



PILGRIMAGE:

Travels and Teachings of Jesus

2019 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
National City Christian Church

Cover Designed by Colleen Walsh

Welcome to the 2019 Lenten Devotional

Pilgrimage: Travels and Teachings of Jesus

pilgrimage (noun) \ 'pil-grə-mij \

1. a journey of a pilgrim, especially one to a shrine or a sacred place
2. the course of life on earth

When Miriam and I made a trip to Jerusalem, the first instruction our guide gave to us was this: "You are not traveling in this land as a tourist; you are here as a pilgrim." To travel in the places where Jesus once traveled, and to study his teachings from historic vistas described in the scriptures were meaningful moments that left us changed.

This Lenten season we are going on a journey. A journey of the heart. A journey with Jesus. Our theme is *Pilgrimage: Travels and Teachings of Jesus*. I hope that you will set aside some time each day for the next 40 days for this journey. If necessary, put it on your calendar. Keep your Divine appointment. Read the daily scriptures. Ask God to direct your walk that day. To increase your spiritual growth, find a group of Christians to gather with weekly and discuss your journey in that week. And above all, do not neglect your weekly worship.

These daily Lenten devotions were prepared by members and friends of National City Christian church, just for our pilgrimage together. I want to dedicate this year's devotional to Diana Morse who has faithfully labored as our editor for over a decade. For all of her contributions to our journey of faith as National City Christian Church, I am so very grateful. This year's devotions were collected and edited by the Reverend Steven Baines, who has blessed us on staff in this last year.

Though we may not travel far physically, this Lenten season, let us journey together spiritually -- traveling with Jesus, learning from his teachings, and the teachings of his many contemporary disciples. Remember: we are not tourists here; we are on a pilgrimage with Christ and one another!

*Rev. Dr. Stephen W. Gentle
Senior Pastor*

First Week in Lent
Jesus Is Led Into The Wilderness
Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, and “One does not live by bread alone.”

“Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

“Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

“Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.”

Ash Wednesday, March 6

The Temptation of Jesus, which we read about in today’s passage, occurs immediately after he is baptized and a heavenly voice proclaims, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” The writer of Luke is perhaps warning us that we are at risk of being tempted when we are exuberantly confident of a path we are on, perhaps especially when we are embarking on a new stage in life. We have made our choice, the discernment period is over and we bound ahead, rather than continually return to the wilderness to listen carefully for God’s voice.

It is at these times when we can become too sure of ourselves and our pride can interfere with our being open to new learning or novel information. In my work as a psychologist and a graduate school professor, I spend agonizing hours with people as they discern whether a cherished path needs to be relinquished and a new path needs to be found. In the scripture passage we read for today, Jesus stays the course and the guideposts he uses are instructive. Do not be guided by materialism or covetousness for “Man does not live on bread alone.” Do not be guided by a desire for power or influence but rather “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” Do not abdicate responsibility for your life but be in daily discernment about your path lest you put “the Lord your God to the test.” With these guideposts we can discern whether we are on the right path; or whether unexpected changes are necessary and whether we need to embrace these new, and perhaps necessary, changes with grace and determination.

Prayer: Dear God, may we continually return to the wilderness to ensure that the voice which guides us is yours. Amen.

Sarah Hedlund

Thursday, March 7

For 40 days the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus did not succumb to that persistent temptation. Of course, he didn’t. But could we do the same? And just 40 days? Doesn’t it sometimes feel like we spend our entire life in the wilderness being tempted by the devil? Are you tempted to betray a coworker? Are you tempted to not love your neighbor? Are you really being the best Christian you can be or are you tempted to take what seems like the easier route and not worship the Lord your God and serve him only?

We are constantly tempted by the pressures of this world. The devil is never all that far away. But there is good news. God is even closer. If we don’t stop and take in the big picture, it is easy for us

to think the devil's way is the right way. It may seem like the easier path. But it isn't. God's way is not only the right way, it is the easier way. Think about how much better your life is when you realize you trust God and are ready to follow that wonderful path. We may spend our lives in the wilderness, and we may be constantly tempted. But we were created in God's image and we were given the gift of reason. We know the difference between right and wrong. And we know God is always right and always good.

Prayer: God, temptation pummels us. The devil wants to rip us away from you. But we love you. We trust you. And we will follow you. Thank you for the gifts you have given us. And thank you for our relationship with you. From time to time we may stumble, and for that we ask your forgiveness. We ask that you continue to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Just as you led Jesus out of the wilderness. Amen.

Paul Guequierre

Friday, March 8

The Bible is full of wilderness stories. In fact, the wilderness seems to be one of God's favorite places to be revealed to individuals. The Bible is also filled with references to the number 40, using it to represent a lengthy period of time.

This experience of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness ties him into the great spiritual lineage of Moses on Mt. Sinai, Elijah on Mt. Horeb, and even the 40-year nomadic wandering of Israel. The wilderness is where the resources are scarce and the individual is vulnerable. Wilderness experiences then, are those desolate places and barren times, when the familiar and comfortable are disrupted.

You do not need to look far for them. You can find wildernesses right here in the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C. Perhaps some of you are experiencing your own wilderness time right now. Our wilderness experience may be an event that creates fear or confusion, an experience of personal depression or emptiness, or a loss that brings despair and loneliness. Whatever the wilderness, the comfort comes from knowing we are not alone there.

Our devotion today teaches that Christ himself encountered such a time and that he was tempted and tested. Our lesson also teaches that by calling on the strength of God, and calling on his own inner strength, he persevered. The same is true for us as we go through the trials and challenges associated with one of life's wildernesses.

Even today, God is seen most clearly, and experienced most vividly, in the wilderness. When our supports are removed, our provisions are limited, and our direction is unclear, it is our open hearts that make possible the fullness of God.

There are many routes to Easter, but all of them go through the wilderness. All this we know, but we need to be reminded of it, and Lent is a good time for that.

Prayer: Holy God, open our hearts to experience all that you desire for us. Open our eyes so that we may see you are more than an oasis in the wilderness. And open our ears that we may always hear the Holy Spirit's gentle leaning even when our human strength is almost gone. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Woodie Rea

Saturday, March 9

This passage of scripture opens by stating, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit." This simple statement can be easy to pass by very quickly. However, it is one of the most fundamental expressions of a very important truth to understand. The Christian life cannot be lived by ordinary human strength. In fact, it is impossible. Jesus was able to conquer the flesh in the temptations that Satan is giving him here because he was endowed with power from on high. It was the Holy Spirit that not only empowered Jesus but who will also empower the believer who places their trust in God.

There have been so many pitfalls that I've been able to avoid because of my practicing this truth. I say "practice" because it does not develop overnight. After many years now I've come to a place where I can discern the tactics of the enemy who will do anything he can to keep me from being who and what I was created for...to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.

Total reliance on the Holy Spirit has brought me wisdom and victory over numerous temptations. Even if I have a temporary setback, I know I will come back stronger than before because I will have learned something of the grace and mercy of God. This will lead me to having more compassion for others, especially for those who have not yet come to know the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am so thankful for the provision of the Holy Spirit, given so that your people can have victory over Satan and his tactics. May we continue to walk in obedience as we follow the example of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Paul Heffron

Sunday, March 10

Note: Writers on Sundays were asked to address the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their lives.

"On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." Luke 4:11

As with the devil's first two temptations, Jesus did not accede to the third – to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple – even though the devil enticed Jesus, saying: "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you" (v. 10) and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." (v. 11)

Jesus sternly cautioned the devil: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." (v. 12)

The eagle's wings image is oft-used in the Bible, calling to mind that, when its young are first fledged, the eagle is said to assist them in their flight by flying beneath them, so that, if necessary, the young may settle upon its wings or back. God intends for us to know that he has likewise bestowed the same tender and powerful care upon us.

The hymn *On Eagle's Wings*, written by Father Joncas in 1979, has become one of my favorites. Its four verses and refrain, based on Psalm 91, is included as No. 77 in our Chalice Hymnal. Most frequently heard at funerals, it offers great comfort knowing that "He will raise you up on eagle's wings...and hold you in the palm of his hand."

Prayer: Holy Comforter, my heart, mind, soul, and body are at peace knowing that you hold me in the palm of your hand. Amen.

David Walker

Second Week in Lent Jesus Draws Near To Jerusalem Scripture: Luke 13:31-35

"At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem." Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Monday, March 11

What is your mission? Do you know? Do you have a clear picture?

