

Lenten Reflections 2015



**Prepared and compiled by
St. Mary's in Barnstable**

Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2015

A season for the broken heart: A Lenten message from the Right Rev. Alan Gates

For years I resisted admitting that my eyesight was slipping. Always I told myself that the light was bad, or I was just tired. I was unwilling to recognize this gradual function of nature because, honestly, I had spent a lifetime being quite proud of my eyesight: 20/20 in one eye, 20/15 in the other, the doctor had once told me. I felt quite superior! I could read the bottom line on the eye chart, the highway sign in the distance, the fine print on the product label.

Can you imagine anything more foolish than being proud of something over which one has no control whatsoever? It's not like one's eyesight represents an accomplishment! Still, pride describes exactly how I felt about my vision. Consequently, I refused to acknowledge a growing imperfection, and struggled for years. Eventually the solution proved simple. (Glasses!) But that is not always the case, for as long as we deny our need we cannot be healed. The denial of need prevents the possibility of healing.

This is the covenant that I will make with the people: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [Jeremiah 31:31-34]

I once heard the gifted writer Madeleine L'Engle recount how a rabbi had been approached by his people and asked, "Rabbi, why is it that the prophet says that the law of the Lord will be written on our hearts? Should it not be in our hearts?" And the rabbi replied, "Perhaps it is because until our hearts have been broken, nothing is able truly to get in."

Here is a deep truth. The most grace-filled people I know are apt to be people who, along the way, have had their hearts broken. Some have endured life-crippling illness. Some saw things in war that they never wanted to see, or left a piece of themselves at the beach in Anzio. Some have been abandoned in relationships, and some know that they themselves bear the guilt of abandonment. Some have known the death of a child, leaving a hole in the fabric of their lives that never fully mends. In so many of these stories, the broken heart of the one who grieves has opened up to become a bigger heart, a more grateful heart, a more compassionate and generous heart.

Our brokenness, of course, can come not only from exterior circumstance and tragedy. Sometimes that brokenness comes from our own interior frailty. My failure for so long to correct blurry vision is paralleled by other sorts of failure. Bad eyesight is scarcely the only thing we resist admitting. We may fail to see and acknowledge when our relationships are out of focus, or when our priorities have gone askew, or when some dimension of our life has gotten out of control. We may fail to see and acknowledge when—as individuals, as groups, or even as a nation—we have headed in a wrong direction.

And what is the consequence of this failure? It is, of course, that we cannot find healing. Until our hearts are broken, God's grace cannot enter. Until we recognize that brokenness, the path to new life is obscured. Twelve Step programs which have been a channel of grace for so many begin with Step One—an acknowledgment of brokenness, of something which we, of our own power, cannot fix. And early on is Step Four, a "searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." These principles apply not only to addictions, but to all the physical and spiritual ways in which we find ourselves in need of God's strength.

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” [John 12:24]

Jesus’ message encompasses the truth of the rabbi who said that the heart must break for God to enter fully. It encompasses also my own self-evident learning, that my foolish pride of eyesight had to die so that I could find the means to see clearly again. In ways both small and large, mundane and profound, Jesus’ utterance touches our lives.

There is something in every one of us that needs to be broken and die in order to open the way for healing and rebirth. Or perhaps it already has died, but needs yet to be acknowledged. If you and I haven’t figured out what that something is by Good Friday, then Easter will fail to be all that it can be. Let me say that again, framing it in the positive: There is something in every one of us that needs to die, or perhaps it already has. If I can come to a fuller acknowledgment of what that is during this season of Lent, then I can bring that brokenness to the cross in Holy Week, and embrace even more fully the glory of Easter.

Where is pride keeping your vision blurry? Where is your heart broken, or needing to break? I invite you to ponder these things in Lent, that after these forty days the cross and empty tomb might have their fullest way with you.

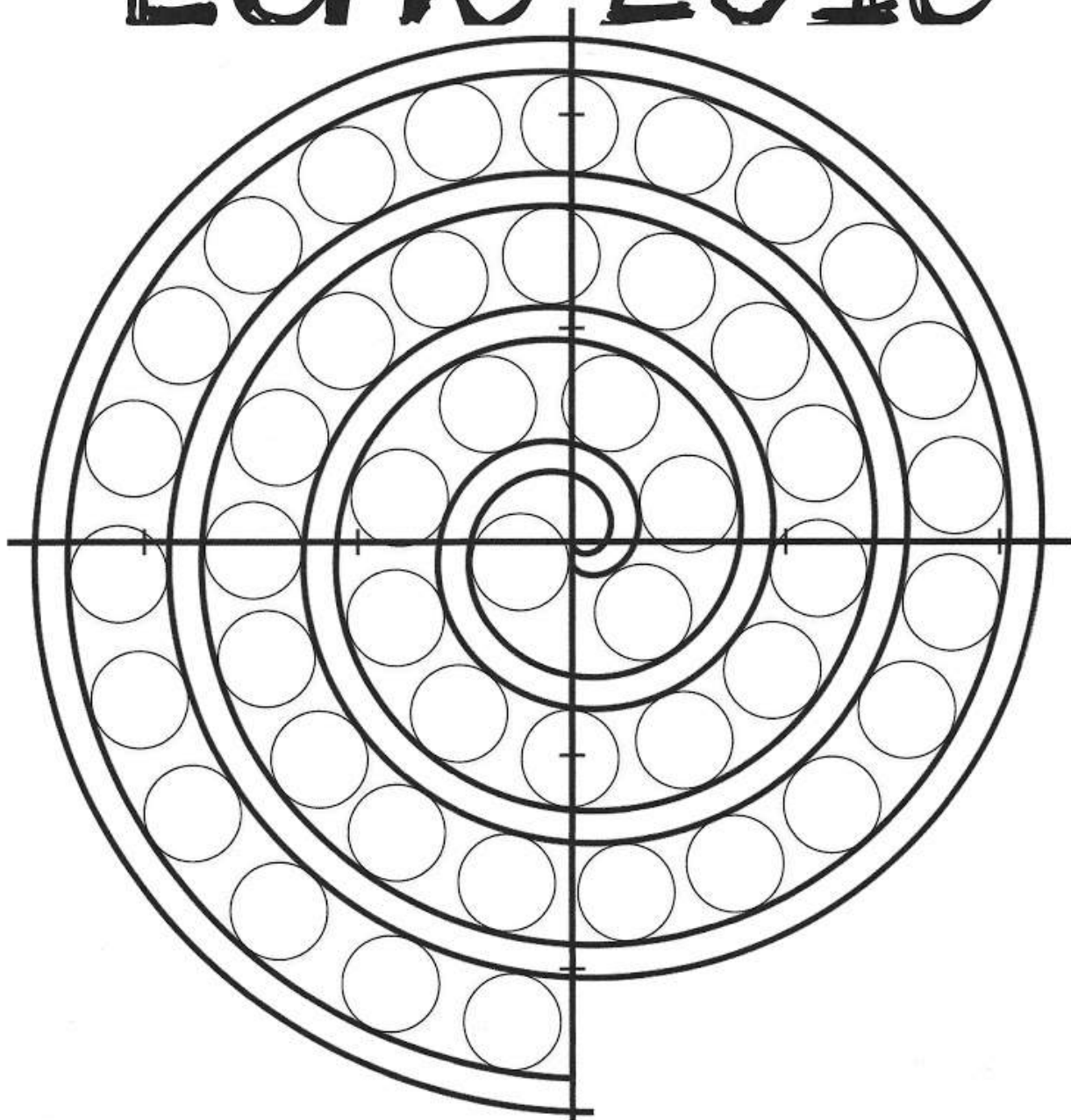
Faithfully and fondly,
+Alan

February 19, 2015: Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:1-14; 1 John 1:3-10

In addition to reading the Lenten devotions in this booklet, consider using the “calendar” on the next page. Here are some ways to use the calendar, drawn from the website www.prayingincolor.com

- 1) Pray for someone each day. Write a name, doodle around it, pray with words or in silence as you draw.
- 2) Choose a word from the Daily Lectionary or other reading and write it in the space for the day. Pray the word. Meditate on it. Spend time with it as you draw. Let it tell you about itself. Let God reveal something new to you about the word.
- 3) Write a word you associate with Lent—sin, forgiveness, journey, palms, Jesus, salvation, crucifixion,... Meditate on it. Spend time with it as you draw. Listen to what the what can tell you about itself. Let God reveal something new to you about the word.
- 4) Just doodle or draw in the space without words. Keep silence and listen for the “still small voice of God.”
- 5) Write one of the different names for God each day and pray/meditate on the name.
- 6) Write one of your character defects or “sins” in the space each day. Offer it up to God; ask for help and forgiveness. Very Lenten!

