**“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”**

**The Church of the Holy Comforter Lenten Devotional for 2016**

Dear Friends,

On February 10, we will enter the Season of Lent—a 40 day period prior to Easter in which we relive the story of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and are reminded of the courage, hope, and self-giving love, that led him there.

Over the next 40 days, we hope that this Lenten devotional booklet will assist you as you take time to enter into quiet and unhurried places and to become aware of your longing for God and God’s longing for you.

This collection of thoughts and prayers in this booklet come from a variety of voices and a range of personal perspectives. Each offers a glimpse into the faith journey of a person seeking to know and to follow Christ in his or her own concrete daily life. These devotions remind us how much we are enriched by faithful friendships in Christian community. We need each other and we learn from each other. What you hold in your hands is a labor of love and we thank all who accepted the invitation to write one of the devotions.

Lent holds the possibility for real growth and transformation in our lives. May the Spirit of Christ guide you and strengthen you in that holy endeavor.

Fr. Rick Lord+
Ash Wednesday has long been one my favorite days of the church year. Does that seem strange? There is something vitally important about observing Ash Wednesday. On this day we face the reality of our humanity, our mortality, our sinfulness. We are invited to stop pretending and instead to perceive clearly that we are all wounded and broken and full of sin. All of us. And when we see that smudge of ash on one another, we realize that we are not alone. On Ash Wednesday we find that while we are deeply connected in our sinfulness, we are more essentially connected in our forgiven-ness.

As a hospital chaplain, I experienced Ash Wednesday in profound ways, giving ashes to those who were dying; to nurses working 12-hour shifts unable to get to their own church; to people of different Christian traditions for whom the observance of this holy day was vitally important. Regardless of faith tradition or background or age or race or ethnicity or health, the sign of ashes was universal and unifying.

As you begin your own Lenten journey, remember that you are not alone. Remember that we are all connected – in our sinfulness, but more importantly in our forgiven-ness. I invite you to spend time with Psalm 103 today. Read it several times, being aware of which verses or phrases resonate with you. Today, bear ashes on your forehead and remember: “God redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness.”

Rev. Valerie Hayes
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 11 Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Psalm 37:1-8; Habakkuk 3:1-10 (11-15) 16-18; Phillipians 3:12-21;
John 17:1-8

During Lent I am reminded of the humanness of Jesus, he had a family with parents who loved him and who tried to protect him. When I see all the pictures in the news of refugee families risking their lives to save their children I think of the Flight Into Egypt and how Mary and Joseph risked everything to save Jesus not because he was born to save the world but because he was their baby. Early in World War II, my parents opened their farm house to Jewish refugees from Austria. Although I never met these people I grew up hearing their stories and their stories have given life to those whose photographs I have seen but whose stories I will never know.

FLIGHTS INTO: JESUS WITH REFUGEES
Renaissance artists painted Mary in blue satin riding side saddle
The baby a china doll, the angel in front-a servant with a lantern,
All of their halos on straight. The family off to a garden party not the
Two hundred mile trek from Bethlehem to Egypt through the desert.
The refugee Holy Family would have hidden
From Herod’s soldiers by day and from jackals at night;
Constantly hungry, thirsty and afraid.
Desperate parents on the run to rescue their children
Every generation and every country owns this story;
Having a baby in a stable a “piece of cake”.

In 1938 Switzerland closed its border with Austria to Jews
Abandoning them to the Nazis. At the last minute
My mother’s friends planned their escape. He got out.
His wife stayed, trapped in the hospital having just had their baby.
She waited lying low until the snows came.
Then one clear night with no angel to guide her
She strapped her baby on her back, slipped past the soldiers
And skied her son across the border to safety.

Barbara Maniha
Preconceived notions can really work you into a bind! Take the example of today’s reading from Ezekiel. For generations it was taught “The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezekiel 18:2b). In other words, the sin of the parents is also the sin of the child and there was no way to ever be free from that binding! Even if you were “perfect”- too bad- it still goes on and on: no chance of repentance. Besides, it was the convenient explanation for why the nation of Israel found themselves in exile in Babylon while their beloved temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed. And what it is amazing is that that notion had no Godly basis in their scriptures. But God tells Ezekiel to proclaim and remind-yes, remind- the people that God is concerned for all lives, “Know that all lives are mine..” (Ezekiel 18:4a) and sin is committed by one person just as that one can decide to repent; it is an individual’s responsibility. I also find the equations of “sin is death” and “repentance is life” an interesting precursor to Jesus’ teachings with the underlying reminder that God always has and still loves each and every one of us. Remember, this is the God who was loving enough to make clothes for Adam and Eve before their expulsion from Eden. This is the God who trusted faithful Job to demonstrate that bad things can even happen to good people. This is the God who gave his only Son. This is the God who proclaims “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone…Turn, then, and live” (Ezekiel 18:32).

Philene Ware Dunn
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

**February 13 Saturday after Ash Wednesday**

Psalm 30, 32; Ezekiel 39:21-29; Phil. 4:10-20; John 17:20-26

Or

**Absalom Jones, Priest (1818)**

Psalm 137:1-6; Isaiah 11:1-5; Galatians 5:1-5; John 15:12-15

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**Rules and Regulations**

*(Galatians 5: 1-5)*

In this passage, Paul is admonishing the Galatians on their rule keeping, missing the freedom in Christ that is our privilege because of Him. It makes me think of how I create an order for my private devotions and prayers. I must read my Jesus is Calling book, 1st., the Forward Day by Day, 2nd., the Upper Room, 3rd., Bailies Daily Prayers, 4th, Encounter with God 5th and on and on. I give myself no peace and freedom, as though He won’t hear me or listen to me if I don’t do it all and in order. My prayers also have an order. And, then I get to thinking that unless I do all that I have set up to do, it won’t be effective. Do you ever fall into this trap?

I imagine Paul talking to me, too. I am now striving to be faithful and also really enjoy this time with him. I am striving to give God time that I might listen to his plan for our time together. I am striving to allow time for pleasure with God, for just reading his word and listening to him and basking in his grace, beauty and love.

In so many ways, just following rules and regulations is easier. Get a list, check it off and count it done. Paul is telling us there is so much more. And, when I give myself freedom to mix it up, drop something off or add something, it is so much more fun.

*Sue Addison King*
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 14     Sunday, Lent 1


Luke’s Gospel rendition of Jesus’ temptation begins with, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, (Luke 4:1) and ends with "he (the devil) departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). These two phrases describe well our Lenten journey and our lives. Deep down, we know that our hearts are full of the Holy Spirit, alive and present in grace. We also know that during these 40 days the devil will definitely tempt us, and do so often.

As we face those juxtaposed realities in the days ahead, let us pray for each other that we all have the presence and discipline to call on the Spirit as we are tempted. Unlike Christ, we will fail. When we do (and I know I will), may we remember to ask our all-loving and merciful God, to forgive us. Our Lord died for our sins, offer yours up and be thankful. Paul, in today's reading from Romans, sums it best: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13)

I began my time reflecting with my personal mantra, “Come God in Grace and Awaken the Spirit”. I am now reminded of the closing of Our Lord’s Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one". I always personalize the ending to remind me that evil is real, not abstract.

May we walk these days together, facing the devil with our minds and hearts full of the Holy Spirit.

