

*Meditations  
for  
Lent*

2004



*Lent is a time to begin again. It is the best time to begin again. It is the time that is now. It may be the only time we have. Of course, any time is a good time. We cannot pick and choose the time. But Lent presents itself “in our face.”*

(John B. Coburn, retired Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts, *The Living Pulpit*, Vol. 9. No.1)

In a simple and direct way, Bishop Coburn reminds us that Lent is a time to look again at both the life of Jesus and at our own lives. This Lenten Meditation Booklet, prepared by members of the cathedral congregation and edited by Toni Ponzo and Jan Snow, is intended to help you begin again in your Lenten Journey. May it be a breath of fresh air, as the next forty days grow longer and warmer with the hope of Easter spring.

Faithfully,

**The Very Rev. Tracey Lind, Dean**



## ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

*Collect 217*

*Psalm 103*

*Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12*

*II Corinthians 5:20b-6:10*

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

We Christians go to church today and get “ashed” before God. As the priest marks us as God’s own, we are reminded of our mortality, that from dust we came and to dust we shall return.

People unfamiliar with thi tradition may wonder why you are walking around with dirt on your forehead. They may ask, “Did ou bump into something?” or even try to rub it off for you.

This year for Ash Wednesday, bump into something. Bump into the wall that is our separation -- as sinful mortals created of dust -- from God our creator. Bump into that wall. Try to climb over or under or around it. Contemplate it for awhile and when it seems like an impassable barrier, recall Psalm 103: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits. Who forgives all your iniquity, Who heals all your diseases...As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.”*

Now take a look at that wall again. Do you see the man standing there? He is standing next to a door you weren’t able to see before. That door is just wide enough for you to get through and the man is holding it open for you. But the door is not wide enough for you and all of your baggage. The man at the door will take care of the baggage that may have kept you from getting in before. So, go through the door. Reclaim your relationship with the loving creator. An when somebody asks if they can take care of that smudge on your head for you, tell them, “No, thanks. A friend of mine named Jesus took care of it for me already.”

Toni Ponzo

## Thursday, February 26

*Psalm 1*

*Deuteronomy 30:15-20*

*Luke 9:18-25*

At the very beginning of Lent, the Scriptures pull no punches. Moses asks his followers if they are prepared to love God by “*walking in [God’s] ways and observing [God’s] commandments.*” Jesus, in turn, declares that anyone who wishes to become a disciple must “*deny themselves and take up their cross daily*” and that anyone who wishes to become a disciple must “*deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow [him].*” Even the psalm contrasts the path of the righteous with the path of the wicked: “*the Lord watches over the way of the righteous.*”

The time has come to choose; life or death, the promises of this world or the reality of God’s realm, an allegiance to our own self-made gods or a covenant with the living God. Lent is a season that invites us to go deeper, to take a spiritual inventory of our lives and to look critically at our life-choices. What is it that demands most of your time? In what is your heart and soul invested? When it comes time to pray, or rest, or wait on God, what gets in the way?

Notice that the readings from Deuteronomy and Luke speak in terms of gain and loss. What did we gain when we chose to listen and follow the word of God and the example of Jesus? What did we lose or forfeit when we chose to ignore the Holy Spirit?

Today’s collect reminds us that “*all our works [are] begun, continued and ended*” in God. And perhaps that’s a good place to begin our Lenten self-examination, with the realization that all that we are and all that we have, comes from God. When we begin to see ourselves as a part of God rather than apart from God, we are laying the groundwork for faithful living and true discipleship.

Greg Jacobs

## Friday, February 27

*Psalm 51: 149;10*

*Isaiah 58:149;9a*

*Matthew 9:1049;17*

In today's reading, Isaiah speaks pointedly about the uselessness of the way Israel observed the laws of fasting. *I will tell you why [I am not impressed with your fasting], says Isaiah. It is because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting. You keep right on oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? You humble yourselves going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like a blade of grass. You dress in sackcloth and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? (Verses 3b49;5, NLT). Isaiah then responds to his own questions with a surprising answer. No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned, and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. If you do these things...then when you call, the Lord will answer: yes, I am here, he will quickly reply. (Verses 649;9a, NLT).*

Wow, what an answer, not only for the ancient Israelites, but for all of us today in Cleveland! Trinity Cathedral sponsors more than two dozen activities that provide help to our neighbors in the city. Which one are you active in? Which one will you join?

Ambrose A. Clegg

P.S. Did you notice how closely Isaiah anticipates Jesus' very words in his "Love your enemies" sermon? (see Luke 6:2749;38 NRSV or NLT).

## Saturday, February 28

*Psalm 86:1-11*

*Isaiah 58:9b-14*

*Luke 5:27-32*

Much like the psalmist, I am a sinner. I am such a sinner that it seems fanciful to me to admit it publicly during Lent. I know my ways and my priorities are a little off from the divine rule. Christ comes to me, in this condition, prepared to heal.

My ways will keep my family and me comfortable and safe. They will guard and protect. My ways, ultimately, build up my power and influence but cause isolation. The psalmist has several other ways to describe human sin, that we each have ears to hear. In order to appreciate forgiveness and generosity, it is important to me to remember how and why I sin. It also helps me know for what I need to ask help and change. Although he wasn't speaking of the gospel, I think Arlo Guthrie got it right when he said, "You can't have a light without a dark to put it in."

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says, "*I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance,*" calling on us to identify and root out our sin.

Certainly, we the people of Trinity Cathedral can feel good about ourselves -- rich in diversity, growing in numbers, welcoming to all, contributing valuable service and benefit to the surrounding community. It would be very lenten and even better for us to remember that these characteristics of our community are all results of divine good. Our contributions to this community in word and deed are themselves prayers, not accomplishments. Our efforts are not accomplishments. They are statements of belief in a forgiving God, abounding in steadfast love to all who call out in prayer.

Mysteriously, God collects our personal prayers, our singular efforts, and uses them collectively to create good for others.

Bryan Gillooly

## **First Sunday in Lent, February 29**

*Collect 218*

*Psalm 91*

*Deuteronomy 26 (1-4)5-11*

*Romans 10:5-8a) 8b-13*

*Luke 4:1-13*

*Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you might to save. BCP, p.218*

*You shall not be afraid of any terror by nith, nor of the arrow that flies by day.*  
Psalm 91:5

Each night as I lie down to sleep, I think of my son, Doug, just beginning his shift as a Cleveland police officer. The words of the collect from Compline come to mind: *“Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night...”* and then I add, “and please, dear God, may I not be awakened by one of Doug’s fellow officers coming to tell us he’s been hurt or killed in the line of duty.” The words of Psalm 91, also part of Compline, remind me of God’s protective love and relieve the terror that sometimes assails me at night.

Moses’ final instructions to the Israelites before his death and their entry into the promised land command people to remember God’s *“almight hand and outstretched arm”* that delivered them from the oppression of the Egyptians (Deuteronomy 26:8). in Romans, Paul reminds us that, *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* In the Gosple lesson, the temptations of Satan are no match for the power of God’s word.