Lent 2015



February 20, 2015: Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:15-25a; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

This Lent, Add Instead of Subtract by Carolyn Moomaw Chilton

Many years ago I explained to my rector that I didn't like giving up something for Lent. "I don't quite see the connection," I said. "What does giving up chocolate have to do with my spiritual life?" Wise man that he was, and still is, he replied, "There may not be a connection for you. Why don't you take on something instead?" And so I did, and so I still do. And it works for me. Maybe it will for you too. If your church makes recommendations to members for Lenten disciplines you might consider including some of the ones below.

Read as a Lenten Discipline This could be on your own, with a family member, in a group or on a social site like Goodreads. I've done this a number of years and my books have ranged from spiritual and religious to fiction. Some of my favorites have been:

- Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church by Martin Smith
- Wisdom Distilled from the Daily by Joan Chittister
- Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives by Wayne Mueller
- The Return of Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming by Henri Nouwen
- In fiction, I've just finished All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr, and I think it would be a wonderful Lenten book.

Feed the artist in you Yes, you have one in there! If you're like me, you just need to give yourself permission to not be Picasso or Jane Austen and then you'll be fine! **Write**. Try journaling; write some memoir or stories from your life; start a blog even if it is only for you. Sign up for Tumblr and read the blogs there and start your own. My husband and daughter and I did this - just the 3 of us - for Advent and it was wonderful. We shared photos around daily themes for each day of Advent. **Paint**. I recommend Roger Hutchison's "The Painting Table." Take photographs and share them with friends and family. Garden - indoors or out depending on where you live.

Build Relationships Commit to dinner one or more times a week with family or friends. Keep it simple. It can be fast food, take out, pot luck... the point is time together. Invite someone you don't see often to lunch - maybe a different friend each week. This could also be someone you'd like to know better. Write a card or call someone each week. Volunteer. Visit at local retirement homes; drive folks to doctor's appointments or to the grocery store.

Care for yourself There are many ways to deepen spirituality by caring for your body, mind, and soul. Commit to an exercise regimen - if this is new for you, keep it simple and easy. Take a spiritual retreat during Lent. It can be ½ day, a day or even a full weekend. Find a spiritual director and schedule an appointment. Get out of the office during the day - walk around the block, go out for lunch, sit in the park. Worship. This can be hard for those who are employed by the church or have volunteer positions that make Sundays very busy. Perhaps you can attend a morning or evening service at another church near you where you can sit quietly and worship. Whatever you choose - adding or subtracting - the point is to do something that feeds your soul without draining your energy or making you resent the time. Be realistic, keep it simple and enjoy!

Carolyn Moomaw Chilton writes and blogs as a spiritual discipline and an invitation to conversation with others. She is currently on staff at Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia as the Assistant for Evangelism and Stewardship. This article appeared on the Building Faith blog at Virginia Theological Seminary.

February 21, 2015: Psalm 25:1-10; Psalm 32; Matthew 9:2-13

The stories and parables of Matthew resonated strongly in me well before I took part in a high-school production of “Godspell”, the popular 1970s musical drawn from this Gospel. Today’s reading from the ninth chapter, verses 2 to 13, while not included in Stephen Schwartz score, is one of the most powerful.

“Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?” And later “But I want you to know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God...”

15 years ago, in the heat of a quiet summer afternoon, I took our firstborn son Henry for a father-son swim in Barnstable Harbor. It was low tide. The water was calm and inviting. A confident swimmer, I knew we could make it across the channel to walk on the sandbar.

We strode out together, holding hands, and kept walking as the chilly water deepened, our eyes fixed on the gleaming sandbar opposite. When the rising water reached Henry’s shoulders, I put him on my back, arms draped around my neck and kept moving. Once the water reached my chest, I began to swim. Several strokes into it, I realized reaching the sandbar would be more difficult than I had thought. “Why are the boats moving, daddy?” Henry asked suddenly. I look back over my shoulder, expecting to see the familiar shoreline we’d just left. But we were already more than 100 yards down, and being carried together on a swift and strong outgoing tide. “The boats aren’t moving, buddy,” I told him, trying to feign calm. “We are.”

What in the world was I thinking?! No one in sight on the water or on shore. No flotation! I’d love to say I began meditating on Psalm 25, “In you, Lord God, I put my trust.” Instead, all I could see was the headline in my head: “Barnstable Man and Son Drown in Foolish Incident.”

We made it eventually, swimming madly to grab onto the back of one moored sailboat, holding on to rest as the current still tugged at us; swimming to grab another; and another, and finally feeling the bottom come back up underfoot. “It’s OK buddy, it’s OK” I panted, as I carried my six-year-old back up the shore. “We can walk now.”

Patrick Ramage

First Sunday in Lent, February 22, 2015

In each of our scripture readings for today, we have the Lord’s promise and assurance that our Christian Journey is blessed by new life in Christ Jesus!

Genesis 9:8-17 – A glorious rainbow, both for Noah and for us today, a sign of God’s faithfulness to His Word. . . . An everlasting covenant between God and every living creature!

Psalm 25:1-9 – A passage filled with guidance . . . while we are tempted to demand answers from God, we need to ask direction, seeking and learning from His Word as we receive holy specific guidance.

1 Peter 3:18-22 – Peter assures us that through Baptism we identify with Jesus who separates us from the lost and gives us new life!

Mark 1:9-15 – Through Baptism, the Lord proclaims that Jesus is His Divine Son! During times of severe trials and of inner testing, Jesus will walk with us and we will have new strength and power. Jesus faced temptations to demonstrate to us God’s promise fulfilled . . . freedom, mercy and hope!

These passages of promise remind me of a difficult time during my second appointment as Pastor in a large congregation in Seymour, CT (near New Haven). This United Methodist Church was a beautiful large cathedral type building with many lovely stained glass windows and an altar that was beautifully appointed, surrounded by semi-circular rows of pews, affording seating for more than 250 worshipers. Unfortunately, at that time, the congregation had diminished to less than 50 attending members. During the next two and half years, with prayer and guidance (and the Lord's promise and assurance), the commonwealth of believers prayed, professed and invited many new people. In addition, many new children's programs were introduced. The Lord had us flourish in faith and in number; we doubled in size.

In the spring of my second year serving this energetic congregation, most unfortunately, an electrical problem in the basement created a huge fire which in short order, burned fiercely up into our sanctuary with it's main path targeted for our altar . . . on that late Monday afternoon on my day off (of course), I received a call and immediately came to a very sad and frightening scene. The fire department trucks had arrived, with a dedicated crew of brave firemen attempting to put out a raging fire. As I stood nearby with another clergy person, arm in arm looking up at the flames and praying, a very large beautiful rainbow covered the sky. It appeared to be hugging the grand church building that we loved. It remained for a long time in an intriguing shape framing the frightening fiery view below . . . we began to cry tears of joy, knowing that GOD was once again extending a loving promise . . . remembering our Baptism, we had our Lord's assurance!

About two years later and a cost of 2.4 million dollars we were once again able to worship in our sanctuary, always remembering that the true sanctuary of God was always there, in our hearts! Amen.

Joan Johnson, Retired Pastor, The United Methodist Church

February 23, 2015: Psalm 77; Job 4:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-10

"And 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. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12: 30-31

Having just completed a "Refreshing the Spirit" weekend retreat here at St Marks Episcopal Church in Venice, FL, many thoughts abound of love, life and making Peace around us!

