

# **MEDITATIONS FOR LENT**

**CHRIST CHURCH**

**ROCHESTER**

**2<sup>ND</sup> EXPANDED EDITION**

## Preface

The parishioners of Christ Church offer these reflections for our Lenten journey. They range from thoughts about giving something up versus taking something on, to thoughts about the day's celebrated saint, thoughts about the day's readings, and thoughts about a theme in the readings. The guidelines were purposefully loose to invite many voices, styles, and perspectives.

This is the first year Christ Church has done this; we started recruiting writers a bit later than we should have, so we don't have meditations for every day. Readers are invited to supplement these reflections with readings from the online site (<http://www.lectionarypage.net/CalndrsIndexes/Calendar2012.html>) and readings from the Daily Office – Year 2 – in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Shirley Ricker  
Editor

Thanks to the contributors who are:

<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Meditation</b>	<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Meditation</b>
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Anstey, Jennifer	March 16	Liddell, Kyle	March 24
Barnes, Bob	February 23	McCutchon, Joe	April 2
Bement, Jim	March 19	Pedersen, Jean	March 7
Collins-Bohrer, Padriac	March 17	Reynolds, Beau	February 29
Collins, Sarah	March 3	Ricker, Shirley	March 13
Cushman, Laura	March 9	Schultz, Mary	March 14
Ferguson, Ruth	April 6	Sconfitto, Joe	March 12
Fields, Noah	March 2	Sconfitto, Margaret	April 4
Gehl, Michael	March 30	Sweet Page, Marilyle	April 5
Henshaw, Richard	February 22	Talley, Claire	March 21
Hilton, Ron	February 27	Tompkins, Christine	March 23
Hilton, Sharon	March 6	Urban, John	March 10
Kristoffersen, Peg	March 31	Vukman, Mary	March 26
Least, Wayne	March 27	Vanderbilt, Deborah	March 20
Lechman, Theodore	March 9	Wiersma, John	March 5

Special thanks to Noah Fields for his photographs

**Wednesday, February 22, 2012**

**Ash Wednesday**

***Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12 \* 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 \* Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 \* Psalm 103***

I like the season of Lent, and look forward to it every year. It gives me something I long for, some discipline in my life, a direction to go, and a chance to confront this topsy-turvy world head-on by doing something about it! We need all the help we can get!

For many years I have followed, along with others of my students, a self-imposed RULE OF LIFE to guide me during Lent, giving me a daily rhythm. It is very simple and goes somewhat like this:

- 1) Give prayerful thanks to the good Lord every day, for adding one more day to your life, said either at the beginning or at the end of the day.
- 2) Read a selection of the Bible every day, following the lectionary or a passage of your own choosing, and pause afterwards and meditate for some time on a passage that touches you. Listen, listen to what it says.
- 3) Do a good deed every day: a handout, a smile, a hello, a telephone call, a visit, a letter or e-mail, to someone you meet, someone you love, or someone you don't love.
- 4) Attend church at least every Sunday.

This RULE will hopefully put into your life the spirit of Lent, day by day. It will make you more whole. It will give you a way to deal with the contradictions you meet at every crossroad. Some new decision must be made with these differing demands. What is it to be?

The RULE will allow you to act, to confront the forces which are pulling you this way and that, sometimes (you later find out) not to the you that you wish deeply to be. (Thanks for some of these ideas to Esther de Waal, world renowned Benedictine layperson.)

Reverend Richard Henshaw

**Thursday, February 23, 2012**

**Feast of Polycarp, Bishop and Martyr**

***Revelation 2:8-11 \* Matthew 20:20-23 \* Psalm 116:10-17 or 34:1-8 or 121***

God is

everything that is good

and the goodness

that everything possesses

is God

Julian of Norwich

Bibliography

Meditations with Julian of Norwich

Lent with St. Francis

Lent with Evelyn Underhill

The above books give thoughtful meditations for each day in Lent

Bob Barnes



Photograph by Noah Fields

**Monday, February 27, 2012**

**Feast of George Herbert, Priest**

***1 Peter 5:1-4 \* Matthew 5:1-10 \* Psalm 23 or 1***

**Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

Today we honor George Herbert—priest and poet—who lived to be only 40 years old. Born when Shakespeare had just begun his acting and writing career, Fr. Herbert brings readers up short with his images, his fervent faith, and the sometimes odd shape of his poems. Those who attended Christ Church Friday night suppers 20 years ago or so will remember the late Joseph Sommers' introduction to Herbert's work. Herbert was one of Joe's several specialties as a University of Rochester English professor.

Herbert's faith was his passion, and he wrote passionately about it. Never, it seems, uncertain about God's place in the world, he sought in his poetry to work out his place in relationship to God.