Carl Riedy
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 15     Monday in the First Week of Lent

Psalm 41, 52; Genesis 37:12-24; 1Corinthians 1:1-19; Mark 1:1-13

As I read and reflected on the two New Testament readings that I was assigned and the coming of Easter, a common theme emerged for me. As Christians we should focus on the special gift of Christ to humanity. I am struck by the central place of giving and self-sacrifice that is embodied in the New Testament and in the life of Christ. And the way that the teachings of Jesus provide a focus and uniting sense of common purpose to Christians. So that, while we all have our viewpoints and our preferences, we realize that we only see dimly the way forward. Our guiding light is to continue to reflect on our faith which was inspired by the life and teachings of our lord and savior. As Paul says there are no followers of Paul, there are only followers of Christ. Paul was sent to preach the gospel of Jesus. Each in our own way must reach our own interpretation of the teachings of Jesus through prayer, reflection, and living our lives. And seek to invite the Holy Spirit to help us live in a way that honors and nourishes our friends, loved ones, and all of those that we encounter in our journey.

Chris Jones
Anticipation. This is an emotion that we feel all the time. As children, we anticipate Easter or summer vacation. As young people, we anticipate our future. We may have a “plan” for what we will do with our lives. We might take steps to prepare for our plan. Go to school. Apply for a job. Sometimes our plans are interrupted. Maybe we find we no longer have the same interests, and we simply change our minds. Or maybe something drastic happens which makes our previous plans irrelevant. Anticipation starts anew – a new chapter begins.

In the readings for today, there are several examples of plans changing and new chapters. In Genesis 37:12-24, we read about Joseph who is cast into a cistern in the dessert by his jealous brothers. His coat is stolen, and he is left to die. From that moment on, Joseph had to anticipate a new story…a new plan. In Mark 1:14-28, Jesus calls his first disciples. He tells Simon and Andrew that if they leave their fishing nets behind, they will become “fishers of men.” For them also, a new plan began.

In the Psalms for today, we see how God is our refuge and our strength. In Psalm 48, we read, “For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.” So in our anticipation…even if plans change…we can remember this hymn:

“Be not afraid, I go before you always. Come follow me, and I will give you rest.”

Sarah Helmicki
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 17  Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

Psalm 119:49-72, 49; Gen. 37:25-36; 1Cor. 2:1-13; Mark 1:29-45

“What no eye has seen, What no ear has heard, 
What no human mind has conceived - the things GOD has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2: 9)

Today's readings remind us that the SPIRIT is forever with us - in our actions, our thoughts and our understanding of the world around us.

In today's Psalm, David mentions the following words: Hope, Comfort, Promise, Obey, Trust, Grace, Love and Law. Law is mentioned four times more than any other. [Jesus later tells us in the New Testament to obey the SPIRIT of the law, rather than the letter.]

In Genesis 37, we learn how Joseph's brothers sold him to traders for 20 Shekels and faked his death, nearly destroying their father with grief. The lack of spirit in Joseph's brothers is apparent in their greed and treachery, even as the enormous spirit of Joseph is revealed in his ability to thrive.

In Mark 1, we hear how Jesus heals and prays. His spirit is strong and masses of people flock to his side, to benefit from his blessings.

There is a zen saying, "Before enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water." It is not always the action that is important, but rather the spirit in which the action is performed. No matter what you are doing, fill your heart with the essence of your action, feeling gratitude for your blessings, and knowing that you are making a difference, no matter how big or small.

Morgan Hanzlik
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 18     Thursday in the First Week of Lent
Psalm 50, 19, 46; Gen. 39:1-23; 1Cor. 2:14-3:15; Mark 2: 1-12
Or
Martin Luther, Theologian (1546)
Psalm 46; Isaiah 55:6-11; Romans 3:21-28; John 15:1-11

The theme of loss and resurrection is especially present for our family as we mourn the recent loss of John’s father, John Walter Davison, Jr. known affectionately by all as Jack. Psalm 46 reminds us that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change…Be still, and know that I am God!” This sentiment of protection in times of trouble is so beautifully echoed in the powerful hymn “Rock of Ages”* which concludes “…While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyelids close in death, when I rise, to worlds unknown and behold thee on thy throne, Rock of ages, cleft for me let me hide myself in thee.” John’s father, Jack, was an advocate, connoisseur and lover of music in many forms, and found special beauty in liturgical music. The words of scripture have the power to bring us comfort, insight and knowledge. The hymns we sing have the power to inspire, encourage, and move us. They remind us that we are not alone—that joy, suffering, fear, and love help to connect us to the experience of so many Christians throughout the ‘ages.’ That “Should my tears for ever flow, should my zeal no languor know” we need only cling to the cross.

Scripture, songs, liturgy are all a reflection of our lives in our reality and our aspirations. In Lent, we have the opportunity to be with Christ and with one another in our suffering and the suffering of those around us. At Easter, we will celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Most importantly, we celebrate His resurrection truth—that those we love who have passed on, and we ourselves, will someday be part of that kingdom. For now, we can take comfort in the knowledge that we are not alone because God is with us, wants to be with us while we are here on earth. On some glorious day, we can be assured that we will go and be with God, and my sincere hope and belief is that we will all be joyously reunited.

*Rock of Ages, Hymn 685, Hymnal 1982, Church Publishing Company
Words: Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778), alt.
Music: Thomas Hastings (1784-1872)
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

**February 19     Friday in the First Week of Lent**

Psalm 95, 40, 54, 51; Gen. 40:1-23; 1Cor. 3:16-23; Mark 2:13-22

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me.” (*Psalm 51:10-11*)

These resounding words from the Psalm present a fitting way to prepare for the celebration of the Lord’s resurrection. I will ask God’s help to restore the clean heart that he created in me through Baptism and to put the right spirit within me. The stains that have built up on my heart over the years aren’t just smudges that can be wiped away. No, they’re more like mildew that comes back again and again: ugly, foul-smelling, and unhealthy. Their presence stands between me and a closer relationship with God. At first I wonder if I even want to make the effort to root them out. Then I think of the rewards that a clean heart might bring to me. If I can scrub away pride, I will more often learn from the good in other people. If I erase selfishness, I will better understand their needs. If I can conquer envy, I will take more pleasure in sharing other peoples’ joys. So during Lent and beyond I will try to remember the words of the Psalm. I will ask less often if my heart is reaching out for happiness and more often if it is striving to be clean.

**Margy Collom**
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 20  Saturday in the First Week of Lent
Psalm 55, 138, 139; Genesis 41:1-3; 1Corinthians 4:1-7; Mark 2:23-3:6

Or

Frederick Douglass, Prophetic Witness (1895)
Psalm 85:7-13; Isaiah 32:11-18;
Hebrews 2:10-18; John 8:30-32

Frederick Douglass, Prophetic Witness (1895)

Prophets of old often warned of God’s impending wrath. I prefer the inspiring words of our new Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, surely a prophetic witness of the present day. God has a dream for his creation, Bishop Curry has said, referencing lay author Verna Dozier, and God will not rest until that dream is accomplished.

A prophetic witness preceding Bishop Curry was Frederick Douglass, who died on this date 121 years ago. Douglass was a great American, a basically self-educated runaway slave who became a courageous and influential orator, Christian pastor, and newspaper editor. He spoke out passionately for the abolition of slavery, an end to racism, and also for women’s rights long before women won the right to vote. Douglass yearned that we might live into the dream of God.

Martin Luther King’s dream of equality and dignity is also this same dream of God. Yet another post-New Testament prophetic witness is Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who wrote that God sent us here to help realize God’s dream of a new kind of society—gentle, caring, compassionate, sharing. A society with no outsiders or aliens. One where all belong in the family of God.

Bishop Curry’s call for us to live out of our nightmares and into the “dream of God” is prophetic witness. In this holy time of contemplation, Bishop Curry holds before us a vision of a world transformed by God’s love. He is bringing us hope when we need it most.