When asked what would make a better world, my thoughts turned to my grown children and how they might cope in the future world! A discomfoting thought in today's world!

When Carl and Carolyn were little, they would be so excited about new games they had received at Christmas, that they would delve right in with boards and game pieces!

Inevitably they would come to a stalemate, wondering what to do next and there would be tears and discord, which Mommy Peacemaker would attempt to assuage!

"Did you take time to read ALL the rules before you started the game? "...."No?"

And I would explain that games are easier to play if you follow the Rules! LIFE, too, is LIKE that!

Last week in church we were asked what we thought might make a better world.

My first thought was "Follow the rules of the Game!"

God, through Moses, gave us the TEN commandments, Life Rules to follow, simple rules to help us avoid conflicts! In the NEW testament, Jesus said "A NEW commandment I give you..." Love God...and

Love your neighbor as yourself!" Put another familiar way, maybe the easiest rule for children to be taught early and to think about and truly understand, is: *DO TO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU!*

Children quickly understand that you don't SAY or DO something to someone else, that you would not want them to SAY or DO to YOU! I pray for the strength, grace and courage to always follow God's rules. GOD help and bless us all ! What a wonderful world it could be!

Prayerfully submitted, Margaret Mankiewicz

February 24, 2015: Psalm 77; Job 5:8-27; 1 Peter 3:8-18a

A Reflection on Suffering, Through the Lessons of Job 5: 8-27

Job is a book of wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures. It seeks to instruct us in understanding the human condition and our own mortality. No one, not even Jesus, is exempt from suffering and death in this earthly life. Jesus faces down temptation, weeps over the death of his friend Lazarus and his own imminent death. He suffers an unimaginable death on the cross after brutal torture. The Gospels teach us many righteous ways to respond to suffering.

My response is not always on the mark; like Job, I too have lamented the day of my birth and have thought that others have gotten what they deserve. However, I always awaken to God's love and goodness, to the joy of life and God's perfect forgiveness. I have often heard that "God does not give us more than we can handle." What a harmful and callous thing to say to someone. While, St. Paul tells us, suffering can produce endurance, character, and hope, such growth usually comes as we reflect back upon what we have been through and how we got through it. God does not put suffering in our lives, but uses such opportunities to help us grow in love and faith.

During this Lenten season, let us be mindful of our response to all suffering with compassion, prayer, and a listening, non-judgmental ear. May we be transformed and redeemed through love and mercy, wisdom and gentleness; Lord, guide us in our actions and reactions. Amen.

The Rev. Carol Bolstad
Southeastern Open Door Mission, Inc.

February 25, 2015: Psalm 77; Proverbs 30:1-9; Matthew 4:1-11

"Give us the foolishness to believe we can make a difference in the world..."

So ends a prayer that begins with a plea for more palatable spiritual gifts...wisdom, patience, compassion, that sort of thing. Actually asking to be foolish would seem to invite derision. And yet, given the state of our world, we probably need a generous dollop of foolishness just to keep on keeping on, and even more of it to think that the daily-ness of our individual lives could somehow bear significance. But over time, people from Jesus to Martin Luther King to Pema Chodron to Barack Obama have had the audacity to believe that intent and action matter.

Most of us are not that famous or wise. We're just us -- here on Cape Cod, oft inundated by snow and fog and work and grocery shopping. But we can start right where we are. Maybe with that tiny

mustard seed grain of faith. Maybe with that prayer. Maybe with the Rogers and Hammerstein description of a "cock-eyed optimist...stuck like a dope with a thing called hope..."

Maybe we start by just being more mindful of what we do and say, a little bit each day. Then it could be that our awareness of ourselves and each other will grow; our connections might strengthen, and our influence might spread. Most change, most steps that make a difference, start small, after all. Greeting a stranger, planting a flower, teaching a child a rhyme, turning off the TV to listen to a long lost friend...anything that shakes up our old patterns and wakes us up to possibilities. Is it "foolish" to believe that counts?

It just might be that foolishness is also refusing to buy apparent meaninglessness, an "unfounded" belief that there is an order in the seeming craziness of our universe. That in random chaos one can find reason. It was Victor Frankl, from his WW II prison cell, awaiting what seemed inevitable death, who wrote about hope in "Man's Search for Meaning". He saw that search as primal, as definitive of humanity, and as ultimately life-affirming. Given his extreme circumstances, he was undoubtedly dubbed "foolish". Would that we, in all our own paths, could be given that grace, that essential courage, to grow ever more foolish.

Betsey Edwards

February 26, 2015: Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 15:1-18; Romans 3:21-31

Faith: A Lenten Reflection

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield." The Lord had come to Abram in a dream and spoke those words to him.

I don't know for sure, but although Abram came to believe in the Lord, he may, like so many of us - have had some initial doubt and apprehension about having faith. I could picture Abram saying, "Yes, Lord, easy for you to say." He had no children and no kin to whom to leave his holdings. The fact of the matter, though, is that he believed and for that belief and faith he was duly rewarded.

It may be fear or doubt or some sense that we're smarter than the Lord that diminishes and compromises our faith. The fear and apprehension about others who share this earth with us give rise, all too often, to our being unneighborly, indifferent and insensitive to all of the Lord's people who cross our paths. "Do not be afraid," warns our Lord.

Lent, I believe, is as perfect a time as any for reflection and mindfulness as it relates to our honoring our Lord and His cautions to us regarding each other. Do we love the Lord our God fully enough to love others and to treat others compassionately with all our hearts, minds and souls? How well do the Lord's words resonate within us and guide our daily interpersonal practices?

"Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield."

Ronald Armstrong

February 27, 2015: Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

I don't know about you, but I hate being left out. One of the many reasons I love my faith is believing that we are all beloved children of God and we are always a part of His family. Nothing we can do can separate us from the love of God. In the reading from Genesis, Sarai mistreats Hagar because she has become pregnant by Abram (though Sarai was the one who "put my slave in your arms"). Not a nice family situation, but pretty typical. Jealousies, mistreatment by others based upon attributes we cannot change: was it Sarai's fault she couldn't conceive? Was it Hagar's fault she could?

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, talks about circumcision and uncircumcision- who is to be accepted in this family of faith, these new Christians? Paul asks was Abraham righteous before he was circumcised or after? Paul is sure God accepted Abraham before and after, and made him the father of many nations.

Eleven years ago, I was meeting with a therapist who worked with people entering into the ministry discernment process. This was a difficult time for our Episcopal Church and our country- battles were raging over the role of gay and lesbian people in our church and in our society. Gene Robinson had been consecrated a Bishop, churches broke away, states passed anti-same sex marriage laws and I was feeling the brunt of it all, a faithful and patriotic Episcopalian American who was being cast out based upon something I couldn't change, my sexuality. My therapist asked me calmly: "Hilary were you baptized in the Episcopal Church?" I said yes. "Were you confirmed in the Episcopal Church?" I said yes. "So, Hilary, what changed?" And I realized that I had not changed, I was still a beloved child of God but to the people around me, being a gay Episcopalian and American caused some to cast me out. But God's love never changes and that's enough for me.

Hilary Greene

February 28, 2015: Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:7-15; Mark 8:27-30

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi: and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah: and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him. "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Reflecting on this passage I began to think about identity and how I can personally recognize and come to know Jesus in my life. In Mark, Jesus has been frustrated by the crowds who still don't know who he is. Only Peter answers him, "You are the Messiah." Then Jesus sternly orders them not to tell anyone (emphasis added). Is he angry that the crowds who have seen him preach and perform many miracles still don't get it? Is he afraid of being caught by the increasingly suspicious Pharisees? Would I see Jesus if I ran into him on the street as an unassuming common man, a carpenter or toll taker or a janitor? Would I stop to listen, believe and then drop everything and follow him (or her)? Would you?

What about our own identity? If you ask all of your friends and family who you are, what would they say? Would they be right or even close? What comes up when you try to write down words to describe who you are? Is it what you do for work, for your family? I have been working very hard in the midst of challenges and joys in my life of late to feel Jesus as part of who I am in my heart and as my guide. I try to watch for signs that I am on the right path and try to listen for that voice telling me when I might have missed the boat. I hope I don't miss an opportunity to see Jesus as clearly as Peter did.