Jesus came to earth knowing what his mission was. He varied his “tactics” or approach. He was always about ministering to others through feeding, healing, teaching, even as he approached Jerusalem. Although the road was difficult, he moved ahead. He could not be persuaded to give up or take another route. He had to be obedient to God’s purpose.

I look around to see where God is leading me. It seems the specifics have changed over the years: I have taught Vacation Bible School, sponsored the Young Adults, visited the sick and shut-ins, but always the focus is to follow and serve Christ, to live a life that honors and brings glory to God. My road may not be easy or even seem real clear. Prayer can help to focus and direct me each and every day.

You, too, can turn to God in prayer for help in finding your mission.

Prayer: Oh God, open my eyes to your leading today. Amen.

Kathleen Swihart

Tuesday, March 12

Dr. Ruth Anne Reese of Asbury Theological Seminary describes in her commentary of Luke 13 three distinct uses of the Greek word, *thelo*, meaning “desire,” “wish,” or “want.” The Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod *wants* to kill Jesus (vs.31). Jesus *desires* to gather Jerusalem to himself as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (vs. 34). And Jerusalem does not *wish* to be gathered (vs.35). All distinct uses of the same Greek word, yet with three different consequences.

During these difficult and turbulent times, when it is easier to shout than to listen, I often wonder what I, a minister of the gospel, truly long for or desire. I say I want peace, but do I seek to become peace? I say I wish for all the fighting to stop, but do I desire to stop fighting myself? Sometimes these thoughts and questions drive at the heart of this text. Jesus cried for the holy city of Jerusalem longing to shelter her as a mother to her infant. Yet in equal defiance, the people of Jerusalem did not long for the care of God.

Dr. Reese concludes her observations of this scene stating: “In this world of religious and political violence, what does it mean to long for our enemies to experience Jesus’ compassion even as we ourselves have?” Jesus knew that his message was not to be heeded, but there was work yet to do. He went about healing and caring for those most in need. Jesus’ treacherous road through Jerusalem is our Lenten journey. It may be challenging, but may we desire to be sheltered under our mother’s wings as we go.

Prayer: “Lord make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, joy.” Amen. (Prayer of St. Francis)

Steven Baines

Wednesday, March 13

The Old Testament has some pretty brutal stories, and the book of Revelation is filled with harrowing images that still make their way into blockbuster horror movies, but few moments in the Bible make my hair stand on end like those episodes where Jesus gets angry.

In Luke 13:31-35, Jesus isn’t flipping over merchant’s tables and casting traders out of the temple (yet), but his words burn as he describes Jerusalem, the epicenter of the Jewish faith, as a city that murders God’s messengers.

Jesus’ sentiment here feels very close to home. If you know my parents, it may be hard to imagine that my mother and father are even capable of anger or exasperation. However, I made plenty of messes when I was growing up that left them with little recourse. And I don’t just mean the times I

left my muddy shoes in the middle of the living room; I made some choices that I'm sure frustrated my mom and dad.

These days, I view those stressed moments in our past with more clarity. My parents made sacrifices to provide for my siblings and me, keep us safe, and prepare us for life's trials. But sometimes I didn't appreciate their gifts, avoided their protection, or dismissed their guidance. How often did they want to gather me in "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings"? At the time, my self-defeating actions must have been more difficult for them than I realized.

In this passage from Luke, Jesus laments that Jerusalem is a city blind with its own blessings, arrogant in its pursuits and skeptical of its own redeemer. Jesus has given his all and is about to sacrifice everything to save the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and yet he's pushed away — even threatened with death. Unlike Herod, the Pharisees and the many pious people of Jerusalem, we have seen Jesus for who he is. We know his hopes and desires for us. Yes, we make messes, and — who knows — we may still exasperate him. But we are blessed with enough clarity to return to his teachings and gather under his wing. We know to greet him saying "blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Prayer: Lord, you work to heal me and lead me towards wholeness, but there are still times when I push you out and reject your help. I am sorry. Thank you for the gift of your son and the knowledge that he has paid for my sins. I will follow his guidance and listen for your will for my life. Amen.

Wesley Gentle

Thursday, March 14

Christians are called to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' life and death and on the role we play in continuing his mission. As in all the gospels, the Pharisees in Luke are largely antagonistic to Jesus and Jesus to them. Though the Pharisees' motives seem problematic, Luke 23:8 suggests Herod's interest in Jesus was not in killing him. In fact, when given the chance to condemn Jesus, Herod refused to do so. Of course, we cannot be sure of Herod because he had both imprisoned and executed John the Baptist.

To reinforce that Herod has no control over him, Jesus adds that he will be doing these things "today and tomorrow" (Luke 13:32), which may be referencing the resurrection. It is the following verse that makes it clear that it is his death that Jesus primarily has in mind: "Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem." (Luke 13:33)

Lent is preparing us to experience Jesus' cross. We are called to do so by considering whether our lives lead appropriately to that cross. Can we make sense of our lives as part of the establishment of God's kingdom in our world? Are we frightened from our mission by threats of earthly rulers? Or consider this: were Jesus to speak prophetically to us, what would his message be? Or how have we resisted God's messages and kingdom and/or what difference does it make for us during and beyond Eastertide? Certainly, these are imperative questions to weigh from today's meditation.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we ask often that we may do your will on earth as it is in heaven. Yet, our lives here make understanding your divine will difficult, if not rather confusing at times. During Lent, may our prayer and reflections on your teachings bring clarity to our mission and lasting strength for the journey. In Christ name we pray. Amen.

Bill Brown

Friday, March 15

We have all been rejected and rejection doesn't feel good. It can be devastating. In the scripture, Jesus' message and ministry are rejected. The Pharisees are trying to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem. But Jesus doesn't fall for their ruse. Rather, Jesus laments their hard hearts and continued dismissal of God's prophets. However, it is in the midst of this confrontation that Jesus'

purpose becomes clear. Jesus knew that he had to fulfill his calling. He would continue driving out demons and healing people and travel to Jerusalem, no matter the danger.

Prayer: Gracious God, reveal to me my purpose in life so that when trials, tribulation, or temptation come my way, I will be constrained to follow the path God has set for my life. Amen.

Beverly Goines

Saturday, March 16

Sometimes I get frustrated by all the parables that Jesus tells his disciples and followers. Wouldn't it be easier if Jesus just plainly said what he meant? And yet, other times he doesn't mince words at all – like that one time he called Herod a fox (which some interpret as “pompous pretender.” No confusion in meaning that day. Jesus plainly says he will continue his work and continue on his way to Jerusalem.

His unwavering commitment to his divine mission and worldly journey is evident. No time for frivolous threats from foxes. He quickly turns his attention away from these Pharisees and Herod and turns toward Jerusalem.

Like a parent bemoaning a child who has gone astray, Jesus laments the loss of his beloved Jerusalem. But as always with Jesus, this passage ends with an esoteric verse. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Does it suggest the Palm Sunday parade or his second coming or something else entirely?

Prayer: Lord, may we make time to ponder these verses, your words, and meaning. May we see Jesus and not be blinded to his true teachings about the love of God and God's love for our neighbors. Amen.

Shana Williams

Sunday, March 17

Note: Writers on Sundays were asked to address the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their lives.

Poetic words that spark our imagination are part of the appeal of all the psalms. In the psalms, “the seas roar, the trees of the forest sing. The earth rejoices.” Through the poetry of the psalms we are taken to the heights of joy or to the depths of the valleys of shadows. Psalms lift our spirits and turn our hearts to God, the Creator.

*“Bless the Lord, my soul,
and bless God's holy name.
Bless the Lord, my soul,
who leads me into life.”*

The hymn refrain, “Bless the Lord My Soul,” is based on Psalm 103. It was composed for the Taizé community by Jacques Berthier (1923-1994), the organist of Saint-Ignace Church in Paris. The Taizé Community, an ecumenical community in Taizé, France, was founded in 1940. This community brings together people from around the world to pray and meditate using scripture and song.

Singing the psalms is a form of prayer that brings us closer to God. In this Taizé hymn refrain, the repetition of the words and music offer us a chance to go deeper into the words of scripture, helping us to clear our minds and focus only on our prayer to God. When used as an introit, this refrain transports us from our daily lives and helps us prepare for worship.

For every moment of our lives, there is a psalm. A psalm of trust, a psalm of lament, a psalm of thanksgiving, a psalm of praise. As we move from the valleys of shadows to the highest mountains of our lives, may we turn to the psalms for comfort, strength and praise.