Some of his most intriguing poems attempt to replicate the subject matter in the form of the poem. Hence, one titled "The Altar" leaps off the page in the shape of an altar, and "Easter Wings" appears in the shape of wings. Then, right in the middle of "The Altar," are little short couplets whose pungency knows no equal:

A heart alone  
Is such a stone,  
As nothing but  
Thy power doth cut.  
Wherefore each part  
Of my hard heart  
Meets in this frame,  
To praise thy name.

Let us this Lent reach across the centuries to join with Herbert in praising God's holy name.

Ron Hilton

**Wednesday, February 29, 2012**

***Deuteronomy 9: 13-21 \* Hebrews 3:12-19 \* John 2:23-3:15 \* Psalm 119:49-72***

**Psalm 119:45**

“I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought your precepts.” NRSV

The season of Lent, to many, is quickly equated with a period of solemn penance, abstinence from excess, and hymns sung in a minor key. Lent has commonly been approached with a sigh of resignation.

The Psalmist gives us a contrasting view of the life governed by not only the moral principles, but also the more challenging and ambiguous ideals of spiritual poverty and humility, presented to us through the words of Christ. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt 5:3). From this perspective, the practices of spiritual penitence and reflection do not lead to a miserable existence characterized by sorrow and restriction, but a liberty of being that extends to all aspects of our existence. This liberty is the direct result of the resurrection effected on Easter morning, that which we are prepared for during the forty days of Lent. Our inward preparation, which some might view as limiting, frees us to experience the liberation of Easter.

During this ‘night of the soul’, this season of Lent, let us always keep the freedom brought to us by Christ in our view as we reflect on our lives, repent of our transgressions, and amend our ways for our good and the good of those around us.

Beau Reynolds



Photograph by Shirley Ricker

**Thursday, March 1, 2012**

**Feast of David of Wales**

***1 Thessalonians 2: 2b-12 \* Mark 4:26-29 \* Psalm 16:5-11 or 96:1-7***

David of Wales lived during the mid-to-late sixth century. In his youth, he founded a monastery, where he intended to live by a strict rule of quiet meditation, self-denial, and hard work for the rest of his life. This didn't work out exactly.

He was “dragged” (I quote *Holy Women, Holy Men*) to an assembly of bishops to fight Pelagianism, a movement that challenged the doctrine of original sin and argued that humans are capable of freely choosing between good and evil without divine aid. David spoke so well that the Archbishop chose him as his successor as Primate of Wales. He founded eleven other monasteries, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and was mentor to several Irish saints.

He became legend, his life's story embellished in an eleventh-century hagiography written by Rhygyfarch, a son of the bishop of St. David's (this material is *not* in *Holy Women, Holy Men*). In this imaginative biography, David is son of a nun who was forced to marry a prince, possibly a relative of King Arthur, fulfilling a prophecy St. Patrick had heard from an angel. Stories tell that David advised Welsh soldiers to wear leeks in their hats in battles against the Saxons so they could tell their friends from their enemies. They say that his monks tried to poison him, but an Irish saint rode to Wales overnight on the back of a sea-monster and blessed the poisoned bread, which they ate together with no ill effects. And, in my favorite story, when David goes (or is dragged) to the Synod of Brefi to debate the Pelagians, such a crowd gathers that God raises up a hill under his feet so that everyone can see and hear him – and know for whom he speaks.

If that change doesn't illustrate deep anti-Pelagianism, I don't know what does. Five hundred years later, people wanted a saint who, regardless of how well he communicated or how others responded to his message, had to be revealed as the agent of divine truth by the ground miraculously rising under his feet. It is so hard to trust ourselves (or others?) to be confident in what we've discovered through some quiet interior process, or as a community – we need our truths to be self-evident.

I can't untangle doctrines of original sin, grace, and free will at the moment, and I won't vouch for the historicity of Rhygyfarch's account. But this hill story speaks to me anyway. It speaks to our human hope that, regardless of our inner state or the crowds around us, truth will appear, miraculous and indisputable, in the middle of controversy. I like this kind of thing. We celebrate those truths we immediately recognize, the ones that are at our core because we are made in God's image: Love one another; do justice; love mercy.

This is why I need the reminder in today's reading from the gospel of Mark: “[Jesus] also said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.’”

Epiphany passes. As soon as we start to try to live out those truths, there's a Lenten wilderness to wander in, and who knows what grows in it, or how. We find other mountaintop experiences in our Lent and Passion gospel readings, but they are not places where conflict dissolves. They are places where Jesus is lonely, tempted, afraid,

sorrowful, dying. They are places where proverbs and easy answers fall dead to the ground, and God-with-us asks why God has forsaken him.