Whatever our nighttime terrors, whatever our temptations, whatever our oppression, we who live in the shelter of the Most High can call out to God with confidence, for our God is mighty to save.

Charlotte Nichols

## **Monday, March 1**

*Psalm 19:7-14*

*Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18*

*Matthew 25:31-46*

Boiled down to their essence, these readings say to obey God's law. The kingdom of God allows no slandering, stealing, prejudgment, hatred, dishonesty, putting of obstacles in the way of the disabled, putting others in danger or coveting others' goods. A tough order for most of us!

The last line of Leviticus says to love your neighbor as yourself, another tough order, both in regard to our neighbors and ourselves. Matthew charges us with the difficult task of loving those of our neighbors who are most in need. Taken together, these readings challenge us to live into our baptismal covenant: will you seek and serve in Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself and will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Allison and Martin Hauserman

## **Tuesday, March 2**

*Psalms 34:15-22*

*Isaiah 55:6-11*

*Matthew 6:7-15*

When I was fourteen, I started working on my aunt and uncle's farm, the farm that my grandfather purchased roughly 70 years ago and where my mother was born. My fondest childhood memories come from my years of living in the country: riding to the barn on my grandfather's bicycle, popping tar bubbles in the road with my fingers, running through the corn rows, sliding over the frozen creek in winter and lying in the soft needles beneath the pines my grandfather planted at the top of the hill.

Reading the lines from Isaiah took me back to this experience. Patience and faith are good character traits for a farmer. Once the earth has been prepared for sowing and the seeds planted, she must wait for months until the fruits of that labor are ready to harvest. Likewise, in waiting, she must have faith that the earth preparations, weather and seed quality will all yield a bountiful harvest. Here is how I would sum up those verses: God knows what's best for his us. His investments will pay off in the end.

When I think about that message and then read Matthew, I am immediately reminded of KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid). Say what you have to say and do what you have to do, then let the details work themselves out. Help those in need. Spend time with folks who are lonely. Listen to someone who needs to vent.

Let God use us to help invest in each other and the positive return will be glorious for all. Like a row of cascading dominos, a chain-reaction begins with a single unassuming event.

Chris Vandall

## **Ember Wednesday, March 3**

*Collect I, 256*

*Psalm 99*

*Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29*

*I Correnthians, 3:5-11*

*John 4:31-38*

Not until John's Gospel do we hear of the Samaritan woman and her encounter with Jesus at the well. In initial readings frequently concentrate on Jesus' audacity in talking with a Samaritan, one from that despised tribe that lies even now between Jerusalem and Galilee. The exchange is even more radical. The Samaritan is a woman, viewed as a lower form of humanity by much of the ancient world. Then follows what kids often think is magic. Jesus seems to see right into this woman's mind, telling her things about her life that no stranger could possibly know. The woman recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, and runs off to share her discovery. The disciples show up, surprised that Jesus is talking with a lowly Samaritan woman. Why are they surprised? Jesus has done the unexpected ever since they met him. You can almost hear him sigh as he moves into another teaching, this time about harvests and plantings and other agricultural motifs. No, he's not hungry, that you. His food, his sustenance is in doing what God wants. They may think they are planting, but the harvest is right here, now, in front of them. That's what the Samaritan woman saw. You don't have to wait for something important to happen; it's happening right now, and Jesus is the proof. Jesus has already done the work, the planting, and now everyone can harvest what he gave us. The Samaritan woman saw that, while the disciples were still scratching their collective heads.

So, don't wait for some future work to be done on your behalf. It's been done, and you are a recipient. Just harvest the crop of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and plant it somewhere else, to be harvested again and again. Run and tell your friends.

Joyce Walker

## Thursday, March 4

*Psalm 138*

*Esther 14: 1-6; 12-14*

*Matthew 7: 7-12*

Esther is a Jew trying to assimilate into Persian culture, and doing rather well at it – she is queen of her country. But despite all her conformity, she is still a Jew, and she and her uncle, Mordecai, are in danger of losing their lives in a pogrom plotted by Haman, a conniver who has the king's full trust. It is up to Esther to stand up to the king and Haman to save her people. This is a fearsome thing; the last queen, Vashti, forfeited her life when she disobeyed the king's command.

Esther probably doesn't feel Jewish. She probably gave up being observant when she joined the king's harem. At first, the pogrom is someone else's heartbreak. Not her problem. But then Esther realizes that she is no better than anyone else in the sight of God. She humbles herself, puts on sackcloth and ashes – queens don't do this – and asks God for help and courage. And then she bravely faces the king and Haman, and rescues her people.

We all want to separate ourselves from those who are not like us. When others are discriminated against, we distance ourselves from them. We may be white, or straight or not a recent immigrant – whatever we are, we are not they. "I'm not like that." "I don't relate to his lifestyle or his politics." "I've left that behind." Their problems are not our problems. But when we do this, we are enablers of injustice. We make it possible for the Hamans of the world to perpetrate atrocities upon others. We make it possible for governments to legislate injustice and bigotry. Far better to open our hearts and minds to others and humble ourselves before God, standing up for everyone's justice because, like Esther, we are no more queen than any other Jew in Persia.

Emily Ingalls

## **Friday, March 5**

*Collect II, 256*

*Psalm 63:1-8*

*I Samuel 3:1-10*

*Ephesians 4:11-16*

*Matthew 9:35-38*

Today's readings are about heeding God's call. God's call to Samuel was loud and clear, yet Samuel was certain it was Eli calling him. If even Samuel and Eli had a difficult time discerning that it was truly God calling, how can we hope to hear? Roaring traffic, a constant stream of TV and radio ads, the expectations of our children, our bosses and ourselves all compete for our attention. God calls to each of us again and again: "Wake up. Pay attention. FOCUS!" It may take moments for us to hear her call. It may take years. We must listen in order to hear.

When I was a child in Catholic grade school, Lent was about giving things up - usually television or candy. In some ways, Lent is still about giving up. It's about giving up busy-ness so we can learn to hear. It's about giving up the excesses of our lives so we can move along a simpler path to knowledge. The simple path leads us among many more of God's people rather than away from them. The path becomes simpler because we bring less with us on the journey, not because the journey asks less of us. When we unburden ourselves, we can take the time to look around, listen and hear.

Jude Ayers

## **Saturday, March 6**

*Collect 256*

*Psalm 15*

*Exodus 19:3-8*

*I Peter 4:7-11*

*Matthew 16:24-27*

*O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?*

David's psalm asks who shall be admitted to the worshiping congregation. He answers his own question with a list of moral requirements: walk blamelessly and speak the truth from the heart; do not slander, take up evil, or discredit your neighbors; do not praise the evil of others, but honor acts of mercy and kindness; do not profit from the hardship of others, and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

These are decent things to strive for, but David is mistaken in thinking that perfecting this list is required for entry into the community. Who gets to evaluate the worthiness of others to enter? (Picture the bouncers at the door, checking IDs.) When people evaluate others' worthiness, you get a homogeneous, exclusive community. This is definitely a bad model for the church.

