanding and the resistance to his teachings, Jesus continued to preach the good news of God’s coming.

Mickey Cooper

Prayer: Our Father, may our ears be open to your word, our eyes responsive to the glory of your hand, our minds inspired to serve your purpose, and our hearts receptive to your love.

Thursday, March 4

Scripture reading *Mark 4: 21-34*

Additional Readings: *Genesis 42:29-38. & 1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...Hide it under a bushel? NO! I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!” (Children’s gospel song written by Harry Dixon Loes, 1920)

Our scripture for today reminds me of this well-loved song and my children and their friends as they enthusiastically sang it standing in a circle during a Family Life gathering. As I remember, the room was darkened and they all had real lighted candles. That was a good long time ago (my children are 30, 27 and 21!), but I still can see all the children’s bright smiling faces as they shouted, “NO! I’m gonna let it shine!”

How does God’s light shine through you? Does your faith, obedience and service to God help light a path for others to be closer to God? Or is your light hidden under a “bushel”? We as Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel and share it with all God’s people. Jesus is the ultimate light of the world: “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

Susan Thorkelson

Prayer: Dear God, especially during this time of Lent, we thank you for the perfect gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Help us to keep our light brightly burning as we seek to glorify you.

Friday, March 5

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 7:1-9

Additional readings: *Genesis* 43:1-15 & *Mark* 4:35-41

The New Testament lectionary readings for today have Jesus rebuking the wind, calming the storm and admonishing his disciples for their lack of faith. Meanwhile, long before Masters and Johnson, Paul is offering husbands and wives direction regarding “conjugal rights.” (1 *Corinthians* 7:3) Who knew reading the Bible could be so much fun? Since I can’t add anything to what Paul has suggested, check it out for yourself. Let’s turn our attention instead to the stormy seas.

Does God sleep through our storms? Is he indifferent to our suffering? Is he quick to criticize our lack of faith? God will not test us beyond our ability to bear. (1 *Corinthians* 10:13) However, God never promised that our days would be free from trials and tribulations. He said he would never leave or forsake us. In that we should take comfort. The wind and the seas may howl, but the strong, still voice of God will prevail.

Am I afraid? This is not the Spirit of God living in me, but the spirit of myself crowding God out.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.
(Hymn by Horatio G. Spafford)

Keith Brinks

Prayer: Oh Lord, when the storms of life are raging, remind us that we are not alone. You are indeed in the boat with us and can calm the seas. As the Psalmist says, “when I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” (Psalm 56:3)

Saturday, March 6

Scripture reading: *Mark 5:1-20*

Additional readings: *Genesis 43:16-34* & *1 Corinthians 7:10-24*

In Mark 5 we read of three miracles of Jesus. In the first he encounters a madman of great strength who would cry aloud all day and cut himself on the stones. He sought help from Jesus and Jesus cured him. The demons were cast out. He then wanted to follow Jesus but was told, "Go home to your own folk and tell them what the Lord in his mercy has done for you." Next, Jesus' garment is touched by a woman suffering from hemorrhages. As she reveals that she has been healed, he says to her "go in peace." Then in verse 38 he hears that a girl of twelve has just died. He goes to her side, takes her by the hand and instructs her, "Get up, my child." She got up and walked about. According to Mark, "He gave them strict orders to let no one hear about it, and told them to give her something to eat."

In these miracles, we might note how differently Jesus instructed the healed to respond. In the first miracle Jesus wanted the action publicized; in the third he wanted it to be kept secret. The instructions given by Jesus in the two instances show that there are no pat answers on how to respond in gratitude. From this we might gather that it may be simple to express our need, but very complex to frame the appropriate response. The decision of how to show gratitude might be more difficult than asking for the blessing itself. Perhaps, then, in addition to asking for God's healing mercy, we are also called to turn to God in prayer as we seek how to faithfully respond to God's grace.

John Huffaker

Prayer: Dear Father, we are quick to turn to you for help in our times of need. Having received your help, we ask that we be both thoughtful and patient as we pray for guidance on how we reflect the receipt of your blessing on our lives.

