

**2012 Lenten Reflections
from the Congregations of**



**The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
and
The Evangelical Lutheran Church
of the Master**

**To the communities of faith at
The Lutheran Church of the Covenant and
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Master,**

Once again we offer a Lenten devotional for your use during the 40 weekdays and six Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. We hope it will serve you well during this season and you will make it a part of your daily time of devotion and prayer.

As with our Lenten and Advent devotionals in 2011, we are pleased to say that this is a collaborative effort between The Lutheran Church of the Covenant and The Lutheran Church of the Master. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we have combined the thoughts and writing talents of both communities to glorify God and our Lord Jesus Christ and to give faithful witness of our Christian faith.

With each publication we have new contributors, and it is always especially gratifying to welcome those who have volunteered for the first time, and express our appreciation to repeat essayists. We pray that you find each effort a rewarding and enriching task that has deepened your understanding of God's Holy Word. As the psalmist says:

*Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands.*

Psalm 90:17

It bears repeating that an effort of this magnitude cannot be realized without the involvement and assistance of many people. We thank Pastor Karen Ullestad of The Lutheran Church of the Master for once again encouraging and guiding the faithful people she serves to take part in this season's publication.

We thank God for the organizational skills and editorial talents of Jennifer Garberich, Covenant's Parish Administrator, who combines all the diverse contributions into one readable product. We are thankful for her editorial talents.

May this devotional be a blessing to you this Lenten season as you venture through the 40 days in anticipation of the joy of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Abraham D. Allende

Pastor

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant

Lent 2012

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Contributors

Elaine Allen is the newest member of Lutheran Church of the Master. She is involved in the Service and Outreach committees, and is a lector. (March 10)

The Rev. Abraham Allende has served as pastor of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant since September of 2009. He also serves on the Executive Committee of the Northeastern Ohio Synod Council; is a member of the Southeast Clergy Council and is the council's liaison to the Meals on Wheels program. (Feb. 26, March 18, April 5)

Linda Gotthardt-Allende is the wife of Pastor Allende, and serves as a lector at The Lutheran Church of the Covenant. She teaches English as a second language at Kent State University and The University of Akron. (Feb. 27)

Desiree Barber joined Lutheran Church of the Master with her husband and children on November 8th 2009. She assists in serving in the church nursery on a rotating basis. (March 23)

Mary Kaye Bernardo is Chairperson of the Board of Evangelism and Social Ministry of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant and serves on the Covenant Council. She is one of the members of Vision for the Future Task Force which runs the Covenant Farmers Market. (March 17, April 3)

Norm Braun serves on The Lutheran Church of the Covenant Board of Evangelism and Social Ministry. (March 13)

Cathy Cashman has been a member of Lutheran Church of the Master since her parents joined when they moved to Bedford Hts. in 1959, a year after the church was started. Cathy was confirmed, and married to her husband of 41 years at Lutheran Church of the Master. Their five children and five grandchildren were baptized there. Cathy is currently serving on the Lutheran Church of the Master Council. (March 5)

Tom Cashman is active in the choir at Lutheran Church of the Master, Tom also serves on the Stewardship Committee, and helps with many property repairs. He has been on the Church Council and was the chair of the Search Committee. (March 6, 20)

Gloria Coleman joined The Lutheran Church of the Covenant in 1974. Please refer to the Editor's note following her reflection to learn more about Gloria. (March 26)

Daralynn Constant is a lifelong member of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant, previously served four years as Council President, and is also a lector. She is a Child Protection Coordinator for Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital. (March 15)

Judy Detman has been a Lutheran Church of the Master member since 1972. Currently serving on the Altar Guild and the Stewardship and Property Committees, and singing in the choir. (March 9)

Kenneth Detman has been a Lutheran Church of the Master member since 1972. Currently President of Church Council, Usher, Teller, Finance Coordinator, Budget Committee. (March 24)

Chuck Dickey teaches the teens' Sunday School class, and is a member of the Board of Managers at Covenant. He is also the director of the Southeast Clergy Hunger Center. (March 1)

Stephen Dobush serves as Assistant Treasurer of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant, and is also an usher and a lector. (Feb 24, March 14, 31)

Amy Fazi has been an active member of Lutheran Church of the Master for over 10 years. She teaches Sunday School for the elementary grades, is on the property committee and council and is one of our gardeners. She is the mother of Mark and Katie Fazi. (March 8)

Donna Franz was baptized at St. Andrew Lutheran Church and became a member of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant when St. Andrew and Trinity merged to create The Lutheran Church of the Covenant in 1947. She also serves as Eucharistic Minister to the homebound. She is one of the members of Vision for the Future Task Force which runs the Covenant Farmers Market. (March 2)

Barb Gaglione has actively headed The Lutheran Church of the Covenant Stewardship campaign for several years, is a member of the Mutual Ministry Committee. (Feb. 25, March 16)

Jen Garberich is Parish Administrator of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant, where she also serves as Eucharistic Minister to the homebound. (Feb. 23, 28, March 27)

Rosa Garnett is The Lutheran Church of the Covenant Congregational Council Secretary. (March 12)

Paula Hohenstein serves on the Mutual Ministry committee of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant. She is one of the members of Vision for the Future Task Force which runs the Covenant Farmers Market. (March 3)

Shirley Jenkins has been a member of Lutheran Church of the Master for over 15 years. She writes notes to our shut-ins through the Outreach Committee and serves as a nursery assistant. (March 21)

Linda Richter is the Director of Music and Organist at The Lutheran Church of the Covenant. A native of Michigan, Linda is a student at the Baldwin-Wallace College studying music therapy. (March 30)

Betty Schuette has been a member of the Lutheran Church of the Master for almost 25 years. She serves on the Church Council and Stewardship committees. She is active as a Sunday School teacher, on the worship committee, Altar Guild and sings in the choir. (March 19, 22)

Diane Slifka is the newsletter editor, a choir member, and the treasurer for WELCA at Lutheran Church of the Master. She also serves on the Learning and Mission Endowment committees. She has been coordinator / co-coordinator for vacation bible school for almost 20 years.

The Rev. Karen Ullestad has been the pastor at Lutheran Church of the Master since 2005. She is a member of the Southeast Clergy Council and serves on the synod's global mission/companion synod committee. (Feb. 22, March 11, April 1, 7, 8)

The Rev. Harry Werner serves on the Board of Education of The Lutheran Church of the Covenant. He teaches an adult Sunday school class and is a frequent supply pastor at both Covenant and The Lutheran Church of the Master. He is Director of Pastoral Care at University Hospitals. (March 4, 25, April 6)

Janet Wilkens serves on the Board of Worship & Music and is Eucharistic Minister at The Lutheran Church of the Covenant. She is also a weekly volunteer for the Covenant Farmers Market. (Feb. 29, April 4)

Linda J. Wright serves as a lector and serves on the Board of Evangelism and Social Ministry. (March 28, 29, April 2)

Wednesday, February 22

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2

Corinthians 5:20b—6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The reading in Isaiah, which is the alternative to the usual *Ash Wednesday* reading in Joel, describes the kind of *fast* that is consistent with God’s mission throughout God’s history. “Loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free, share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless into your house, cover the naked.” This kind of fast takes the focus away from our sin and places it on God’s actions and God’s call to us. God has chosen and called Israel, and therefore us, as part of the new Israel, to accomplish God’s mission.

As we begin our Lenten season we mark our foreheads as a way to remember that we are part of God’s mission to love and save the whole world. The ashes remind us that we are not the whole picture, because “remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” But as long as we have breath we are called to participate in God’s mission. That means we must give up or leave at the lakeshore our old lives that are turned inward, in order to feed the hungry, house the homeless, and cover the naked.

God’s call through Isaiah, then is not a fast just for 40 days, it is a whole life of service to others. Turning from our old lives of sin to serve others loosens the burden of that old life, and Isaiah says the gift of that liberation is “your light shall break forth like the dawn, your healing shall spring up quickly.” May your Lenten celebration be filled with light and healing as you serve God’s people.

Loving God, in your great mercy you feed us, clothe us, house us, and liberate us. Through your grace, you call us to participate in your mission to provide your mercy to others. Turn us from our ways to yours so that the world may know light and healing. Amen.

Rev. Karen Ullestad

Thursday, February 23

Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:1-14; 1 John 1:3-10

Walk the Walk

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.6If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

(1 John 1:5-7)

This passage reminds me of the contemporary phrase, “If you’re going to talk the talk, you’ve got to walk the walk.” Actions speak louder than words. If we claim to be “good Christians” because we fill a space in the pew each and every week and put money in the basket, but we don’t spend the other 166.5 hours of the week living a Christ-like life, giving service to others and spreading love, then we are just talkin’ the talk. Gossiping, road-raging, worshipping material things – that’s not walking in the light.

Extend this further to the American political scene. We see candidates claiming their strong Christian faith requires them to do things that are ultimately discriminatory to persons of different classes, genders or sexual preferences, all the while lining their pockets with more money than they’ll ever need in two lifetimes, and/or behaving abominably in their own families. It’s hard to resist getting sucked in to the argument, trying to prove ourselves right and “them” wrong. Banging around in the darkness, unable to find the light.

God is the light. But we spend too much time looking at the darkness. God isn’t there; so why would we want to be there? “If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” FELLOWSHIP. LIGHT. FORGIVENESS. Sounds great to me!

Jen Garberich

Friday, February 24

Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:15-25a; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

To those of us paying attention recently at worship, it should be clear that Pastor's emphasis has been on one theme.....*prayer*.

I confess that I have neglected selection of any Psalms in my past Devotionals. Still a neophyte in my study of scripture and Lutheran teachings, I confess that I have endeavored, perhaps out of pride, to focus on readings which speak to *me*, and to discount the value of the Psalms as rigid, 'sing-song' recitals.....having, until recently, been an exercise in 'chanting' prescribed by the pro forma structure of the worship service.

How wrong I was!

My study of the Psalm selections for this issue of Devotionals has revealed to me the value of the Psalms *as* 'prayer'.

Psalms typically are three-part recitals:

1) **They begin with a plea or petition...** (Here, "...do not let me be put to shame", and "... do not let my enemies exult over me")

2) **They identify a trouble or a suffering being struggled with...** (Here..."Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame", by those "who are wantonly treacherous"...i.e., those non-believers who persecute us.)

3) **They conclude with an expression that we can, by expressing ourselves TO God assure ourselves that God does indeed hear us.** (Here, "...Good and upright is the LORD"... "he instructs sinners in the way"...the paths of the "LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.")

I thank Pastor for his stress and gentle, yet firm, insistence on learning the importance....indeed, the *power* of prayer. Further, I thank him for his request of me to submit more than the one or two devotionals I usually submit. Call it serendipity, call it Grace.....the lesson I have been blessed to finally comprehend is that all of the writings in Scripture are of equal value. Instead of 'cherry-picking' those readings which, as I noted above, **spoke to me**, I should have recognized that the Psalms, as prayer, stress the vital fact that we all of us need regularly to **speak to God**.