Debbie Chiumento

Second Sunday in Lent, March 1, 2015: Proverbs 15: 14-21; Psalm 16:5-11; I Thess. 2:2b-12; Mark 4:26-29

Today we celebrate one of the two great Celtic saints of Lent: Dewi Sant, a.k.a Saint David, recognized as the patron Saint of Wales for the past nine centuries. The Welsh people – my people – celebrate the day by wearing leeks or daffodils in their buttonholes, singing the national anthem Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau (Land of my Fathers), and, let's face it, occasionally eating and drinking to excess. That's ironic, because the saint was reputedly a strict vegetarian who drank only water.

Born around the year 520, David was educated at a local monastery. Ordained as a priest, he became a missionary, traveling through Wales and Britain. In those journeys he founded a dozen monasteries, including a familiar one at Glastonbury in the west of England and another at Minevia, near his birthplace in southwest Wales. The latter became his cathedral seat when he was made a bishop. The cathedral makes the location, now called St. David's, the smallest city in the United Kingdom.

The simplicity of that city should resonate with us today. We should undertake our Lenten journeys of faith humbly and without hypocrisy, following the example of St. David's abstemious life. That doesn't mean that we should drink only water throughout the 40 days or avoid meat on Lenten Fridays. But by following the tradition of giving up something or performing some special task during Lent, we bind ourselves to those ancient Christians such as David who spread our faith in an era far more threatening than today's.

Peter Gwynne

March 2, 2015: Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 21:1-7; Hebrews 1:8-12

At the time, it seemed like a few words with a perfect stranger; in retrospect, it was a message straight from heaven.

Outside the window, the Blue Ridge Mountain peaks rolled away towards Tennessee. A voice beside me said, "What are you worrying about?" Startled, I replied, "My laundry. It's going to rain." "Can you do anything about that?" I shook my head. "Then what's the good of worrying?"

We weren't poor, but we had nothing to spare. Child of thrifty Yankees, I rarely used credit. Upshot: we had no dryer. Winters, laundry dried quickly in the basement, the rest of the year, outside by the lilacs under the Appalachian sun.

It was spring, we had three youngsters, rain had fallen daily for two weeks. That morning the sun shone, so five loads of laundry hung on the line. Now black thunderheads boiled in from the west.

My initial reaction was "you just don't understand!" Later, I realized: I couldn't do anything about it: it was going to rain, the laundry was going to get wet.

The journey toward letting go of worry and trusting in the Lord began that day. Can I do anything about this situation? No? Let it go, things work out. God knows what I need better than I do.

Later that spring, my aunt visited. "You have three babies and don't have a dryer?" She handed me a check. I got a dryer; indeed it was a blessing. But the bigger blessing came from not having one.

Rebecca Scott

March 3, 2015: Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

If it seems odd that the brothers Wesley, John and Charles, founders of the Methodist movement, should be honored in the Anglican calendar, we might remember that they each remained priests in the Church of England until their deaths. As scholars, preachers, evangelists, missionaries, reformers and hymnists, they sometimes demonstrated the orthodox faith in unorthodox ways, but their passion was always directed toward serving God in those whom Christ came to save. “The world is my parish,” John Wesley famously wrote. What is received at the altar must be lived in the streets.

If their vision was radical, its inspiration was wholly biblical. Consider the Epistle for the day:

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. (Romans 12:11-17)

Christian faith, the Wesley’s, with the Apostle, believed, encompasses all of one’s life. And as we are transformed in our living into the likeness of Christ, so the world, too, will be transformed.

Preached United Methodist Bishop William Willimon: “God loves us just as we are, but too much to leave us this way.” The danger and promise of Lent is that we shall be changed. May this be our prayer for today.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Goad

March 4, 2015: Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Jeremiah 30:12-22; John 12:36-43

“Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways!” So begins Hymn 652, one of my favorites. Lent is a good time to reflect on the words and thoughts so beautifully expressed by John Greenleaf Whittier.

Forgive,
Re-clothe
“Take from our souls the strain and stress,”

We ask God to “forgive our foolish ways”. Daily we are often foolish in things we do or don’t do, say or wish we had not said. “Foolish” may not cover the more serious ways in which we have acted badly; but often it is the small, “foolish” things that we have done that need God’s forgiveness.

Once we have shed our foolish behavior, we ask God to “re-clothe us in our rightful mind.” We ask God to re-clothe us, to help us, live more caring, forgiving and faith focused lives. Where our ways have been foolish, we ask that we be renewed in such a way that we are less likely to repeat our past imperfect ways.

Finally, we ask God to “take from our souls the strain and stress.” Lent is the perfect opportunity to set aside some quiet time to allow God to remove the strain and stress that burden all of us at one time or another. Daily prayer-filled time can help us in our Lenten journey as we ask to be forgiven, re-clothed and relieved of the strain and stresses that we encounter.

Bunny Thompson

March 5, 2015: Psalm 19; Exodus 19:1-9a; 1 Peter 2:4-10

Excerpted from Melody Beattie: Living in the Mystery

“Climbing a holy mountain in China with my hiking partner, I was running out of steam. Mountain climbing there meant climbing thousands of steps. For the first three hours we climbed, vendors badgered me to pay them to carry me in a sling. I refused. I came here to climb, not be carried. Besides Jiuhua Shan is so steep that I’ll slide off the back of that chair, I thought. But my resolve to climb grew dimmer with each step. Where were the men with the chair now? I’d take my chances about falling out.

While I huffed and puffed, silently praying for the men with the sling to return, a man suddenly approached from behind. He was bent over, his head almost touching the ground from the weight of the wooden beams on his back. The beams looked like they weighed as much as he did. When he passed and then overtook us, awe replaced my fatigue.

Later when the three of us sat down to rest, the man explained in broken English that the wood he carried was special, sacred. It was to help repair the temple at the mountaintop. Carrying the beams was a privilege to him, not a burden. When we started climbing again, the man moved with extraordinary strength and speed. He beat us to the top.

When we surrender, we get the Grace and strength to carry any legitimate burdens we have. Carrying them is important for the temple, other people, and us. Often we don’t see the benefits until later, after we’re done climbing. We can endure almost any pain or problem, or carry any burden—if it’s for a good reason. Purpose transforms ordinary tasks into sacred missions. Mistakes become destiny instead of random fate. No matter what burden we’re carrying, making it to the top of the mountain is what this (*journey*) is about.....

Don’t look down. Look up! The steeper the climb, the more important it is to laugh. People say the bubble is popping, it’s bad out there, and it’s getting worse. Everyone’s getting the rug ripped out from under them, one man said. No matter how bad it gets, we can still find happiness. There’s some for each of us. We may need to redefine what happiness is before we can find it but when we do, we discover it’s been there all along. Another word for happiness is Peace. It’s been looking for us....

<http://www.melodybeattie.com/>

March 6, 2015: Psalm 19; Exodus 19:9b-15; Acts 7:30-40

Psalm 19 is a poem of great beauty that moves swiftly from the unquestionable presence of God in nature (1:6) to the soft whispers of comfort that can be heard in the word or “law” of God (7: 11), finally stopping at how all of this relates to us, the human being (12:14).

While beauty and wonder in nature are delightful, the psalmist here notes even greater joys lie in the act of obeying the word and law of God. “They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold, they are sweeter than honey from the honeycomb... in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:10). Most religious scholars define the “laws” in the psalm to the commandments and teaching of Jesus.

Delighting in our individual adherence to the commandments or the teachings of Jesus sounds sycophantic to me; but I can understand rejoicing in the good in people; in the good in the actions of our community, in the good in our relationships and the love that we experience with the people here on earth. I see that collectively experiencing and “finding the good” may just be the gold the psalmist is referring to.

I am particularly inspired by individuals who find goodness in the face of unconscionable evil. One such person is Kayla Muller, the U.S. aid worker who died while being held captive in Syria by ISIS. While in captivity, she wrote, "I have been shown in darkness, light; and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it." I trust she found great peace in her love for humanity and I pray for her.