Monday, March 8

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 7:25-31

Additional readings: *Genesis* 44:18-34 & *Mark* 5:21-43

How often are you conscious of God's presence in your life? Our days are filled with our conceived needs and personal expectations without listening or hearing God speak to us. In these few verses, God challenges us to be more personally responsive to his direction. It is our responsibility to act first in accordance with God's expectations...we must not be distracted by the earthly attractions that we are confronted with. Seek first the kingdom of God and work with those on earth who act in a similar manner. It is important to be in touch with God's wishes for us and learn his plans through prayer, study and meditation.

Marge Kennedy

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us to listen for your word in our daily activities. May we place you before all others in our lives and treat those on earth as you have shown us with your own life. Keep our dialog with you alive and nourished with your love and guidance and may we remember always the gifts you have given us.

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Tuesday, March 9

Scripture reading: *John 4:43-54*

Additional readings: *Genesis 45:1-15, 1 Corinthians 7:32-40, Mark 6:1-13*

When Jesus heals the official's son, we are struck by how powerful and miraculous Jesus is. He is able to say something and it happens, just because a man asked. (Cameron, age 8). We are also amazed that he can heal someone without touching or seeing them. (Jamie, age 7) We cannot see Jesus, but he does amaze us and offer us miracles in our own lives each day.

The story also reminds us about when you go to God and sincerely ask, especially if it is selfless and on behalf of someone else, God will help. This reminds me of why we pray for others and the world in church. (Lindsay, age 13) It sometimes takes courage and faith just to ask for help; to make ourselves vulnerable. With God we can bring our joys and concerns, our needs and our gifts, and he is able to help us and help others through us.

The man did believe Jesus would heal his son, even if he never touched or saw him. Would he have gone looking for Jesus, would he have sought him out, if his son were not sick? Maybe this is why Jesus said we need miracles and wonders. (Gavin, age 11) What do we need today to make us believe? What brings us to seek Jesus? Do we need wonders in our lives to believe?

We know Jesus is with us always. Sometimes we only go to our heavenly Father when we are scared or alone. God, like a good parent, is with us all the time and wants us to know him better; he loves and cares for us. God wants to laugh with us and comfort us. We want to have faith and believe; we don't want to need big wonders to feel God's presence in our lives. Some of the smallest wonders are the biggest reminders of God's love.

The McKendrick Family

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for sending Jesus to us. Thank you for his life that both amazes and challenges us to lead our lives better. Please be with us as we journey towards Easter and help us to be amazed each day by your love and presence.

Wednesday, March 10

Scripture Reading: *Mark 6: 13 – 29*

Additional readings: *Genesis 45:16-28 & 1 Corinthians 8:1-13*

Would you believe a man who said you needed God to change your life? Would you believe this man if he lived alone in the desert, wore camel skins and ate wild honey and locusts?

John the Baptist had looks and a lifestyle that were as outrageous in the time of King Herod as they would be perceived today. He was no lunatic, nor was his message his own. God prepared John to announce the coming of Jesus Christ, our Messiah.

King Herod, who beheaded John, understood that John was a just and holy man, a man of great spiritual discernment. John knew the difference between those who responded to his message with humble, repentant hearts, and those who came to mock and criticize.

What a blessing to know we can ask God for this same ability to discern good from evil and that he will give it to us freely. God will assume full responsibility for our needs when we obey him.

Barbara Carter

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your open invitation to ask for anything we need and for your reassurance that when we seek your direction you will grant us godly wisdom that can only come from you. Please give us a heart to discern like you; let us see how you see and be attracted to what pleases and glorifies you.

Thursday, March 11

Scripture reading: *Mark 6:30-46*

Additional readings: *Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34 & 1 Corinthians 9:1-15,*

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, Imagine having to provide food for 5000 guests, especially if you were in a remote place and it was very late in the day. This was the dilemma of the disciples when they approached Jesus with their solution to this problem. In Mark 6:36, they suggested sending the people away to the villages so they could buy something to eat. But to their surprise, Jesus told them to give the people something to eat. Again, the disciples explained to Jesus that that the cost would be prohibitive. The disciples clearly thought that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and that this situation was impossible. But Jesus knew that this was a perfect time to glorify God and trust Him to provide for their needs. Jesus took what they had, the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to heaven, gave thanks and broke the loaves. A miracle took place in the hands of Jesus, proving that he is our provider. He is able to bless and to multiply. The lessons that we must take away from this wonderful miracle is, first, to determine God's will and trust Him to meet our needs. Secondly, we must realize that this miracle revealed that Jesus is Our Provider who meets every one of our needs. May we trust in Jesus to provide even when it seems impossible to us.