John Hedley
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 21     Sunday, Lent 2

Or

John Henry Newman, Bishop and Theologian (1890)
Psalm 48; Song of Solomon 3:1-4; 1 John 4:13-21; John 8:12-19

Peonies by Mary Oliver

This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready
to break my heart
as the sun rises,
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers

and they open —
pools of lace,
white and pink —
and all day the black ants climb over them,

boring their deep and mysterious holes
into the curls,
craving the sweet sap,
taking it away

to their dark, underground cities —
and all day
under the shifty wind,
as in a dance to the great wedding,

the flowers bend their bright bodies,
and tip their fragrance to the air,
and rise,
their red stems holding

all that dampness and recklessness
gladly and lightly,
and there it is again —
beauty the brave, the exemplary,

blazing open.
Do you love this world?
Do you cherish your humble and silky life? 
Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath? 
Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden, 
and softly, 
and exclaiming of their dearness, 
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers, 

with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling, 
their eagerness 
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are 
nothing, forever?

from New And Selected Poems by Mary Oliver (c) Mary Oliver
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 22  Monday in the Second Week of Lent

Psalm 56, 57, 64, 65; Gen. 41:46-57; 1Corinthians 4:8-20(21); Mark 3:7-19a

On this very cold day with wind chill at zero, I am staying in. Being that dependent on the vagaries of weather reminds me how little things have changed from when the Psalms were written or Joseph was selling the grain he’d stockpiled in Egypt, or Jesus was choosing and commissioning the apostles, or Paul was writing to the church in Corinth -- all of which are referenced in today’s readings.

None of us, except Jesus, had or has any control over the weather. And weather is only one of the major life events I have no control over. As we walk again through this Lent, we can recoil from that precariousness; we can also embrace it and take our chances outside on a very cold day. With the psalmist we can proclaim: “In God I trust; I am not afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me? (Ps. 56:7). When the precariousness shows up as a close friend whose cancer returns and for whom treatments have failed, we can speak to God in our hearts: “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?” (Ps. 56:8). We can dare to trust that God listens attentively to our friend’s cries, to the tears and anger of our shared grief. We can dare to hope that God is present with her in ways we cannot be. We can look to God in the terrible precariousness of our lives.

Judith Bowers
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 23     Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

Psalm 61, 62, 68: Gen. 42:18-28; 1Cor. 5:1-8; Mark 3:19b-35

I am writing this as I contemplate the recent record snow. The storm gives meaning to the phrase "act of God." My modern imagination makes it difficult to cry out to God as the psalmist does today. Americans are after all free, independent, and self assured. Who cries out to God? But a night and a day and a night of snow brought us to our knees. Let me find refuge under the shelter of your wings!

In today's gospel Jesus offers adoption to all of us. "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit and identifying the will of God has never been easy for me. The Spirit rarely shouts out to me and my choices seem mostly determined by what I have done in the past. Lent gives me the quietness to listen more carefully. It gives me the desire to search more carefully through my choices and, hopefully, identify a path that most closely follows what might be the will of God. It can be hard to find that path and a further difficulty to walk on it. We all hope that we are on it and are moving along wisely.

Sing to God, Sing praises to his name.

Phil Allard
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 24     Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

Psalm 72, 119:73-96; Genesis 42:18-28; 1Corinthians 5:9-6:8; Mark 4:1-20

So, what is this somber purple season of Lent, coming hard on the heels (particularly this year!) of joyous Christmas and Epiphany? Christians observe Lent during the forty days leading up to Easter and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Lent is meant to be a time of repentance, simplification of our lives, and growing closer to God. As we work to keep a Holy Lent, we can begin to become the "good soil" Saint Mark refers to in today's passage from his Gospel known as the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20)

Growing closer to God is, as Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby says, "at the heart of a good Lent". How can we do that? There are three interconnected way to focus on our relationship with God during Lent. One is prayer time set aside to spend with God in praise, thanks, intercession, and confession. Our prayer book offers all sorts of prayer forms if we draw a blank! The second means to connect with God is through service to others. When we give of ourselves we are taking on the mantle of Christ, and our generosity is itself a form of prayer. Service can be as simple as offering to shovel a sidewalk, or providing toiletries for our Hypothermia shelter guests, or giving up your seat on Metro. The third vehicle for growing closer to God is to take a Fast from everyday activities, or "time suckers", that distract us from God, and use that gained time to be in prayer or service.

Lord, help me to eliminate distractions and busy-ness that keep me separated from you, that I may become "good soil and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold" to further God's kingdom.

Lolly Mixter
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 25 Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

Psalm 71, 74; Genesis 42:29-38; 1Corinthians 6:12-20; Mark 4:21-34

“Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes.”

(Mark 4:24, Translation in contemporary language from ‘The Message’)

I’m immersed in reading historical and biblical scholarship these days through my EFM class and also a discussion group reading Christ Actually. It’s been eye opening to learn about the life of Jews in Jesus’ time. Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries were under Roman oppression and were most probably very poor. The prospects for survival were grim at both a personal and community level. Despite living in these conditions Jesus urged generosity. What could that mean for him and for us?

I sift through stories in my mind’s eye, bible stories where Jesus interacts with people one by one, and a clear picture of generosity as self-giving takes shape. Jesus’ mother pulls him aside at a wedding feast and he does what she asks. Jesus goes to a well for a drink and talks to a woman from a different religious tribe. Jesus heals the son of a royal official – a member of the political party oppressing the Jews. In a crowd of people, Jesus feels the touch of a dying woman; he stops, speaks to her, and heals her.

Grounded in the knowledge of being God’s beloved, Jesus goes out day after day to share himself and this message, expanding our understanding of generosity to include kindness, respect, tolerance, gentleness, compassion, goodwill and more. Today’s verse reminds me to be alert daily for opportunities to practice generosity.

Joanne Menke
I specifically chose February 26th because this is my father’s birthday. He would be 78 on this day. In reading Psalm 95 and thinking about God as my Father, I want to thank Him because He reminds me that I am one of His sheep, one of the people of His pasture, and His flock under His care. It is comforting to know that I am always under His care! This Psalm also reminds me that song is part of our Liturgy which honors and thanks Him, which is why I am thankful for the Holy Comforter music program and how it enriches my worship experience. The Psalm taught me that God knows my heart and when it has gone astray. I often seek God’s guidance and ask myself, “in my heart, how can I honor and serve the Lord?” God also teaches us to not be concerned about what other people see or think – which can be difficult to do in the workplace, the community, and even at church. This verse reminds me to focus on what God sees in my heart. What can I do today to best serve him? Pray today and reflect on how your heart can make the Father proud. I am thankful for both my earthly and heavenly Fathers on this day!

David Grove
I search for ways to comfort and console myself when stressed or challenged by this life. I do things that relax my body and mind and help me think more clearly and cope with my distress. I may have a cup of tea, go for a walk or do a bit of yoga. I always have a favorite song or poem that helps me put words to my feelings. I turn to music and poetry to voice my frustrations and express my emotions as well as to soothe me and calm my storms.

The Psalms are ancient lyrical poems where we can find refuge. As we read them, we recall that our worries and pains are not new and that we are not alone. The Psalms are beautiful reminders of God’s love for us and of his strength and power when we need protection and comfort. Today’s readings include one of the most beloved of psalms, Psalm 23. In this holy poem, we are promised love, guidance, shelter and protection. We are immediately transported to a place of warmth and serenity, a safe haven, a place of respite. Take a moment to sit quietly and read the words to yourself. Allow them to wash over you. Hear how the Lord can lead you to a place of tranquility and will guard you from your enemies of anxiety, fear and worry. Feel the warmth of love restore your soul and give you rest.