If you would like to listen to the refrain, "Bless the Lord My Soul," here is a link:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4

A Psalm Prayer: God of life and love, we bless your holy name. We lift our praises to you. May our meditations be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Miriam Gentle

Third Week in Lent

Jesus Teaches On Theodicy: "When Bad Things Happen"

Scripture: Luke 13:1-9

"At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

"Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."

Monday, March 18

I sometimes question why tragedies happen to good people while bad things seem not to happen to bad people. This scripture mentions two events in which bad things happened to unsuspecting people. It makes us realize that our existence is delicately precarious. Jesus asked if those who suffered these tragedies were greater sinners or guiltier than those who were present, but yet spared from the same calamities. Jesus implies that the victims did nothing wrong – nothing that caused their demise.

In the face of tragedy, which can sadly become commonplace, Jesus provides comfort and a sobering call for all of us to examine our own lives. We should not assume that others who are experiencing bad things are being punished or make assumptions that people always get what they deserve. In God's eyes, we all have sinned, and suffering is not direct retribution for sin. Tragedies should teach us that since death and judgment are imminent, we need to be ready through true repentance. We don't know when our time is up, but as Jesus states in this scripture, unless we repent, we too will perish like the people who suffered in this scripture.

Later in this scripture, Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree. For years the tree has had no fruit, and its owner tells the gardener to cut it down. However, the gardener states that he will fertilize and nurture the tree waiting to see if it bears any fruit. Are we like the fig tree just sitting around, not bearing fruit, and seemingly doing nothing? What am I doing to be a fruit during this season of Lent? Am I rooted in Christ and living a Christian life to the fullest? The Lenten season offers us an opportunity to make us aware of God's presence in our lives. Let us be open to being tooled and nurtured by God, like the gardener who fertilized and nurtured the fig tree. And, let us not presume that others who are not experiencing good things in their lives are being punished. God is there when tragedy happens and when good things happen to guide us to live a more full and dedicated life of faith.

Prayer: Lord, help us to give up what stands between us and you. Let us use this Lenten season to examine ourselves in the sight of God and experience the liberating presence of repentance and the new life it brings. May we not squander the grace of the present moment. May we say yes to you, to your will, and to your way of holiness. Let us not wait to repent for we are living on borrowed time. Amen.

Tuesday, March 19

As Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem, it was reported that Pontius Pilate was upsetting and irritating the Jewish people by ignoring their religious beliefs and demanding that they live by Roman laws and standards. In this scripture, Pilate is using the Temple money to build an aqueduct, and brutally killing those who rebelled against the usage of the money. Furthermore, while some Jews were on pilgrimage from Galilee offering their sacrifices in the Temple, Pilate sent troops to kill them – fearing a possible riot. The scripture says that their blood mingled with the blood of their sacrifices, polluting their Temple.

The moral of the story is, yes, Pilate killed the Galileans in Jerusalem, but the Galileans were no more sinful than any other Galileans seeking revenge against the Romans. Jesus' message is you must repent and follow God's directions, or you will be destroyed. Many years later in 70 A.D., Jerusalem was destroyed when the Jewish people refused to follow God's direction of peace which Jesus urged throughout his ministry. Jesus is making it clear that unless you repent and follow him you will suffer the consequences.

There is an alternative to the promise of destruction which is offered in the example of the fig tree that produces no fruit. The fig tree is given a second chance when the gardener promises to re-cultivate the fig tree in hopes of producing fruit. In other words, are we following God's example for our lives? Are we producing good fruit for God's Kingdom? More importantly, are we doing the will of God?

Prayer: Dear God, standing here in your presence. Thinking of the good things you have done. Waiting here patiently, just to hear your still small voice again. Holy, righteous, faithful to the end, Savior, healer, redeemer and friend. I will worship you for who you are, Jesus. Amen. ("For Who You Are," by Hillsong Live)

Loretta Tate

Wednesday, March 20

Time to Refresh

One of the words I've adopted from the digital age is "refresh." The computer will "refresh" my email, bringing in the new and (maybe) fixing the old. I use that word at the beginning of each New Year to evaluate what I'm doing and why and to make adjustments.

As I read and pondered this passage and parable from Luke, I found myself focusing on the word "repentance." It's familiar from Bible study but it's not in my everyday vocabulary. What does it mean, today, to "repent"?

A dictionary definition could simply be to turn from evil and to turn to the good. As often as I've heard "repent and be saved," I'm hard pressed to explain it with depth. But I'm overflowing with thoughts of "turning to the good." A life led in communion with God and trying to follow the life that Jesus has taught us is rich beyond measure. I spend more time thinking of good things to do than regretting things I shouldn't have done. Still, should "repent" expand my view of good works? Should I be more involved in works to make this world a better place?

Prayer: O God, help me find new meaning to life and deepen my spiritual life to better serve you. Amen.

Diana Morse

Thursday, March 21

Bad things happen. A hurricane ravages Puerto Rico. A gunman massacres young people in a South Florida school. Wildfires destroy Paradise.

We live in a world where bad things happen. Innocent people get hurt. But Jesus teaches us that this is not the judgment of God. Instead, Jesus warns us to repent and bear the fruit of love. God is not quick to judge. God does not lash out in violence. God is the patient vineyard owner, continually nurturing us – his stubborn fig tree. In this Lenten season, let us bloom and bring love to our church, our neighbors, our community, and our world. The fig tree exists to bear fruit. What will you bring to the table?

Prayer: Holy God, we thank you for your patience and your steadfast love. Help us grow and cultivate us in the image of your only son Jesus Christ, so that we may bear the fruit of love. Amen.

Anthony Mague

Friday, March 22

I have often been frustrated by people who tell you that God doesn't give you anything you can't handle. I look with mystery at people in the "prosperity movement." This thinking denies the magnificence of what makes faith so important. If you accept pain, loss and disappointment as elements of living a full life, it is by digging deeper in your faith that you discover that it is God's grace that helps you manage the challenges of life. Simply living a "pure" life does not give you the strength to handle the losses that occur with painful regularity in life. If you never experience the loss of a loved one, how can you appreciate the glory of a newborn baby or survival after disease?

People of faith cannot expect that as long as they obey the rules there will be no setbacks, no crime, no injury, no disappointment. When life invariably happens, this implies that either they lacked faith or that something else was determined to set them off the course to God's will. I know that if I had lived this way I would have my faith strained every day. I have not led a simple or an entirely righteous life. Sometimes I think I tell myself that God has a sense of humor but I am certainly more a "person of faith" by the setbacks in my life. I take responsibility for my failures and ask God for the strength to handle the next problem with grace, and live in a manner that only reflects God's presence.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are sometimes clumsy, careless people stumbling through the world. Let us strive to lead a better life knowing that you are by our side. We are not always worthy but we desire to be your disciples. Let us strive to be forgiving of ourselves and others. Let us manage pain and disappointment knowing that it is part of Christian growth and allows us to serve others who suffer as well. Amen.

Barbara Boward

Saturday, March 23

"Jesus told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, "Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" And he answered him, "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."

In response to two tales of apparently undeserved tragedy, Jesus calls those who can hear to repentance: "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Then, he tells a parable about an unproductive fig tree, its owner, and the gardener. The owner, understandably frustrated that he has lost money on the tree for three years straight, wants to cut his losses. Still, the gardener counsels patience, and asks for more time to coax fruit from tree.

It's not at all clear who's God in this parable. It may be that the owner represents God, and the gardener represents Christ and/or the Holy Spirit. What is clear, given that my three-year old is screaming in my ear for candy while I type, is that the fig tree represents all of us. And that is the good news, that our present is not our future if we accept the instruction of experience and those who care for us. We can improve, grow, and produce the fruit of the Kingdom.

Prayer: Lord, in your grace and mercy, help us to learn, to seek wisdom, to seek your understanding, so that our lives may produce the fruit that you seek. Amen.

Alan Williams

Sunday, March 24

Note: Writers on Sundays were asked to address the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their lives.

Lord Who Throughout These 40 Days

Claudia Hernaman (1839-1898)

Tune: St. Flavian, C.M.

Our congregation often sings this simple yet earnest hymn every Lenten season. The reason: the verses track closely with our own Lenten journey. We first notice that the title, "Lord Who Throughout These 40 Days," includes the number, 40. Forty is, of course, a number which recurs throughout the Bible with special significance. We recall:

- Noah's flood: It rained for 40 days, and Noah waited another 40 days before opening the window of the Ark;
- The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years;
- Moses, Elijah, and Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days each; and
- Jesus was seen on earth, 40 days after the resurrection.