Janie Johnson, courtesy of Ann Butcher

Prayer. Father, I praise you because Jesus is Our Provider who meets every need. Help me to trust in him to do the impossible. Help me to see the miracles of your provision and glorify you by giving thanks. I pray this in the precious name of Jesus.

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Friday, March 12

Scripture reading: *Mark 6:47-56*

Additional readings: *Genesis 47:1-26* & *1 Corinthians 9:16-27*,

This passage follows the story of the feeding of the multitude with five loaves and two fish. Jesus tells his disciples to get into the boat and find a quiet place, but a big storm erupts and Jesus walks upon the water and climbs into the boat, thereby calming the heavy winds and saving all on board. At first, the apostles thought that Jesus was a ghost and they were terrified, but when he caused the winds to cease, they were astounded and found additional reason to believe in his divine powers.

From time to time we all face rough waters and head winds. Faith in our Savior goes a long way toward calm, inner peace and healing.

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Tom & Cindy Stewart

Prayer: Loving God, please give us the faith to believe in Jesus' powers and to rely on him during difficult times.

Saturday, March 13

Scripture reading: *Mark 7:1-23*

Additional readings: *Genesis 47:27-48:7* & *I Corinthians 10:1-13*

"You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition... Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him?"

When we insist that our own code of conduct is the only right one, we are taking our eyes off of God's law and over-riding it with our own. Jesus tells us in this passage that our external façade and superficial rituals are not what matter to God. It's what's in our heart that counts.

Tolerance and respect for others, no matter how different their behavior may be from ours, is God's expectation of us.

While we are often eager to claim ownership of our virtues and blame others for our weaknesses, pointing fingers at outside influences when we discover greed, jealousy and assorted sins in ourselves, Jesus reminds us that our sins originate inside us. It is from the inside out that we need to change our behavior.

Lynn Yeakel

Prayer: Give us the light, Lord, to see our duty to each other. Give us also the wisdom to respect our differences. With this light and this wisdom, grant that we may walk in your image so that in whatever direction we turn, we may see you coming toward us. This is our prayer. This is our promise.

Monday, March 15

Scripture reading: I *Corinthians* 10:14-11:1

Additional Readings: *Genesis* 49:1-28. *Mark* 7:24-37

First Corinthians tells us we should please all men in everything we do, not seeking our own advantage. Actions we take may be lawful, but we need to question if they build up others, whether they are good for our neighbors.

Are the decisions you make during each day for the good of mankind or are they good for you only? You might hear a voice questioning, "How do I use my money? What do I throw away? What gifts are given from the true heart? Are there ways I make decisions that take advantage of others? Am I always right? Politically, am I thinking of all of us? Morally, do I speak out, helping to change the world by action and deed?"

"Let no man seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."

Nancy Heckscher

Prayer: Lord, lift me from my complacent soul. Help me to improve and accomplish change in my life. Teach me by listening how to be less self-righteous.

Tuesday, March 16

Scripture reading: *Mark 8:1-10*

Additional readings: *Genesis 49:29-50:1* & *1 Corinthians 11:2-34*,

These verses from Mark indicate how thoughtful and compassionate Jesus was with people in need. Even though the crowd was large and all of them were in the desert, Jesus commanded his disciples to gather bread and fish and deliver them to the people who had nothing to eat. Once they were satisfied, he took the leftover food with his disciples and moved on to other areas in order to satisfy more people in need. In this way, Jesus spread scarce resources of bread and fish to many more until there were none.

The parallel in life to this story are the thousands of people today directly around and near us who are in dire need of shelter and food. We, who do not have this problem, must ask ourselves what we can do to make a difference. So often, we think and read about desperate people and go on our way. We are too busy and let someone else fill the void. Like Jesus, we need to step up to the plate and find the time and energy to satisfy their needs. Many of us do give our time, but unfortunately sometimes we do nothing. What will stimulate us into action, be it big or small? When we do something with people in need, the feeling and feedback will break your hearts. You will immediately feel that you can do more. What a difference you can make.

Ben Heckscher

Prayer: Dear God, let us learn from others that sharing and doing good in this world will give us an emotional and physical feeling that lifts you to another level beyond taking care of ourselves. Reaching out to the needy creates that inner feeling of satisfaction that will complement our lives in ways that are new and meaningful. Try it, feel it and you will be better off for it.