Tara Machnik

March 7, 2015: Psalm 19; Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8

But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. . . May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14, NIV)

In Psalm 19 David asks God for wisdom, guidance, forgiveness and blessings. David reminds me of myself. As a girl growing up and wanting to please God, I tried many things to honor God and feel closer to Him during Lent. I didn't really know how to honor God, but I was told that giving up something that I loved would draw me closer to Him. So, every year on Ash Wednesday I said good-bye to sweets or chocolate for the forty days of Lent. Three days into it I would be grumpy and resentful towards God and find myself participating in the exact activity that I had set out to stop doing. Every year in my heartfelt attempt to honor God, I would fail and give up on my abstinence. I felt discouraged and disconnected from Him.

In looking back I realize that all of my Lenten attempts were not failures. My heart was in the right place. I tried to honor God, but I spent so much time thinking about the thing I was giving up that my mindfulness backfired on me. I thought about the chocolate or sweets or what ever it was I was abstaining from, I didn't think about God. I was mindful of my loss, not God.

In Psalm 19 I see King David mindful of God through his actions and his words, and it reminds me that God wants me to be mindful of the same every day, not just in Lent. If giving up something for the 40 days of Lent draws me closer to Him, then I should do it. I should do what ever it is that helps me to be mindful of God. I can give up chocolate if it helps me focus more on God (not likely). I can pray, read the Bible, go to church, volunteer my time, or do what ever it is that will encourage me to be mindful of Him as we prepare for our risen Lord.

Stella Bearse

Third Sunday in Lent, March 8, 2015: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

In our throwaway society we devalue many things and simply toss them aside – replacing them with the newer. Yet the voices from the past, in this case from those called the Desert Fathers, still ring true – especially in this season of Lent.

A certain soldier asked an old man if God received a penitent man. After heartening him with many words, the old man said to him at last, “Tell me, my beloved, if your cloak were torn, would you throw it away?” “Nay,” said the soldier, “I would patch it and wear it.” The old man said to him, “If you would spare your garment, shall not God have mercy on one bearing God’s own image?”

May you know how valued you are to God. May you, in spite of your scars and blemishes, know God’s welcoming embrace. May God, in whose image you have been made, bless you! Amen

Pastor Ed Saling

March 9, 2015: Psalm 42:1-7; 2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:23-30

*As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *
so longs my soul for you, O God. Psalm 42: 1*

Today we might say, “I have a God shaped hole in my heart.” That is no different from what the psalmist said 3000 years ago: “As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God.” We may try to fill that longing with an appetite for approval, or income, or entertainment. But nothing fits that God-shaped hole like God does.

I was a cradle Episcopalian, but like many young adults had focused on education, career and other interests for many years. I was away from the church for a long time when I began to recognize the God-shaped hole in my own heart. I found a church that nurtured me and brought me closer to God through worship, formation, and the opportunity to “strive for justice and peace among all people”.

Now as I confront the illnesses of older age, I find these words of the psalmist especially speak to me:

Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?

Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Eleanor Braun

March 10, 2015: Psalm 84; 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19; Hebrews 9:23-28

On a day when the wind is perfect

On a day
when the wind is perfect,
the sail just needs to open and the world is full of beauty.
Today is such a
day.

My eyes are like the sun that makes promises;
the promise of life
that it always
keeps

each morning.

The living heart gives to us as does that luminous sphere,
both caress the earth with great
tenderness.

This is a breeze that can enter the soul.
This love I know plays a drum. Arms move around me;
who can contain their self before my beauty?

Peace is wonderful,
but ecstatic dance is more fun, and less narcissistic;
gregarious He makes our lips.

On a day when the wind is perfect,
the sail just needs to open
and the love starts.

Today is such
a day.

Rumi

Love Poems From God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West by Daniel Ladinsky

March 11, 2015: Psalm 84; Ezra 6:1-16; Mark 11:15-19

The Little Boy with Orange Sneakers

In a market on New Year's Eve evening I spotted a tall man with a small boy. The child was so cheerful and happy skipping around - they were having such a good time together. He was a remarkable little guy because he had a white mask covering his entire face with bandages wrapped around his shiny brown head -holes for his eyes, where his nose should be and his mouth! He told me his name was Leo! We spoke briefly. When I left I found them outside. His dad shook my hand and said I'm Nate and I'm fostering Leo. He's from Burundi (next to Ruanda!) where he fell into a fire! He's having reconstructive surgery at Shriner's Children's Hospital in Boston. Oh, I wished them well - I was so happy to have met them! They went off into the night Leo skipping along- side the cart in his orange sneakers. It was an encounter that touched me - at home I found the address for Shriner's Hospital.

March 12, 2015: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Genesis 9:8-17; Ephesians 1:3-6

If I wanted a boat

I would want a boat, if I wanted a
boat, that bounded hard on the waves,
that didn't know starboard from port
and wouldn't learn, that welcomed
dolphins and headed straight for the
whales, that, when rocks were close,
would slide in for a touch or two,
that wouldn't keep land in sight and
went fast, that leaped into the spray.
What kind of life is it always to plan
and do, to promise and finish, to wish
for the near and the safe? Yes, by the
heavens, if I wanted a boat I would want
a boat I couldn't steer.

Mary Oliver

Blue Horses; The Penguin Press, New York, 2014

March 13, 2015: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Daniel 12:5-13; Ephesians 1:7-14

Lent, for me, has always meant fasting. And fasting has always been a practice of mindfulness. A practice that simply reminds me to stop. To be in the here-and-now. To pray. To remember that God is with me. Lent is the time of year when I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, slowly, 40-days-slowly.

This year, though, I'm not going to fast. I want to spend less time focusing on the present and more time reflecting on the past, specifically the past year which was, for my family, a roller coaster of pain, illness, and gratitude. It was a season of prayer without ceasing. It was a season of deep dependence on God's strength, comfort, and peace. And it was a season of awestruck gratitude when my prayers of "help" and "help!" and "HELP!" were answered with God's strength, encouragement, and the incredible generosity of family and friends. We've all experienced seasons like this, I think.

Recently I was listening to the hymn "How Firm a Foundation." The author talks about our dependence on God in times of trouble. Maybe you, like me, have heard it and taken comfort in the idea that God is with us when we're hurting and helpless. Since hearing it, though, the third stanza has worked its way under my skin and given me pause to reflect this Lenten season.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

The first two lines are quoted directly from Isaiah 43:2. It's a hopeful, strength-giving image: God is with us when we feel like we're drowning and God will help us keep our head above water. But it's the second two lines that I can't stop thinking about. How does God sanctify and bless our troubles? How

does our pain, illness, fear, anger, and hurt become holy? I don't know. I have a sneaking suspicion that it has something to do with gratitude, empathy, and maybe even dancing. My prayer is that God will help me to better understand His redemptive power, and I am praying that this Lenten season God will reveal Himself to us in our deepest distress and in our deepest joy.

Kate Dunigan-Atlee

March 14, 2015: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Numbers 20:22-29; John 3:1-13

"Preserve me from minding little stings or giving them" – Phillips Brooks

The word love comes up frequently when we speak of God: "God is love", "love your neighbor as yourself", "we love because God loved us first", "love is patient, love is kind", etc.

But what is this love, and how do we increase the amount of love in our lives? First, and most importantly, we must let God into our life and accept God's unconditional, everlasting love for us.

We can get practice from familial love and/or romantic love that many of us have experienced. But these seem almost automatic; how about loving those we don't know well or those that aggravate us? I got inspiration from a book I read years ago titled "Love is a Decision".

I believe we must decide to make love and the spreading of love a priority in our lives. We can also decide to love specific people in spite of their habits or ideas which are bothersome to us. I do this by asking myself: How important is this thing which is preventing me from loving the person? Upon reflection, I can often decide that it's not only not worth getting upset about but is not even worth mentioning. I can decide to love this person in spite of what I perceived as faults.