Celestine Jones
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 28     Sunday, Lent 3
Or
Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, Educator(1964)
Psalm 78:1-7; Proverbs 9:1-6; 1Timothy 4:6-16; Luke 4:14-21

Exodus 3:1-15 Moses and the Burning Bush

In reviewing the lectionary for this third Sunday of Lent, I was pleased to see the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. Perfect, I thought, everybody knows this story. And then I was overcome by just that statement. Everybody knows this story! What have I gotten myself into? Should I really try to say something about the fig tree story? I don’t really like figs. I know! I will research Moses and the Burning Bush (like any good graduate student would). Wait: doesn’t that defeat the purpose of me saying something about this? It was about at this point in time that I realized I did have something to say about this story.

Moses seems to be a man simply trying to live a normal life, until one day he is called by God into service. Moses responds with trepidation as he asks in verse 11 “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh…” This is a question that many of us ask ourselves: who am I that I should take on a new and challenging task that will put me outside of my comfort zone and potentially lead to epic failure? Case-in-point: writing on a well-known biblical story for the whole congregation to read. But the truth is in what God says to Moses in verse 12: “I will be with you”. God is present to help us through our challenges and calls us to service through which we can grow and see his glory.

Karen Murray
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

February 29  Monday in the Third Week of Lent

Psalm 80, 77; Genesis 44:18-34; 1Corinthians 7:25-31; Mark 5:21-43

“Only believe! Only believe! All things are possible. Only believe!”
The Gospel for today, from Mark 5, calls up for me this “Young Life” song from my youth.
To the father who hopes Jesus can restore his twelve-year-old daughter, Jesus says, “Do not fear.
Only believe.” Jesus touches the girl and she is revived.
Jesus has been delayed in reaching the child because a woman suffering from a hemorrhage is
certain she can be healed if she can only touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. And she is! Jesus
says to her, “Your faith has made you well.” She believed.
I am reminded of the admonition in Mark 11 from Jesus to his disciples: “Whatever you ask for
in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”
I want so much to hold onto that promise! To have the courage to believe it! It is a powerful
promise! Can we trust it? Does it come down to us in our present day? If we just had the faith
to reach out and claim that promise, as the woman reached out to touch Jesus” garment, think
what we could make happen!
And imagine how our worries and stresses would be relieved! How much better we would sleep!
How much our blood pressure might be reduced! And how much closer our relationship with
God would be. We could walk with confidence in God’s light.
In Mark 9 another father brings his child to Jesus, asking for an evil spirit to be extracted from
his son. Jesus says to the father, “All things can be done for the one who believes.”
My cry for today echoes this father’s response: “I believe! Help my unbelief.”

Frances Sullinger
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 1  Tuesday  in the Third Week of Lent


The Wind that Passes and Will Come Again

Before Christ we had the law
   A guide for how to live
Our God was “shock and awe”
   Sacrifices we did give

Goshen we were promised
   If we only would behave
If we listened to the Psalmist
   And obeyed Yahweh to the grave

From dust we were made flesh
   And to dust we would return
But because of that holy crèche
   Heaven we now can earn

We shake the dust from our feet
   When others refuse to hear
Of Christ in his heavenly seat
   Yearning to bring us near

Before Christ, we were the wind
   That passes, but comes not again
Now, even though we’ve sinned
   Eternity is close at hand

Kip Brailey
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 2  Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

Psalm 119:97-120, 81, 82; 1Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 6:13-29

Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

What a difference a year can make! On Maundy Thursday last year (April 2), my husband Frank celebrated his 80th birthday. Very shortly thereafter he received the devastating diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, for which there was no effective treatment. We had three precious months left together, and then he was gone.

It has been quite a journey for me since then. The process has been painful, but it has challenged me and strengthened me. My faith has been tested, but ultimately it has been deepened. I feel that I have been given this experience for a reason. I know that God has a plan for me, but He has not yet revealed it to me. I must be patient and put myself in His hands, trusting Him to show me the way.

My church family has rallied around me and provided more loving support than I ever thought possible. I will be forever grateful to my Pennywise friends, my Open Circles family, and all the other members of the congregation who have been so compassionate and understanding. I have had a wonderful Stephen Minister who has listened to me, held my hand, and guided me through rough spots on this journey.

I am blessed that God gave Frank to me for 55 years. Then He wanted him back and called him home. I am comforted when I think about Frank because I know he is in a wonderful place, a place where there is no pain or sorrow but everlasting life.

Corinne Mertes
The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 3
Thursday in the Third Week of Lent
Psalm 42, 43, 85, 86; Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34; 1Corinthians 9:1-15; Mark 6:30-46

Or

John and Charles Wesley, Anglican Priests, Musicians (1791, 1788)

“Lord, you give the great commission: “Heal the sick and preach the word.”
Lest the Church neglect it’s mission and the Gospel go unheard,
Help us witness to your purpose with renewed integrity;
With the Spirit’s gifts empower us for the work of ministry”
(Hymn 528, Hymnal 1982, Church Publishing Corporation)

Jesus said, “Go to the towns and help the sick, do not take the towns’ water or food to eat or drink or eat.” If they don’t want you, you will leave and talk against them. That means to me that he wanted them to help but if nobody in the towns wants them, they can speak against the town. When they said, “help the sick,” it meant to go help people who need help. That’s important to us because we should also help other people who need help.

James Bissett, age 9
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 4  Friday in the Third Week of Lent

Psalm 95, 88, 91, 92; Genesis 47:1-26; 1Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 6:47-56

“Lord, my God, by day I call for your help, by night I cry aloud in your presence.” I can identify with those cries, and the vulnerability I feel when praying. Now that I no longer limit my prayers to requests for support, they have become a shelter of belonging, a true home; I am able to release the burdens and distractions in life and center on gratitude. Inside the protection of prayer there is absolute acceptance, support, and peace. To quote John O’donohue, “We weight the notion of prayer with burdens of duty, holiness, and the struggle for perfection. Prayer should have the freedom of delight. It should arise from and bring us to humour, laughter, and joy…Prayer should be the wild dance of the heart, too.” My encounters with prayer occur most often when joy and amazement at the beauty that surrounds me bubbles over. There is so much in my life to celebrate; opportunities to be “satisfied with honey from the rocks” abound! My heart is dancing “to the music of a ten-stringed harp, to the sounding chords of the lyre.”

Ursula Contin
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 5  Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

Psalm 87, 90, 136; Genesis 47:27 – 48:7; 1Corinthians 10:1-13; Mark 7:1-23

“For His Steadfast Love Endures Forever” (Psalm 136)

There have been times that I have questioned whether or not I fully understand this fundamental principal of our faith in God. That is probably true for most of us as we have faced and lived through the challenges that life brings to us. I say “understand” because it is not just believing, but a matter of figuring out how His love fits into the pain, sorrow, and suffering of our lives. Sometimes that understanding seems so elusive that doubt sneaks in and begins to undermine our foundation.

Many years ago now, I went through a very difficult time and I felt I had nowhere to turn. I read a story about walking a labyrinth and that people who did that found a way to meditate and feel closeness to God. I started searching for labyrinths in the Washington area and found that there were several. This was before the one built at Holy Comforter. I sought them out and found one that I could walk and begin to sort out how I could face my troubles and how God and Christ were still there. I didn’t hear a voice, but as I walked my thoughts would migrate in unexpected directions and allow me to let go and have faith that He was there with me.

The labyrinth was/is a way to connect our lives with God and search for and hopefully feel the sense of His enduring love. The bequest of the labyrinth at Holy Comforter was a wonderful gift and I hope that others seek it out.