Wednesday, March 17

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 12:1-11

Additional readings: *Genesis* 50:15-26 & *Mark* 8:11-26

This passage of scripture tells us that each of us is given a talent from the Holy Spirit for the common good. We all have different talents, but they come from the same God. The way in which the Spirit dispenses these talents is for a good purpose.

Verses 4 – 11 of this text deal with the recognition of the diversity of these talents and the significance of that diversity. It is suggested that these differences are inspired to enrich the community by God's design. Thus the distribution of these gifts is not by accident, but they are distributed as the Spirit has seen fit for God's purposes. It is suggested that rather than look at a talent from an individual point of view (or boasting), one should try to integrate the behavior into the community and contribute to a sense of belonging and serving one another in Christ. These varieties of talents work to strengthen the life and service of the church.

I enjoyed reading verses 12 – 22 of this chapter where it further explains how each talent is indispensable to the welfare of the whole church. There is a comparison of the church to the human body. Each organ of the body contributes to the proper functioning of the entire body, but cannot function alone. Let us keep this in mind when we consider our individual talents.

Barbara Gord

Prayer: Dear Lord, we humbly pray that we may find our talents and use them in concert with others to make this community of faith stronger. Help us to remember that our talents come from the Spirit and are to be used in our community for the common good.

Thursday, March 18

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 12:12-26

Additional readings: *Exodus* 1:6-22 &, *Mark* 8:27—9:1

In this letter to the church at Corinth, Paul writes about how we are one body in Christ, made of many parts. He uses the body parts as a metaphor for all the different people of the world who follow him as one body with the Holy Spirit in each of us.

This brings to mind a memory of visiting our son in San Diego one Christmas. My young nephew, a Baptist minister serving a church in the same city at that time, had made connections with a Baptist church in Tijuana. The Mexican church had invited him and members of his congregation to visit their church the Sunday before Christmas. To my delight, he invited my husband, son and me to go along. The program, thoughtfully, was printed in English on one side and Spanish on the other so we could follow it together. As we look at each other on both sides of the aisle, there was a shared feeling of warmth and friendliness coming from our worship of the Christ Child. It was truly a spiritual experience.

Marilyn Stringer

Prayer: God, may the Holy Spirit use all my body parts to show love, faith and trust to family, friends and strangers.

Friday, March 19

Scripture reading: 1 *Corinthians* 12:22-13:3

Additional Readings: *Exodus* 2:1-22 & *Mark* 9:2-13

During his travels to Greece and after experiencing a mystical dream in which the Lord directed Paul to speak out, he decided to make Corinth home base for his missionary activities. As he traveled throughout Hellas, the Roman provinces of Achaia and Macedonia, Paul wrote back to Corinth reassuring the early Christians about their faith.

Paul spoke of God's extraordinary gifts to Christian believers, whom he defined as "the body of Christ." In modern terms, the body of Christ's organizational structure depicts Christ at the top of the pyramid, then apostles, then prophets, followed by teachers, through miracle workers and so on. But Paul explains in his letters that no matter who you are or what you possess, if you don't have God's love (*agape*) then you have nothing. To have God's love, one must be ready to receive this all encompassing gift.

What about today? As Christians how are we part of the body of Christ? Do we know Apostles? Prophets? Miracle workers? We, like the early Corinthians, may rarely come across those very special people possessing God-given gifts such as Paul, Augustine (4th century doctor and philosopher), Jerome (a scholar and philosopher who translated the bible into Latin), or more recently St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Theresa or Pope John Paul II. Like Christians through the last two millennia and those to whom Paul addressed his letters filled with hope and direction, we are simple people, interacting with friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

Paul promises that God gives the greatest gift - the extraordinary gift of *agape*, God's all-encompassing love - the very essence of his being. Not romantic or friendship-based, *phila* love, God's love is the Holy Spirit, which he bestows and which envelops every one of us, even (and especially) when wholly undeserved. God's love never judges. God's love never wavers. God's love never ceases.

Based on original devotion by Rosalinda R. Madara

Prayer: Dear God, help us, in our diverse roles, to recognize that it is your all-encompassing love that binds us together as the body of Christ..