Perhaps David is suggesting self-evaluation before entering the community. If the requirement for entry were perfection, the room would be empty. (David certainly would not qualify). But let's say that you only have to exclude yourself from the community when you do something wrong. I don't know about you, but I especially need to be in the community when I've made a mistake. Sometimes, it's only within the light of the community that I realize I've wronged someone. I need the community to keep me honest and aware not only of my thoughts and actions, but of whether or not my views are too narrow. When I am struggling, I need the witness of the community to provide a model for life transformation. Through the community I know that God and other people still love me even when I mess up. God wants all of us to always feel welcome into the community, as a living sign of God's love and grace.

Kurt C. Wiesner

## **Second Sunday in Lent, March 7**

*Collect 218*

*Psalm 27*

*Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18*

*Philippians 3:17-4:1*

*Luke 13: (22-30)31-35*

I read the words of today's Collect and immediately make a connection in the first clause, "O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy....". I thumb quickly through the prayer book and find it in Holy Eucharist I. It is the prayer of Humble Access and the turning point of this prayer is in the statement, "But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy."

In computer-speak, we often refer to software having a registry or properties. The properties are the parameters or patterns by which the software runs and is governed. God has a pattern that was handed down to Christ. Christ, by his example, gave us a pattern to follow and to teach that pattern to others.

There is a pattern to the collect. Do you remember the equation James Diamond gave us back in February? Truth + Forgiveness = Reconciliation. The collect's equation is much the same. We have gone astray, but if we are penitent (truthful) and have faith in the Word and in Christ Jesus, then we are, indeed, forgiven and reconciled to God and to one another.

Karla Rivers

## **Monday, March 8**

*Psalm 79:1-9*

*Daniel 9:3-10*

*Luke 6:27-38*

Have you ever had a person in your life, a person who betrayed you or undermined all your best efforts, a person who lied about you or enjoyed making you totally miserable? Chances are that if you're like me, you haven't been including this person in your daily prayers. But Jesus asks us to do exactly that.

I have tried praying for my enemy from time to time and it's not so easy. For one thing, even if you start well, it's hard to stay sincere. Once, while asking Jesus to improve the personality of a particularly arrogant and annoying person, I found myself suggesting that humility might come more easily to her if he would smite her with a little dermatological problem – the heartbreak of psoriasis, maybe, or perhaps hair loss. You see the difficulty? Praying for your enemy requires you to stop fondling your little resentments and grudges and to let go of cherished grievances. It's freeing, of course, but it's a loss, too.

I wonder why I have not prayed for my enemies more often. I suppose I have regarded the passage in Luke - "pray for your enemy" to mean simply- "don't hate your enemy." But as I read the passage today, I feel it not as a figure of speech but as a direct command: "Pray for your enemy. Just do it." So this year, this will be my Lenten discipline. I will make up a little list of "enemies" and every day I will pray for them. I will inventory all my little grievances and pray for the wisdom to let them go.

Maia White

## **Tuesday, March 9**

*Psalm 50: 7-15, 22-24*

*Isaiah 1: 2-4, 16-20*

*Matthew 23: 1-12*

Of course, I get these heavy hitters: Isaiah trashing the Israelites, God scolding the Israelites (Did they ever get it?), and Jesus reminding the crowds of the arrogance and hubris of the Pharisees. (They also never got it.)

There is a lot of rebuking in these passages. We have also heard a lot of rebuking in our Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. I fear we will face a long period where people who are comfortable at Trinity Cathedral in downtown Cleveland will be rebuked repeatedly, as they continue a journey of faith and growth and recognize the limitless potential of inclusion. Some are not willing to pursue a journey beyond a certain comfort level. Their actions belie their statements of theology and philosophy.

Even as he took after the Pharisees, Jesus reminded the crowds that the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. “. . . *therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.*” Where can we find scribes and Pharisees in Ohio? Would it be in the Ohio General Assembly? Read the passage from Matthew to appreciate this fully.

I am going to remember this passage from Matthew in the coming months, as we continue our discussion about inclusion and try to practice what we also preach. I am also going to remember that this also applies to me. Do I practice on Monday what I say on Sunday?

Michael Wells

## **Wednesday, March 10**

*Ps 31:9-16*

*Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20*

*Matt 20:17-28*

When I was trying to find my purpose in life, there were times I thought I was on the right track only to have my progress stymied. Roadblocks appeared and progress was minimal. It was frustrating and often discouraging. After all, if I was really doing God's will, things should fall into place and I should "get it." But I couldn't see what I was being molded into and kept interfering with God's efforts to mold me.

As I got better at listening, at stepping back and taking my own willfulness out of the picture, interesting things started to happen. I started to hear what God was saying to me. Roadblocks were replaced with gentle course corrections and the pieces started to fall into place. I made great progress. As long as I listened and kept my will out of the way, I could let God mold me. These were the times I felt myself taking shape as something pleasing to God.

It wasn't always easy. My fears, impatience and pride would stir up my willfulness and I would try to take control again. This invariably led to more roadblocks and frustrations until I would stop to listen again. It's a common problem. We let ourselves think we're in control, forgetting that God is the one with the power to build us up or knock us down. God is the one who can make our paths easier or more difficult.

Eventually I learned to keep my trust in God and take the easy route. It doesn't always take me where I would have chosen to go, but it always reminds me that I am not on this journey alone. God is beside me, guiding my footsteps and loving me.

Sherry Watts

## Thursday, March 11

*Psalm 1*

*Jeremiah 17:5-10*

*Luke 16:19-31*

### **Infant son, lay rest and wait**

Mommy has to pay for a seed she didn't grow  
Reach down tiny finger to my burning tongue  
Cooling peace in a smoldering tomb.

Wretched womb full of ashes  
Aged wounds, wrinkled flesh turns gray in waste  
**To hasten a fleshy sack from warm embrace**  
A vast, arid home of empty space.

Lazarus don't deny my right  
Tit for tat - no wiser  
A river quenching salt  
Ransom from an empty pouch.

Rain down with fresh winter hail  
Bitter and fragile in the sun  
Angels carry me  
To my son.

Tracy Leisman

## **Friday, March 12**

*Psalm 105:16-22*

*Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28*

*Matthew 21:33-43*

The overriding themes in these lessons seem to be envy and greed. As I reflected on these passages, I asked myself about envy and greed in my own life. My initial response was kneejerk: “I don’t have any envy or greed.” I expect that a lot of us would think, “I’m satisfied with my life,” “Material possessions are not important to me,” or “Everyone I know has more stuff than I do.” I think about a relative’s family with their huge new house, their swimming pool, their SUV and their minivan. We all know someone like that. We also know many individuals who have much less than we do. We attend church with them every week.

Of course, envy and greed don’t have to be about material things. Could we be seeking more love, attention, respect, or appreciation? Many of us could wish for better health, a good night’s sleep, or a little more time.