Mary Coulombe
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 6    Sunday, Lent 4
Psalm 32; Joshua 5:9-12; 2Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Or
William W. Mayo (1911) and Charles Menninger (1953) and their Sons
Pioneers in Medicine
Psalm 91:9-14; Sirach 38:1-8; Acts 5:12-16; Luke 8:40-56

Today is the day when our family awaits the arrival of our second grandchild; and todays readings send out messages of a divine welcome to all humankind to God's Love and Forgiveness. Paul reminds me that because of Jesus' gift of salvation to all, my grandson will receive the eternal gift of unconditional love that surpasses his mere mortality. I receive much comfort from reading in the 32nd Psalm that when I acknowledge both positive and negative parts of my being; I will always be welcome in God's presence.

O God, who sent Your Son Jesus to enlighten our lives with the Beauty of Divine Love and Forgiveness; may we always seek you as a spiritual refuge from the iniquities of human life as we struggle to become more like Jesus in our daily lives. Amen

Lillian O’Connell
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 7  Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent
Psalm 89:1-18, 89:19-52; Genesis 49:1-28; 1Corinthians 10:14-11:1;
Mark 7:24-37

Or
Perpetua and Her Companions, Martyrs at Carthage (202)
Psalm 124; Daniel 6:10-16; Hebrews 10:32-39; Matthew 24:9-14

In Mark 7: 24-37, Jesus has traveled north of Israel to two port cities on the Mediterranean Sea. Both Phoenician cities were very wealthy, materialistic, and had a reputation for wickedness. Jesus performs two miracles: sending a demon out of a girl in Tyre and healing a deaf man with a speech impediment in Sidon. Per Mark, Jesus did not want anyone to know he was there and desired to keep his presence a secret. After the second healing, Jesus commanded the people to not tell anyone. Jesus basically tells the mother of the girl that he doesn't want to be interrupted and in the healing of the deaf man, Jesus gives a "deep sigh". Since Jesus was sent to us in human form, in reflecting on these reactions, I find them to be very human-like and my personal description would be reluctance. Jesus had plenty of reasons at this point of his life on earth to be reluctant: 1) Scared - Herod had heard of Jesus and beheaded John the Baptist; 2) Frustrated - His own people in Nazareth had not been receptive, he was amazed at their disbelief. Yet he may have also been amazed that non-believers in the Phoenician cities had such strong faith; 3) Uncomfortable - Being in the spotlight; 4) Purposeful- Wanting time with his disciples to teach them; and/or 5) Tired - Needing rest. Have I been reluctant and felt any or all of these? Have you? Have I been reluctant to take on a commitment beyond my norm such teaching Sunday school or volunteering at Pennywise? I've felt that I had good reasons for excuses including personal, family, work or just being tired. Praying about it usually caused me to set my reluctances aside. Perhaps reluctance has been present in not even a large commitment but in everyday encounters such as helping someone or just taking time to listen. Could this be a small miracle to the other person(s) whom we have touched and yet fulfilling to us? Could we turn this around in some small way and say that these instances make us humans more Jesus-like?

Luanne Obert
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 8      Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Psalm 97, 99, 94; Genesis 49:29-50:14; 1Corinthians 11:17-34; Mark 8:1-10

"They ate and were fed" *Mark 8:8*

Once upon a time there were two long beautifully appointed banquet tables next to each other, but separated by a high thick wall. Each table was set with the finest china, silver and delicious foods and drink. There were many people seated at each of these two tables.

At the first banquet table the poor souls were unable to bend their elbows and therefore were unable to eat and were slowly starving. They were very quiet.

The other banquet table (also set with fine china, silver and delicious foods and drink) was very noisy with happy chatter even though these souls could not bend their elbows. But they were well fed and satisfied as they fed each other across the table.

"They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full."

An old story, I don’t remember from where......... bon appetit!

Sarah Cochrane
When I sat down to read the Bible verses a couple of weeks ago one thought went through my mind today as I reread and write my devotional the same thought is there again. (Thank you, God). How did we get God’s laws and rules so twisted? So many parts of our world are being torn apart by one party wanting to take away or destroy another party. I am brought to tears when I hear the news regarding new killings or outbreaks of war. Psalm 119: 36; “Rivers of water run down my eyes because they keep not thy law.” (King James). I am reminded of a dear friend of mine from Palestine. When Israel moved into their hometown her two brothers and one sister were given 2 hours to remove what they wanted from their homes. Their homes were being taken by the Israelites. They had to leave their homes and their hometown. If we wonder why there is so much hatred in the Middle East let this story serve as a good example. This one event took place over 40 years ago and still the anger lingers. I know I am a hopeless romantic but I still cling to the hope that we can pay more attention to God’s simple laws. Psalm 119: 139; “My zeal hath consumed me because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.” (King James). It seems so simple to my heart; “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. We can all interpret God’s law in words that very but keep the meaning. Please join me this Lenten season and pray for the people being oppressed or misplaced by those in the name of their religion. God will hear our prayers. We must not lose heart for God’s wonderful world.

Marilyn K Lyren
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 10  Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Psalm 69:1-23(24-30)31-38, 73; Exodus 1:6-22; 1Corinth. 12:12-26;
Mark 8:27-9:1

The Pain of Leaving, the Risk of Loving

This is a year of transition for Holy Comforter as our longest-serving rector, our dear friend Rick Lord, plans his retirement this summer. It's also a year of transition for me as I prepare to leave Vienna after 27 years. My son and daughter will launch their careers, and I will wrap mine up, in New York City.

Fr. Rick has preached about church being the "third place" in our lives (with home first and work or school second). And so it has been for my family. I was received into the Episcopal Church here. They were baptized and confirmed here. We said goodbye to a nephew and many friends from here. Countless friendships started here. We love this place and it will be hard to leave.

I have seen many clergy come and go during these 27 years, and every parting is sad. Yet every time, God sends us someone wonderful, someone who brings new skills and new ideas, who invigorates a part of us that was asleep. Although our next rector will have mighty big shoes to fill, I have no doubt that God has someone wonderful in mind for Holy Comforter. Take a risk; love him or her. They will leave eventually, too, but love them all the same. As the great theologian Henri Nouwen said:

“Every time we make the decision to love someone, we open ourselves to great suffering, because those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. The greatest pain comes from leaving. When the child leaves home, when the husband or wife leaves for a long period of time or for good, when the beloved friend departs to another country or dies … the pain of the leaving can tear us apart. Still, if we want to avoid the suffering of leaving, we will never experience the joy of loving. And love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking.”

Katherine Hutt
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 11  Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Mark 9:2-13

As members of an Education for Ministry class, whose focus this year is Christian maturity, we selected 1 Corinthians 12, which talks of our being members of the Body of Christ. In a world growing with Fear, Anxiety and Distrust, Paul reminds us that our gifts enable us to uphold and strengthen one another in enduring Love.

Blessed are you, Lord God who created each of us with unique gifts and talents; for You knew and loved us before we were formed in the womb.
We pray that we can use these gifts to spread Your Love so that all may live in Peace and Fellowship, as we follow the example of your Son Jesus Christ.

2016 EfM  Friday Class
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 12  Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent


1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

As Jesus grew up in Galilee, he, like all Jewish boys would have heard the words of Deuteronomy 6:5-9. “You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” When he was older and a teacher to his disciples, he told them, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength …and love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 29-31) And Paul in I Corinthians tells us that all of the teachings of the gospel can be summarized in one word: love. It matters not if I can speak with the tongues of men and angels or prophets or if I am so generous that I give away everything I have. Love suffers long and is kind; love is not conceited, envious, rude or easily provoked. Love rejoices in truth and hopes and endures all things. Paul says that love is the greatest attribute of man and without it, we are nothing.