I also pray the line printed at the top which comes from a prayer that is always printed in the Forward Day by Day booklets: *To love and to be loved - that is why we are here.*

Charlotte Stiefel

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 15, 2015: Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

Laetare Sunday, the Golden Rose, Simnel Cakes, Lenten Marriage, and Mothering Sunday

"Today is Laetare Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. In the UK it is still called "Mothering Sunday" because of the fact that in the 16th century, the faithful returned to their "mother church" or Cathedral for a service to be held on the 4th Sunday of Lent. Anyone who took this "mini-pilgrimage" was said to have gone 'a-mothering.'

Since people each returned to a central location, families that had been separated (remember there were no cars or trains) were reunited. This custom existed into the 19th century in a more secular form: servants were allowed on this weekend to go home and visit their family. Also associated with this Sunday are the traditional Simnel Cakes baked to celebrate the reunification of families and a refreshing break from Lent.

In some places, this Sunday is the only time during Lent in which Christian marriage may be solemnized. And let's not forget the rose vestments. Rose colored vestments apparently have two different explanations. The first is the that the color of rose comes from the floral gifts given to mothers on account of sons being able to see the mothers once again upon reunification with their families. The other more likely origin comes from the tradition of the Golden Rose. On this fourth Sunday of Lent, the Pope would bless the "Golden Rose" to be sent to Catholic kings and queens. This Sunday became known as "Dominica de Rosa," and eventually rose colored vestments were introduced to complement the theme. All that being said, have a happy, refreshing, and holy Laetare, Mothering, Refreshment, Rose Sunday."

Published online at Canterbury Tales blog on 3/26/2006 by Father Peregrinator

March 16, 2015: Psalm 107:1-16; Exodus 15:22-27; Hebrews 3:1-6

Our hearts and minds are faced with many challenges each and every day throughout our lives. That is not some of us but all of us, with or without money, education, employment, or health. We define challenge individually as it reflects our privilege: Will I get the promotion? Will I find a job? Can I afford to move to a larger house? Will I have to move out if I can't pay the rent? Will my snow blower meet the need if there's another blizzard? Will there be a warm place to go if there's another blizzard? With a diagnosis this severe should I get a second opinion? How can I afford health insurance? We wrap ourselves in the layers of our challenges, like wounds that need bandages. Some of us are very heavily bandaged.

Lent is an opportunity to change our bandages. I know that I cannot do that for anyone else because I have my own to deal with, however, I know I can be more understanding to others and realize that their bandages cover wounds real or perceived that I am not in any place to judge. I believe if we can remove the bandages we carry we will be in a better place to accept the healing that is offered to all of us through Jesus Christ. It is only when we ourselves start to heal that we can begin to offer to help others.

Louise Koch

March 17, 2015: Psalm 107:1-16; Numbers 20:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

Despite his identification with Ireland, Saint Patrick, whose life we celebrate today, has long had global appeal as a universal representative of our Christian faith. Whenever Irish emigrants have moved to the farthest corners of the Earth, they have taken with them their veneration of the saint and have made March 17 an authentic red letter day on calendars worldwide.

That's appropriate, given the international character of Patrick's early life. Born under Roman rule in England, Scotland, or Wales – the history is unclear – he first reached Ireland as a teenage captive. Having converted to Christianity, he escaped to France, where he studied for the priesthood. He eventually returned to Ireland as a bishop, preaching the Gospel to the pagan population, organizing dioceses, founding monasteries, and ordaining local priests.

Two facets of Patrick's heritage strike me as significant. Over the centuries he has emerged as a political healer. Despite their centuries of mutual distrust and loathing, Roman Catholics and Protestants in Ireland and Northern Ireland agree on his status as the patron saint of all-Ireland. And the joy of celebrating his sainthood gives us slight relief from some of the more somber aspects of Lent: When March 17 last fell on a Friday, Boston Archbishop Sean O'Malley released his flock from any Lenten obligation to avoid meat on that day. As we watch or participate in today's parades, we can bless Patrick for his ability to bring us together and to do so joyfully during the often dreary days of Lent.

Peter Gwynne

March 18, 2015: Psalm 107:1-16; Isaiah 60:15-22; John 8:12-20

Digging

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Seamus Heaney

Death of a Naturalist Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1966

March 19, 2015: Psalm 51:1-12; Isaiah 30:15-18; Hebrews 4:1-13

Today's reading from Hebrews promises that the faithful will "enter God's rest." The word "rest" might evoke an afternoon on the couch; or a day at the beach; or a vacation out of town. To me, the sweetest rest is to lie down at the end of a really hard day's work, ticking off a mental checklist of the tasks I accomplished.

There is a lot of work to be done for God's kingdom: caring for the sick, the poor, the marginalized; caring for God's creation; working against injustice around the world; working for peace; empowering people through education; sharing God's love with each and every one of God's children.

Today's readings remind us that our past mistakes or bad habits can weigh us down in our work for God's kingdom, but also that God "longs to be gracious," today just as much as ever. So they exhort us to move on from our mistakes, with new resolve to accomplish the work that God's spirit nudges us toward: "Today, if you hear God's voice, do not harden your hearts."

What part of God's work is the Holy Spirit prompting you to join in? What will you do Today to participate in that work? And on the next "Today"? And the next?

There is much to be done, but let's take courage that God's rest is already promised, so we can take up the work with renewed energy and faithfulness, a "willing" and "steadfast" spirit. If we are faithful to this work, "entering God's rest" will feel like that satisfied exhaustion at the end of a hard day's work.

Aaron Dunigan- Atlee

March 20, 2015: Psalm 51:1-12; Exodus 30:1-10; Hebrews 4:14-5:4

Coming to Be

From infinite longings
finite deeds arise...

But in these dancing tears,
what is often withheld can be found:
our strength.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Images* in

A year with Rilke, Translated and Edited by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows; Harper One 2014

March 21, 2015: Psalm 51:1-12; Habakkuk 3:2-13; John 12:1-11

While I love to read from it occasionally during Sunday services, I'm not really much of an Old Testament guy. And of all the lines I have trouble with in the Hebrew Scriptures, none sticks in my throat more than Psalm 51: 5

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." I've always quietly believed my the Psalmist got that bit wrong -- that we are not, in fact, by nature sinful and unclean.

But beyond the academic argument, who can dispute that all have sinned and fallen short? We know our transgressions. Our sin is always before us. But God does not cast us from his presence. He restores us to the joy of his salvation and grants us a willing spirit to sustain us.

Today's Habakkuk passage can also difficult to swallow. God comes with plague before him and pestilence in his steps, crumbling mountains and collapsing hills. He rages against the sea and splits the earth with sweeping torrents of water and roaring waves.

A simplistic analogy from my days in church youth group: Imagine the entire human race is lined up along the coast of California for a contest: swimming to Hawaii. The distance each swimmer will cover will be in proportion to the quality of the life they each lived. The more selfless, holy and spiritual your life, the further you will be able to swim. Some of us will wallow in the shallows, some will lose their way in the breaking waves, others will quickly lose sight of the shore. Some may make it hundreds of miles. But in the end, left to our own devices, all of us will fall short. Without forgiveness, we would all drown.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin . . . wash me and I will be whiter than snow."

Patrick Ramage

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2015: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-13; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

A group of us retired clergy here at St. Mary's recently gathered together for prayer, scripture study and conversation. The question came up of how as clergy and lay people we share the Gospel with other people.

St. Francis of Assisi suggested that we should share the Gospel through our words! Whether we know a lot or little of the Gospel we have no excuse for not sharing what little we know. If we have belonged to the church for a long time we need to ask ourselves why do I not know more about Jesus and sharing His life and work with others? A good question for Lent!

Remember the blind man in Jesus teaching who was healed by Jesus said "I was once blind but now I see". He didn't know much but what he knew he shared and people were comforted with the Gospel.

Jesus in his ministry looked desperately at the disciples to find one who knows who He is. Jesus must soon face the cross and He needs someone to really know who He is. He needs them to know him as more than just a prophet. He's the Son of the living God. Peter will realize it. Jesus needs us just like

He needed Peter. He needs us to know Him spiritually and personally, and then communicate that knowledge. Why? So the church can remain in existence and in fact grow.