How do we break the cycle of envy and greed? For me, being aware of and grateful for the abundance in my life is a good start. My house is warm, my cupboard is full and my car gets me where I need to go. My family has regular income, and we are healthy. I have a supportive family and many friends. I have much to be thankful for, and I hope that I never forget that. I also know that helping others who have less (time, money, health, etc.) also helps to put things in perspective for me. I don’t realize how blessed I am until I interact with friends or strangers who don’t have the things I do. At the end of my reflection, I come to one conclusion: There is no room for envy and greed, when I have so much already.

Ginger Bitikofer

## Saturday, March 13

*Psalm 103*

*Micah 7:14-15, 18-20*

*Luke 15: 11-32*

Today's readings are a matched set, lessons in unconditional love and second chances, including that quintessential second chance story, the parable of the Prodigal Son. God knows (well, yeah . . .) I need second chances. I've made such a hash of my life, I'm into third, fourth and even double-digit chances in some areas. You'd think I'd have been booted well out of the game by now, but no. Whatever I've done or - more often - not done, I get to get up the next day and try it all over again. How cool is that?

Of course, in my darker moments, I think I'm Sisyphus, condemned to push that darn rock up the hill over and over, only to have it roll down again every time. But I get over it, in spite of the boulder, because there's that unconditional love.

What I choose to take from the parable of the Prodigal Son, besides the second chance thing, is that we - each and every sorry one of us - are valuable. We are worth something. That includes, believe it or not, me. Even when I've messed up big-time, I'm worth that second chance (or third or fourth . . .). And not only am I worth it, I actually get it.

I'm reminded of this each night by my bedtime prayer. It's the one from the New Zealand prayer book that contains these lines: "It is night after a long day. What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; *<let it be>*." (Emphasis mine. I often need to be spoken to sternly.) The prayer concludes, "The night heralds the dawn. Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, and new possibilities." I like that. And I go to sleep on the reassurance that one more time, I get that second chance . . . or third or fourth . . .

Jan C. Snow

## **Third Sunday in Lent, March 14**

*Collect 218*

*Psalm 103*

*Exodus 3:1-15*

*I Corinthians 10:1-13*

*Luke 13:1-9*

There is a lot about sin in today's readings. In Luke, Jesus tells us that life's calamities are not necessarily the wages of sin. He describes two events in which people lost their lives. Apparently, others were saying that those people died because of their sins, but Jesus says that they were no more sinful than we are.

This doesn't always sit well with us. We want to be able to blame someone. We don't want the "baddie" who commits all sorts of evil deeds to get off scot free, and if the punishment results from the crime, well, it just goes to show you. Whether a serial killer or an Enron bigwig, we want to see the wrong-doer get his comeuppance. There are even those in our society who see the avenging hand of God in the AIDS epidemic. (How come nobody sees pneumonia or gout as divine retribution?) Our thinking, of course, misses the point.

The point isn't whether or not those who died in the catastrophes Jesus refers to were being punished for their sins. (They weren't.) Jesus' point is that each of us is just as much a sinner as any of those who died - just as sinful, and just as much in need of repentance and forgiveness.

We need to find a new direction. To help us, St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, gives us a long string of examples of how the ancient Israelites went wrong and were punished for their sins. He gives us plenty of guidance from the Old Testament on what not to do. More importantly, he assures us that God will not let us be tested beyond our strength, that we can meet the challenges that face us.

Jim Boldey

## **Monday, March 15**

*Psalm 42:1-7*

*2 Kings 5:1-15*

*Luke 4:23-30*

Naaman had it all: trophy wife, children attending the finest schools; winters in Aspen, summers in Spain, command of the most powerful army in the region. There was nothing that he desired that he could not get - except that he was continually plagued with leprosy.

As the story unfolds, the stubborn and haughty Naaman gradually comes to the realization that he is not quite “the master of his fate.” Rather, God chooses to use the little people to effect Naaman’s miracle cure. First, an Israelite girl captured in one of Naaman’s raids suggests a cure. Then, there is the messenger of the prophet who instructs Naaman about how to rid himself of the leprosy. When Naaman angrily rejects the messenger’s instructions, his own servant imparts sage advice that changes his mind. The prophet Elisha, too, is only a means to end Naaman’s leprosy, just another “holy man” who must be bought off.

God’s blessings often come from unexpected sources, in unexpected ways. Moreover, God frequently blesses those that we do not think are particularly worthy. This is the hardest truth for us to accept. We prefer to believe that God only blesses “the faithful.” The people of Jesus’ hometown Nazareth rose up in righteous indignation when he reminded them they were not the only objects of God’s favor. Sometimes, we fall victim to our desire to make the Creator of humankind into our own personal god, denying blessing to others, deserving or not.

God does not live down to our expectations. Holy purposes get lived out on a much bigger stage than we can even begin to imagine or fathom. Today’s psalm suggests that we live each day in deep remembrance and gratitude for all that God has done for us, even in the midst of our own doubts.

Greg Jacobs

## Tuesday, March 16

*Psalm 25: 310*

*Daniel 3:2527*

***Matthew 18:2135***

*“...if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times? Jesus said ... not seven times, but, I tell you, seventyseven times”*

*“...unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart.”*

As I was preparing to write this, Trinity Cathedral had an entire morning of hearing the story of our Cross of Nails and reconciliation. As the story relates, Coventry Cathedral, from where our Cross of Nails comes, had just been bombed and the congregation was called together among the smoldering timbers and asked to pray for those who did the bombing. It is not easy unpacking that word “forgive,” let alone “reconciliation.”

Now throw in “truth.” The Gospel story of extremes tells me how I have to forgive from my heart. It doesn’t say my head, or brain, or my mind, but my heart ... OUCH! Does it really mean that I have to be truthful in what I say and do, like “walk the talk,” or “let go and let God?” Why does forgiving have to be so difficult?

I like referring back to hurts I’ve experienced. I like wallowing in my tears once in awhile. I like carrying grudges and being angry....NOT. My selfish feelings cause unbelievable pain in my heart back to the heart thing. “Me”, I say, “pay attention here and forgive, from the heart.” The same heart where Love begins. Jesus loves me and paid the ultimate price, and all He is asking of me is to be truthful when I am asked to forgive my brothers and sisters from my heart. Jesus’ stories are not easy to read, but the message is clear: forgiveness requires truth, and reconciliation requires both truth and forgiveness.

Difficult tasks? Yes, Lots of work still to do? Yes, Blurred lines? Not anymore.

Debbie Hunter

## **Wednesday, March 17**

*Psalm 78:1-6*

*Deuteronomy 4: 1-2 , 5-7-*

*Matthew 5: 17-19*

Moses commands that the statutes and ordinances given by God be followed diligently, that others might see and know that you have wisdom and discernment. Teach all generations.

When we are children, our parents take us to church. There we observe behaviors that we don't see elsewhere. Not only do our parents follow the rules, but so does everyone else in this place. It doesn't take long for us to understand the importance of these actions. Remember the works of God. Pass this on to the generations.