The Bible is filled with wonderful scripture: history, law, poetry, prophecy. Thousands of other books have been written about Christianity, helping to enlighten us and show us how to live. The words of the Torah, of Jesus and Paul define our faith simply: Love God; Love your neighbor……. On this rests all the scripture.

Jane Schmiedekamp
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 13  Sunday, Lent 5
Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

Or

James Theodore Holly, Bishop of Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Today’s reading in Acts 8:26-39 has much to ponder and instruct. Philip heeded the call of a messenger from God and interacted with a powerful official such that the stranger’s eyes were opened to the Lord and lead to that individual’s declaration of faith through baptism and thence to his continuing joy. If a similar opportunity were presented to me to bear witness and guide a non-believer to Christ would I be ready and willing to do it?

But it is the day after the blizzard and I am awestruck by the beauty and serenity of God’s creation. The snow envelops my physical environment giving a tangible testament to God’s love and Jesus’ grace which enfolds us all. Our hectic lives have been stilled by the calmness of this white mantle which smooths the bumps and messiness of the usual drab winter landscape. Yes, we missed communal worship today but by giving us the splendor of this day, God has invited us to get a glimpse of the kingdom which awaits us if we only would take a moment to open our eyes and listen with our hearts to hear Him calling us. Tomorrow we must face the task of dealing with the effects of this dazzling event on our everyday lives, but for now I am happy to be content in pondering the majesty of our Lord.

When we open our eyes and hearts to His word could we not become as strong a guide as Philip in bringing forth the peace and joy of heaven on earth just one piece at a time? The magnificence and peace of this day emboldens me to try.

Jon Collom
"The Pilgrim Way of Lent"

March 14  Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

Psalm 31, 35; Exodus 4:10-20(21-26)27-31; 1Corinthians 14:1-19;  
Mark 9:30-41

“Into Your hands, I commend my spirit”

Today's readings are about Moses’ call from the burning bush and his reluctance to accept God’s mission to the Hebrews. In Mark, we read about Jesus healing an epileptic boy after the disciples' failure. While Moses and his family are on the road, God comes to kill Moses. His wife, in a monumental change of faith, steps forward and circumcises her son, which allows Moses to live. Similarly, Jesus requires the father to have firm belief before He is willing to heal the son.

I am reminded of a dialogue from the Order of the Phoenix, in which Harry Potter has been told that Lord Voldemort/Satan has always wanted to destroy him and Harry is unsure of how he can survive. Dumbledore (the Christ figure) tells him that although he has no choice in the matter, by remembering all those people that have been affected by Lord Voldemort’s cruelty and wrath, he can step forward to fight and ensure that no one else suffers. In that moment, Harry finally understands the difference. You are called to take up a cause but you have a choice: you can take up that fight with your head held high knowing that God is with you; or go in to battle feeling that you will lose regardless of your actions.

"With God, all things are possible” – go forth believing, knowing that God is with you, always.

Leslie Barnhart
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 15    Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

Psalm 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126
Exodus 5:1-6:1; 1Corinthians 14:20-33a, 39-40; Mark 9:42-50

I rejoiced when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” Psalm 122:1

I don’t believe that anyone ever said such words to me. But the image is so vibrant it feels as if multitudes have. There are two parts in the image. One, the destination, the ‘house of the Lord’ as each knows it. In the Psalm, Jerusalem, but also a tabernacle, revival tent, cathedral, house church, monastery or desert. And, the other, rejoicing and shouting ‘let’s go!’ Running, skipping, shuffling, with a partner, holding a child, alone, assisted, over a great distance and time, or around the corner right now. A great convergence of worshippers, gathering, signaling with waving arms, or creating openings for others to merge.

In the reading from Exodus today Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh to let people journey for 3 days to worship and feast. He refused. Obviously the Israelites had too much idle, unproductive time, so Pharaoh also increased their workload. An impassable obstacle plunked down on their way to worship. They could not go.

In 1 Corinthians, we are told not only to gather together, but also to bring along a psalm, lesson, revelation, new tongue or interpretation. So that folks that join in the procession will say ‘God is really among you!’

I am profoundly grateful that I fell in with these journeyers. And, that we have the opportunity with this enlightening multitude, to travel daily to the house of the Lord.

Kathie Rawson
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 16   Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

Mark 10:1-16

“Out of the depths I cry to you, L ORD.
   Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
  to my cry for mercy …
I wait for the L ORD, my whole being waits,
   and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
   more than watchmen wait for the morning,
   more than watchmen wait for the morning.”(Psalm 130:1-6

Many nights I awake in the pre-dawn darkness and long for the return of much needed sleep. Usually my thoughts are a jumble. On the toughest nights, they turn to those episodes when I have hurt some of those closest to me to serve my own selfish interests. All too often I fail to pray for forgiveness.

During the penitential season of Lent, God uses the long, grey winter to encourage all of us collectively to seek forgiveness and to prepare our thoughts for the redemption of Christ’s Resurrection at the glorious dawn of Easter … just as the Lord may use the dark hours of night to move me toward seeking His saving grace.

Jay Creswell
Sacrifice. the removal of fear. faith. a belief in good and right – these are the messages of today’s daily readings, and the messages 2,000 years ago ring as true today as ever. I love the spirit of Lent. It is a simple self-examination, where we look inward for an embodiment of the sacrifice made by Jesus. I have struggled in modern times to conceptualize what it means to give up all, or to follow blindly with faith. I love the analogy “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than... a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”. But who can imagine actually giving up our houses, food, our entire well-being, our families and friends? Tough to conceptualize. But what I can do is come to a meaningful symbol in an attempt to walk in the footsteps of those before us. This practice will always speak to me in memory of my mother, who took this sacrifice so seriously – sometimes french fries, ice cream, or chocolate. It seemed minor at the time, but I get it now as a parent in 2016 especially when our world is in a mode of instant gratification, constant motion, on demand and fast forward, totally overloaded with information and emotion. For me in this season of Lent, I’m going to take a PAUSE. I think this year Lent will be a 40 day long prayer where I really try to enjoy the spirit of the sacrifice.

David Turner
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 18   Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

Psalm 95 & 22, 141, 143:1-11(12); Exodus 9:13-35; 2Corinthians 4:1-12; Mark 10:32-45

I start today praising God

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
    let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation,
Let us come before him with thanksgiving
    and extol him with music and song.
For the lord is the great God,
    the great king above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth,
    and the mountain peaks belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it,
    and his hands formed the dry land. (Psalm 95:1-5)

I have been taught that there were four kinds of prayer: (1) Praise, (2) Thanksgiving, (3) Confession, and (4) Intercessions. Thanksgiving, intercession and confession are much easier prayers for me than praise. The daily praise feels only half-hearted. What do I pray? Perhaps, I might say the words of the song “How Great Thou Are”? Even that does not feel genuine. Oh, it is easy for me to exclaim to God how magnificent a beautiful vista is. My “Thank you, gracious God” is truly heartfelt. How do I carry this praise with me into each new day? Timothy Keller in his book Prayer (which our Open Circle has been reading), writes that praise is how we show our love to God. C. S. Lewis claims the more we find to praise an object, the greater will be our enjoyment. Our behavior is directly related to what we love. These words cause me to reorient my thinking toward showing my love in praise prayers.