Saturday, March 20

Scripture Reading: I *Corinthians* 13: 1-13

Additional Readings: *Exodus* 2:23 - 3:15 & *Mark* 9: 14-29

This passage describing the meaning of love is a familiar one to many, especially to those who have heard it read at a wedding or other occasions celebrating the love between an adult couple. Such words, however, should be kept in mind during the Lenten season and at all times, even when one may not be inclined to consider the importance of such a true, unselfish love.

It has been said that true happiness lies in sharing positive experiences while in relationship with others. With this passage from 1 *Corinthians* in mind, let us take this concept one step further and consider that the relationship mentioned shall be one in which the love described in 1 *Corinthians* is nurtured and shared.

Working as a mental health therapist for children in South Central Los Angeles, I often try to block the above mentioned love from any relationships I may have with my clients, due to the impending grief and disappointment that may arise when I am unable to improve a quality of life or see a smile emerge on the face of a child who has experienced severe physical abuse or watched a parent die after being shot on the street. However, when accompanying several of my clients to a Christmas party held by a local agency, I felt my own arrogance, irritability, and resentfulness fade, forgetting that I could be finishing my shopping or relaxing at home in front of the TV, and began to allow the patient and kind love to rest in my heart. Watching the children dance and laugh, caught up in a moment of pure happiness, I was able to open up and share such a joy with the children. Allowing myself the time to relax and forget about my own agenda, I was able to experience an unforgettable loving moment.

It is here that happiness is found in sharing a positive experience with another, but true happiness is felt when such experience is shared with the kind of love Paul writes about in his first letter to the *Corinthians*.

Mary Brearley Khan

Prayer: Dear Lord, during this busy day, grant us the ability to put aside our own agenda and share pure love with you and those who we meet along the way.

Monday, March 22

Scripture Reading: *Mark* 9: 30-41

Additional readings: *Exodus* 4:10-20 (21-26), 27-31 & 1
Corinthians 14:1-19

“In My name” are words that occur again and again in these twelve brief verses of the ninth chapter of Mark. Jesus is traveling with his disciples in Galilee and uses the occasion to present some important teaching moments for their benefit. He gets their attention by foretelling his death and resurrection, and they are alarmed and confused by the news. But they remain chiefly concerned with themselves, speculating about who among them is the greatest. Jesus admonishes them, reminding them that in his name, “whoever would be first shall be last and the servant of all.” Jesus continues to teach, using the example of a child. He proclaims, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me, but him that sent me.” In response to John’s critical remark regarding another’s performing exorcism in Christ’s name, Jesus encourages them, “Whoever is for us in my name cannot be against us.” Finally, using the example of a simple gift of a cup of water, Jesus promises them, “Whoever acts in my name, because he belongs to Christ, he shall find his reward.”

Here seem to be four lessons in humility, faith, witness and charity, all connected by the empowering phrase “in my name.” I am reminded of the words from the beautiful hymn, “How Clear is our Vocation, Lord,” that refer to how casually we as Christians wear his name. During this most holy season, we are called to believe, to confess, to embrace and to proclaim that name of Jesus Christ. Let us join one another in doing so!

“We mark your saints, how they became in hindrances more sure,
Whose joyful virtues put to shame the casual way we wear your
name, and by our faults obscure your power to cleanse and cure.”
(Fred Pratt Green)

DeAnn Clancy

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, in your name, may we gain strength, guidance, inspiration, wisdom, knowledge, forgiveness, unity, humility, faithful witness, charity, salvation and love.

Tuesday, March 23

Scripture reading: *Mark 9:41-50*

Additional readings: *Exodus 5:1 -;6:1 & 1 Corinthians 14:20-33a, 39-40*

We tend to think that it is the Old Testament that speaks of sin and punishment, hell and damnation, but in this passage from Mark, it is clear that Christ also has something to say about this. Verse 43 states, "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire." Other verses express, with the same fervor, Christ's fundamental commandment to avoid sin and to not lead others into sin. And to those who show acts of kindness in his name, he promises a reward. (Verse 41)

What does all this mean to us? It is easy to understand that Christ wants us to be kind to others, but surely he does not want us to literally cut off a hand or a foot, or pluck out an eye. He wants to get our attention. He wants us to know that it is our transgressions and the transgressions we cause in others that break down the world. That's serious stuff! But here is the good news: "For everyone will be salted with fire." (Verse 49) James Moffatt translates this and the following verse, "Everyone has to be consecrated by the fire of the discipline. It is Christ who offers us this discipline through his teachings, love and saving grace. Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Prayer: Gracious Lord, keep us ever mindful that it is you who provide the salt that allows us to live our lives in a manner pleasing to you and a good example to others.