Lord, who throughout these forty days for us did fast and pray, teach us with you to mourn our sins and close by you to stay.

The first verse of this hymn reminds us immediately that the purpose of Lent is to use the 40 days as a time of reflection, through increased prayer as an opportunity to grow closer to Jesus, as a way to accompany Jesus as He was moving through his own 40 days of trials prior to Crucifixion and Resurrection.

And through these days of penitence, and through your Passiontide, forevermore, in life and death, O Lord, with us abide.

This verse offers us comfort that no matter the trials and tribulations that we Christians and our Church face, we can always rest assured that we abide in faith with the Lord. We will not be left comfortless.

Abide with us, that through this life of doubts and hope and pain, an Easter of unending joy we may at last attain!

The final stanza rejoices that at the end of our own troubles and pain, the joys of Easter and promise of Resurrection await us all.

Prayer: As we move through the 40 days of Lent, let us use this time for prayer, reflection, and spiritual growth. Amen.

Kathleen Burger Gerada

Fourth Week in Lent

Jesus Teaches About the Two Sons

Scripture: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

"Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” So, he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

Monday, March 25

Jesus was with the Pharisees at the Temple and he was trying to tell them about forgiveness. He told them this parable to help them see that there is a way to forgive if they have an open heart and mind.

There was a father who had two sons and one son wanted to go out into the world and experience all that was out there. Some of the things he did were not very good and there came a time when he became ashamed of all the bad experiences. So he decided he needed to go back home and see his father and apologize for leaving and not staying to help with the work that needed to be done on the farm.

The father had another son who stayed at home and worked day and night on the farm. He heard that his brother was coming back and needed the father to forgive him for leaving. The father was welcoming this wayward brother and son with open arms and wanted to celebrate his return. The brother who stayed at home was so angry that he was not recognized for his hard work. When he saw his brother and how contrite he was he knew that he had to forgive him.

We go through life doing things that hurt other people and we know we have done these hurtful things. We want them to know that we did these unforgivable hurts but how can we ask them to forgive us if they do not open their hearts and minds to our apologizing? So, we pray that they will someday see that we have changed and they will forgive us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the lessons you have given us. We want to ask forgiveness for those we hurt in word and deed. Please let their hearts be open to acceptance and love. Amen

Beverly Williams

Tuesday, March 26

The familiar story told in Luke 15:1-3; 11-32 is often called the “Parable of The Prodigal Son.” A more appropriate name might be the “Parable of the Forgiving Father.” Indeed, this passage speaks to the depth and breadth of God’s love.

First, we see Jesus not just talking to but eating with sinners and tax collectors much to the dismay of the Pharisees and leaders of the Jewish community of the day. These keepers of the rules focused on who to keep out while Jesus offered his message to all.

We know the story – the younger of two sons goes to his father requesting his inheritance and leaves with that treasure to explore. Ultimately, he finds himself destitute and remembering that even the servants in his father's home have food and shelter. He returns seeking forgiveness while offering to become a servant. The forgiving father sees his lost son from afar and runs to welcome him home ordering the finest meal to celebrate his return. Immediately the father restores the son to his place in the family.

Meanwhile, the elder son who has stayed home and worked diligently all this time returns from the field to hear music and dancing. Learning that the festivities are for his returned brother, he refuses to come in and boasts of his own loyalty and good behavior. The elder son wanted to be acknowledged for his faithfulness, he focused on himself and failed to share his father's joy. His father came to him and reminded him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we must celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

So what does this mean today? At times we may be the prodigal sons and daughters and at times we may be the elder child, but we are always children of God. God's love is the unconditional love of a parent who will always find us even in our darkest hour, who will be there when affliction leads us to search for home. The father's acceptance of the younger son is total – just as is God's grace. God pursues sinners because we are all children of God.

We are called to welcome the penitent. Just as the forgiving father went to the elder brother who did not want to come in, God calls us to celebrate when someone who is lost is found – in whatever way we may be lost today. Reconciliation involves not only God and the individual but also the individual and the community.

The story does not tell us whether the elder brother went inside and joined the celebration. We should think of times when we too are invited to join in the celebration of redemption – will we go in? Or will we stand outside in self-righteous anger? The parable of the Forgiving Father offers a path.

Prayer: Forgiving Father, our sins are ever before you, yet your love is always before us. May you give us the wisdom to step into that unconditional love, and be the vessels of grace and mercy to all in need of your redemptive life-giving power. Amen.

Jane Campbell

Wednesday, March 27

Many times I can jump to conclusions and perceive people and situations in such a judgmental way that makes me ashamed when I eventually find out the facts. In this regard, I am like the prodigal son's brother who was a good son and yet had little understanding of the great lesson that is to be learned from watching his father who knew how reliant we all must be on the grace of God. It is a lesson I have to repeatedly be reminded of and seemingly relearn.

Each of us is the architect of our own lives and happiness that is created by being obedient sons and daughters of God. Sometimes the world we live in can seem like a minefield and like a good soldier we have to be perpetually vigilant. We must be like the branch on the vine that Jesus talks about in John 15 so that we can draw from the source of all wisdom and strength when we make choices that affect not only us but also more people than we may be aware of.

The blame game must be cast aside as we look on other lives thinking we know what someone should have done or not done. I'd like to believe that the lesson that the prodigal son learned from this story made him a far better and more mature man than he would have been without going

through the scenario that Luke gives us here. The scriptures indeed tell us that in whom there is much forgiveness there is much love.

This story has certainly humbled me and taught me a great lesson about my own character and the example I set before others that I encounter every day. It reminds me to let the master potter continue to mold me into the best I can be as I cooperate in obedience.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that the compassionate qualities of the earthly father in this story will continue to develop in me as I look to you each day for your love and grace.

Paul Heffron

Thursday, March 28

What does the word “Prodigal” mean? The basic meaning is: “wasteful” (i.e. wasting money) and from Latin: “forth” (*pro-*) and “to drive” (*agere*). It can be described as a person who wastes money with reckless abandon, or “One who drives forth his money.” This is what the younger son does in this story. Jesus tells the parable of the lost son, exemplifying the theme of being lost (lost in sin) and then being found (coming back to God).

In summary: Younger son asks the father for half of all he owns *now* before his father dies. His father agrees; the son goes away and squanders or wastes his property on loose living; son falls into poverty. Prodigal son returns home to his father, who, rather than scolding the son, celebrates his return with great joy and gladness. The younger son was not dead but was alive.

The oldest son questioned his father’s joyous reaction because his brother wasted his share of the property. Father said: “I have you here but your brother was not dead and has returned. He is my son just as you are.”

Two quick lessons can be learned here. Lesson 1: Regardless of how we misuse freedom, the best course of action is to return to God and seek his forgiveness. Lesson 2: God does not begrudge what we have done. God does not take us back reluctantly. We humans are all plagued with faulty issues and a free will. But it is how we deal with our failings that matter.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we humbly ask you to accept us back into your grace and forgive us of our sins. We ask this in Jesus name claiming the promise of a new covenant: “Ask and it shall be forgiven.” Amen.

Gary Lewis

Friday, March 29

The prodigal son’s mistakes were pretty big; he squandered his inheritance – his father’s life savings! His father could have been angry. Furious, even. Instead, he greeted his son with joy. There was no anger. There was no judgment.

When we come home to God, we are welcomed, and there is no anger, and no judgement. We’re human. We will make mistakes, and whether we think those mistakes are very big, or very small, it doesn’t matter to God. We will be greeted with love, and joy, and open arms.

Prayer: God, thank you for your forgiveness, and for greeting us with joy when we come home to you. Amen.

Gentry Alexander

Saturday, March 30

Whenever I read the Parable of the Two Sons, my instinct is always to side with the older brother. I understand his frustration and confusion. Why is his father so quick to welcome back his younger brother and shower him with gifts? What about him? What about his years of loyalty and faithfulness to his family?

But it never fails, when I read the passage again a second time and a third, the scripture becomes

less about the brother who feels wronged and more about the father who is quick to forgive and embrace. I'm reminded this parable isn't even really about the foolhardy son who leaves and returns. This is about a loving father whose forgiveness knows no bounds. Sound familiar?