In Matthew, Jesus says that he has fulfilled the law. He has performed all that is asked by the scriptures. But performance of actions is not enough. If we want to know God, we must move beyond laws, commandments or acceptable social behavior. Jesus asks us to be transformed by loving one another. The commandments of old are an external performance in order to be an example of the Holy. Going beyond performance and into transformation is to experience the Holy. Only when we give unconditional love can we begin to understand the compassion of Jesus, who embraces all that we are. Why then do we believe that Jesus cannot embrace all of humanity? Perhaps it is our limited image of God that cannot embrace all of humanity. We can easily see the unholiness in our neighbor, but do we ask our neighbor for feedback on our own unholiness?

Jesus came not to judge us but to extend our experience with God into new light and life. We can only love as Jesus does if we love unconditionally. Spreading the Good News does not mean that we are in charge of our neighbor's relationship with God. It means that we are to speak of the joy and transformation of our own relationship.

Holy God, help us more.

Diane Hexter

## Thursday, March 18

*Psalm 95:6-11*

*Jeremiah 7:23-28*

*Luke 11:14-23*

I'm so confused!!! I got to the end of the Luke passage, and found the words "Whoever is not with me is against me..." (Lk. 11:23a), and thought for a moment that I got this whole thing wrong. I thought the saying goes, "Whoever is not against you is for you." Well, it turns out that Jesus said that too (Lk. 9:50)!

Has Jesus:

- a) changed his mind?
- b) waffled to suit his purpose (think politics)?
- c) forgotten that he used that expression already?
- d) been misquoted?

I can't answer to "d," but upon reflection, I don't think there really is a conflict between the two passages. Luke 9:50 answers the disciples' concerns that someone outside of Jesus' circle of followers was casting out demons in his name. Appropriately, Jesus says, don't stop him: this person is healing people, and thus responding to the call of God to care for people. "Whoever is not against you is for you."

In today's passage, people voice concerns over the source of Jesus' power to heal people. Some say that Jesus is in league with Satan (ruler of demons), others ask for proof that Jesus is healing with God power. Jesus finds this line of thinking absurd: if you use the power of Satan to cast out demons (heal people), it compromises and weakens Satan's power. Jesus suggests that the more likely scenario is that a power greater than the demons (or Satan) is responsible, and that power is God's. Jesus insists that healing people is a good thing, and that doing so is doing God's work. So anyone not for God's reconciling work of healing and caring for people (spiritually, physically, emotionally) is against (or at least missing) the point of Jesus' ministry. Whoever does not "gather" people together in healing grace is working to "scatter."

Kurt C. Wiesner

## Friday, March 19

*Collect 239*

*Psalm 89:1-29 of 89:1-4, 26-29*

*II Samuel 7:4, 8-16*

*Romans 4:13-18*

*Luke 2:41-52*

In the verses of today, Romans and Luke, Paul suggests that grace - if we are open to it - can be an integration of the divine with the human condition. The dictionary says that grace is “divine love and protection bestowed freely on people.”

Paul also talks about “the laws.” These laws, he implies, are an attempt on our part to control and to be in charge of our life, world and future. These laws are decidedly needed, but grace, on the other hand, is an acceptance in our hearts of an opening, and of waiting for the divine presence, energy and force in the universe to enter the soul.

As we pray, the spirit is our guide and connects us to the eternal. Our presence in church provides an opportunity to be still and experience divine grace through ritual and hearing of the word. Our task is to be patient, open and present in submitting to the embrace of the one. The task of meditation is to enfold us into the grace of God and move to the realization, “I AM.” I am connected to God, creation, the universal and all sentient beings.

Meister Eckhardt reminds us that being ever open to grace in Christianity is about subtraction, not addition. This tells us that we already have what we need to be “I AM.” The words that Carl Jung had over the doorway to his home also imply grace: *<Vocatus Atque Non Vocatus Deus Aderit>* (Bidden or not bidden, God is present). Silence and stillness of the heart will open doors to awareness, consciousness and gratitude as we pass through the many doors of life.

Sally T. Sherry

## **Saturday March 20**

*Psalm 51:15-20*

*Hosea 6:1-6*

*Luke 18:9-14*

*Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*

Be warned. These are the thoughts of someone who took an internet spirituality test and discovered that the “faith” that fit his responses is neo-paganism. Oh well, Trinity is a tolerant family.

I have been pulled back and forth so many times by my religious feelings that it is no wonder I don’t walk the straightest path on my journey. Sometimes the very process of pulling closer to God triggers an avoidance response that pushes me away. I blast off into a godless universe until God draws me back: my own spiritual “big bang” and “big crunch.”

It seems cosmologists no longer believe there will be a big crunch. Dark energy is accelerating the expansion of the universe to the point where the future ends up dark and lifeless. Not appealing cosmically or personally. To counter dark energy, I propose God’s love – gravity - whatever you wish to call it. All I know is that it pulls me back to the center of my universe where there is life, where I “return unto the Lord.” The push/pull of doubt and faith continues, and I pray that my faith will be a bit stronger.

In his wonderful novel, *<Life of Pi>*, Yann Martel writes about the conflict of faith and doubt. As Pi says, doubt is useful for a while. We must all pass through the garden of Gethsemane. If Christ played with doubt, so must we. If Christ spent an anguished night in prayer, if He burst out from the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” then surely we are also permitted doubt. But we must move on. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation. Like Pi, I try to “move on” and “return unto the Lord.”

Larry Anderson

## **Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 21**

*Collect 219*

*Psalm 34*

*Joshua 5:9-12*

***II Corinthians 5:17-21***

*Luke 15:11-32*

I pulled into the parking lot at my parents' nursing home, and as I got out of the car something in a nearby patch of snow caught my eye. I walked over to take a closer look. Crocuses! Sturdy little snouts poking straight up through the drifts. It was a brutally cold morning, and my first thought was, "They'll never make it." My mistake. As the days passed, the slender shoots kept right on rising. They were my first sign of spring.

Those confident little bulbs offer a comforting image as we press deeper into this season of selfexamination. Perhaps, like the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke, we have recognized our faults and our failings. Maybe we are ready to begin the long journey home.

I think we have an advantage over the Prodigal Son because we already know how his story and our story will end. The Prodigal returned home filled with trepidation, hoping only that his father would accept him as a servant. What an astonishing welcome he received! We are much more fortunate as we make our Lenten journey. We do not have to be fearful about how our Father will receive us. We can turn to the Psalmist's text, "I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.... O taste and see that the Lord is good! Happy are those who take refuge in Him!" And we can listen to Paul's words in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, "So, if any one is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new." What hopeful messages. As hopeful as those tender crocus shoots pushing up toward the sun.

Judy S. Drotleff

## **Monday, March 22**

*Isaiah 65:17-25*

*Psalms 30:1-6, 11-12*

*John 4:43-54*

I used to give up one of my vices for Lent. But now that I've given up so many of my vices all year round, the pickings are kind of slim. My daily half-cup of caffeine? Breyers Peanut Butter & Fudge Ice Cream? I'm getting to be a guy whose idea of a wild time is staying up past midnight with a book, and even then I don't read fiction newer than the 19th century. What am I going to give up? I really didn't know until I was asked to do this Lenten meditation and read the scripture assigned for my day. Then it came to me: This year I'm giving up giving things up for Lent.