The Thursday morning prayer group wishes you all a blessed Lent. We continue to pray for all those in our prayer lists. God, we thank you for all members of this church and thank you for the Holy Spirit that guides us in prayer each day.

Wednesday, March 24

Scripture reading: *Exodus 7:8-24*

Additional readings: *Mark 10: 1-16 & 2 Corinthians 2: 14-3:6*

The story of Moses is familiar. Found in a basket in the reeds by the Pharaoh's daughter, raised and adopted into the family. Moses killed an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew and was forced to flee to Midian, where he started a new life with a new family. In time the Pharaoh and all who knew of the killing had died and God decided it was time to free His chosen people from the bonds of Egypt. God told his plans to Moses from the burning bush. Moses chose Aaron to help him accomplish God's plan. Moses was 80 and Aaron was 83 years of age. Senior citizens we would call them. In the first meeting with the Pharaoh, Moses made God's plan known and Aaron turned his walking staff into a serpent. These were Hebrews to be listened to, but God had hardened the Pharaoh's heart and permission to let the Hebrews go was denied. The next day, Moses and Aaron met the Pharaoh and his servants at the river where the Pharaoh went to bathe. Moses made another request to the Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go to do God's will. Again the Pharaoh denied the request. Aaron took his walking staff, probed the water and the water turned to blood. This was the first of the ten plagues put upon Egypt.

Christians still communicate with God. We know when God is speaking to us. How many hints do we need to understand what God wants to do?

Jack and Betsy Miller

Prayer: Dear Lord, open our eyes and our hearts to hear and obey your plans for our lives.

Thursday, March 25

Scripture reading: *Mark 10:17-31*

Additional Readings: *Exodus 7:25-8:19 & 2 Corinthians 3:7-18*

When I first read this passage, I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what the Bible was trying to tell us when Jesus told the rich man, "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." But then I thought about it more and it made me think about a Steven Green song that talks about treasures in heaven and on earth and how children are a treasure of the Lord. The song is titled "Where Your Heart Is." It was inspired by Matthew 6:19-21, which says, "Do not store up for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The more I thought about this, the more the passage made sense to me. The Lord says that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven because the rich have stored treasures (i.e., money, tangible items) on earth, instead of spending that money to help the poor in their community. He says that it will be very hard, but it is not impossible. This passage still gives us hope of reaching the Kingdom of Heaven by telling us that if we help those in need with our money, instead of storing it selfishly, and store up treasures in heaven, instead of on earth, we have a greater chance of inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jennie Wilber

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember that storing treasures in heaven is more important than storing treasures on earth. Help us to be ever mindful of our neighbors in our community who need help and let us be compassionate toward them.

Friday, March 26

Scripture reading: *Mark 10:32-45*

Additional readings: *Exodus 9:13-35* & *2 Corinthians 4:1-12*, *Mark 10:32-45*

This passage is alternately hopeless and hopeful. Jesus' description of the humiliation and pain that lies in front of him is wrenching, and we feel the disciples' pain as they hear him tell of it and walk alongside him toward his death. But his pronouncement to the disciples that "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" requires a refocusing on each individual's duty to serve others, instead of themselves. And that is inherently hopeful.

True leadership is best exemplified by and through serving others. In this way, the leader sets an example for all to follow. And by following the leader's example, his followers create the greatest good for all. The leadership-through-service quality that Jesus demonstrated to his disciples can also be seen in the loving relationships between husband and wife, between parent and child, between friends, and between pastor and parishioners.

In our role as parents, we try our best to create the example we want our children to emulate. As spouses, we work constantly in the service of our partnership as a whole, often at the expense of momentary, selfish wants. And that partnership exists in the service of our children -- to demonstrate on a daily basis the Christ-like principles of love and compassion we hope to instill in them. It's not always easy. But on a larger scale, this is the way in which our family is in service to the Lord.