Sheila Creswell
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 19  Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent
Psalm 137:1-6(7-9), 144, 42, 43: Exodus 10:21-11:8; 2Corinthians 4:13-18;
Mark 10:46-52

Or

St. Joseph, Earthly Adoptive Father of Jesus
Psalm 132; Isaiah 63:7-16; Matthew 1:18-25

St. Joseph, Earthly Adoptive Father of Jesus

I like St. Joseph. I had a very Catholic, Mary-centric upbringing. Joseph always played the minor, supporting role for Jesus and Mary. His biggest role is in the nativity narrative, where he bucks tradition and accepts a pregnant Mary instead of having her stoned. But I myself, a father, an adoptive father and a foster father, really resonate with St. Joseph and his feelings for the adopted Jesus. I understand how strong a father’s love is for their children, regardless of their beginnings. The feelings in your core when you are holding your child, is how I think of God’s boundless love, mercy, and grace for us all.

Paul Ware Dunn
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 20  Palm Sunday

Liturgy of the Word: Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Phil. 2:5-11

Throughout Luke’s Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ is presented with joy. From the annunciation to the birth of Jesus, from the miracles and signs Jesus performed throughout Judea to his triumphant entry into Jerusalem a week before he would be arrested, tried, and killed, joy has been the theme associated with Luke’s account of the life of Jesus. It is impossible to be anything but joyful since Jesus came into the world to save humanity. What joy we have in God who came to earth as a human being in order to save us! But how can we find joy in the horrific way in which Jesus was executed? How can there be any joy when Jesus suffered one of the most inhumane ways a person could die? The answer lies in God’s presence. Jesus gave his spirit to God before he died because he knew that God’s presence was still with him during his crucifixion. God’s presence had always been with Jesus throughout his life and ministry and continued to be with him even during his suffering on the cross. God’s presence in our lives gives us hope, comfort, and joy even when life is at its worst. When our days seem dark and hopeless, when our world seems to be falling apart and collapsing all around us, when it seems that our lights are going dark, we have the comfort and joy that God’s presence will always sustain and be with us no matter what we will experience in life. This is the ultimate joy we have in God!

Tim Meyers
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 21  Monday in Holy Week
Mark 11:12-25

*Or*

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Chief Author of the Book of
Common Prayer & Martyr (1556)

“Have faith in God,” Jesus [said]… “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have
received it, and it will be yours” Mark 11:22-24

I may be 48 but I still feel like my abilities as a prayerful person pretty much stink. If I *do* get
around to raising things up to God (since I try to handle most things myself, not trusting that the
Lord really can care about my petty needs), I'm more than likely to toss them upwards simply
because I "should" as a Christian than I am to presume they are high on God's care-about list.

Jesus' disciples needed the same reframing. I can picture Peter, mouth agape at the withered/dead
fig tree (when the previous day it was leafy/alive), registering the fact that Jesus rebuked it only
the day before for not bearing fruit.

Jesus takes this as a teachable moment for Peter (and me) to outline some basics: have faith in
God...without doubt. Instead of seeing our world and our circumstances in terms of what is
HUMANLY possible, be open to and faithful in the things that GOD can do.

Jesus directs us to not simply HAVE faith...but to USE it for God's glory. When we trust Him--
REALLY trust Him--things beyond our expectations or outside our imagination can happen.

This story is less about a dying plant and more about a living faith where the seemingly
impossible becomes real. As I watch my daughters grow and my vision for a photographic
service nonprofit take flight, I'm so, so glad that these words are true.

Kevin Krisko
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 22   Tuesday in Holy Week

Psalm 6, 12, 94; Lamentations 1:17-22; 2Corinthians 1:8-22; Mark 11:27-33

“You’re a writer,” she said. “Maybe you can write for our Lenten Devotional.”
But I write about trivial things. People kicking soccer balls … or each other. (Yes, I’ve written about mixed martial arts.)
Gandhi, though, had a thought on trivial things: “Everything you do in life will be insignificant, but it’s very important that you do it.”
Our Scripture readings today are full of frustration. “Help, Lord! Look at this!” Paul is on the defensive in a letter to the Corinthians. We writers have our critics, and Paul is no exception. That’s life. Trivial. Frustrating. Yet it’s very important that you do it.
Gandhi also has a quote attributed to him about Christianity: “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”
So when we do our trivial things each day, how can we be less unlike our Christ? Can we love our neighbors as ourselves, even when they’re deceitful (as in Lamentations)? Or when the wicked are triumphant (as in Psalms)? Or when they’re questioning us, as the Corinthians questioned Paul?
We can’t avoid conflict. We can’t avoid frustration. We have to commute to work, deal with unpleasant people, and do trivial things.
But if we’re less like the Christians in Gandhi’s critique and more like Christ, going about these frustrating tasks with love and grace, will they not be more joyful? And maybe that will inspire us to do something surprising -- like a disheveled sportswriter writing a Lenten Devotional.

Beau Dure
Today's first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Lamentations. While I had never read these five poems, I am now glad I opened it and researched it. Lamentations is a moving expression of grief over the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile by King Nebuchadnezzar.

The depth of their grief and a belief that the destruction was ultimately God’s judgment in response to their sins struck me. The comparisons to Holy Week are palpable. Loss, desperation and grief overwhelmed Christ's followers, His disciples and Mary as they watched Him being crucified, dying and buried. Over the next two days, we too will attempt to place ourselves in the Garden, at the trial, in the courtyard, on the walk to Calvary and at the foot of the Cross; placing aside the knowledge that Christ did die for our sins and rose from the dead.

If time allows, read this book and place yourself with our Jewish brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to their grief and their appeals for God's mercy, much as we so often do. It may help prepare you for the rest of the week.

Through it all, note these hopeful lines, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

**Carl Riedy**
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 24       Maundy Thursday
Psalm 102, 142, 143; Lamentations 2:10-18; 1Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:27-32; Mark 14:12-25

Or
Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador (1980) and the Martyrs of El Salvador
Psalm 31:15-24; Isaiah 2:5-7; Revelation 7:13-17; John 12:23-32

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1:5

Yes, I cheated. This verse is not from today’s readings. But when I think of Maundy Thursday (my favorite holy day), these words come to mind. These are dark days in our Christian calendar. Jesus knows that his time on earth is coming to an end. He will be betrayed, tortured, and killed. The grief seems overwhelming. But despite that, I think there is great light here on Maundy Thursday. Here is Jesus, facing this horrific future, sharing an incredible moment of love with his friends. He humbly serves them and washes their feet; he shares a meal and urges them to remember how cares for them. Goodness, love, and humanity are strong here. I often think, isn’t this how I would want to spend my last evening—in a room with the ones I love, showing them how I deeply I care for them? Is this community not the light in the darkness of Holy Week? I think I feel closest to Jesus on this day because he seems so human in these moments. Later we see him in the garden vulnerable, overcome with grief, begging to be comforted and spared of his fate (wouldn’t you?). But what we can be reminded of in these dark days, and others like them in our lives, is something very simple. There is a community that can bring us light. There is joy that can be shared. We can gather around a table and share in God’s love. This is comfort that we can ask for and accept. There will be dark days, but you can seek the light shining in the darkness.

Melissa Murray
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 25       Good Friday
Psalm 95 & 22, 40:1-14(15-19), 54; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; 1Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38 (Morning) – John 19:38-42 (Evening)

“To mock your reign, O dearest Lord, they made a crown of thorns;
set you with taunts along that road from which no one returns.
They did not know as we do now, That glorious is your crown;
that thorns would flower upon your brow, your sorrows healed our own.

In mock acclaim, O gracious Lord, they snatched a purple cloak,
your passion turn’d, for all they cared, into a soldier’s joke.
They did not know, as we do now, that though we merit blame
you will your robe of mercy throw around our naked shame.

A sceptered reed, O patient Lord, they thrust into your hand,
and acted out their grim charade to its appointed end.
They did not know, as we do now, though empires rise and fall,
your Kingdom shall not cease to grow till love embraces all.