As we all await his glorious coming as saved but mortal sinners, prayer is the least we can do, as it shows Him our waiting is *active* rather than *passive*. Further, as a continuous and daily exercise, it helps us all to more readily be in a frame of mind of kindness and compassion to our fellow sinners.

Thanks to all at Covenant who afforded me this opportunity to grow in the Lord by leaving these last few unclaimed dates to fill. Heed Pastor's lesson... pray... often; sincerely and with the knowledge that He will hear us as "Day by Day, We Magnify Thee".

Stephen E. Dobush

Saturday, February 25

Psalm 25:1-10; Psalm 32; Matthew 9:2-13

The other day my granddaughter (Emma age 6) asked me if I was tempted by the devil when I was a little girl. She told me that the devil is sneaky and makes her do things like being mean to her little sister. I explained that I was not only tempted by the devil as a child, but every day as an adult too. We agreed that we would always be on the lookout for that sneaky devil and make sure he didn't talk us into doing things that were wrong, but when we did things that we are sorry for we can always, always ask God to forgive us, and HE WILL.

I was reminded of my conversation with Emma when I read both Psalm 25 and Psalm 32. In Psalm 25, David laments to God, please don't let me be disgraced, don't let my enemies gloat over me. Teach me your paths and most of all, please don't remember the sins of my youth (or my adulthood for that matter—my words). As true today as it was in David's time.

Psalm 32 tells us how blessed we are because God does forgive our sins, even when that sneaky devil temporarily wins out. Keeping silent about our sins weighs heavy on our hearts and saps our strength, but by acknowledging our sin, that guilt is lifted and by trusting enough to confess our sins, we are surrounded by God's unfailing love.

Barb Gaglione



Sunday, February 26

First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

Genesis 9:13

In the 1979 version of *The Muppet Movie*, Kermit the Frog opens the film singing, “The Rainbow Connection,” while strumming his banjo in the middle of his habitat – the swamp. Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher wrote this song for the movie and Williams says: “We looked at his [Kermit’s] environment, and his environment is water and air - and light. And it just seemed like it would be a place where he would see a rainbow. But we also wanted to show that he would be on this spiritual path, examining life, and the meaning of life.”

Our Old Testament reading for this first Sunday in Lent is the conclusion of the flood narrative in which God destroyed the earth but saved Noah and his family and two of every species of living creatures. After the waters receded, God made a promise with Noah that never again would there be a flood to destroy the earth. Three times God repeats the phrase, “never again,” as if to call attention to the importance of the promise. As a sign of that covenant, God placed the rainbow in the clouds.

God’s covenants with humankind are unique in that they require nothing of us in return. In a marriage covenant, for example, both the bride and groom promise to be faithful to each other and usually they exchange rings as a sign of those promises. In contrast, however, God’s covenant is unconditional. It is only what God does for us that matters.

Yet even though God promises to never again destroy the earth, there is always a clear and present danger that humankind itself, through sinfulness, corruption, greed, evil, and neglect, could achieve the same negative result. It is humanity – not God – that initiates war, contaminates the environment, and pays little notice to the health and well-being of other humans and living creatures.

Rainbows are vividly colorful, richly symbolic, and inspire a limitless spectrum of possibility. It is somewhat appropriate then, that as we begin our 40-day journey of self-examination through Lent with the story of a rainbow – a reminder of God’s abiding promises – we might also bear in mind that we are stewards of God’s creation. The care of our world, the earth, the water, the air, is in our hands to protect – not to destroy. May that be our “Rainbow Connection.”

Rev. Abraham Allende

Monday, February 27

Psalm 77; Job 4:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-10

I originally chose this date for my reflection because this was my mother's birthday. My mother had a profound effect on me and my whole family. She was famous for her wit and interesting comments. My nephews and my niece have lots of colorful memories of their grandmother. Whenever we get together, we talk about these memories and both laugh and cry. Our parents and grandparents have roles to play in how our lives turn out. They teach us and give us examples to follow. As for my mother, she is responsible for imparting to me a love of animals, especially cats.

As I said before, I chose this particular date because of my mother's birthday. As I read the lesson from Ephesians, I realized that it contains the verses assigned to me when I was confirmed. The text from Ephesians reminds us that God has an even more profound effect on us than our families. God is responsible for teaching us to love. This is all God's doing; we have had no hand in the matter. Through Jesus, God claimed us and transformed us into his people; people who are charged with doing his will during our lives. Through the Spirit, God fills us with his love so that we, in turn, can love. With God's help, we can make a positive impact on the people we come in contact with each day, showing God's love.

Linda Gotthardt-Allende



Tuesday, February 28

Psalm 77; Job 5:8-27; 1 Peter 3:8-18a

Imagine how different the world would be if we followed this chapter of 1 Peter:

Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing.

Of all the commandments and instructions that people claim to obey from the Bible, I wish this one was on the top of the list. People declaring war against those with different beliefs and lifestyles in the name of Jesus – I don't get it. To be like Jesus means to love and to be humble.

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit.

Imagine what would happen if we banded together and worked for peace and love.

It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

Jen Garberich



Wednesday, February 29

Psalm 77; Proverbs 30:1-9; Matthew 4:1-11

Proverbs 30:1-9

Verse 5: *God keeps every promise he makes. He is like a shield for all who seek his protection.*

This is my great comfort.

Verse 8: *I ask, let me be neither rich nor poor.*

As I sit at home alone or go shopping, I think of all I lost. You don't have the family or friends anymore. I'd like to buy that big roast. Too much.... That's ok, I'd be eating it all week.

Verse 8: *Keep me from lying and let me be neither rich nor poor.*

I'm not alone; the Lord is with me. And he gives me memories and lets me know I still have friends and family there, just not here. And I may not have that roast, but I can still share my soup.

"God is not with me. God is not with me and I am helpless." How many times in life did I feel that way? How many times did I blame him? "When I lost my husband, why did You leave me alone?" When I lost my job and dad was giving up, I thought, "How can I save this house?"

I'm not rich.

I'm not poor.

The Lord will provide just what I need. (FAITH)

Pray for those that don't know the Lord.

Thank you Father for giving more than I will ever need. Amen

Janet Wilkens

Thursday, March 1

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18; Romans 3:21-31

As February draws to a close and winter seems to be never-ending, we can appreciate David's lament in the verses preceding the Psalm reading. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In the midst of his misery, David still says "You who fear the Lord, praise Him". We are reminded that no matter what troubles us, it is God who is all powerful, in charge and will not forget us. He will provide for our needs. God's power is awesome now and for all of time. As we tell God's story from one generation to the next, so God will be there for future generations who see His awesomeness and serve Him. Our gift to future generations, as well as our responsibility, is to tell everyone God's story.

In Genesis God makes a covenant with Abraham, and keeps his promise. Generation after generation has told this story of God's promise and power, and God has continued to care for and bless those who love and believe in Him.

In Romans Paul reminds us that we are all human and we all doubt that we can ever measure up to God's laws, yet God justifies us in his sight by grace through Jesus. Just as we look out at the dreary winter and see we have no power to overcome it and make spring come, yet each year God renews life with the blooms and green, and warmth and his love - to everyone, no matter their religion, or race or creed! God's love is for all.

Chuck Dickey



Friday, March 2

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

In Confirmation class we all learned the Biblical definition of "faith." Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Because the Jews were so proud to be called children of Abraham, St. Paul uses Abraham in this chapter of Romans as an example of someone who was saved by faith. Because Abraham believed God, His faith was credited as "righteousness" - our first father in the faith. He found favor with God by faith alone.

For us then, faith is believing and trusting in Jesus Christ and reaching out to accept the wonderful gift of salvation. People worry, "Do I have enough faith? Is my faith strong enough?" It is Christ who saves us and not our feelings or actions. He is strong enough to save us no matter how weak our faith is. Jesus offers grace because He loves us.

If we recognize our sins, admit them, and ask God for forgiveness and then let go of the guilt, it will be counted as "righteousness." Jesus is willing and able to forgive every sin. King David says in his psalm that the man is blessed who asks for forgiveness receives it and is right with the Lord. David was guilty of terrible sins-adultery, murder, lying; yet he experienced the joy of forgiveness.

I can only imagine the peace and joy that Luther felt when he made these verses his own. After years of self-deprecation and misery, he "experienced" the grace which our Christ offers.

As Paul relates in verses 9-12, the rite of Circumcision, the ritual, was a seal for the Jews that they were God's people. Abraham was blessed before the ceremony was introduced, so that he is the father of faith to the Gentiles or uncircumcised too - the father of all who believe in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

What is the quality of our faith? Do countless questions make their way through our minds? Is Jesus really the Savior? Have my sins been forgiven? Will I be raised from the dead? These questions are not failures of faith but tests of faith. We must take our doubts to Jesus. In His time and in His own way, He will restore the confidence our hearts seek. It is not the perfect faith that is required for justification, but the prevailing faith, the faith that has the upper hand over unbelief.

Donna Franz

Saturday, March 3

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:7-15; Mark 8:27-30

As I am beginning this Lenten devotional in early January, I feel as if we have just finished working on the Advent devotionals. I am not able to dash these off quickly – just the opposite. It seems they take me an exorbitant amount of time. But, on the other hand, I'm rewarded by being part of a group effort and I look forward to reading the other contributions each day. I think about the writers and praise God for their effort, their insight, their personal stories and their testimony of faith.

Various businesses have reward programs, with all kinds of catchy names: "Choice Rewards", "Frequent Flyers" and "Fuel Perks" to name a few. If you stay at their hotel, fly on their airline or shop at their store you get reward points that you can put toward a future hotel stay, airplane trip or gas fill-up. God has a reward program for us as well. He tells us if we fear, love and trust him he will reward us.

In Psalm 22, an ever expanding group gives praise. Future generations will be told about God and join in the praise of God's saving acts. All who fear the Lord will praise him. Those from the most prosperous to those about to die are coming to their senses and running back to God. The path we are to follow is not always easy or the way we'd like to go. In Genesis, Hagar heard from an angel while she was running away from Sarai, and was told to go back to her mistress and submit to her. How hard that must have been to submit to Sarai's anger and envy. The angel told Hagar her reward would be a son, Ishmael, and descendants too numerous to count. Even though it was hard, Hagar did as the angel asked. In Mark, Jesus was asking the disciples who they thought he was. Peter said, 'you are Christ' but Christ cautioned them not to tell anyone. It was not yet his time. He knew his path was going to be hard, that he would suffer, die and rise again, but he was doing the Father's bidding.

By God's grace, through faith in Christ, we have forgiveness of our sins and a place in eternity. God has saved us, saved us from hell, saved us for heaven. This is our reward!