The McCormack Family

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to follow Jesus' example, to lead by example, to embrace the social consciousness of the greater good; guide us to select those leaders who embody Jesus' ethic of service and humility; inspire us to be a friend, spouse and parent in Jesus' image.

Saturday, March 27

Scripture Reading: 2 *Corinthians* 4:13-18

Additional Readings: *Exodus* 10:21-11:8 & *Mark* 10:46-52

The ancient Babylonian law code of Hammurabi summarized its philosophy of justice in the statement “an eye for an eye.” This principle was later adopted by the Jews during their captivity in Babylon. (Deut. 19:21) Jesus said, “If your eye offends you, pluck it out.” (Matt. 18:9) Themis, the goddess of justice and law, is famously blindfolded, demonstrating our belief that justice at least should be blind. The apostle Paul seems to extol the virtues of openness as well when he writes, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.”

These authorities speak of the importance of messages beyond those that our physical sight conveys. How might our lives change if we heeded these? What negative judgments of others would never come to mind? What self-hatreds would never arise? What friendships would have a chance to bloom that otherwise might not? What new priorities would arise in our lives to take the place of those based on understanding limited to what we see?

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians does not include instructions on different ways of seeing, even though at times our faith to act on the guidance of Jesus falters. The first step may just be to begin to become more aware of the instances in which we let our sight usurp the throne on which our hearts should sit, and to recognize those moments for the coup d’états that they are.

Adapted from an original
devotion by Scott Rauch

Prayer: Dear Lord, please give me the opportunity to see with my heart instead of my eyes.

Monday, March 29

Scripture reading: *Lamentations* 1:1-2, 6-12 & *II Corinthians* 1:1-7

Additional reading: *Mark* 11:12-25

Comparing the first two readings for today shows the difference between pain and suffering.

In the verses from *Lamentations*, Jerusalem is sunk in despair after her capture by the Babylonians “wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.” The writer describes the people of Jerusalem as feeling they have become “a mockery,” despised, lonely, worthless, and unclean “with none to comfort her.” The people in these passages have experienced the pain of a defeat, but their pain turns into suffering because they see only a judgmental God and react to their set-back with self hatred. This is suffering.

We always suffer when we are in a self-hating mode like this. The verses from *Lamentations* give us the opportunity to ask the question. “What can liberate us from such suffering?”

The passages from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians point us to the answer.

Having had an insight into the basic goodness and compassionate nature of the universe, Paul writes of a God who “consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction.” He describes affliction and pain not as an opportunity to blame and hate ourselves but as an opening for “consolation and salvation.” Thus, the inevitable pains and afflictions we encounter transform through love and compassion for self and others. They remain as pain, but do not become suffering.

Ona Hamilton

Prayer: May we appreciate that Jesus was trying to liberate us from suffering by teaching us to love and forgive ourselves and others who cause us pain. And may we appreciate that he was willing to endure a painful death in order to teach us this.

Tuesday, March 30

Scripture reading: *Lamentations* 1:17-22

Additional readings: 2 *Corinthians* 1:8-22 & *Mark* 11:27-33

Adapting these verses to be about a person rather than a city, these are my thoughts:

A man who was the epitome of success, power, leadership and religious fervor becomes exposed as having betrayed the trust put in him. He has been self-serving, ruthless and dishonest.

He is a **SINNER!**

His friends, business associates, public figures, and, most importantly, his family have abandoned him. They are no support in his time of need.

He is **ALONE!**

He is in deep despair and much pain. He has forsaken the ways of the Lord, so highly touted by he himself. He seeks succor and solace, but there is none.

He is **HUMBLLED!**

He has felt the wrath of the Lord and is in a limbo of fear.

Now he must find his inner strength to re-awaken his faith and put himself in the hands of the Lord in order to find his way forward from his nadir to the Light once more. The Commandments will guide him to life again, but first he must admit that the way of the Lord is the way to a life worth living and put his trust in the Lord.

He can be **SAVED!**

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23)

Margo Bennett

Prayer: Lord, find us when we are in despair and guide us to your love. May your grace enable us to grow in faith, love and service to you and to follow the path shown us by your Son, Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, March 31

Scripture reading: *2 Corinthians* 1:23 – 2:11

Additional readings: *Lamentations* 2:1-9 & *Mark* 12:1-11

Conflict is inevitable in our lives. We have conflict in our families, at work, at school, with friends, and sometimes within the church. When conflicts arise, there is the potential for hurt, distrust, anger, and alienation. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, is trying to diffuse a sensitive situation and resolve conflict and controversy. He begs the Corinthians to forgive someone who has already been punished so this person shall not be “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow,” and asks the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for him. Conflict is unavoidable, but how we deal with conflict is not. We must have a will to forgive and a commitment to being a forgiving people. That is the spirit of Paul – a desire and longing to forgive – as well as the spirit of Christ.