(Hymn 170, Hymnal 1982, Church Publishing Corporation)
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 26       Holy Saturday


One of the Desert Fathers, St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, said this about Holy Saturday:

“Something strange is happening … there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: “My Lord be with you all.” Christ answered him: “And with your spirit.” He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying, “Awake, O sleeper....”

For me, also, there is strange and great silence on Holy Saturday. There is emptiness, a sense that Jesus truly is not here. As I long for his return, St. Epiphanius comforts me. I can see Jesus, in lovingkindness, moving among those waiting for new life. How they must have welcomed him with shock and deep hope!

Judith Bowers
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 27       Easter Sunday

One of most dramatic moments of John’s witness to the Resurrection of Jesus is the moment when Mary, aching with grief, hears a familiar voice calling her by name – Mary. Sounding forth from this voice was the unmistakable person she thought she would never see or hear from again. She heard the person of Jesus – literally the per-sonare, the “sounding through” of his unique life standing right in front of her!

In that moment of realization, Mary’s world shifted, and so can ours. The resurrection means that the last word about Jesus is not his death but his rising to life and the gift of his personal presence. I have a hunch that most of us have heard such a voice calling our name as well. Throughout our lives, in times of disappointment, illness, heartbreak, a life-giving voice calls our name. It is an inner voice of love that reminds us we are not alone, that we truly matter to God:

“Do not let fear overtake you. I am always with you.”

Trusting this voice gives us the capacity to see the world differently. What if we began to imagine a world where death is not the end, where God always has more life to give every last one of us no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in? Such a faithful imagination would give us new reasons to live in this world with more willingness to risk the giving of ourselves in thought, word, and deed, to those we live and work with.

What a privilege it has been to preach the Resurrection at Holy Comforter for these past 22 years! We can trust this: “Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

Rev. Richard A. Lord
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 28       Monday in Easter Week

Psalm 93, 98, 66; Exodus 12:14-27; 1Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

Psalm 93:3-4

The first time I read this psalm, I was moved by the beautiful poetic image of the ocean’s waves relentlessly and powerfully crashing on the shore. I love this word picture, and I have always loved the sea. I am amazed by the fact that almost always the waves stay bounded within a certain narrow range on the shore--and that this enormous expanse of vast water energy, being pulled upon by the gravity of the spheres, is obediently staying put, following the establishment ordinance from the creation Word. The Lord separated the waters, and ordered them not to come any further.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear’ (Genesis1:9) and it was so.” (Genesis1:9) “I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it.(Jeremiah 5:22)

The sea is a manifestation of the Omnipotence of God...and a sign to me that God is trustworthy, powerful, and that I have nothing to fear. The Power and Glory of the Risen Christ is the ultimate Revelation of God’s powerful Promise.

Alexandra MacCracken
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 29       Tuesday in Easter Week

Psalm 103, 111, 114; Exodus 12:28-39; 1Corinthians 15:12-28; Mark 16:9-20

Jesus taught us a lot, and sometimes He used words. In His life and actions, we can discern some of His teachings:

- He taught that poor shepherds and rich wise men alike celebrate and value new life.
- that innocent people, especially children, suffer and die as a result of adult power-seeking.
- that companions can help: we don't have to do this alone.
- that we can look beyond the superficial, in an impetuous Simon to be able to see a rock-solid Peter.
- that wonderful, inexplicable things sometimes happen.
- that the ordinary can become a celebration, an abundance.
- that when we are paralyzed by our circumstances, our friends can lift us up to receive healing.
- that a focus on acquiring wealth can be a hinderance to the abundant life which is the Kingdom of Heaven.
- that we can feel so bound up in our problems that it is hard to stand upright and live as our true selves.
- that it is possible to speak truth to power, and that remaining silent is also a viable option.
- that sometimes it is better to lose our lives than our integrity or soul.
- that very bad things can happen to very good people.
- that even when something appears to be completely lifeless, hope is still possible.
- that in order to achieve great things, we need to allow Jesus' unquenchable Spirit to enliven us.

Maggie Bain
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 30       Wednesday in Easter Week

Psalm 97, 99, 115; Exodus 12:40-51; 1Corinthians 15:30-41; Matthew 28:1-16

Do you think if Jesus had a “bucket list” it might have gone something like this? “Walked on water today. Done! Did the water to wine last week. Check! Raising Lazarus from the dead is on schedule. Excellent. Ah, and then there is me rising from the dead. That will take a little planning.”

And then - here it is – today – it happens. With all the planning and preparations complete - drama and emotions having run at a fevered pitch - Jesus lives! It’s like right out of the Psalms readings – lightning, earthquakes, angels! What a show. But it’s not over yet. With the splendor of a resurrected body, Jesus has not yet completed his earthly list. He has people to meet, assurances to make, commissions to give, maybe catch a meal along the way. And then there is flying off to heaven, where – yup - there is his heavenly “to do” list.

Recently, I heard a radio article about living life fully while acknowledge death as a part of life. Jesus lived fully, relying on the Father for strength and direction. With his victory over death he continues to live fully as our Redeemer and Great High Priest. Thus, it is Christ who empowers us to live fully in him – bucket list or not.

Doug Yon
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

March 31 Thursday in Easter Week
Psalm 146, 147, 148, 149; Exodus 13:3-10; 1Corinthians 15:41-50;
Matthew 28:16-20

Or

John Donne, Priest (1631)
Psalm 27:5-11; 1Corinthians 15:20-28; Wisdom 7:24-8:1; John 5:19-24

“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” (1Cor 15:42-44)

“It was a strange and dreadful strife when life and death contended;
The victory remained with life, the reign of death was ended;
Stripped of power no more he reigns, an empty form alone remains;
His sting is lost forever! Alleluia!”
(Hymn 186 from Hymnal 1982, Church Hymnal Corporation)

Devotional Committee
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

April 1       Friday in Easter Week


“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”
(Psalm 118:1; Psalm 118:29; Psalm 136:1)

Important things deserve to be repeated. If that is so, the above phrase must be very important as it appears at least three times in the Psalms. But what does it mean for God’s love to endure? I can tell you how His love has endured in my life.

April 1st, April Fools’ Day, is a day usually reserved for practical jokes and whimsical hoaxes. But that all changed for me when I was diagnosed with breast cancer on April 1, 2013. My father had died just one month earlier, and, still unknown to me at that time, my mother would receive a terminal diagnosis just over a month later. How was I supposed to carry on without them? Would I even survive myself?

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

It’s like a refrain, a chorus that plays in the back of my mind whenever I start to feel alone or unloved. It’s a reminder to count my blessings and be thankful for all the good things in life. There are many clues along the way—a neighbor’s invitation, a stranger’s kindness, a visit from a friend.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

We are an Easter people. We have just witnessed the reminders of Christ crucified and risen from the dead out of love for us. Let us live accordingly.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Linda Johnson
“The Pilgrim Way of Lent”

April 2  Saturday in Easter Week

Psalm 145, 104; Exodus 13:17-14:4; 2Corinthians 4:16-5:10; Mark 12:18-27

“All things bright and beautiful all creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all”
(Hymn 405, Hymnal 1982, Church Publishing Corporation)

God created animals. So they eat and drink from earth’s water and food. God made all these things so be thankful for everything. There are habitats for animals, too. Pandas, tigers and elephants all live in Asia. Wolves, bears and fish all live in Europe. Hyenas, lions, and giraffes all live in Africa. Groundhogs, kangaroos and koalas all live in Australia. Spiders, birds and monkeys all live in South America. Dogs, cats and snakes all live in North America. Thank you God for everything you gave us!  PS – People are animals, too!

Lauren Bissett, age 8