Paula Hohenstein

Sunday, March 4

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

I love Peter. He is a man of strong passion, conviction, and faith. In the section that precedes today's Gospel reading in Mark, Peter was the one who boldly and correctly gave the answer to Jesus' question, "Who do **you** say that I am?" Peter immediately blurts out, "You are the Messiah!" In today's Gospel, just five sentences later, we see this same Peter objecting to Jesus' explanation of the Messiah's mission. Peter could affirm Jesus as Messiah as long as he was Peter's kind of Messiah - presumably a Christ of power, glory and worldly success. Peter wanted nothing to do with a Messiah who would undergo great suffering, be rejected, and killed. Jesus ends up calling him Satan!

How about us? Do we, like Peter, affirm Jesus as the Christ but not allow want him to be **his** kind of Messiah? The Messiah's mission will always be one of great suffering, rejection and death. In today's lesson Jesus tells his disciples and the crowd that if they wish to be his followers that they and we must "...deny (ourselves) and take up our cross and follow (Jesus)." What kind of Messiah do we want in our life? When we pray our most fervent desires what do we want from him? More money, no illness or misfortune, success, revenge on our ex-spouse or fellow worker, and the defeat of our enemies? Jesus' promise for us is nothing of the kind. He promises us, his followers, **his** path -- one of great suffering, rejection, and death. Would Jesus call us out, even as he did Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Quite the predicament, isn't it? We want a Messiah, but we want him to be in our image, not Jesus'. What to do. It really starts and ends with Jesus - Jesus and his death on the cross. The same Spirit who called us to faith in the waters of Holy Baptism is calling us to our knees in repentance. The same Spirit who provoked tears of repentance and called Peter back to faith after he denied the Lord is calling us now. We know that the sins that we confess have been forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross. Forgiveness is ours in faith. Faith is given to us a free gift of God for the simple reason that the Father loves us so very much. We couldn't purchase faith or forgiveness for all the money in the world. We couldn't earn it for all the good works of every man, woman, or child who ever lived. What couldn't be earned or bought has been given to us by God. We are free with Peter to confess our sins, tearfully grieve them, and leave them at the foot of the cross to live a new life in Christ. We are free to live our life in faith with strong passion and conviction even as Peter did to the glory of Jesus, the Messiah.

Rev. Harry Werner

Monday, March 5

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

(Psalm 105:45 “Praise the Lord”)
Promises....Promises

Is it fair to say that most of us, in one time or another or even several times, have been the giver or receiver of a broken promise? I'm sure that the answer is yes. The promise given or received was not intentionally meant to be broken. Being that we are only human, unfortunately we fail and are unable to keep some of the promises we make. That means not only broken promises but also disappointments, broken hearts, and maybe even broken relationships.

In Psalm 105 we read of God's wonderful works, His covenants, His promises kept through generations. Giving them all that they needed, whether it was protection or freeing them from oppression and feeding them in the desert. The psalmist lets us know that God had been steadfast. He had been faithful and worthy to be praised.

Genesis tells us *“he dealt with Sarah as he had said and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised.”* Yes God kept his promise and brought her laughter through the birth of Isaac even though she and her husband Abraham were way past the years of childbearing. God had kept his promise.

Hebrews lists several quotations from the Old Testament to describe the superiority of Christ to the angels. The heavenly angels were to worship God and to be his messengers. But Christ has been with God from the beginning, the foundation of the earth. God has anointed Him and he will not perish but remain the same and His years will never end.

What does this mean for us? God through Christ and his life, death and resurrection **is** present with us. He **is** steadfast in His word. He **is** faithful in His promises. He **is** forgiving when we fail to keep our promises. His promises stand today, yesterday, and tomorrow. You can count on that.

Praise the Lord!

Cathy Cashman

Tuesday, March 6

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

Just have Faith?

My religious experience started as a Roman Catholic. I went to St Pius (now Holy Spirit academy) from 2nd grade to 8th.

One thing I liked about Catholic school was catechism class. Once a week, a Priest would teach catechism. I think that was my favorite. When the nuns taught they did not seem to be very tolerant of questions; a standard answer from the nuns (what seemed like a standard answer to me at the time) was, “Just have faith.”

The priest on the other hand, it seemed, enjoyed questions. I remember when I was around eight, after asking a group of profound questions, being named “Theologian” by the priest. At the time I thought it was a compliment. Maybe it was?

Ask yourself this; do questions, profound or otherwise have a place in the faith formula, or is faith merely blind belief?

Atheists believe that there is no God.

Agnostics believe that there might not be a God.

Is it a fair statement to say that us Christians start our journey believing there might be a loving God?

If you think about it, all of these beliefs involve questions, if the people professing them are sincere in their conviction.

When Abraham was taking Isaac to sacrifice him, Isaac had a question, but still went willingly onto the altar.

David in Psalm 105 answers the question: Does God love his people?

The author of Hebrews also answers a question: Who needs faith?

Do we have God given abilities to be able to determine Gods will?

Or stated for the atheists, do we have natural abilities to determine what is right?

If we have the ability to question our beliefs and that leads to action, could that be a formula for faith?

Belief + Questions X Action = Faith

Do you in your journey through life find yourself questioning injustice, or things that don't seem right, the status quo?

If so, what should you do?

Maybe that advice of those nuns in Catholic school wasn't so bad after all.

“Just have faith.”

Tom Cashman

Wednesday, March 7

Psalms 105:1-11, 37-45; Jeremiah 30:12-22; John 12:36-43

"I promise, I'll just be a second", "This pill will make you feel fantastic", "Just 30 minutes and all your problems are gone", "If you fix it, I will go to church every week". I know you can add to this list many times over. How many times a day do we hear, or say these empty promises? We know they're empty and yet they just keep coming, and we just keep trying to believe them. Want to hear an unbroken promise? Open the Bible. It is filled with God's many promises, His unbroken covenants to his people - us. What a wonderful God we have that we can count on him to fulfill his promises to us. Praise God! His many acts of love are amazing. I am certainly glad we keep all of our promises to Him! What? Uh, sure, I've kept all my promises to Him! I also have a bridge I'm selling. What's so amazing is that God knows this, and has given us all countless "do-overs", countless opportunities, and, every single time, he has welcomed us back to His light!

Repeat after me: (insert your name here) is a Child of God. I will walk as a Child of the Light.

Have you figured out God's ultimate promise to us yet? Through His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, we will have eternal life. Alleluia!

One of my favorite hymns is *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*.

1. *I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus.*

God set the stars to give light to the world. The star of my life is Jesus.

2. *I want to see the brightness of God. I want to look at Jesus.*

Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path, and show me the way to the Father.

3. *I'm looking for the coming of Christ. I want to be with Jesus.*

When we have run with patience the race, we shall know the joy of Jesus.

Refrain:

In Him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

Diane Slifka

Thursday, March 8

Psalm 19; Exodus 19:1-9a; 1 Peter 2:4-10

In our busy lives we often don't take the time to stop and admire all the things around us that God has made. Verses 1-6 of Psalm 19 discuss how wonderful our universe is. As I read this, I was reminded of a story my son had told me from his 8th grade science class. His teacher had asked the class how the Earth was made. My son raised his hand and said "God made it". What a wonderful feeling to know that my 14 year old had accepted God as his Rock and that especially in today's society, he was not afraid to voice such an opinion in school.

After this conversation, it made me stop and look around not only at the sun (which was out), but at all the wonderful creations around my house. The maple trees in my back yard, my daughter outside playing with friends, even the clip clop of the horses and buggies going up and down my road. All of these things are wonderful creations from God. We need to "stop and smell the roses" more often. In doing so, we can be reminded that the Lord is our cornerstone and Rock in our lives. Through our ministries, albeit shopping for someone, fixing a meal for someone, having my daughter hold the door as for an elderly man as he goes into the store or calling a friend to say hi, we are living our lives following the Lord. Changing how we do things, even simple things or changing how we view things can have a great and positive impact on others. As adults, we need to stop the whirlwind and pay more attention to God's awesome creation.

Amy Fazi



Friday, March 9

Psalm 19; Exodus 19:9b-15; Acts 7:30-40

In Exodus we see the Israelites in the Sinai desert. Moses has gone up the mountain to speak with the Lord. The Lord wants to consecrate all the people. The people were to fast, wash their clothes and prepare themselves for on the third day the Lord would appear in a cloud on the mountain to them. The people were not allowed to go near the mountain or touch it until that time.

Aren't we happy that we do not have to go through all that ritual to see God? If we look, can we not see God in so many ways around us every day?

Psalm 19 is a hymn praising God for creating the universe. Can we not see God in nature every day?

In Acts we read part of Stephen's speech to the council. In Stephen's speech he brings up Moses leading the people out of Egypt and how the people doubted that Moses could be their leader. They would become doubtful when they wandered through the desert for 40 years and Moses went up to the mountain to speak with God. The people became restless when he did not return when they thought he should. We doubt where the Lord is leading us, just as the Israelites doubted the Lord and the Lord appeared to them in the desert. I find that we usually start doubting the Lord when we do not stay connected in the community of believers. We all need to stay part of that community of believers with Bible study, worship and fellowship. If we stay focused on the Lord and not allow our lives to waiver we can see the Lord in the lives of those around us every day. Or we might be the one showing the Lord to someone else. We need to stay focused on the Lord in our Lenten journey.

The Psalm ends with these words: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." Amen.

Judy Detman

Saturday, March 10

Psalm 19; Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8

Psalm 19 - Creation

I look at my 4-year-old grandson and the excitement he has when we get ready for church. The first thing he asks when I pick him up on Saturday morning is “Are we going to church?”

Even though he doesn’t understand the laws of the Lord, he excites in going up to listen to the children’s sermon or taking communion, learning when to fold his hands and say “Amen.” Not knowing yet about the body and blood of Christ.

He doesn’t understand sin. He can’t wait if he gets something new to bring it to church and show it to Pastor Karen, his Sunday School teacher or his buddy Shirley.

I want to teach my grandson as he gets older about the grace of God, and creation. What a wonderful creation God created in my grandson. When he smiles at me, it reminds me of the sun God created. The trees and creeks and nature all around.

He likes to throw stones in the creeks at the park. As he gets older, I can teach him God’s commandments. He’s learning to thank God for what we eat.

Going to church and participating in church activities, he will learn so much about God’s creation.

Take time in your busy schedule and look around to what God created. It’s amazing!

Elaine Allen

Sunday, March 11

Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

In my study Bible, the commandments in this Exodus reading are referred to as a creed, something in which we believe, or as the word *credo* means, trust. We believe or trust in God, therefore we don't make other gods, we don't make wrongful use of God's name, we remember the Sabbath and so on. In this account of the commandments there is no punishment for not keeping them. The gift of God's laws, then, is that they give us a collective guidepost for living out our belief in God. When we say we believe in the Lord, we have no need to murder, because God always brings life. When we trust God to provide all we need, we do not need to steal. Following the commandments becomes a way of life that demonstrates our belief.