We are always welcomed back to the Father's arms, no matter how far we've strayed, how much money we've blown, how many mistakes we've made. God always takes us back. The father of the two sons also reminds me of Jesus, who at the beginning of Luke 15 is surrounded by tax collectors and sinners and is criticized by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law for being so accepting.

Like the older brother, the father could have rejected his prodigal son. He could have called him a sinner and turned him away. But he feasted with him, as Jesus did with those society shunned.

He rejoiced when his lost son was found, alive once more. How blessed are we to know our Father in heaven does the same.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your unconditional love that time and again, welcomes us back, no matter how far we've strayed. We pray for those who feel lost and yearn to find their way home. May they know your arms are always open. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Aixa Diaz

Sunday, March 31

Note: Writers on Sundays were asked to address the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their lives.

"How can I say thanks for the things you have done for me – things so undeserved, yet you give to prove your love for me? The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude. All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to thee."

Have you ever felt like that? Grateful that despite my shortcomings, regardless of poor choices I have made in my life, there is a God who keeps blessing me in ways I could never have imagined. "Things so undeserved?" That's grace!

In Philip Yancey's book, *What's So Amazing about Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), he writes that "Christianity's unique contribution among the world's religions is grace...only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional...Grace means that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less."

The first words of this devotional begin with the song "My Tribute," the middle section of which is found on page 39 in Chalice Hymnal: "To God be the glory, to God be the glory, to God be the glory for the things you have done. With his blood Christ has saved me; with your power you have raised me; to God be the glory for the things you have done." "My Tribute" was composed by Andraé Crouch (1942-2015), an African-American pioneer of contemporary gospel music.

The last part of the song is as follows: "Just let me live my life — let it be pleasing, Lord, to thee; and should I gain any praise, let it go to Calvary." It reminds me of Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Prayer: Lord, please guide my thoughts and actions today to better reflect Christ's example. Amen.

Valeria Foster

Fifth Week in Lent

Jesus Teaches About Generosity

Scripture: John 12:1-8

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

Monday, April 1

The winter can be extremely brutal in Washington, D.C. I moved here a year ago from North Carolina in the dreary midst of winter. Each morning I put on my long, heavy, winter coat, scarf, hat, and gloves. Once bundled in sufficient layers, I make my way onto the streets towards downtown D.C. I encounter many people on the streets who are homeless and without gloves, warm clothes, or anything to keep their extremities covered.

On this particular day, I encountered a guy named Charles. I extended my hand to introduce myself and asked would he like a cup of coffee to warm his hands. I purchased a hot cup of java for Charles and returned back to the place where I was sitting in the coffee shop. Charles’ face was still emblazoned in my mind as I sipped my daily cup of coffee. I reflected on my encounter with Charles; how cold his hands were, as well as how difficult it was for him to shake my hand. Finishing my coffee on my way out the door, I turned to Charles and asked him did he need a pair of gloves. Knowing that the only pair I had were my own, I pulled them off and offered them to Charles. As I handed him the gloves, he turned and asked, “Don’t you need them?” I smiled at Charles and said quietly, “No, I can always get a pair. “

After leaving, Charles yelled, “Thank you, Tony.” As I reflect on today’s verses from John’s gospel, I think maybe Charles is Jesus in the story. The woman was showing Jesus extreme generosity forgetting who was watching or what consequences might follow. Do we realize that even the slightest offer of kindness to a stranger might be received with extravagant joy? Quite often during these cold days, I wash the hands of many with gloves of love and warmth, knowing that I may never see Charles or others at the dinner table. But I will always see Him in the streets among the poor. Jesus is always in need of gloves!

Prayer: Loving God, I forget oftentimes that generosity is not only in the one who demonstrates the gift of compassion, but it is in the pure joy of receiving the gift itself. May we, as your chosen children, always remember the extravagant love poured out on us and the flood of joy that can spring forth to others around us. Amen.

Tony Johnson

Tuesday, April 2

This is a story of extravagant generosity: Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from the dead in response to the pleading of his sisters, Mary and Martha. When Jesus stopped at the home of Lazarus on his way to Jerusalem (where Jesus was to be tried and crucified), Mary anointed his feet with perfumed oil and wiped them with her hair. The perfume was so strong that it filled the whole house. Was this generosity and hospitality excessive?

According to Judas, it was. He criticized Mary for wasting money to buy perfume when that money could have been given to the poor. The perfume was extravagantly costly (the equivalent of a year’s wages according to my annotated Bible). And Jesus had repeatedly taught that we are to care for the poor. But Judas was motivated by greed rather than charity, and his criticism ignored the context of Mary’s actions.

Mary’s display of generosity and gratitude is bookended in the gospel of John by two resurrections: She was responding to the resurrection of her beloved brother Lazarus, which demonstrated Jesus’

love for Lazarus and God's love for us. Her actions also foreshadowed the most extravagant display of God's love for us – God's sacrifice of himself, through his son, for our salvation. Could any expression of generosity on her part or on our part be excessive in light of these extravagant gifts?

Prayer: Lord, help us to appreciate the extravagance of your generosity to us and to reflect back to others the light of that generosity. Amen.

Sara Ann Ketchum

Wednesday, April 3

"A pound of pure nard." Obviously far more than was needed to anoint Jesus' feet, and just bought. How much did Mary, Martha, and Lazarus know of the future so close ahead? The Disciples did not understand, and were not preparing for the events that were falling into an inevitable finality, but Mary was prepared for Jesus' death. Only a small amount was needed to anoint Jesus at the dinner, and at 300 denarii, it was a large luxury, if it was not needed soon. This is what fascinates me, as the supper in the upper room is still in the future, with its prophetic pronouncements of the culmination of the present form of Jesus ministry.

I am led to believe that in his many quiet times visiting in this household, with these dependable friends, he has quoted the relevant scripture, and discussed the meaning to his life and end times; they do indeed understand what is going to happen quite soon. In spite of this, they continue with their lives in an orderly way, preparing a meal and welcoming the disciples to their homes. In our lives, it can be difficult to accept some of the changes that come our way, but we, too, must accept the things that we are unable to change, and continue in our lives in the best way that the remaining resources or family will allow, and work hard to achieve a new balance in life.

Mary expected to need the nard, and she was prepared. It is often difficult for us to adjust to the changes that inevitably come to us, but the example of Mary, patiently going forward in all that was customary, is a guide to how we should react to the impending upheavals that come from time to time.

Prayer: Oh Lord, give us the wisdom to see the things we can change, and the will to do our best with the ones we cannot. Amen.

Norman Kruse

Thursday, April 4

Jesus and his disciples gathered at dinner with Lazarus following his raising Lazarus from the dead. While Martha served the meal, Mary took a pound of costly ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair. The question was raised as to why she didn't sell the nard and give the money to feed the poor. Jesus responded that they should let her alone and let her keep it for the day of his burial which was coming soon. A similar story is told in the other three gospels.

When I first read these passages many, many years ago, the scene I visualized always seemed a little strange. Why would anyone find it acceptable to get down on their hands and feet and use their hair to wash and dry a guest's feet. I never thought of it as being a generous activity – maybe being a show-off (Mary) – maybe being embarrassed (Jesus) – maybe being disruptive (to the other guests) – while everyone was trying to dine.

After further contemplation, I believe the generosity of Martha was not only monetary but of devotion, time, and kindness, all things taught by Jesus. I need to be more like her.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be more generous in my giving of money to the church, to charities, to those in need. Don't let me hold back in my love to others, in feeding and clothing the poor, in visiting the ill, in worshipping and remembering you in my prayers. Thank you for being so generous to me over the years. Amen.

Jane Strotman

Friday, April 5

John 12:1-8 accounts Jesus' return to the home of Lazarus for a dinner honoring Jesus, six days before the Passover celebration. After dinner, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, and Judas Iscariot remarked it would have been better to sell it and give the money to the poor.

This situation recalls the values we place on the material wealth and how we may view helping the poor. Mary gave from her heart because she loved and appreciated the Lord to the extent that she gave a prized possession *and* applied a human touch. In our modern society we often use money as a solution to a problem, but what about the human touch? I am not convinced that money or stuff will bring ultimate peace when a friend is sick or needy; only person-to-person interaction can still the soul.

When Jesus replied to Judas to leave Mary alone, I think he was saying that her act came from a loving heart, showing appreciation and was not based on the expense of the perfume. She also showed her belief in Jesus' power of resurrection through his raising Lazarus. Unknowingly, she honored Jesus in his coming crucifixion.