The passage that brought me this epiphany can be found in the 11th verse of the 30th chapter of Psalms, which I've always thought of as the friendliest book in the Bible. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."

I've given up all the crazy stuff so I can enjoy life more by being both physically and mentally healthier. And enjoy not only my life but also that of my beautiful wife and amazing daughter. So that's what I'm going to consciously practice for these days of Lent. I'm giving up mourning for my lost youth and taking up a little middle-aged dancing; shucking that scratchy sackcloth of a past life and luxuriating in the satiny comfort of now.

Of course, now may not have the thrilling crests and peaks of my roller-coaster dare-devilry days, but now also doesn't have the miserable valleys and freaky periods of isolation that sometimes plagued me in the past. Now is calm, and calm is just my cup of tea. Decaffeinated tea, alas, but mine. Cheers.

Tony Brown

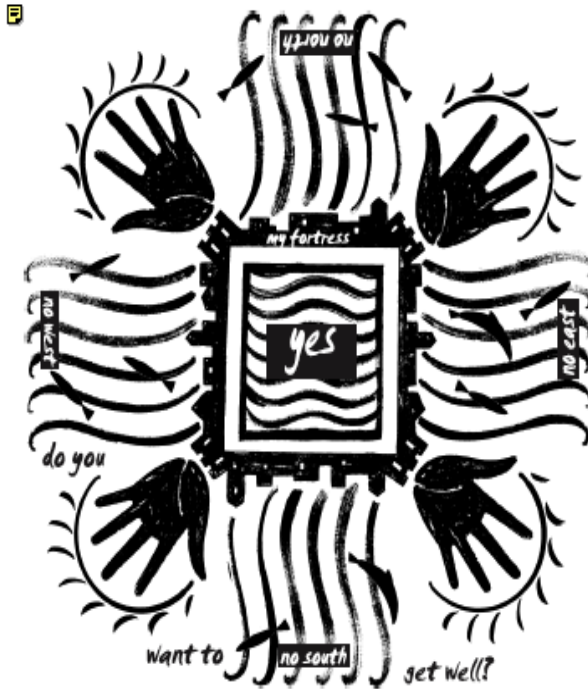
## Tuesday, March 23

*Psalm 46:1-8*

*Ezekiel 47:1-9,12*

*John 5:1-18*

*Preface of Lent*



Connie Laessig

## Wednesday, March 24

*Psalm 145:8-19*

*Isaiah 49:8-15*

*John 5:19-29*

*A mother may allow her child sometimes to fall, and to learn the hard way, for its own good. But because she loves the child she will never allow the situation to become dangerous. Admittedly earthly mothers have been known to let their children die, but our heavenly Mother, Jesus, will never let us, his children, die.*

Julian of Norwich, <*Revelations of Divine Love*>

How many mountain paths we attempt to level for our children. We devote our energy to clothing, feeding and sheltering their bodies and souls. Yet, we all fall short.

“Enough!” they declare pushing open the door to their own possibilities. And we are left with half full pots still simmering with advice and admonitions, aprons soiled with small spots of rejection and smudges of regrets, and their fingerprints on varying heights of our hearts.

Consolation remains.

Our heavenly Mother’s hand is always upon “his children” and the milky sweet lap of God open for us all.

Janet Kody

**Thursday, March 25**

**Feast the Annunciation of our Lord Jesus Christ**

*Psalm 40: 1 - 11*

*Isaiah 7:10 - 14*

*Hebrews 10: 5 – 10*

*Luke 1: 26 – 38*

At first glance, today's readings seem disjointed. What could Isaiah's testy rebuke to King Ahaz's temerity have to do with Luke's account of Gabriel's gracious visit to Mary or with Psalm 40, a long time favorite of mine?

As I flipped back and forth in my combined BCP and Bible, I began to sense a thread of relationship. In all of these passages, there seems to be a challenge placed before a single individual to confront God's plan.. Mary is challenged, overwhelmed with God's favor. Jesus is mindful of the elimination of legal sacrifices in accepting his own role as the ultimate sacrifice. The psalmist seems to speak in a somewhat hesitant voice - as if to assure God - while proclaiming God's good works now that he is freed from the desolate pit - that his new song is sung wholly and without hesitation.

Private moments. Compelling changes of behavior or belief, publicly declared. Confidently, timidly, hopefully, or even in irritation. Four people, four transformative moments.

That's when I went back to Psalm 40, which asks me to "wait patiently" until God places a new song in my mouth. Not to restrain my lips this time. Not to conceal God's love for me, but to give it out – magnify it – and believe. This year, I intend to mark the nine months of Mary's pregnancy, the growing of the Savior of the world, as my own time of growing. I believe that faith is fear that says it prayers. Increasing in faith can only come from repeatedly declaring that yes, I am fearful but my God has looked to me to set my fear aside.

God, set my footing sure in your loving care and protection. Let this be my gift from you, my own Annunciation.

Bill Tregoning

## **Friday, March 26**

*Psalm 34:15-22*

*Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24*

*John 7:12, 10, 25-30*

Psalm 34. Good. John. Excellent. Wisdom. Ah, yes, Wisdom. I need a dose of Wisdom to drive away the winter chill. Here is a book of the Bible I didn't even know existed until I joined the Episcopal Church. It was never read as a part of the Lutheran lectionary or taught in Catechism.

I pick up my Jerusalem Bible and start to flip the gold edged pages. I find great pleasure in locating Wisdom without help from the index. Along the journey, I find little treasures. A memorial card from a co-worker. He was 37, came to work one day, drank his coffee, went to the bathroom and died of an aneurysm; another for a friend and co-worker who was only 63 and had cancer; a tiny Associated Press article headlined, "Episcopalians get 1st woman Bishop." That first woman is a friend, too. Finally, I locate it, between the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, the section of books filled with lush poetry and deep, spiritual thoughts.

The passage from Wisdom speaks to the definition of a virtuous man and foreshadows the Messiah, his life and his death. After several harsh verses, I can almost hear the crowd shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And then, the writer turns it around, ever so gently, with the words, "God did make man imperishable, he made him in the image of his own nature." The hope of Eternal Life.

Christ was a virtuous man. He was strong, courageous and conformed to the highest standards. He was a virtuoso in love, in life, in death and in his resurrection. I find the same images in my friend, the Bishop, and in the memories I hold of how my departed friends lived their lives. I am blessed in these reflections of wisdom.

Karla Rivers

## Saturday, March 27

*Psalm 7:6-11*

*Jeremiah 11:18-20*

*John 7:37-52*

*Psalm 7: 6 "Rise up, O Lord, in your anger lift yourself  
up against the fury of my enemies..."*

On CrustSkin of JudgementWrong  
and on SpiritFlow of AngelSong,  
endless Layers  
In-Between  
always Present, never Seen -  
press on Walls, on vague DoubtSigh  
from the deepest Bowels of BigotCry.