Moses told the people that God gave them these laws so that they would not sin. The writer of Psalm 19 reminds us though that "the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul...rejoices the hearts, enlightens the eyes...More to be desired are they than gold." By living out the Lord's decrees, demonstrating our belief in God, the Psalmist says we are given a great reward. Because we cannot keep the Lord's law perfectly, we do not strive for perfection, rather, to attain the reward of a soul that is revived, a rejoicing heart, or enlightened eyes. These gifts are more than gold. In these days of Lent may we focus our attention on what God has done for us by giving us the law.

*Dear God, you are our only God.
Give us the strength to live our belief
in you. Amen.*

Rev. Karen Ullestad



Monday, March 12

Psalm 84; 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22; 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Psalm 84: The writer longed to get away from the bustling world to meet God inside his dwelling place, his holy Temple. We can meet God anywhere, at any time. But we know that going into a church building can help us step aside from the busy mainstream of life so we can quietly meditate and pray. We find joy and strength not only in the prayers, music, lessons, and sermons but also in fellowshiping with other believers in a special place.

The pilgrimage to the Temple passed through the barren Valley of Weeping. No specific valley has been identified. The “weeping” may have been a symbolic reference to the times of struggles and tears through which people must pass on their way to meet God. Growing strong in God’s presence is often preceded by a journey through barren places in our lives. The person who loves to spend time with God will see his or her adversity as an opportunity to re-experience God’s faithfulness. If you are walking through your own Valley of Weeping today, be sure your pilgrimage leads toward God, not away from him.

God doesn’t promise to give us everything we think is good, but he will not withhold what is permanently good. He will give us the means to walk along his paths, but we must do the walking. When we obey him, he will not hold anything back that will help us serve him.

1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22: In honor of God, the Temple in Jerusalem was built without the sound of a hammer or any other tool at the building site. This meant that the stone had to be “prefinished” (cut and shaped) miles away at the quarry. The people’s honor and respect for God extended to every aspect of constructing his house of worship. This detail is recorded not to teach us how to build a church, but to show us the importance of demonstrating care, concern, honor, and respect for God and his sanctuary.

1 Corinthians 3:10-23: The foundation of the church - of all believers - is Jesus Christ. Paul laid this foundation (by preaching Christ) when he began the church of Corinth. Whoever builds the church - officers, teachers, preachers, parents, and others - must build with high-quality materials (right doctrine and right living) that meet God’s standards. Paul is not criticizing Apollo but challenging future church leaders to have sound preaching and teaching.

In the church built on Jesus Christ, each church member should be mature, spiritually sensitive, and doctrinally sound. However, the Corinthian church was filled with those whose work was “wood, hay, and straw,” members who were immature, insensitive to one another, and vulnerable to wrong doctrine. No wonder they had so many problems. Local church members should be deeply committed to Christ. Can your Christian character stand the test?

A building is only as solid as its foundation. The foundation of our life is Jesus Christ; he is our base, our reason for being. Everything we are and do must

fit into the pattern provided by him. Are you building your life on the only real and lasting foundation, or are you building on a faulty foundation, such as wealth, security, success, or fame?

Two sure ways to destroy a building are to tamper with the foundation and to build with inferior materials. The church must be built on Christ, not on any other person or principle. Christ will evaluate each minister's contribution to the life of the church, and judgment day will reveal the sincerity of each person's work. God will determine whether or not a person has been faithful to Jesus' instructions. Good work will be rewarded; unfaithful or inferior work will be discounted. "The builders themselves will be saved, but like someone escaping through a wall of flames" means that unfaithful workers will be saved, but only by the skin of their teeth." All their accomplishments will count for nothing.

Just as our bodies are the "temple of the Holy Spirit", the local church or Christian community is God's temple. Just as the Jews' Temple in Jerusalem was not to be destroyed, the church is not to be spoiled and ruined by divisions, controversy, or other sins as members come together to worship God.

Paul was not telling the Christian believers to neglect the pursuit of knowledge. He was warning them not to glory in the wisdom of the age. God's way of thinking is far above ours; he knows all the futile thoughts of the "wise". The Corinthians were boasting about the wisdom of their leaders and teachers. Their pride made them value the messenger more than the message. We are not to put our trust in anyone but God.

Paul says that both life and death are ours. While nonbelievers are victims of life, swept along by its current and wondering if there is meaning to it, believers can use life well because they understand its true purpose. Nonbelievers can only fear death. For believers, however, death holds no terrors because Christ has conquered all fears. Death is only the beginning of eternal life with God. *Life Application Study Bible.*

Rosa Garnett



Tuesday, March 13

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

In trying to find a pattern in these three passages of Scripture that would apply to the Lenten season, I could only decide, first, upon the beauty of God's Church (his temple) in Psalm 84 and, second, on the restoration of the temple from ruin and idolatry. All of this, however, was more than completed by the coming of Jesus as pointed out in the Hebrews verses.

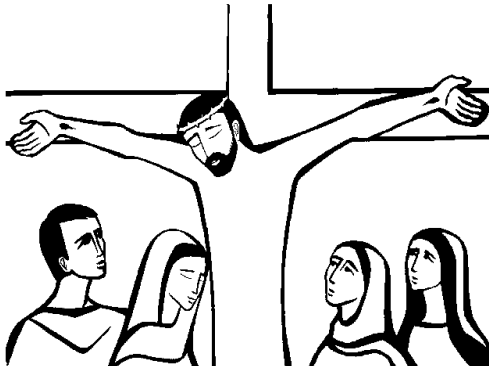
After a second study of all three Bible passages, I discovered one central theme. This consists of just one word: "sacrifice." The animal sacrifices in the temple as well as the various ceremonies and rituals at the altar were means of keeping the law and obtaining forgiveness of sin each time sacrifices were made.

In Hebrews, however, we learn that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, sacrificed himself once for our sin and for the sins of the whole world. This has become the very key of our Christian life.

All of our life we should be conscious of the great blessing given to us freely by Jesus in his suffering, death and resurrection. He has also given to us a clear picture of his Father, the God of steadfast love, of justice and mercy and of glory and power.

During Lent as we remember the passion and death of the Father's greatest gift of his Son, let us sacrifice ourselves and our desires and put into practice our motto to "Reach out, Reflect Christ and Renew lives" as we seriously direct our own personal lives into prayerful, humble and repentant ways.

Norm Braun



Wednesday, March 14

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

That we should love God to the exclusion of all and any idols; that we should love our brethren on earth as we love ourselves.....these two things are inherent in our beings as saved sinners who acknowledge God's Grace as a gift we can never merit.

To know this.....more importantly, to *live* this....will imbue us with a stature no less than any Saint; any biblical scholar; or any prophet, in God's eyes.

Our "brethren" necessarily includes all of humankind. *Including the "least of these"*. It is interesting to note, in this passage of the Gospel of Mark, that Jesus, the Son of God, enters Jerusalem willingly, acknowledged by happy throngs as the "blessed one", who "comes in the name of the Lord"... knowing full well what was in store for him some scant days later. Yet he exhibits this glorious status not with royal robes or carriage, but with donated clothes, carried on a borrowed ass's colt, having crossed the river beforehand in a borrowed boat, and having eaten the Passover in a borrowed chamber, knowing that his mortal remains will eventually be placed in a borrowed sepulchre. Thus, the King of Kings underlines the importance of minding not the "high things", but rather the meager status of the adoring throngs.

Yet his power and supreme knowledge are evident. He calls for the colt to be brought to him from the place he alone among his followers knows it to be waiting. He easily mounts a colt that has never been "backed" a feat any other man present would consider foolhardy at best and dangerous at least.

Jesus is notably angry in this passage. The anger here is not that of the impatience throughout Scripture he could often express with verbiage such as "know ye not?" or "truly, I say to you that....." The anger here is *physically* acted out. Jesus bodily scatters the money of the money-changers to the ground, and upends the tables of the sellers of doves and oxen, which the managers of the temple rent to vendors to profit from those who come to worship via sacrifice. For the temple has ceased to become a house of prayer, and has been compromised in its holy purpose of worship by being permitted by the church officials to be a market place and a public thoroughfare. Jesus beholds that the leaders of this church had, in fact, granted "easements" through the property of the Lord, allowing the commerce of the citizenry to be transported in parcels and packages over and through it like freight along a tollway.

Jesus is emphatic when he reminds observers: "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have turned it into a den of robbers!"

"Robbery".....of *whom?* Those being "robbed" here are not individuals who might be short-changed at a money-table, or of travelers forced to relinquish their own doves and to purchase instead "officially sanctioned" temple doves for sacrifice, but rather, ANY individual having genuine faith that

“whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved” It is sufficient in God’s eyes that a person of *any* nation having such faith be permitted without reservation, restriction, or qualification to offer prayer and praise in God’s temple.

Sacrifices and offerings such as oxen or doves have no place in God’s temple. Rather, sacrifices and offerings of **prayer and praise** are the only “legal tender” anyone, however meager of means or humble in social stature, needs to express their love of God and of each other.

Money and merchandise are finite. God’s love for us is not. As such, one who truly has faith in the Grace of God is rich beyond measure, and will share in God’s Kingdom all the more with each act of forgiveness, mercy and charity bestowed upon his neighbor.

Steve Dobush



Thursday, March 15

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

In Ephesians 1:3-6, the Apostle Paul calls for a blessing upon God our Father in return for the spiritual blessings God has bestowed upon us. He talks about the depth of God's love for us, stating "he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ." Paul makes it clear - we are all God's "chosen ones".

Being a mother of three children, two through adoption, I find special meaning in this verse. As his adopted children, God assures us that we are His – fully, completely, and unconditionally. The children of his heart. Children who are destined to be part of his ultimate plan.

Over thirty years ago I became a mother through adoption to a 17 month old. As I rocked him to sleep that first night, I marveled at the miracle of it all – feeling his little arms wrapped around me, the warmth of his tiny, trusting body, the soft, black curls touching my chin. I knew that he was mine – fully, completely and unconditionally. The child of my heart.

Over the next few years, six more children were adopted into families of Covenant and into the hearts of the congregation. The people of Covenant accepted them fully, completely and unconditionally. We watched them grow, rejoicing in their baptisms, their confirmations, their graduations and the unique gifts each one brought and brings to Covenant. And in our love, we gathered to grieve the loss of one who was committed to the eternal care of our Father. All children of our hearts.

The path to adulthood is rarely smooth and there are special challenges for those to come to a family through adoption. Children may struggle with identity issues, wondering: "Who am I?" "Where do I belong?" "Am I just as special as a birth child?" Although parents know the answers to these questions, they must patiently help their children grow into an understanding that they are indeed ours – fully, completely, and unconditionally.