As we approach Easter, let us be encouraged to live for Jesus through our daily interactions with each other, applying our expensive spiritual perfume on all we meet.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to understand your Word and to give our very best as our Savior Jesus has, and still does. Amen.

Byron Cotton

Saturday, April 6

Loved ones are understandingly anxious and nervous knowing the health of one much loved is in danger. But even when Jesus received word "Lord, the one you love is sick," the disciples took their time – staying two more days before concluding, "Let us go back to Judea."

Note how generous Jesus was with his time. He didn't rush about when first hearing Lazarus was ill. Probably he taught and shared ideas with his disciples, helping them understand new concepts for his teaching before announcing it was now time to return to Bethany.

Maybe we can assume that Jesus had a plan that he would execute in his own time. Maybe he was trying to "tie up some loose ends" before going back to the people who had tried to stone him. Certainly, he was the epitome of generosity – not just with his time but with his life. He wanted Martha to believe convincingly what she later said, "[Yes], Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is to come into the world."

Jesus' life certainly stood for generosity in every meaningful way – time, treasure and even his life itself. And Mary, how might she have better applied the idea of generosity in what we know about her? Could she have been more generous? Could we all be more generous? Now there's a thought worth pondering, don't you think?

Prayer: God of Creation, in this world of abundance, may we, as your chosen and beloved children, learn and practice the spiritual discipline of generosity this Lent. May we offer back to you without hesitation all of our good and perfect gifts to you who have so richly blessed us. Amen.

Nett Brown

Sunday, April 7

Note: Writers on Sundays were asked to address the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their lives.

Music is a powerful tool as it is truly the language of the heart. The words of a song heard, learned, and sung get inside not only my head but can be felt in my heart. The "Via Dolorosa" by Sandi Patty is one of those songs that almost haunts because of the combination of words and music. Together they are simply brilliant.

The words vividly depict the last road Jesus travels prior to his crucifixion. While I have yet to visit Jerusalem, in my mind I am there watching the horrors that Jesus suffered on his way to Golgotha. The soldiers, the curious, the beatings that caused his back to be striped, the crown of thorns but the description doesn't stop with the physical events, it gets deeper as we hear about the scorn that he endured and suffered. Then so brilliantly turns to his ministry as we are reminded that he loves each of us so deeply that he chose to walk that path.

"Via Dolorosa" by Sandi Patty

*Down the Via Dolorosa in
Jerusalem that day
the soldiers tried to clear the
narrow street. But the crowd pressed into see
a man condemned to die on Calvary.*

*He was bleeding from a beating -
there were stripes upon his back
and he wore a crown upon his head.*

*And he bore with every step
the scorn of those of those of
those who cried out for his death.*

*Down the Via Dolorosa called the
way of suffering
like a lamb came the Messiah, Christ the King*

*But he chose to walk that road
out of his love for you and me
Down the Via Dolorosa all the way to Calvary.*

Prayer: Almighty and loving God, may I never forget the depth of your love for me and that you see me as a person of value. Thank you for sending your son who traveled that horrid road to die as a sacrifice for my sins. Help me to remember this as I go about my way and help me to share that love with those around me. In Christ's holy name, Amen.

Teresa Swihart

Sixth Week in Lent

Jesus Enters Jerusalem for the Last Time

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40, 45-48

"After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

"Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.'

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard."

Monday, April 8

"If they keep quiet, the stones along the road will burst into cheers!" Luke 19:40 (Living Bible)

Like any new mother, I have received lots of parenting advice over the past six months. Some unsolicited, most helpful, all well intended. But my favorite piece of advice – the one I have pinned above my desk so that I see it each day – is "have fun." With sleepless nights, nursing strikes, concerns over childproofing, and fears of helicopter parenting, I find it nice to be reminded that this new adventure my family is on should be a fun one.

All too easily, we can lose the fun in Lent as well. We rightfully focus on the sacrifice, the solemnity, the preparation for the cross. But in the midst of that, one might forget a simple fact that is pretty obvious if you think about it: Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem sounds like a legendarily fun day.

Jesus fulfills prophecy by riding an unriden colt, he is welcomed like royalty on a carpet of cloaks, he casts out merchants and sellers from the temple (which had to be quite the show), and he fellowships with a crowd who "began joyfully to praise God" and "hung on his words." I like to imagine that those who bore witness to Jesus' arrival in the holy city that day would offer play-by-play accounts to their children and grandchildren in the years to come.

Of course, like a newborn's diaper, that week in Jerusalem ended in a mess. But that doesn't – and shouldn't – detract from the joy that preceded it. As we seek this Lenten season to embrace the ways in which sacrifice deepens our relationship with God, we shouldn't forget the ways that joyful revelry and fun are also parts of our faith.

Prayer: God, lest we forget during these 40 days you are the creator of all things "fun," which bring forth immeasurable joy. Lead us down this triumphant path of cheers so we will be well prepared to travel the dusty road to your cross. Amen.

Laura Zasoski

Tuesday, April 9

The beginning of this passage, often known as "The Triumphal Entry," is exciting. It brings us memories of parades. We wave palm branches at church. We can't help but smile. And to some degree, we can even personally relate, as we ourselves have experienced the excitement of finally getting to a long-awaited destination – whether it's that trip to Hawaii we've been looking forward to or a visit home after a long absence. But sometimes, things don't always quite meet our expectations during our trip.

Look at that last section of this passage – Jesus' entry into the temple area where he found it being made into "a den of robbers." How many times has a trip included a scene or event you hadn't expected? And then did that result in a reaction or emotion you didn't plan to have during this joyous time? To me, this is another beautiful example of how Jesus was both fully God and fully human. So inexplicable but yet so perfect in paving the way for us to become better Christians on our journey home.

Prayer: O God, today help me to remember that I am but fully human and my emotions may turn on a dime. When they do, help me to reset and reflect and turn my sights back to you. Amen.

Terri Malone

Wednesday, April 10

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado once wrote: "Traveler, there is no path; paths are made by walking." I've had the opportunity to travel. With each journey, I've learned so much about other places and cultures. I've learned how beautiful this world is, with its diversity of peoples, customs, and geography.

Travel is transformative. Each journey is a chance to grow and expand our world view. For me, each journey has been a pilgrimage. I've learned to see the sacred in the ordinary and find God's presence in the most mundane interactions of each journey. Traveling is a central theme in Luke's gospel. In Luke 9, we are told that "Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem." Each step, leading up to the dramatic climax of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, was a sacred step; a pilgrimage to the holy city, Jerusalem.

On this journey, Jesus modeled true shalom; teaching his disciples about loving the neighbor, taking care of the poor, the sick, and the marginalized. More than two thousand years later, we are walking that pilgrimage path with Jesus, not just during Lent, but every day. We are like the original disciples, learning at Jesus' feet. Like them we are learning that the path to God's kingdom is not an easy path, and the powers of greed, hate, and apathy are still strong.

The liturgical season of Lent is a time to reconnect and rediscover the Spirit of God inside each of us. It is a pilgrimage season, a daily transformative journey with Jesus, to Jerusalem, to the very foot of the cross. Even after the season of Lent is over, we still travel with Jesus because every day is a pilgrimage to the heart of God.

Embrace it and share it knowing that Jesus walks with you. Where are you in your pilgrimage with Jesus?

Prayer: (African-American Spiritual)

"I want Jesus to walk with me

I want Jesus to walk with me

All along my pilgrim journey

I want Jesus to walk with me."

Amen.

Miriam Gentle

Thursday, April 11

In this passage, we read of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He gives instructions to two disciples to go find a colt that has never been sat upon. Jesus states that the disciples are then to bring this colt back to Jesus for "the Lord has need of it." This colt with cloaks on its back serves as the means of transport for Jesus' grand arrival into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. As he arrives, the people begin to rejoice for they had already seen Jesus' mighty works and knew him to be the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

We, as disciples of Christ, are to give praise and joy for we have also seen the Lord's miracles performed in our lives and in others. When ways have been made where there were none to be found, the Lord was right there with us providing us the strength for our life's journey. As we read this passage, may we be just as vocal as the Jerusalem multitude in sharing our love for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May we know, that draped in God's infinite grace, we will one day make our triumphal entry into heaven.

Prayer: Father God, we thank you for allowing us to be used by you every day. We are so grateful and appreciative of the undeserved grace that you extend to us. May we have our faith and love for you strengthened by the sharing of this journey together. Thank you for enabling us to encourage our fellow believers on the road, and grant us the understanding to treat one another as you would have us to do. In your name we pray. Amen.