We who call ourselves Christians have a tremendous responsibility when it comes to telling others about the Gospel. If we will not do it -- will it get done?

Do you hesitate talking about Jesus to others? Just make a start and tell others that you are a Christian. You will be surprised how easy it is. By stepping out in faith you will see God respond to your effort. It's a great experience. Try it!

Grace and Peace,
The Rev. Dr. Harry B, Irwin, III

March 23, 2015: Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 43:8-13; 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

“Live according to your word” sounds straightforward.

But even as a child, I remember asking my mother, minister, Sunday School teacher, and God, “how do I KNOW what I should do?” And then, “how do I live with the consequences of doing the right thing?”

Lorraine, a new girl at school: treat her as I want to be treated, that’s easy. But she was dirty, she smelled bad; once I was nice to her, she stuck, leech-like. My friends shunned me. For nine months, I struggled. Then Dad got a new job and we moved. I felt guilty for years about how relieved I was that I didn’t have to be nice to Lorraine any more.

Five years ago, my amazing mother died. (She celebrated her 80th birthday windsurfing, skied into her mid-80s.) She was clear on end-of-life wishes: if she couldn’t be active, she didn’t want to live. The day she had a stroke, my instinct was to keep her home, call in Hospice. But Dad was her proxy, he wasn’t ready to let her go. Please God, whom must I honor? My mother or my father? The physician looked me in the eye: “this is a very big stroke.” Please God, should I be forceful about no interventions?” Mom lived only three weeks; but I wondered if I did the right thing in not being more forceful about the few interventions she did undergo. Last month, my sister said, “You did the right thing. I was so grateful for having time to say goodbye.” Thank you, God.

Rebecca Scott

March 24, 2015: Oscar Romero

Psalm 31:15-24; Isaiah 2:5-7; Revelation 7:13-17; John 12:23-32

PRAYER

Almighty God, you called your servant Oscar Romero to be a voice for the voiceless poor, and to give his life as a seed of freedom and a sign of hope: Grant that, inspired by his sacrifice and the example of the martyrs of El Salvador, we may without fear or favor witness to your Word who abides, your Word who is Life, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be praise and glory now and for ever. Amen.

Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez (August 15, 1917 – March 24, 1980), commonly known as Monseñor Romero, was a priest of the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador. He later became prelate archbishop of San Salvador.

As an archbishop, he witnessed numerous violations of human rights and began a ministry speaking out on behalf of the poor and victims of the country's civil war. His brand of political activism was denounced by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and the government of El Salvador. In 1980, he was assassinated by gunshot while consecrating the Eucharist during mass. His death finally provoked international outcry for human rights reform in El Salvador.

In 1997, a cause for beatification and canonization into sainthood was opened for Romero and Pope John Paul II bestowed upon him the title of Servant of God. The process continues. He is considered the unofficial patron saint of the Americas and El Salvador and is often referred to as "San Romero" in El Salvador. Outside of Catholicism Romero is honored by other religious denominations of Christendom, like the Church of England through its Common Worship. He is one of the ten 20th-century martyrs from across the world who are depicted in statues above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey, London.

Also commemorated on this day are three Maryknoll nuns and a woman lay missionary killed by a Salvadoran army death squad on 2 Dec, 1980, and additionally six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter, who were also murdered by the Salvadoran army on 16 Nov. 1989.

Drawn from Lesser Feasts and Fasts

March 25, 2015: Feast of the Annunciation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Blessed Virgin Mary: Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 45; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.”

Almost thirty years ago, I had begun work in a parish in Central New Jersey. In one of their hallways, the church had a glass display case with ecclesiastical items for sale: prayer books, hymnals, devotionals, cards, crosses...and something which intrigued me. It was a small statue, about ten-inches tall, painted very simply, and yet was strikingly beautiful. This statue of the Virgin Mary, though probably mass-produced in Japan by the thousands, seemed incredibly individualistic to me...I had not seen anything quite like it. What was it that drew me towards it?

As I think back, the time of year was just before Christmas. The artwork was not of the mother and child, whose birth we would soon be celebrating. It was just of the mother...which made me think of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and says: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” The date appointed for the Feast of the Annunciation is March 25...exactly nine months before the date we celebrate the birth of her child. In that plain and simple statue, I saw a teenage girl...reflective, meditative, contemplative...taking the time to ponder the angel’s message and God’s plan for her and, ultimately, all of us. As we journey through the season of Lent, let us not overlook this important feast-day in the life of the Church. And may we, like Mary, and like the image I saw in that glass case long ago, take the time to be reflective and contemplative...pondering God’s plan for us all.

Douglas Keilitz

March 26, 2015: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Philippians 2:1-11



The Annunciation, Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1898

I've always loved Henry Ossawa Tanner's portrayal of the Annunciation. The room, especially the colors and the un-made bed, the expression on Mary's face, the strength, curiosity, awe, and fear in her body, and the angel... breathtaking! Beyond the artistic and spiritual beauty of this painting, I love to think about the irrepressible talent of the man who painted this scene. Tanner was born in Pennsylvania during the mid-19th century and was the first African-American painter to gain an international reputation. Despite the rejection from fellow artists and the scorn of the public, Tanner could not deny the gifts bestowed on him by God and he accepted them no matter the cost. As we draw to toward Holy Week, hold the courage and strength of Mary and Tanner in our hearts.

Libby Gibson+

March 27, 2015: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:1-9; Philippians 2:12-18

Shining as Lights in the World (Philippians 2:12-18)

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

March 28, 2015: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:10-16; Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

Father of all, to thee
with loving hearts we pray
through him, in mercy given,
the Life, the Truth, the Way:
from heaven, thy throne, in mercy shed
thy blessings on each bended head.

Father of all, to thee
we breathe unuttered fears,
deep hidden in our souls,
that have no voice but tears:
take thou our hand, and through the wild
lead gently on each trustful child.

Father of all, to thee
our contrite hearts we raise,
unstrung by sin and pain, -
long voiceless in thy praise:
breathe thou the silent chords along,
until they tremble into song.

Father of all, may we
in praise our tongues employ,
when gladness fills the soul
with deep and hallowed joy:
in storm and calm give us to see
the path of peace which loads to thee.

Words: John D. Julian, 1874.

Music: Via Pacis, Joseph Barnby, 1889

March 29, 2015: Palm Sunday: Mark 11:1-11 and Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Today has come to be known as Palm / Passion Sunday in the Episcopal Church. In the Roman Catholic missals, Passion Sunday used to fall on the fifth Sunday of Lent (a week before Palm Sunday) and marked the beginning of Passiontide, a two-week period that included Holy Week. With this structure, Palm Sunday included readings of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and it was assumed that people would return during Holy Week to hear the stories of the Last Supper, foot-washing, Garden of Gethsemane, betrayal, denial, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus.

With this structure and shifting patterns in worship attendance, a person could attend Palm Sunday services and return on Easter Sunday, never hearing the lessons of Holy Week. So in the Episcopal Church and many other denominations, the Passion reading is now included on Palm Sunday. In some ways, combining the readings of Palm / Passion Sunday encapsulates the breadth and depth of our devotions and betrayals of Jesus. Yet, eclipsing Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem denies us the chance to celebrate and give "glory, laud, and honor" to Jesus as the earthly king that the Jews hoped him to be. Only when we live into the expectations and the hopes of Palm Sunday do the disappointments and horrors of Holy Week take on their full meaning.

We know that Holy Week is coming. We know that we did and do betray Jesus. But do we take the time to celebrate the transformative power that his message of love, peace, and hope can have in our broken world? While ultimately not the kind of earthly ruler that the Jews expected, Jesus brings us the courage to face the powers and principalities that oppress and betray our fellow humans. Today, can we grasp the edges of his royal robes and cling to hope of a transformed world?