As the "adopted" children of God, we may have the same struggle with Christian identity. We may ask, "Who am I?" "Where do I belong?" "Am I really special to God?" As a "parent", God knows the answers but he patiently waits and guides us into the knowledge that we are truly His – fully, completely, and unconditionally.

Scripture is the "blessed assurance" of many things. We are assured of God's love for us, whether poor or rich, black or white, adult or child. We are assured of God's ultimate plan for us – to share in resurrection and new life. We are assured that we are God's "chosen ones" through adoption as his children through Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God our Father!

Daralynn Constant

Friday, March 16

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

These readings tell of people who are confused, in trouble, and at their wit's end. One interpretation of Psalm 107 that I read talks about four different "kinds" of people that call out to God in their despair. People who are hurting, who are frantic and restless seeking security; those who are slaves to some sort of sin; those who are hopeless and ready to quit; and those who think that things are going pretty well when suddenly there is an unexpected tragedy that sets their lives upside down. I have fit into each of these categories (sometimes even all at the same time), and I am pretty sure that each of you have as well. The common thread is that at some point no matter what the trouble we call out to God for His loving kindness and mercy for support and answers.

Each of these readings also offers comfort and help, no matter what "category" of problem. God gives each of us his undivided attention. He is always there to listen to each of us. Calling on Him is not a burden to Him, taking our troubles to Him is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign that we love and trust in Him. He is the light at the end of our tunnel and darkness and despair. When you are at your wit's end remember that God fixes broken people, He uses them to do his work, and promises them everlasting life. This is ours for the asking.

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

Barb Gaglione



Saturday, March 17

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

Having been a member of Covenant for over twenty-one years, I can attest to the fact that this congregation is great at shouting praises to the Lord. This congregation has gone through trials, losses, grief and battles and it has never ceased to praise the Lord! We have also celebrated our triumphs and blessings. We accomplished miracle Sunday where we raised a tremendous amount of money to keep the physical building up and running. We have effortlessly raised money to paint and install new tile in the Sanctuary. More recently we have easily acquired the funds to tile the Parish Hall and put up a new curtain for the stage. These are all great accomplishments and great praises to the Lord. And all of these achievements were accomplished by people who have overcome great difficulties in their lives and still show up each Sunday to praise the Lord for all the wonderful things He has done for them.

But what I see in Psalm 107 is a Lord who keeps rescuing His people out of love and patience. He is a forgiving Lord who will save His people from the deepest troubles. And yet, I detect sadness from this Lord as he keeps rescuing people who seem to miss the point. He keeps digging his followers of trouble and they praise Him, but do they really praise Him thoroughly? Do we at Covenant sing His praises to our community? Or, do we just praise the Lord to each other? Do we shout for joy to those who do not experience God's love so that they too may learn to celebrate God's love?

We are definitely on the right track with recent developments in our outreach. At the farmer's market we saw members of this community come together to share a wonderful time of fellowship and love. It took great sacrifice for the members of the Vision for the Future Committee to plan and implement the market each and every week during the summer. Was it hard work? Yes. Did the benefits outweigh the sacrifice? You bet! We are at last opening up the doors of our wonderful church and inviting the members of the community to experience the joy that the Lord has given us.

*"Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy."*

Mary Kaye Bernardo

Sunday, March 18

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

John 3:14-15

Remember the Whiners? They were a fictional comical couple that was featured on Saturday Night Live back in the 80's. They spoke with irritating nasal tones and complained about everything. They were never happy. Both suffered from diverticulitis and could only eat macaroni and cheese. It was the family you loved to hate.

The Israelites in the reading from Numbers could have very well been the basis for the Whiners characters. After having been freed from slavery in Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and spent a great deal of time grumbling. They spoke out against Moses and against God.

"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." (Numbers 21:5)

An exasperated God sent a bunch of poisonous snakes to bite the people and many died. When they noticed how angry God had become, they went to Moses and asked him to speak to God so he would take away the snakes. However, God asked Moses to put a poisonous serpent on a pole so that everyone who looked at the serpent should live. Notice that God did not take the snakes away, but simply offered the Israelites an antidote, a remedy.

It is human nature to whine, to find fault, to complain. We often say things we later regret. The children of Israel had all they needed but still complained. As children of God, we have so much to be thankful for, not the least of which is the gift of salvation through the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We, too, have been freed from slavery – to sin and death. If anyone had who had plenty to grumble about, it was Jesus. But instead he went uncomplaining to his death, so that we might live.

Let us cease and desist from wandering in the wilderness of grumbling. Instead, let us celebrate in the promised land of thankfulness, trusting and believing in Christ, that we may live in the light of God's grace.

*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!
Evangelical Lutheran Worship #733*

Rev. Abraham D. Allende

Monday, March 19

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

As I began reading Hebrews 3:1-6, I felt humbled and honored. “Therefore brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling,” Each one of us is part of a faithful community and each one is responsible to share the good news. Just as God chose Moses to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land, God has chosen us. I am not placing myself in the same category as Moses, but God chose me. He chose you. We are servants of the Lord. None of us is perfect, but we should try to have our words and deeds reflect our love for God.

I love to sit in my sunroom. I am sitting here now, putting my thoughts down on paper. The writer of Hebrews states “...the builder of the house has more honor than the house itself.” I would not have this room to read, think, have a cup of coffee with my husband, and look out at God’s creation without the builder. Without Christ, I would have nothing. He is the builder of all things. I am blessed to have his love each day of my life. As my six-year-old granddaughter says, “Why wouldn’t everyone believe in God? He gives us everything we have!”

Betty Schuette



Tuesday, March 20

Psalm 107:1-16; Numbers 20:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

Wilderness

As a young boy growing up in Bedford, Ohio, I had the opportunity to experience the outdoors. In a place we called the Glens. It was actually Bedford reservation now a part of the Cleveland Metroparks.

To an 8 year old boy it was the wilderness. In those days 8 year olds could roam around in the woods and nobody would bat an eye. I would usually go with a friend or one of my nephews.

We would pack a lunch in our knapsacks (that's what we called backpacks back then), and we would head for the wilderness. Now this wilderness we would hike through was only a number of square miles, but to us it was full of adventure.

When I grew up and married, my wife and I stayed in the Bedford area, when my kids were old enough I introduced them to the adventure of the "Glens" wilderness.

The three lessons for today all address life in the wilderness and I can to a degree relate to them.

The thankfulness of Psalm 107 I felt after a vigorous day of hiking the Glens to finally get home to rest and relax. From Numbers 20 I can also relate to the frustration of not having enough water, I remember hiking the Glens on a hot summer afternoon after drinking all the water in my canteen.

The problem I have with 1 Corinthians 10 is what seems to be a constant attitude of complaining from the people of God.

God had provided manna from Heaven, he had provided cooling water from a rock and yet the chosen people, still could not appreciate the beauty of the wilderness. Now I'm not saying that my small experience with the "Glens" wilderness could compare to walking around in the dessert for 40 years. I am saying that those ancient Hebrews as well as you and I, should maybe stop and smell the roses. Enjoy some things that maybe we didn't plan to do. When things don't seem to be going right, or as we would like them to, to go with the flow, to see the good, to take that lemon and make lemonade.

Maybe the wilderness in our lives have been put there as a learning experience by our Father.

I know that when I was leading my kids around in the Glens I was trying to make it a learning experience for them. Maybe it was?

Tom Cashman

Wednesday, March 21

Psalm 107:1-16; Isaiah 60:15-22; John 8:12-2

Psalm 107:1-16: Psalm 107 is about giving thanks to the Lord for deliverance from many troubles. The Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever. Some were lost and cried out to the Lord. He led them in a straight way until they reached an inhabited town. They thanked God for his wonderful works for he satisfies the thirsty and the hungry. Some were prisoners who had to do hard labor. God brought them out of darkness and gloom by shattering the doors & setting them free.

Isaiah 60:15-22: This passage is about the Israelites; whereas they have been forsaken and hated – God will make them majestic forever. He will appoint Peace as their overseer and righteousness as their taskmaster. Violence will no longer be heard in their land, nor devastation or destruction and. he tells them the Lord will be their everlasting light. The least of them shall become a clan and the smallest one a mighty nation, for he is the Lord and he will accomplish it quickly.

John 8:12-20: Again Jesus spoke to them saying "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Then the Pharisees said to him "You are testifying on your own behalf and it is not valid". Jesus replies "My testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going. It is not I alone who judge but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two is valid. You know neither me nor my Father." No one arrested him because his hour had not yet come.

This is my outcome from reading these passages in the bible: Why worry? If we believe in God's love and ask him for help when we need it, He will be there to help us.

Shirley Jenkins

Thursday, March 22

Psalm 51:1-12; Isaiah 30:15-18; Hebrews 4:1-13

In this passage of Hebrews, God has promised us rest. What kind of rest and what is necessary for it? I look forward to rest at the end of a day, sometimes in the middle of the day. I have worked hard whether it is physically, emotionally, or mentally. It does not matter what kind of work it is. You need time to rest. Even God rested after the work of creation. He created the universe in six days and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

The Israelites were to enter their rest, the Promised Land. They heard the good news, but did not have faith in the message. God asked them to return to him, in order to be saved, but they put their trust in other gods. That generation did not enter the Promised Land. They were unworthy to enter the rest that was planned for them. It was the next generation, under Joshua's leadership, to enter the land of Canaan, the Promised Land.

God is still offering us the true rest, eternal rest. As faithful Christians, we will finish our work here on earth and share in God's peace and rest forever. We will be in eternal communion with God and His chosen people. We should be eager to enter this rest. The reading concludes by telling us that God's word is living and active. It exposes our inner thoughts and intentions. In addition, God knows what is in our hearts. We may hide things from other people, but not from God. We are held accountable to God. Our works do not earn us the right to eternal rest. However, as Christians and people who have faith in God, we want to share the good news through our words and deeds. We are Christ's hands.

To me, the message is summarized with the words of the hymn, "Come Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove". Lead us to Christ, the living way, Nor let us fret from his pastures stray; Lead us to holiness, the road That we must take to dwell with God. Lead us to heav'n, that we may share Fullness of joy forever there; Lead us to our eternal rest, To be with God forever blest.

Betty Schuette

Friday, March 23

Psalm 51:1-12; Exodus 30:1-10; Hebrews 4:14—5:4

Psalm 51 reminds me that God's forgiveness and mercy are limitless. No sin is too great to be forgiven, however, we always need to acknowledge and confess to our sins. Asking God for a clean heart and a right spirit.

The Lord wants us to be close to him and live a blessed life. Unconfessed sin prevents us from having an intimate relationship with God. All sin is hurtful to us and others. It is also an offense to God.