Travaughn Lovick

Friday, April 12

Jesus comes to Jerusalem: Near Journey's end

Journeys vary a lot...some are important but most are not. Some are long, some short. A trip to the convenience store for snacks can't compare to the journey for education. All journeys have a start, you do things, then you arrive.

Our scripture today talks of tasks occurring near the end of this journey. The disciples needed a way to celebrate, to affirm their choice. Some folks were disrespecting the temple and needed to be sent packing. These and many other things needed attention as Jesus journeyed on. Scripture doesn't tell us why, just that he journeyed onto Jerusalem.

That brings up a question for me...why? Why persist? Why not rest here for a while? Reasons vary of course. We pay taxes because the Government wants us to. We stop at traffic lights because it's safer. We eat because we're hungry. But if we only look at why, then some of our journeys might never get started. I have found help in choosing which journey to take. If my answer to why involves the Government, some "thing" I own (or want), a family member or friend – then I weigh the value. But when the answer comes back as it did with the donkey: "...because the Lord needs it" – then it's best to just get on with it. That's a journey that needs traveled.

Prayer: Lord, please walk with me. Amen

John Scott Williams

IN MEMORIAM: For the faithful life of a beloved Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) leader, presented here is a 2007 devotion on this scripture from C. William Nichols, former Interim Minister of National City Christian Church. May his reflection continue to warm our hearts and inspire our vision for this congregation. To God be the glory!

Saturday, April 13

It was a day of agony and ecstasy. Oh, the ecstasy was there, to be sure: the thrilling reaction of an enthusiastic crowd of people, giving Jesus the adulation he so richly deserved.

But there was also agony that day. Those closet to Jesus saw it in his eyes and heard it in his voice as he drew near the city. As he crested that hill and looked down to see the city spread out before him, he wept. Those near him witnessing that unexpected display of sorrow were nonplussed. Didn't he know that everything he had wanted, worked for, prayed for, was about to become his? He has spoken repeatedly of his new kingdom that was coming, and here – ready to receive him – was that city that would be the political base of that new regime.

Here was the agony: the realization that despite their protestations of allegiance to him, what they really wanted was something quite different from what he wanted. They wanted him to be their kind of king. They had no interest in being his kind of kingdom.

Still today, what he wants from us is not so much the excitement of clamorous praise, but the quietly heroic offering of humbled lives, willing to become instruments of his grace.

Prayer: As Jesus looks over our city this day, Oh God, may our humble obedience honor him. Amen.

C. William Nichols

Holy Week

Palm/Passion Sunday, April 14

Note: Writers on Sundays were asked to address the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their lives.

"Jesus, Remember Me" Chalice Hymnal #569

"Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23:42

Today churches all over the world begin their worship with a festive remembrance of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Children and adults alike will wave palm branches (or branches from trees native to their own regions) and sing joyous hymns of welcome to Jesus, son of David.

This Sunday has two names, however – Palm and Passion – because the church today celebrates two different but related aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. After the procession that recalls Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, we switch almost abruptly to the primary focus of this Sunday. In most Western Christian churches, worship today centers on an extended reading of Christ's Passion, this year from the gospel of Luke.

Luke's recounting of the Passion story is unique among the four gospels, because even in his betrayal, suffering, and dying, Jesus continues to exercise a ministry of mercy, extending healing and forgiveness to those he meets. This is the same Jesus who preached the lavish mercy of God in parables (the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son) and challenged his hearers to be people of mercy (the good Samaritan).

When one of his followers cuts off the right ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus issues a stern rebuke and heals the servant (22:51). He extends forgiveness to his executioners as he prays, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (23:34). The dying Jesus reaches out in mercy to one of the criminals with the assurance, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Prayer: On this Palm/Passion Sunday we welcome the one who not only taught us God's mercy, but lived it even to his death. We sing and we pray: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Amen.

J. Michael McMahon

Holy Monday, April 15
The Plot to Kill Jesus
Luke 22:1-6

"Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present."

In today's text we find the Scribes and Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus. Notice verse 2. It reads, "because they were afraid of the people." But what were they really afraid of? Earlier in the gospel of Luke, its author writes of a Jesus overturning tables in the Temple and dismantling the economic oppression that the religious leaders had inflicted on poor worshippers for far too long. Later, we find Jesus spending a substantial part of his ministry critiquing the self-serving, self-righteous practices of the leaders of the political and religious Empires. And just prior to this episode, we find Jesus healing and restoring the very people that the systems of his day marginalized and oppressed. In turn these people began to faithfully follow Jesus and bring power to the Movement. Ultimately, the Pharisees and the Scribes weren't "scared" of the people. Rather, they were scared of losing their power and their privilege over them. They used rhetoric of fear and hate in an attempt to deter the faithful from following Jesus. When this didn't work they resorted to their next plan, "get rid of him and get rid of him fast."

Nonetheless, we can't forget about Judas. Where does he fit into all of this? I want to suggest that quite possibly Judas falls prey to the fear and hate spewed from the Empire's mouth about this "bad hombre" named Jesus. Subsequently Judas, operating out of an irrational fear, ends up giving in to this dangerous rhetoric of those in power, giving up on Jesus, and handing him over into enemy hands.

Just as in first century Palestine, much of the political and religious rhetoric today is filled with hate and fear against all that the Empire deems a “threat” to its power and control. And far too many who have fallen prey. Like Judas, an irrational sense of fear that “they’re out to get us,” has led certain people to give in and actually believe that their “power” has indeed been jeopardized by those the Empire has deemed ‘other.’

However, as followers of the Jesus Movement we have been called to something different. Amidst the cacophony of hate and fear-filled voices, during this Lenten season we have the perfect opportunity to reflect [and even repent] on the ways in which we engage this rhetoric of Empire and its minions. Even more importantly, it’s an opportunity to ensure that we are guarding our hearts and minds from it as not to end up in the same predicament as Judas. Lent provides us a time in which we can commit or re-commit to wholeheartedly follow and practice Jesus’ central message; love, equity, and justice for *all*. We do this by resisting the hate and fear of the ‘other’ and *always* standing on the side of love. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of *love*.”

Prayer: God, help us to always guard our hearts and minds from the irrational fear and hate provoked by Empire. As we journey with Jesus through this Lenten season and beyond, may we be ever more committed to the ways of justice, equity, and love for *all* of creation. And so, may it be. Amen and Ashe.

C.J. Rodriguez

Holy Tuesday, April 16
The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
Luke 22:47-53

“While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?’ When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!’”

How have you experienced “the power of darkness” in your life? In this story of Christ's betrayal and arrest, we hear and see a vivid contrast between the threat of violence used against Christ and Christ’s own mission of healing and forgiveness. Even as they seemingly denied and denigrated the light of God in Christ, Christ responded with calmness and the power to speak truth with no trace of fear or vengeance. In other words, Christ let the light of God shine even more fully in the face of the darkness that was attacking him.

In our own lives, do we resent and fear, resist and fight against the powers of darkness? When we feel attacked, do we defend or attack in return? Do we just think about what we need and how we have been wronged, or do we pray and seek the light of God and serve the highest good that is needed for all concerned?

Ever since I returned in 2005 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (where I was born to Disciples missionary parents), I have worked with an artist friend Etienne Ngandu in Kinshasa to help poor artists, widows, orphans, and others in need, mostly because Etienne has been continuously eager to serve God by helping the poor. Recently, Etienne shared with me some inspirational stories of how he has helped others.

One story Etienne shared was that a thief once stole something from Etienne in the marketplace. Etienne chased after thief, caught him, and asked him if he would like to be trained to be an artist. The thief replied, “Yes,” so Etienne trained him to be an artist so he could support himself instead of being a thief. Etienne brought the light of Christ in the midst of darkness for the sake of the thief, not just for himself.

Prayer: Holy Christ, may we be so filled with your light that even in our darkest hours, we will respond with your grace, your forgiveness, and like you, become a healing presence even in the midst of those who would attack us or others we love. Thank you for your light that has the power to overcome the darkness in our lives. Amen.

Carol Richardson

Holy Wednesday, April 17
Jesus Is Sentenced To Death
Luke 23:13-25

“Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged now and release him.’

“Then they all shouted out together, ‘Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!’ (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’ A third time he said to them, ‘Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.’ But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.”