Libby Gibson+

March 30, 2015: Holy Monday

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

John 12:8 quotes an enigmatic Christ: "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." One may then ask, why try so hard with charity when the Bible says that 'we will always have the poor amongst us'? It may seem confusing simply because the rest of the verse explains that we will not have Jesus with us forever. As believers, however, we know that Jesus promises that He will never "leave us nor forsake us". (Hebrews 13:5). We who also know that the Holy Spirit lives within us may be driven to ask: why do people believe the first part of the verse "the poor will always be amongst us" but then try to put the second part "but you will not always have me [Jesus]" into context?

Some scholars explain that Jesus was talking to Judas here, not making a general statement that we can never end extreme poverty. Surely we will always have the "poor" in our world, for even in Luke 6:20 we read, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Surely the Lord God would not have us believe it right to have life's basic necessities withheld from starving or needy people or nations, so that other nations, significantly the United States, can have overabundance. Poverty asks a question we as Christians must answer.

Forget that the words provide an excuse not to get involved with global poverty, for in Matthew 25, you will recall, Jesus tells that "whatever we do unto the least of these, we do unto him." The Lord offers us an opportunity literally to worship Him by means of loving, feeding, caring for, and spending time with the poor. Such is charity, an opportunity that has been given us on this side of heaven, and so even if one insists on the fact that John 12:8 literally means that we will "always have the poor with us," I say then praise God, for this allows us endless opportunities to worship Him -- by sharing, by succoring, by feeding the poor.

It is my belief that Jesus who called himself the "living bread" saw the elemental food not only as a metaphor for Himself but indeed as the Eucharist. I wrote a poem about it.

Christ and Bread

That sheaf of grain near the manger bed
in Hugo Van der Goes' The Adoration of the Magi,
which is bigger than Christ, could be another child
and is in a real sense Savior to our eyes,

for Jesus told us, "I am the living bread
which has come down from heaven, if anyone eats
of this bread he shall live forever." This bread is me,
is my flesh. Grain, yeast, dough all rise.

Christ is — embodies — what we are fed.
The very name Bethlehem means "house of bread."
He gave of his body as much as he gave his blood.
Pray to the living Christ. Bread complies.

And with bread, for the eternal poor, so should we comply, as well

Alexander Theroux

March 31, 2015: Holy Tuesday

Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36; Psalm 71:1-14

“When I am lifted up”

Today’s Gospel lesson from John tells us what happened when some Greeks, who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, came to Philip and asked to see Jesus. Philip went to Andrew and together they went and told Jesus. Jesus saw this as a sign that a crucial moment in his life had come because his immediate response was: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..... (12:23) “and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (12:32)

What draws us to Jesus is more than his miracles and teaching. What draws us to Jesus is his loving self-sacrifice. He stretched out his arms upon the cross to embrace the whole world with compassion and love, to embrace all of us, to embrace you and me in every moment of our lives.

Before a child can understand much verbal language, he or she understands that outstretched arms means come, be embraced with the warmth of love and acceptance. No matter what our age, such an embrace means the difference between thriving or not.

In the Anglican Church in Gustavia, St. Barth’s, there is a statue of Jesus in the back corner of the church, behind a bank of votive candles. As one walks in the door and turns left, one sees Jesus in his Galilean robe, arms outstretched with his loving heart welcoming all to come and be embraced. It is an image that I carry with me always and turn to often.

Paul Thompson+

April 1, 2015: Holy Wednesday

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

Wednesdays of any kind now always remind me of that commercial where the camel (or maybe it’s a dromedary- can’t remember if it has 1 hump or 2) is walking around asking: “Guess what today is? It’s HUMP Day!” It made a great showing on Facebook and always seems to crack people up.

Wednesdays are supposed to be the day you just need to get through and then, you’re over the hump and it’s all downhill from there. Leading to Thursday and finally FRIDAY! Thank God it’s Friday, right?

But in Holy Week, it seems to be a hump day that leads truly downhill, to betrayal and death. The Friday after Holy Wednesday is not something we look forward to- it is a day to be endured and look forward to Sunday.

The readings appointed for Holy Wednesday all talk about betrayal: in Isaiah, the author is struck, spit upon and disgraced. In Hebrews, we are told to run the race as difficult as it may be at times, following the example of Jesus who “endured the cross”- the cross of betrayal from a trusted friend. And in John’s gospel, Jesus lets the other disciples know he is to be betrayed and it is one of them sitting among them at supper. But the other theme in all these is the one I hold onto more than the knowledge that we all go through betrayals in our life, we all suffer losses and hatred. It is **knowing** that God is there for us,

staying with us even when everyone else has deserted us; taking away our shame and being “our helper and deliverer.”

So this Holy Wednesday, I am praying to be helped over the hump of shame and disgrace knowing my Lord and my God are with me and that resurrection is near.

Hilary Greene

April 2, 1015: Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35; Psalm 116:1, 10-17

Maundy Thursday always feels melancholy and slightly out of kilter to me. I imagine that is somewhat the way it felt that evening thousands of years ago.

Jesus is unusually serious...really sorrowful.

So much so...even the Apostles pick up on His mood. They are on edge...irritable with one another. Things do not seem right but they cannot quite put their finger on what is wrong.

And it was heartbreaking when Jesus washed the feet of everyone. Even Peter was in tears.

It was a relief to leave the Upper Room and walk to the Garden of Olives. Perhaps the Apostles hoped the soft air and quiet of the garden would lift the spirits of Jesus.

But once they arrived he seemed even more distressed. Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to walk deeper into the Garden with Him. He says He needs their attentiveness as he prays. Jesus walks a bit farther, falls on His knees and beseeches God to lift the heavy burden of impending pain and death. When Jesus returns to the 3 Apostles for solace ... he finds them asleep. With great sadness he says; "could you not watch one hour with me?"

At the conclusion of The Maundy Thursday Service... we will begin the 12 hours of The Night Watch Vigil...taking turns keeping watch at The Lady's Altar.

It is our time to be attentive with Jesus in The Garden.

It is risky, scary and uncomfortable ... allowing ourselves to share ... to be united with ... the sorrow and grief and physical pain of Jesus.

But oh, does it forge a lasting connection with Jesus!

The Rev. Deacon Elizabeth Whitmore

April 3, 2015: Good Friday

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

Following is an edited excerpt from a litany written by Linda Murphy (Triduum Sourcebook, Liturgy Training Publications). I share it with you that we might be in prayer together on this solemn day.

Sisters and brothers, let us lift up our prayers in the same spirit we lift up the cross: proclaiming our Lord as the way that is no dead end, the truth that cannot be silenced, and the life that will not be entombed.

+ We have heard the Crucified One give his dearest ones to one another and believe that he has given us to each other in the same way. Pour out your kindness on your divided family that calls itself the Church, and gather us together into the joy and peace of your presence. Hear us, O God.

+ For the people of Saint Mary's as we strive to fulfill our many ministries. Hear us, O God.

+ For all who lead others, who hold the powers of destruction or apply pressures of opinion. For those who shape society's laws and mold our lifestyles. Hear us, O God.

+ For ourselves when, like Pilate, we turn away from truth and accommodate injustice. Hear us, O God.

+ For all seeking truth and searching for community as they try to find fulfillment of their deepest needs. Hear us, O God.

+ For ourselves when, like Peter, we defensively deny what we cherish most dearly. Hear us, O God.

+ For ourselves when, like the centurion, we stab at dead certainty and find lively mystery. Hear us, O God.

O God, by shedding his blood for us, your Son established the sacrificial mystery of our faith. May we who participate in this mystery ever seek to serve you. In your goodness, make us holy and watch over us always. Amen

Ed Saling

April 4, 2015: Holy Saturday

Job 14:1-14; 1 Peter 4:1-8; John 19:38-42; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

Jesus is in the tomb.

April 5, 2015: The Feast of the Resurrection! Our Lord is Risen! Alleluia!
Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8

Look for this gorgeous image on our Easter bulletins, drawn to our attention by Margaret Mankiewicz. The artist, Gene Albritton has generously given permission to reproduce his art. He writes: "Unlike using paint to portray the colors of earth, I simply use the pigments of our beautiful planet and merely move dirt around the canvas to form a unique piece of art." What does the "Open Cross" say to you?