In the Psalm King David is asking forgiveness for his adultery with Bathsheba and for arranging to have her husband killed. His prayer was heard and the sins forgiven but he still had to face the natural consequences from that sin.

God will always show mercy to those who sincerely seek it but we also have to live with the results of our actions. We should always remember this when we feel the pull of temptation.

Desiree Barber



Saturday, March 24

Psalm 51:1-12; Habakkuk 3:2-13; John 12:1-11

These verses (Psalm 51:1-12), are about our sins and asking to be cleansed of them by asking God's forgiveness. We, at least I do, seem to be always asking for forgiveness in my personal prayers. Forgiveness seems to always be at the top of the list. Some days I think, am I not good enough? Do I think that too many of my sins maybe are not really a sins, but maybe just a severe criticism of myself? Why? We tithe, go to our respective churches and worship, we work hard on committees, we help friends and family. Where might have we gone astray, we might ask of ourselves. Sometimes we want to be in control. We judge others. We have some thoughts that God would not like. Are we always aware of all our sins? It is true that we can make poor choices, but we know the good news of the gospel that God loves us and is willing to forgive.

Above all we must never forget that we can ask God's mercy to forgive our sins. (v7) We ask God to purge us of our sins and we shall be whiter than snow. God will not cast us away but will always keep us in his loving arms. We must always be reminded of God's never ending and overpowering love for us.

Psalm 51:10: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Ken Detman



Sunday, March 25

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

It just wasn't going to work. No matter how much God tweaked it the old covenant just wasn't going to cut it anymore. The deal was that God promised to be the Israelites' God with all the attendant blessings and great promises of power, wealth, fortune, fame, and privilege; if the Israelites would do their part by obeying God's law. God kept his part of the bargain. The Israelites had issues. Behind all the excuses and subterfuges, the problem turns out to be the very nature of law itself. People hate laws. We don't want to be told what, when, or how to do anything. At heart we feel that we know better than the law giver. We want to be our own law giver. We want to be our own god. It started with Adam and Eve and has gone on right up until you and me in our day. This rebellious activity is called sin.

Jeremiah knew all this. He was no dummy. Jeremiah longed for the day that God would scrap the old covenant and strike a new bargain. This dreamy new deal would be unlike the old one. The old covenant was written on stone tablets. The new one would be written within us, on our hearts if you will. In other words, obedience to God would be internally motivated. People would love God and do the right thing just because it was the right thing to do. Right behavior would be part of people's new nature. Just like good apples naturally come from good apple trees, so God-pleasing behavior would naturally happen from this new nature. People would no longer need to be threatened with a beating or bribed with rewards to do the right thing. Under the new covenant right behavior would just naturally happen from love of God to love of neighbor.

God certainly knew all this. He also knew that this new covenant would come about only at a great price. It would involve him in the greatest injustice ever committed. The Father would have to send his only begotten son into the world to die for us sinners. In other words, God had to have his son murdered for us. Can you imagine? I am repulsed by the story of God calling Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice for sin. Fortunately for Abraham and Isaac, God intervened at the last second with an angel who stays Abraham's hand. Lately I have come to see this story as the model for God's introduction of the new covenant. God the Father would sacrifice his son to institute the new covenant just as Father Abraham was called to sacrifice his son in the old. The only difference being there was no angel to mercifully stay Pilate's hand - only an angel to strengthen Jesus in his resolve to suffer death for us. Jesus knew that only if a single grain of wheat dies can it bear much fruit. His death ushers in Jeremiah's long sought new covenant. We are called to follow Jesus in faith in God and to be those grains of wheat that bear fruit in loving service to one another.

Rev. Harry Werner

Monday, March 26

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

Psalm 119:8-13: How can a young man keep his way pure? By studying God's word and keeping it in his heart as Mary treasured all the things the shepherds talked about in her heart. We too must keep God's words hidden in our hearts so as we witness to others, we can do so more readily. Finding time to read God's word and to pray should be done early in the morning upon arising. This is as important as taking care of our physical body with diet and exercise.

In Isaiah 43:8-13, God tells us through the prophet Isaiah that he is God and he is our creator and he has redeemed us. The Lord says because of his death and resurrection all people will be saved when they hear the good news.

In Corinthians 3:4-11, Paul, who was a missionary, went through so much for the cause of Christ, traveled from Africa into Europe teaching and preaching the good news of salvation, encouraging the churches, deacons, women, teachers, preachers, those who the Holy Ghost gave gifts. We are to love one another as Christ has loved the church by giving his life for us. Whatever our background, no matter our humble beginnings, we may be strengthened by the holy communion. Adopt one person, who may be struggling with his faith because of loss of a loved one, a wayward child or personal illness. Pray for them until you hear and realize that prayer changes things.

Gloria Coleman

Editor's note: When asked what she would like in her biographical sketch, Gloria said she wants EVERYONE to know God performs miracles because she herself is living proof. During an illness several months ago, she was in a coma and her children were coming upon the time to make decisions for her final days. Her daughter called in the members of her congregation and they had a prayer circle. Pastor Allende came to visit, and the Covenant congregation prayed for her as well. Gloria surprised and delighted her doctors by coming out of the coma and regaining her health. Every physical struggle she encounters is met with prayer to God for strength and healing. She spends her time at the nursing home, where she lives, bearing witness to the power of the Lord and sharing her light and love with everyone she meets.

Tuesday, March 27

Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 44:1-8; Acts 2:14-24

This Psalm made me think about the world today. Our society is drowning in messages that celebrate greed and selfishness and instant gratification. Television, printed ads, even politics – there’s no escaping it. How am I gonna get mine? How can I get my hands on the best? How can I be the prettiest/thinnest/strongest.

Our society is searching for something fulfilling, but doesn’t realize that the things it chooses to consume merely intensifies its hunger. We think our bodies are craving something sweet, so we eat candy and chocolate, when in reality our bodies are craving the nutrition found in sweet fruits and vegetables. The “good stuff” in life isn’t found at the mall, or in the DVR machine, or in a bottle. We can’t eat it out of a plastic bag or wear it on our bodies.

My daughters are coming upon the age of being highly susceptible to these misguided messages. Almost all the shows on the Disney XD channel depict teens endeavoring to become rock stars. Where’s Doogie Howser when you need him? The High School Musical trilogy showed defeat of the flashy, superficial, selfish girl in preference for the sweet, wholesome, smart girl, but she only found happiness when she dated the cute boy and sang on stage with him. Clearly I need to work harder to provide my daughters with role models who provide service to others; who pursue dreams other than fame and fortune and the perfect outfit.

⁹ How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word....

¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.

¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

They are still a little young to know how to “meditate on God’s precepts” but they are observant and eager to follow the example of others. This is why I am deliberate about bringing them to Covenant – to expose them to the crowd of people with eyes fixed on the ways of God. I want them shoulder-to-shoulder with the people who put others ahead of themselves and give of their time and talents without looking for glory or riches. Keep their way pure by guarding it... being deliberate about what my little sponges are allowed to soak up.

Jen Garberich

Wednesday, March 28

Psalm 119:9-16; Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23; John 12:34-50

Belief Has Its Own Rewards

Psalm 119:9-16 is a prayer to God, the lawgiver. It shows an appreciation for God's willingness to be involved in human life by directing and guiding it. Rather than seeing God's Laws as difficult law codes, they should be seen as: instructions and promises to be delighted in, believed in, treasured in the heart, and cherished above all riches.

Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23 deals with the postexilic Jews who gloomily contrasted the former magnificence of Solomon's temple to the rebuilding of the second temple. Haggai foretells to the governor of Judah and the high priest, to believe that the future glory of the new temple would surpass that of Solomon's. "Greater will be the future glory of this house than the former, says the Lord of Hosts." (Haggai 2:9) Belief in the future of this temple carries a strong messianic message. The second temple's greatness comes from the fact that Christ will enter this one.

John 12:34-50 contends with disbelief. Although Jesus had performed many signs, many did not believe in him. Isaiah had encountered disbelief in his own time and foreshadowed it for Jesus. Jesus implores his listeners to come out of the darkness and into the light, and believe. "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me." (John 12:44-45)

Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it. But whoever rejects Jesus, and does not believe, does not believe in God, and will be judged. Believe in God and His instructions and let Jesus enter through the temple gates of your heart. You will hold in your heart more magnificence and splendor than all of Solomon's temple.

Linda Wright

Thursday, March 29

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

God's Plan – A Packaged Deal

God has always helped His people, and the appropriate response from the people should be gratitude. Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 is a victory procession giving thanks to God for His help in overcoming enemies. Several verses are significant in that they foretell the future of Christ. The cornerstone of the temple refers to the death and resurrection of Christ. "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." (Ps.118:22) The next verses are similar to the people's cry for Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem that we know as Palm Sunday. "Lord, grant salvation! Lord, grant good fortune! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the Lord's house." (Ps. 118:25-26). (My Bible footnoted that "Lord, grant salvation" was translated into English from the Hebrew as "Hosanna.")

Deuteronomy 16:1-8 is an instruction from God on how to observe the Feast of Passover. This reading is a good Segway between Psalm 119 and Philippians 2. Psalm 118 foretells the future of Christ, but, before his resurrection and after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had to become the sacrificial Passover lamb. The Passover Feast changed into the institution of Holy Communion/the Eucharist, with Christ as the Paschal Lamb. The perfect sacrifice to atone for mankind's sins was the Lamb of God. Jesus said, "Take and eat, this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28)

The Passover Feast is now the Holy Communion/Eucharist. Passover commemorates the escape of the Jews from Egypt through God's intervention. The Holy Communion/Eucharist commemorates Jesus' atonement for all of mankind for sin through God's intervention. Both ceremonies are in honor and in gratitude to the one true God for what He has done for His peoples. (Side note: Eucharist comes from the Greek "*eukharistia*" meaning gratitude, and "*eukharistes*" meaning grateful.

If it is confusing for us to understand the role of Jesus being the Paschal Lamb, and the concept of Jesus' divinity and humanity; imagine how confusing it was for the people of Jesus' time. The soldiers and guards came to arrest Jesus. Jesus asked them "for whom are you looking?" They answered him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I AM." Judas, his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, "I AM," they turned away and fell to the ground. (John 18:5-6) (Side note: "I am" in late Jewish tradition was understood to be God's own self-designation and used in Isaiah 43:10, John 4:26, 8:24)

While we may have trouble understanding Jesus' role, God didn't. God had a perfect service plan to be carried out by the Servant of the Lord, Jesus. When we buy a service or goods, we want everything included, or bundled, or a

packaged deal. That leads us to Philippians 2:1-11 that tells us that Jesus was willing to give up his divinity in order to serve in human form. God needed the perfect Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. God was going to have the original “deal of a lifetime.” There would be no returns, no warranties needed, and no mistakes. This would be the perfect one-time atonement done with the most perfect bloodshed. Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

Jesus was the packaged deal to atone for our sins. He was: human and divine; innocent but accused; sinless but punished; King of Kings and slave; and high priest and slaughtered lamb. “Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

Linda Wright



Friday, March 30

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

*Give Thanks to the Lord our God and King
His Love endures forever
For He is good, He is above all things
His love endures forever
Sing praise, sing praise,
Sing praise sing praise*

Psalm 118 set to music by Christian Artist Chris Tomlin

I know what you're thinking: "Always a song with her". Well...yeah, because "the Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation" (Psalm 118:13-14). These quintessential words of David are strong with reassurance for all of us. This Psalm is rich with memorable verses; especially the reference to Jesus in the Gospel "The stone which the builders rejected as become the chief corner stone, echoed in the familiar hymn, "Christ is our Cornerstone". Another great song is "This is the Day which the Lord has made; we will be rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). I love the myriad ways which David gives us to praise the Lord in this Psalm. Before verse 14, David who intensely struggled with mental illness says to his enemies (and Satan): "You pushed, that I might fall, but the Lord helped me".