Chants matter, and one that has especially inspired me is the vernacular chant that claims: “Ain’t no power like the power of the *people*, cause the power of the *people* don’t stop!” Throughout the ages, chants have helped unify groups for purposes as diverse as sacred spiritual rituals to raucous sporting events. Perhaps nowhere more than on the streets of Washington, D.C., chants are constantly used to encourage a common vision, overcome divisions, and even reinforce hope for transformation and justice.

Yet unfortunately, as Luke sadly demonstrates, a chant – and the type of power and unity among people it can produce – does not always result in a positive outcome. Uniquely among the four gospels, Luke takes care to emphasize that Pilate didn’t only encounter resistances against Jesus from the chief priests and leaders. In Luke 23:13, we see Pilate also called together, and was provoked to respond to, the chants of “the people” when deciding what to do with Jesus. Matthew 27 had said it was the “chief priests and elders” who plotted against Jesus. Mark 15 designates it was “the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin” who concocted plans to turn Jesus over to Pilate. In John 18, it was soldiers and high officials who took Jesus to the high priest Caiaphas, and then led him to Pilate.

But in Luke, even though Pilate publicly proclaimed Jesus was innocent and said “nothing deserving death has been done by him” (v. 15), the “power of the people” that didn’t stop careened into criticism and condemnation that called for the release of a criminal while pushing Jesus towards crucifixion on a cross. To be sure, Jesus was not censured only by “the people” –since he was viewed as a threat and castigated by religious and political rulers, too. And to recognize the

“power of the people” in sentencing Jesus in this passage should never lead us to anti-Semitism or to fixate blame on “which” people were responsible then.

Rather, Luke’s highlight on the role that “the people” played in the story invites us to imagine ourselves in the middle of the chanting crowd, too. We can ask: How do we (inadvertently or intentionally) push back against the presence of God before *our* eyes? How might we be allowing “the crowd” to rile us up against supporting the work and ways of Jesus’ love? How are our fears or need to control contributing toward the condemnation of Christ today? And instead of calling to “Crucify him!” – how might we gather our power as people to persevere without stopping in order to fulfill the purposes of his ministry as Jesus had announced them in the temple in Luke 4:18? Let’s chant and be unified in these commitments to keep Jesus alive: “Preach good news!” “Release the captives!” “Let the oppressed go free!”

Prayer: Holy God, during this Lenten season, remind us not to lose heart or turn our eyes off of you and your mission. May your determination to follow that mission to the cross be our determination as well, chanting ever as we go, “the power of the people don’t stop.” Amen.

Sharon Stanley-Rea

Maundy Thursday, April 18
The Crucifixion of Jesus
Luke 23:26-43

“When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’”

“One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”

The observance of Maundy Thursday is multifaceted. We understand this last supper of Jesus as the Passover meal that is commemorated in the Christian church as the Eucharist. It was the time when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, teaching by example that we should love and serve each other. It was the night when Jesus identified the disciple who would betray him. And, it’s the night, while in the Garden of Gethsemane praying for strength, that Jesus was actually betrayed by Judas, arrested, and taken for trial before the Sanhedrin.

Maundy Thursday begins the final hours of our walk with Jesus through his crucifixion. We hear Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples and experience, with Jesus, the deceit of and disappointment by those closest to him. We also allow ourselves to empathize with the agony and pain caused by the torture that Jesus endured. We see the many people who mourned his impending murder as well as those who mocked his life and message.

If we, just for a few minutes, imagine a world without Jesus’ salvific work, we begin to feel the loneliness, the despair, the tremendous weight of our own unforgiven sin and buckle under its burden. We start to wallow in the inescapable emptiness of existence as we envision our lives with no Jesus of the gospels. No risen Christ. No Savior.

Jesus! Dear, Jesus! Please, Jesus! Remember me when you come into your Kingdom!

Prayer: On this Maundy Thursday, God, in the name of Jesus, forgive me for any time that I have not understand your word, taken you for granted, or betrayed you by my words or actions. Amen.

Beverly Goines

**Good Friday, April 19
The Death of Jesus
Luke 23:44-49**

“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.”

You awoke today to the most sad and somber day in Christian memory and experience. Enter and engage the day for what it is, not as a day to be avoided with contrived happy-go-lucky escapist thoughts. It is a day of faith.

Today is the day Jesus died. Today is the day Jesus shares our experiences of death. Today enter that reality; entomb yourself in that reality; immerse yourself in that reality. Our Lord walks with us even in that sad and hard reality in our lives, we will die.

Go deeply into Good Friday reality as you remember Christ's death. Read this account slowly, stopping to imagine what it was like for our Lord and for those at the cross who loved him.

“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.” (Luke 23:44-49)

On this Good Friday, gently enter the sadness of your own personal memories of death: being present at the death of one you love, or a moment when your own continuing health and even life were in question, or the near-death experience of loss of faith. These too are holy memories and moments. Christ walks beside you in these moments just as you walked beside him as you read and reflected on his dying.

You have entered the tomb of your own death in these sad and somber Good Friday thoughts and prayers. But, you have gone into that tomb believing Easter Sunday is coming. The hallelujah trumpets are warming up!

Prayer: Merciful God, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil. Amen.

Peter Morgan

**Holy Saturday, April 20
The Burial of Jesus
Luke 23:50-56**

“Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no

one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.”

Jesus is dead. On this Holy Saturday, we sit in silence staring at the reality that faced his ardent followers. The teacher, master, messiah was dead, and their hearts were heavy in grief. “What had happened?” “We don’t understand?” “Was this all for nothing?” As their Sabbath morning dawned, hope was all but dead as well.

But as I read today’s somber scripture, I also see three powerful actions: Joseph of Arimathea, a “secret disciple,” turned expectant hope into direct action of belief; distressed women followed their friend even into the tomb; and all observed the Sabbath and rested. I imagine Joseph’s pangs of guilt knowing his pleas, ignored by the Council, would not be ignored this time by Pilate. I feel the reality of the women’s painful grief as they walked; the same palpable grief that caused Jesus to weep when learning Lazarus was dead. I exhale deeply feeling the inexplicable exhaustion – any few minutes, or seconds, of peace to close my eyes and sleep. Grief is real on this Saturday.

Yes, we sit today and rest. As I have experienced my own deep, personal grief and shared with congregants’ grief over the years, one common thread holds our stories together – rest! It is essential to our physical well-being, and maybe even more so, for our emotional and spiritual health and survival.

Today we remember the death of our master teacher, Jesus. We want to turn the page on this pain; we want to see the sun again; we want to live again – but not quite yet. It is our day of spiritual preparation to join with Joseph of Arimathea waiting expectantly for the Kingdom of God. We journey with the women back to their homes for funeral arrangements. And we pause with all creation and the Holy Creator to rest. Tomorrow will be a big day.

Prayer: “What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest Friend, for this, thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end? O make me thine forever; and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to thee.” (Attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux)

Steven Baines

**Easter Sunday, April 21
The Disciples Travel To the Tomb
Luke 24:1-12**

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.”

Have you ever arrived at your destination, only to learn that your journey was not over yet?

On that first Easter morning, the women came to the tomb of Jesus, perhaps believing that they were there for the final time. They had traveled with Jesus for several years. Some, like his mother Mary, had been with him a very long time. But now the journey they had been traveling together

with Jesus was at an end. He had been killed on a cruel cross. They had seen him die, along with their hopes and dreams. So, the women made one final trip to the tomb to anoint his body with spices, as was the custom for preparing the body for burial. They thought their journey with Jesus was at an end, but it was not over yet.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” With these words from two men at the tomb, the women got up and went to tell the disciples and all the others. Their emotions of hopelessness, fear, and despair turned into cries and shouts of joy. Their journey with Jesus was not over! Their pilgrimage as followers of Christ was only beginning. They were wonderfully emboldened in the resurrection and ascension of the Lord. From there they traveled sharing their Easter joy into Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

We have traveled this Lenten pilgrimage together for 40 days, and now we may think it is at an end. But it's not. Just like the women who traveled to the tomb and learned that their journey with Jesus was not over yet, so our journey continues. From his Resurrection day to this Easter Sunday, and into all of life's tomorrows, our journey with Jesus is not a destination. Our journey with Jesus is not over yet!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the pilgrimage of Lent as we have traveled with and learned from Jesus. May our Easter joy be infectious as we celebrate our journey with Jesus that never ends, but continues today and into eternity, forever and ever. Alleluia! Amen.

Stephen Gentle