*Jeremiah...11...vs. 19..."...Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,  
let us cut him off from the land of the living..."*

In HateMoment's Indignation,  
Fear's HasteFace, Renunciation,  
looking past each WisdomSight  
brushes off heartborn TruthRight,  
In-Between  
breeds dark DenialCrevice  
stifles Growth, retains most AngerMalice.

*John 7:38 "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me....  
Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water..."*

It is Hunger that awakes from Sleep LoveDaughter,  
of ThirstDeep flow Rivers with LifeGift of Water,  
and to FearDistrust  
the In-Between  
gives Way,  
yet unknown TruthSilence slips through Day,  
And GodSpirit reaches out beyond the UnknownEnd  
through the In-Between  
to SeedBeginning....  
Love..... does send.

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 28**

*Collect 219*

*Psalm 126*

*Isaiah 43:16-21*

*Philippians 3:8-14*

*Luke 20:9-19*

The Lenten season is a time of preparation. Liturgically speaking, it is a period of reflection, soul-searching and repentance. Practically speaking, it is a season of dyeing eggs, stuffing fake grass into pastel baskets and matching up rogue plastic egg halves. And, for parents of girls, the preparation is marked by the search for the holy grail of couture: the Easter dress. Parents of boys have it easy: black suit nice tie and they're set for Easter, and any special occasion that come up in the next year. But if you have a girl, finding the right Easter dress is a bittersweet moment.

It always starts the same way. You don the wool coat, scarf, hat and boots, and drive out in the gray slush. The moment you walk into the store, though, you're besieged with beautiful dresses in fabrics of purple gingham, pink roses and yellow polka-dots. As you smile, you can almost hear the Hallelujah chorus. Yes! Spring is here! In this store! Your heart is filled with hope as you envision your daughter - in a sleeveless pale-blue taffeta dress, lacy socks with white Mary Janes and a matching satin purse - prancing into Trinity Cathedral on a warm Easter morning with blue skies, daffodils and tulips in full bloom. Then, it hits you: This is Cleveland. Put back the white shoes. And the socks, for that matter. Sleeveless? What were you thinking?

As you drive home empty-handed, it comes to you. In many ways, the experience has been a true Lenten preparation because in that search for the perfect dress, you've come once again to the realization that hope for spring eternal cannot be found in pastels or sleeveless dresses. It comes only through the resurrection of Christ Jesus on Easter morning. Even if it snows.

Pam Lilley

## **Monday, March 29**

*Psalm 23*

*Daniel 13*

*John 8:1-11 or 12-20*

*I am but one, but I am one. I cannot do everything but I can do something! What I can do, I ought to do. What I ought to do, I will do. Lord, what will you have me do?*

This motto of the Order of the Daughters of the King has been my salutation to God since 1946.

Review the enormity of what the motto say. First, each of us is important as a child of God with a purpose for our being. To this we make a commitment to do what ever we are able. Therefore, we implore the Lord to show us the way, His way.

Upon stating our request, it is imperative that we give Him at least 60 seconds of quietness of body and mind to respond. (This is the most difficult part of meditation.) In this period of complete solitude, we may hear the sometimes still but other times thunderous voice that gets our attention. Our response may take the form of continued silence, smiles, song or even tears. But always, a sense of relief comes in the awareness that we are not alone in our perplexity.

In Cardinal Newman's <God's Plan For Me,> he says God created each of us to do some definite service which God has not committed to any other. We may be a link in a chain of connection between persons. We may be an angel of peace or a preacher of truth while not intending it. Our sickness may serve Him. Our perplexity may serve Him. Our sorrow may serve Him. He has not created us for nothing. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about, therefore we trust him.

*I am but one, but I am one.*

*Lord, what will you have me do?*

Elizabeth G. Rhine

## **Tuesday, March 30**

*Psalm 102:15-22*

*Numbers 21:4-9*

*John 8:21-30*

Today Old Testament reading is one of those strange little vignettes that cause me to scratch my head. Here are these pesky children of Israel bedeviling Moses again. In verse three, right above, The Lord listened to them, handed over the Canaanites and gave Israel victory. So what do they do? They turn around and start kvetching to Moses. “Why are we out here? We don’t have any water. We hate the food!”

The Lord responds by sending serpents to bite and kill them. When they repent, God tells Moses to make a serpent of bronze and those bitten who look on it will live. Look at what is killing you? Interesting idea.

There is an old tale in which a fairy meets two girls. One speaks kindly to the fairy and is blessed. Every word from her mouth becomes jewels and gold. The other speaks harshly and is cursed. From her mouth comes frogs and snakes.

How often do we bring disaster on ourselves by what we allow to come out of our mouths? Could the people of Israel not have sung praises to the Lord for freedom and victory, instead of complaining about what they didn’t have? How many times do our words turn around and bite us, just like poisonous serpents? Can we draw out the poison? Yes, and God has shown us the way. Look at the result of your words. See how they have become poisonous. Think before speaking. Make necessary amends to draw out the poison. And live.

Toni Ponzo

## **Wednesday, March 31**

*Canticle 2 or 13*

*Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28*

*John 8:31-42*

We know Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We learn their story as children. Even under the demands of a very angry King Nebuchadnezzar (King “N”), they show great integrity and refuse to turn away from God. The three men are cast into the fire, and God is in the fire, protecting them. King N then sings the praises of the young men, admiring them for their faithfulness.

What strikes me is the part of King N’s speech omitted in today’s reading. He says, “Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego don’t disagree.

This was not in the version I learned in Sunday School.

How was this decree of King N’s received by past readers? Did people rejoice, that as long as followers of “the real” God were lifted up, others were simply getting what they deserved? Perhaps this ending illustrates the point that we can turn into our oppressors by insisting that our way is the only way. Violence against others should make us uneasy - always.

My hunch is that Sunday School teachers, alarmed by the violence at the end but not wanting to “argue with Scripture,” leave that part out. Maybe the lectionary writers didn’t want to deal with it either. This is a huge mistake. We must be honest with ourselves. We are always only a step away from turning our integrity and faithfulness into forms of oppression, hatred, and violence...all in the name of God. Being faithful means striving for peace, justice, and love at ALL times: regardless of who has the power.

Kurt C. Wiesner

**Thursday, April 1**

*Psalm 105:4-11*

*Genesis 17:1-8*

*John 8:51-59*

I'm confused, and these readings aren't helping. The Psalm is a laundry list of times when God pulled ancient Israel out of a fix, an Old Testament <Cliffs Notes>. Its relevance escapes me, along with that of the Genesis passage, yet another history lesson. Never mind about today's Gospel. I'm not smart enough to understand that.