In Jeremiah 33: 6, God says to Jeremiah (and all of us) "Behold I will bring it (the houses and king's houses of Judah) health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth". This is a tribute of remembrance to my former husband, Pastor Eric Norgard, an incredibly compassionate, dedicated, funny, Pastor with a brilliant mind who preached the Gospel solidly and had a (second) wife and two young daughters. I found out a week ago from the Obituaries in "The Lutheran Magazine, that he committed suicide on November 19, 2011. For a week I grieved deeply and Pastor Allende loaned me a beneficial book, "Good Grief!" and my home Pastor Dale Krueger counseled me.

We had 11 years together and lots of memories surfaced. Friday, February 3, God broke my grief and I felt better. When I awoke from my "cat nap" with the cat next to me; I saw a large cloud shaped like a fish with an eye, against a clear blue sky. A few minutes later, "Everything little thing she does is magic...I ask her to marry me a hundred times a day," a song that we used to dance to (I recalled his wild, funky dancing with those clear-soled "goldfish" shoes on) popped up suddenly and has become a "musical loop." Fifteen minutes later as I was walking to the library, I noticed the same cloud had morphed into a goldfish shape with fins. I had to laugh and it was as if Eric was telling me: "I see what a great job you're doing, remember the good times". But I was reassured that Eric was in heaven. Sometimes this is how God works. But

always; He is gracious and merciful to us and always loves us.

Paul tells the Philippian community of Christ and us to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) and to “do all things without murmuring and disputing” (no, you can’t even dispute about where particular Christmas decorations are stored!) that you (we) may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the Word of Life so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run or labored in vain”....(Phil. 2: 15-16).

I remember a banner in front at my home church that boldly stated “Forty Days to Grow in Faith.” So we pray more and give up something we treasure for Lent, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but most importantly; faithfulness to God and try our best to “shine as lights in the world.”

Linda Richter



Saturday, March 31

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

The lesson here for me is *faith*....expressed in this reading at two important levels:

The Apostles-- They "were afraid" as they followed Jesus, who boldly strode in front of them. He took 'the twelve' aside and related to them, in a matter-of-fact way, what indeed was in store for him as they continued "up" to Jerusalem. They had been following him with the understandable, but erroneous, expectation that in Jesus, their Messiah had come.....however, he actually was *going*. He would not conquer the Romans in his mortal life span, and they, as his lieutenants, would not be subordinate governors in any lands to be conquered by Him. They were aware of the enmity of the Jewish hierarchy for Him and of the probable treachery which awaited Him. (His relation to them of what awaited was "matter-of-fact" in nature for good reason.....It constituted the third reference to his crucifixion in Scripture. Thus, as observant Jews, they should not have been surprised.)

And yet, they still followed. They followed on through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem.



The Blind Beggar-- i.e., Bartimaeus, whose lot in life was one of long misery, subject to the caprice of passing strangers for his sustenance as a blind beggar confined to the side of the dusty road; whose value to the world could be described as less than that of a mile-marker, (as mile-markers do not beg for change).

But he could 'see' what many around him could not. Hearing that Jesus was among the throng he could sense filing slowly past him, he "saw" several things:

He saw that, this Jesus, of whose feats of healing he had heard from his station along the road, was not a frequent traveler along this road, and that, if he wanted to avail himself of any chance at healing, he had to *act*.

He saw that, due to his position, he would have to call out to be heard...indeed to "shout" in his plea for "Jesus" to "have mercy on me!"

He saw that, when chastised by "many" who "sternly ordered him to be quiet", that he would have to yell "even more loudly" if he was to have any hope at all of being healed. He saw who was important and did not heed those who scorned him.

And when at last heard and called to by Jesus, he threw off his cloak, baring the entirety of his misery for all to see. Jesus asked him: "What do you want me to do for you?", and he responded 'matter-of-factly': "My teacher, let me see again" Jesus responded: "Go, your faith has made you well"

Note that Jesus did not say "Follow me". Bartimaeus regained his sight immediately, and though he was under no constraint to do anything, he "followed" Jesus "on the way."

There are none so blind as those who will *not* see. We do not need eyes to recognize the power of prayer in speaking to God and expressing our recognition of his Grace.

Steve Dobush

Sunday, April 1

Sunday of the Passion

**Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16;
Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1—15:47**

In our lessons today, we hear of the suffering of God's people brought on by the enemy. That enemy takes different forms throughout the life of God's people. The enemy may be those who oppose God's word, or the sin in our own lives. Sickness and death set up barriers to our relationship with God. The texts in Isaiah and the Psalm depict how the enemy affects us. We are the "scorn of our adversaries, a horror to my neighbors" (Ps. 31). "They pull out the beard, they strike the back, they insult and spit on Israel (Is 50). In the passion account we see how Jesus was mocked, beaten, and nailed to a cross in the face of his enemies. Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

However, none of the writers stops at the cruelty of life, the agony of sin. "But I trust in you, O Lord. I say, 'You are my God'" (Ps.31). "The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced...I know I shall not be put to shame" (Is. 50). When Jesus humbled himself to the slavery of the cross, God highly exalted him (Phil 2). And of course, the story of Jesus' death does not end with him in the tomb.

These are words of confidence when we acknowledge the enemy around and in us. No matter how strong the enemy is, God is present to give us strength, to keep us from disgrace, to raise us up from our tomb. As we begin the holiest of weeks when we celebrate God's activity through Jesus Christ, our words can sing like Isaiah's, "therefore I know that I shall not be put to shame." Through Jesus' obedience even to death, the power of our enemies has been destroyed. So then, we can join with every tongue that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord.

All powerful God, make your presence known in our suffering, in our conflict with the enemy. Give us the humility to empty ourselves for others so that they may stand in the confidence of your grace. Amen.

Rev. Karen Ullestad

Monday, April 2

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

God's Crime Drama

Some of our most popular television shows are the crime dramas. Some of the highest-rated contemporary shows are: Criminal Minds; NCIS; CSI with various locations; Bones; and reruns of the various Law and Order series. Today's readings follow closely to the Law and Order format: a crime is committed; the guilty are revealed; and they go through the court system.

All crime dramas have a similar storyline as do today's readings: you have the good guys and the bad guys. As the plot unfolds, someone loves someone else, but there's usually deceit and betrayal. The plot thickens with greed, thievery, and/or murder plots. Then there's the dilemma of how to go about solving the crime. A good crime drama will have many twists and turns which leaves one wondering who is the guilty party. Forensic evidence and D.N.A. have become the heroes of crime dramas in that they solve the crime, and you know who is responsible. The case is then taken to the court system where justice is sought. If the defendant is found guilty, the judge will hand down an appropriate sentence.

God is the Original Judge, and administrator of justice. As in any crime drama, God wants to see justice served. God wants to love and protect mankind; but, He also recognizes that sinfulness is mankind's natural state due to original sin and therefore lacking a state of grace. God acknowledges that despite every person being sinful, there are two types of humans: those who trust in the Lord and do good; and the evil-doers who do wrong. (Ps. 3:1-3). God promises to the "good guys" of the human race that He will make justice dawn like the noonday light and delight in peace, while evildoers will exist no more (Ps. 36:6-11).

God knew that He would have to send help to mankind in order to seek justice. Isaiah foretells that help is coming in the form of the Servant of the Lord (our Redeemer, the Nazarene – both human and divine): "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations." (Is. 42:1). God is seeking justice on several levels. First, He loves mankind, but mankind has inherited the crime of committing sin against God in the original sin. God will need atonement for original sin. Secondly, God is seeking justice (for those who trust the Lord and do good) from the evil-doers.

Jesus was amidst evil-doers when he had supper with Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. It was six days before Passover. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered in a council to plan to put Jesus to death. Jesus dined with Lazarus at Mary and Martha's home, at which crowds gathered to see both Jesus and Lazarus. Many of the Jews began to leave the chief priests and believe in Jesus because of Lazarus being raised from the dead. For this reason, the chief priests planned on killing Lazarus also. In the midst of all this, Judas Iscariot, who was about to betray Jesus, complained when Mary anointed Jesus

with precious ointment, that the ointment should have been sold with the money going to the poor. Judas didn't care about the poor, but was a thief, and would take what was put in the purse (John 12:1-11).

The plot has thickened, and God still wants to love and protect us while seeking justice. How can God reconcile Himself with mankind? God needed a one-time perfect atonement for mankind's sinful nature. Mankind needed to make amends for its sins. There had to be a sin offering and without the shedding of blood there would be no forgiveness. No animal blood of goats and calves or ashes of heifers could atone for mankind's sins. Only the unblemished Christ who was both equally human and divine could shed His blood as the perfect one-time atonement as both high priest and sacrificial victim (Heb. 9:11-15).

God had now solved how to reconcile Himself with mankind which was brought about by Christ. Like most crime dramas, we now know who the perpetrators were and who the victim was. Unlike Earthly courts, however, God as Judge would totally twist and turn everything upside down. In seeking justice, God did not indict, condemn, or incarcerate all of us (mankind) that sinned against Him. Instead, He set us free from the law and sin. In crime dramas, it is the blood, forensics or D.N.A. that convicts the guilty, but in this case, it was Christ's blood which proved that it was the innocent who were responsible. It was Christ's innocent blood, pure and unblemished, both human and divine, that God found both acceptable and atoning.

And yet another twist, God took this crime drama and turned it into a love story for the human race. "I, the Lord have called you for a victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness." (Is. 42:6-7) God loved us so much that He gave us all D.N.A.: the Divine Nazarene's Atonement.

Linda Wright



Tuesday, April 3

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

Did you ever feel like the outcast? When I was a child, my parents were foster parents. We had twenty-five children in and out of our home from the time I was four until I was fourteen. These children were troubled. They had intense behavioral problems. They would start fights in the neighborhood, constantly disrupt class at school, continually lie and steal. Policemen knocking on our door was a routine happening. My parents were naive and faithful and, most of all, loving. They always stood by these children. They always defended them. They loved them like they were their own, no matter how badly they behaved.