Bonnie Callahan

Prayer: Dear God, help me to resolve conflicts peacefully, and help me to fulfill the spirit of Christ by being a loving and forgiving person.

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Thursday, April 1

Scripture reading *Mark 14.12-25*

Additional Readings: *Lamentations 2:10-18 & I Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32*

“While they were eating, He took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”

So the scene of the last supper is set, the model for modern day communion. Jesus tells the disciples to eat the bread and drink the wine, representative of his body and blood. Today, we eat bread and drink wine in order to preserve the covenant that was made on that night.

Except, we must always remember that the covenant was truly made when Jesus was killed. When taking communion, the last supper should not be in our heads: the crucifixion should.

The crucifixion was the entire world’s first true communion. All of mankind took part in the eating of the flesh, the drinking of the blood. Jesus incorporated himself into humanity by choosing a mortal death. As Jesus was crucified, our relationship with the Trinity immediately began to snowball into an all encompassing and intense embodiment of love - he showed us nothing but love, and we responded by showing him to the cross; but he still loves us.

The crucifixion was the ultimate sealing of the deal. Jesus gave his life so that mankind may have a chance of residing with the Father after our days on earth are over. Jesus gave his life so that mankind can experience God’s love on here on earth. We took Jesus’ life, only to be loved by him even more. That is the true essence of communion.

Dan Petrovich

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand the significance of your choice
That you gave your life, made the ultimate sacrifice
All out of your love for us, sinners, imperfect beings.

Friday, April 2

Scripture reading *Lamentations* 3; 1-9, 19-33

Additional readings: 1 *Peter* 1:10-20, *John* 13:36-38 & 19:38-42

Perhaps the current state of the world is not as bleak as the utter destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE.

Lamentations is the prophet Jeremiah's cataloging to God of the death and destruction he has wrought; and Jeremiah leaves no doubt that he attributes it to God;

"How the Lord has covered the Daughter of Zion with the cloud of his anger! He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger." (Lam. 2:1)

In the passage from today's lectionary, Jeremiah recounts his pain and anguish;

"He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long." (Lam. 3:2-3)

Yet, "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.'" (Lam. 3:19-24)

The state of the world today makes us wonder about God's goodness and power. How could he allow the suffering of so many innocent people; the warring between Christians; the unconscionable misdistribution of wealth resulting in obscene luxury for the few and starvation for many?

We must remember that God through Jesus suffered pain and death on the cross. So must we suffer the injustice in the world on the hope that God will save us in the end through his Son Jesus. We must do our best to relieve the pain and suffering in the world until he comes again or we join him in His heavenly kingdom.

Robert Merin

Saturday, April 3

Scripture reading *Lamentations* 3:37-58 & *Romans* 8:1-11

Additional reading: *Hebrews* 4:1-16

In the early church, Lent was a time of preparation for adult baptism, as well as reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant. The sacrament and reaffirmations were then observed as part of the Great Vigil of Easter, between Good Friday and Easter. The season of Easter was a continuation of the Lenten one and a time to focus on “learning the mystery of living life as a baptized follower of Christ and one who breaks bread in Christ’s name with all the faithful.”

Lent can be a journey to visit or revisit the baptismal font. It can be a road to Jerusalem with its reminders of Jesus’ mandate for us to love one another, and his suffering for our redemption. Easter Vigil can be a time to consider death in light of our savior’s resurrection. The days of Easter are an opportunity for recommitment to baptismal promises and heightened receptivity to the mystery in Christian life.

Anita Iyengar

Prayer: “Water on the human forehead...is the sign of death and rising...life is hallowed by the knowledge: God has been this way before.” (“Out of Deep, Unordered Water,” Rustington, found at <http://www.pcusa.org/ideas/lent/lenteasterworkshop.htm>)

*He is not here;
he has risen,
just as he said.*

Matthew 28:6