For weeks I've been feeling as if I'm in one of those bumper cars at Euclid Beach, scooting around in noisy circles and being whacked periodically by the unexpected. Slammed into the rubber barrier, I spin the steering wheel only to bounce off on yet another ineffective trajectory. I'm not exactly getting killed, but I'm not making any headway, either. That I'm writing for April Fool's Day does not escape me. "How appropriate that my words grace this particular page," the head-voice says wryly. HA! Where's Laughing Sal when you need her? A little self-pity there, with a touch of disingenuous self-deprecation. (Well, OK, more than a touch . . .)

Isabel Allende hands me an image that consoles me in my directionless. "About every ten years," she writes in her memoir, <*My Invented Country*>, "I take a look back and can see the map of my journey – well, that is if it can be called a map, it looks more like a plateful of noodles."

So that's what I'm doing! Here I am - not in Chile but in cold, gray Ohio - untangling a heap of spaghetti, following a strand at a time, trying find its other end. I suppose this is why I keep hanging out at church – because it's a good place to get occasional untangling clues. I suppose that's why I persist in reading stuff, like today's Gospel that I don't have brains enough to make sense of. I persist in believing that ultimately these efforts will help me untangle some of my spaghetti. And every now and then, save me from a slam into that rubber bumper car barrier. (Look out!)

Jan C. Snow

**Friday, April 2**

*Psalm 18:1-7*

*Jeremiah 20:7-13*

*John 10:31-42*

**January**

Winter's barely here

I'm tired already

But look

Nights are shorter

Days are longer

The sun is shining

**February**

Cold, cold, cold

Will the snow ever end?

But listen

Birds are chirping so loudly

And the sun is shining

**March**

All this wind!

I can barely stand

But look

Snow melts quickly now

Because

The sun is shining

**April**

Spring at last?

April Fools!

But smell the lilies

See the daffodils

Yes, the sun is shining

I'm so.....

We're so.....

The world is so....

But look,

listen,

feel

The Sun is shining.

## Saturday, April 3

*Psalm 85:1-7*

*Ezekiel 37:21-28*

*John 11:45-53*

I have not had an easy time with these readings. The Psalm is nice but not really saying anything new to me. Ezekiel? Well I don't usually get him anyway. And John. What is this but another story about the people plotting to kill Jesus? But wait, right at the end of this section in verses 51 and 52 "*...he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation and not for the nation only but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.*" This came from Caiaphas, the high priest, while plotting to kill Jesus!

Prophecy can come from strange and unexpected people and places. Caiaphas I'm sure had no idea that what he was saying would come true in less than two weeks. He had no idea that he was being used as an instrument of God's plan or that he was one of the first people to proclaim a central truth about Jesus' life and purpose.

Do you think any of the followers of Jesus heard this? Would they have understood what Caiaphas was saying? Or do you think they only heard an enemy plotting against their leader? Maybe they remembered after the fact and a light went off for them. I hope so.

How often do we not hear something because it comes from a despised source? Don't let who you think someone is or what you think they are saying blind you to the truth. Listen with your heart as well as your ears. Let the Holy Spirit guide your understanding. Love your enemies. They might have some important truth to impart to you.

Toni Ponzo

## **Palm Sunday, April 4**

*Psalm 118:19-29*

*Luke 19:29-40*

*Collect 219*

*Psalm 22:1-21 or 22:1-11*

*Isaiah 45:21-25 or Isa 52:13-53:12*

*Philippians 2:5-11*

*Luke (22:39-71)23:1-49(50-56)*

Today's readings dwell heavily on servanthood. Jesus sends his servants to pick up the donkey, and the donkey's owners become servants by allowing this to happen. What would you do if you saw someone about to drive away in your car? "The Master needs it." Oh, OK. Go right ahead. And now, having served the Master, you are walking to work. Isaiah complains of being a badly treated servant, beaten and spit upon. Jesus served his friends at the Last Supper, and ultimately served us all by dying.

Being a servant is hard going. It requires you to do without so that someone else can be made comfortable. It requires you to humble yourself and take orders, and not mind that you are not appreciated. Wash the smelly feet of people who later will deny they know you. It may even get you killed.

At a diocesan confirmation service a few years ago, Rev. Brian Wilbert, rector of Christ Church, Oberlin, preached, "Be careful what you promise and be careful what you pray for." Every Sunday we recite the words of the Baptismal Covenant, promising all sorts of things. Have you ever really pondered those words? We are basically promising to serve God. To be servants of God. To humble ourselves, follow orders, and not mind that we are not appreciated. Wash smelly feet. Maybe even get killed. Be careful what you promise and be careful what you pray for. When I think about what I am promising, I pray for the strength and courage to get through it. And I do all this in the hope that on that final day, God will say to me: "Servant, well done"

Emily Ingalls

## *An invitation*

**Forty days ago we began this Lenten journey together. A lot can happen in forty days. Forty days and nights of rain for Noah, forty days before Nineveh will be destroyed for Jonah, forty days of temptation in the wilderness for Jesus. For forty days, you've read the musings of those involved in this project. Now we come at last to Holy Week. We invite you to contemplate these final days before Easter and think about their meaning to you. Let your thoughts and feelings flow. Write, draw. Let these pages be yours, to share - or not - as the Spirit moves you.**

## **Monday of Holy Week, April 5**

**scripture listing here**

**<Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?**

**Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?>**

**T.S. Eliot, <Choruses from "The Rock">**

**Toni and Jan**

## **Monday of Holy Week, April 5**

*Collect 220*

*Psalm 36:5-10*

*Isaiah 42:1-9*

*Hebrwes 11:39-12:3*

*Jon 12:1-11 or Mark 14:3-9*

*Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?*

*Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*

**T.S. Eliot**, *Choruses from "The Rock"*

## **Tuesday of Holy Week, April 6**

*Collect 220*

*Psalm 71:1-12*

*Isaiah 49:1-6*

*1 Corinthians 1:18-31*

*Jhn 12:37-38, 42-50 or Mark 11:15-19*

*There are really only two prayers:*

*“Help! Help! Help!” and “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”*

Anne Lamott, speaking at Calvin College

## **Wednesday of Holy Week, April 7**

*Collect 220*

*Psalm 69:7-15, 22-23*

*Isaiah 50:4-9a*

*Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-28*

*John 13:21-35 or Matthew 26:1-5, 14-25*

*Q. What day is today?*

*A. One day closer to death.*

Swami Sivananda

## **Maundy Thursday, April 8**

### **The Liberation Feast**

*Collect 221*

*Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25*

*Exodus 12:1-14a*

*1 Corinthians 11:23-26(27-32)*

*John 13:1-15 or Luke 22:14-30*

*As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.*

*As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

Nelson Mandela, 1994 Inaugural address

## **Good Friday, April 9**

*Collect 221*

*Psalm 22:1-11 (12-21)*

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

*Hebrews 10:1-25*

*John (18:1-14) 19:1-37*

*Sometimes we crucify, sometimes we are crucified;  
but mostly, we just walk by.*

Tracey Lind, Good Friday homily

## **Holy Saturday, April 10**

*If we wanted to live, truly wanted to live, we would rise up in a resurrection of our own making and commit ourselves to the life we have.*

Richard Bode, *Beachcombing at Miramar*