Because my parents fostered these "troubled" children, our family was not very popular. There were actually neighbors who would cross the street rather than walk in front of our house. Of course, I was a kid. What did I know from foster children. I thought of these children as my brothers and sisters. So, like my parents, I defended and stood by them. So, at an early age I knew what it was to be shunned. Shunned for doing the right thing. Childhood develops patterns.

Things have not changed much for me. I am always fighting for unpopular but worthwhile causes, causes that take lots of work, commitment and faith. I have never been known to take the easy way out of anything. It used to make me feel self-conscious and alone. But, as I get older, I realize that fighting for what is right is much more important and satisfying than being popular. And it seems no matter how old I get, there always seems to be something worth fighting for that is not in the mainstream. One thing that makes these inevitable battles easier as time goes by is that my faith gets stronger the older I get. I have learned that I am not fighting these battles alone. When I know that something is right, I also know that I have God on my side. This makes all the difference in the world. When I was young I used to feel small and vulnerable. As my faith strengthens, I feel taller and stronger and more ready for whatever battle that may come my way.

Psalm 71 is a prayer for lifelong protection and help. If you are feeling alone and tired of the fight, it would be good to seek comfort in Psalm 71.

*In you, O Lord, I take refuge, let me never be put to shame
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.*

Mary Kay Bernardo

Wednesday, April 4

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

Isaiah 50:4-9 tells us with faith we may face many hurts, losses, hate in life. But with faith in our life I know the Lord is with me to show me the way.

Hebrews 12:1-3 – the great race: with faith and determination; with Jesus we will win.

Recently, Pastor Allende said something in the sermon, but I don't remember what. All I knew was I had to read Isaiah and Hebrews again. There it was. A couple came to my door and I didn't want to answer it. But they saw me; the dog is barking. OK. "No, I have my own church. No I don't want your papers. No thank you I don't need to talk. I know my Lord." She thanks me, and tells me she is happy that I know the Lord and have a church. And she blesses me.

Do you think they will win the race? The race may be long. Don't give up. With the help of the Lord we will win.

Pray for evangelists.

Janet Wilkens



Thursday, April 5

Maundy Thursday

**Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

John 13:34

I am usually uneasy when couples about to be married choose the above text (John 13:31-35) to be read at their wedding. I have to resist asking them to make another selection. I'm aware that the word, "love," is what draws them to this text. And, truth be told, some pastoral wedding resources actually suggest the text. But an inner voice says to me that if they only knew the context in which these words were spoken by Jesus perhaps they would make another choice. But then again, perhaps a wedding is a very appropriate setting in which to hear this commandment.

Couples about to be married are entering into a covenant relationship in which they promise to love, comfort and honor each other as long as they both shall live. My concern is that in today's society those vows are usually disregarded the moment that conflict surfaces in a marriage. The typical reaction is to walk away. More than half of today's marriages do not last.

The love that Jesus speaks about in the Gospel reading for this day is much more enduring than that. Loving to the very end is anything but an empty promise. He models it first by washing the disciples' feet.

The ceremonial foot washing that we typically do at our Maundy Thursday observance doesn't begin to compare with foot washing in Jesus' day. Back then, feet were really dirty. With little exception, all travel was on foot. The roads were not paved. They were dusty, muddy, littered with everything imaginable. The only foot covering was a sandal that covered just the sole, leaving the rest of the foot exposed to all the grimy elements which would accumulate elsewhere. Washing the feet upon entering a house was something you either did for yourself or had a servant do for you. It was demeaning to wash the feet of someone considered your equal. Yet Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

Jesus' display of love in the washing of the feet is an expression of his willingness to get involved in the mess of our lives. He is not afraid to dirty his hands. In just 24 hours, he would take things a step further by laying down his life for us. How willing are any of us to do likewise? How far are we willing to go to demonstrate our love?

*Jesus I will ponder now on your holy passion;
let your Spirit now endow me for meditation.
Evangelical Lutheran Worship #345*

Rev. Abraham Allende

Friday, April 6

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1—19:42

To all those outside the Christian community I can't think of a more offensive term than, Good Friday. Offensive and an oxymoron. How dare we talk of this day as being good. An innocent man betrayed, falsely accused, unlawfully beaten and tortured, and finally murdered by crucifixion - the cruelest form of death the ever-sadistic Romans could think up - and we have the nerve to call the day good! Those outside the Christian community can understand Christmas. Christmas is the warm and cuddly story of the birth of baby Jesus to a loving teenage mom. Angels, shepherds, and adoring animals observe the wondrous birth. Wise men come to worship led by a guiding star. The perfect setup for a Hallmark card! But a nasty betrayal, bloody interrogation, phony trial, and a torturous suffocating death to a 33 year old young man is nothing to celebrate led alone call good.

How dare we call today good. An explanation is in order. It begins at the beginning of time. Adam and Eve rebelled against God. They told him that they knew better than he. They had no need of God. They could be their own god knowing good from evil, thank you. We saw where that led. It led to their eviction from the Garden of Eden, non-productive work, pain, suffering, and death. Adam and Eve's first son, Cain, even killed his brother, Abel! All of creation has been in rebellion ever since. If you don't think so, ask yourself if you have loved God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself. If you still think you're pretty swell, read the 10 Commandments. If you still remain unconvinced look at the newspaper and observe our environment. Wars, corruption in government, greed, selfishness, and environmental disasters seem to be at an all-time high. Pretty sorry state we're in both as individuals and as a community. There is a price to pay for our rebellion, death: and we are helpless to do anything about it. Years later the Apostle Paul put it this way, "...the good that I want to do I don't do; but I do the evil that I don't want to do!" The short hand word for it is sin. We are sinners - every last one of us-and the wages of sin is death.

The solution starts in love. Way back in the Garden of Eden God had a plan. It started with choosing a people, the Israelites; and establishing a plan, the Covenant. It went through Moses and the prophets. God left hints scattered throughout Scripture. In the psalm we find a God forsaken suffering servant. Isaiah describes this servant in greater detail. It is fully realized in John's Gospel in the person of Jesus, the Messiah. This Jesus, true man, born of Mary and also true God came to our rescue. He suffered and died for our rebellion against God. His death on the cross fulfilled the Old Testament's Covenant and established the New. We become members of the New Covenant in the waters of Holy Baptism. In this community of faith we find forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. We celebrate the death of God's only Son, Jesus, and audaciously proclaim this day as good. We are strengthened in this faith by God's Word and Holy Supper. Yes, today is Good Friday, **GOOD** indeed.

Rev. Harry Werner

Saturday, April 7 Resurrection of Our Lord – Vigil of Easter
Romans 6:3-11; John 20:1-18

The vigil night of Jesus' resurrection is historically when those who have prepared are baptized. The reading in Romans gives us a clear understanding why the early church linked baptism with Jesus' resurrection. "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death..." Through the mystery of our faith we believe we have been united to Jesus' death. The waters of baptism drown our old lives of sin. This gives us a reason not to fear our mortal death, because we have already experienced death, our old self was crucified with him.

But "if we have been united to him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." Just as God has raised Jesus from death, when we are united to him in baptism, we have the assurance that God raises us from our deaths- to a resurrection like Jesus'. And what does that resurrection look like? Paul says we are no longer enslaved to sin. The death that comes about through sin no longer has dominion over us.

But Paul doesn't stop there. Not only are we free from sin, we are "alive to God in Christ Jesus." What does "being alive" look like? Psalm 30: 11 describes this for us, "you have turned my mourning into dancing, you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy."

If you have ever sat vigil, waiting for the first sunrise of Easter to come up over the mountain or the beach, you know the anticipation of the lifting of the burden of our sin. As the slit of light breaks forth from the clouds of night, we hear the shouts of joy, and join the dancing of God's saints, lifted from death to life.

May our daily footsteps always be Easter dance steps!

O God, who knows our mourning and our dancing, we thank you for the gift of baptism to know your grace, love and salvation. Remind us always that through your command and promise in water, bread and wine, we live united to your Son, who has been raised from the dead and now lives with you forever. Amen.

Rev. Karen Ullestad

Sunday, April 8

Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Day

**Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or
Mark 16:1-8 or John 20:1-18; Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 114; 1
Corinthians 5:6b-8; Luke 24:13-49**

“And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all the peoples...he will swallow up death forever.” This passage from Isaiah is the whole crux of the gospel for my faith journey. I see and hear about death through the congregations I serve, as I read the newspaper, and witness it in friends and family members. For the world, there is nothing worse than death. For those who do not know the love of God through Jesus Christ, **death** is the final answer.

But because of Jesus’ obedience to God’s will, God made **life** the final answer. Death is swallowed up forever. The Israelites heard these words of hope as they returned from the exile of Babylon. Christians hear these words of confidence as we live in a world filled with the death of illness, war, sin, and the frailty of relationships.

“The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth.” The disgrace of exile from God, the broken relationship we know without Jesus, this disgrace is destroyed from **all** the earth. And all of God’s creation is made new.

The celebration of this liberation is a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines. This is the meal hosted by the Lord and offered to all peoples on his holy mountain. We tasted this meal this morning as Easter people. God has given us a foretaste right now, on earth, for the life we have with him forever. This was made possible through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us be glad and rejoice in it. Hallelujah!

Rev. Karen Ullestad

Worship and Fellowship Opportunities in Lent 2012

Ash Wednesday Services

Wednesday, February 22

Noon at The Lutheran Church of the Covenant

7:30 at The Lutheran Church of the Master

Lenten Midweek Soup Suppers and Worship Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m.

Join us for our midweek Soup Suppers during Lent at which time The Lutheran Church of the Master and The Lutheran Church of the Covenant will share in fellowship over a light meal followed by a service of evening prayer.

This year, our message series will focus “You Shall Love The Lord Your God.”

The two congregations will take turns hosting dinner on the Wednesday nights in Lent.

February 29 at Covenant

March 7 at Church of the Master

March 14 at Covenant

March 21 at Church of the Master

March 28 at Covenant

Holy Week Schedules

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant

The Lutheran Church of the Master

Palm Saturday

Festival for Children

Saturday, Mar. 31, 9:30a.m.-2:00p.m.

Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 1, 9:00 a.m.

Maundy Thursday

April 5, 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday

April 6, 7:00 p.m.

Easter

Sunday, April 8

Easter Vigil: 6:00 a.m.

Pancake Breakfast: 7:30 a.m.

Resurrection Service: 9:00 a.m.

Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 1, 11:00 a.m.

Maundy Thursday

April 5 (To Be Determined).

Good Friday

April 6, 7:00 p.m.

Easter

Sunday, April 8

Easter Breakfast: 9:30 am

Resurrection Service: 11:00 a.m.



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