I'm twenty seven. Dear God, I'd love just one plain hill, with a prophet or saint with the Holy Spirit manifested as a dove on his shoulder, and I'd wear a leek in my hat every day if he'd just hand me some stone tablets that sketch out some major life events and tell me where I should focus my energy and what I should just let be. Instead, I usually feel like I'm in a mountain range with a million people shouting, "Look at this war, look at these famines, look at this oppression, look at this greed, look at this cycle of violence, look at our prisons, look just across our borders, look around the city, look through the side door of the church after coffee hour – or mind your own business, be an adult, look at more job listings and don't ask why there are so many openings for debt collectors." The whole world seems to echo with groans of injustice, suffering, and division – and to have always groaned in ways that I've only just noticed. In Lent, that truth has its own hill, and we stand when it is named in the Palm Sunday reading of the Passion.

So we go from hill to hill, scattering those self-evident truths into reality (that rocky, thorny place), and we sleep and rise, night and day, waiting for what has died to sprout and grow – we do not know how. But we are promised we'll recognize the ripe harvest, the kingdom come.

Kristy Liddell



Photograph by Shirley Ricker

Friday, March 2, 2012

Feast of Chad, Bishop of Lichfield

*Philippians 4:10-13 \* Luke 14:1,7-14 \* Psalm 84:7-12 or 23*

**“... but when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous . . .” Luke 14: 13-14**

We find Jesus teaching at a place of food, at a place of the sharing of food. At this banquet, Jesus tells the host to expect blessedness, to expect repayment in the resurrection of the righteous, were the host to invite the destitute, diseased, and disabled into the banquet and forego the usual guest list: friends, family, neighbors.

Jesus' injunction poses a radical exchange: give up the familiarity, connection, and safety of family and friends, and supplant it with people whom one does not know, who carry disease that still frightens today, who in some cases cannot walk, eat, or see, and who will almost certainly never host their own communal meals. This radical exchange of guests, however, also promises a reward to the host: repayment in the resurrection.

It gets me on edge when an act of selflessness is condoned and encouraged through appeal to selfishness. I worry about the psychology of such an ethical transaction. If I give up something I desire in the present for a presumably much greater “reward” in the resurrection of the righteous--whatever that may be--isn't the “good” of my sacrifice merely a commodified “good” in a transaction of worldly-divine economy, destined to reap a reward, and therefore actually bereft of ethical significance? I know that I stand to “benefit” by sacrificing safety and familiarity, so why *wouldn't* I be a willing trading partner? Jesus sets up a mutually beneficial economy of reception; the host walks away with blessedness and the forgotten vagrants of the world feast at a banquet.

*On the other hand, the welcoming of the unfamiliar, the diseased, and the possibly harmful over the threshold of a doorway seems so rife with implications for our experience and the meaning of existence that it almost precludes understanding. Therefore,*

I will just conclude:

Perhaps Jesus doesn't give a hoot about the psychology of ethics, nor maybe even selflessness, nor selfishness. In this teaching, at least, he just crams the eternal, vague, and majestic righteousness of the resurrection right down into a room about to be chock-full of lepers, the blind, and their frazzled host. Jesus affirms that an invitation to participation, extended to the needy, to Him, will be rewarded in the resurrection of the righteous, which to me denotes at a minimum the incredible idea that the actions we take have immediate and ultimate significance both to our fellow beings and to God. Moreover, it is action, and not the baroque ethical tumult of the mind, that reaps blessedness and righteousness in the resurrection. Our motivations, fears, and the fears of our motivations pale in significance to the crossing of new thresholds, and to the welcoming of strangers across thresholds.

Noah Fields

**Saturday, March 3, 2012**

**Feast of John and Charles Wesley**

*Isaiah 49:5-6 \* Luke 9:2-6 \* Psalm 98:1-4 or 103:1-4,13-18*

From the Collect for the day:

Lord God, you inspired your servants John and Charles Wesley with burning zeal ..., and endowed them with eloquence in speech and song. Kindle in your Church, we entreat you, such fervor, that those whose faith has cooled may be warmed....

The hymns of Charles Wesley (1707-1788) have warmed the hearts of millions of worshippers for three hundred years. Over his lifetime, Charles wrote over eight thousand hymns. Some of the best loved hymns include "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," "Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies," "Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," "Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending," "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," and "Ye Servants of God."

Of the "Great Four Anglican Hymns" (a listing based on a survey in 1885 of the hymnals of all the churches in the Anglican Communion—the "Great Four" hymns appeared in all of the hymnals), two were written by Charles: "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and "Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending."

The power of his poetry to kindle the fires of faith in the breasts of men and women in our cynical twenty-first century unites us with fellow worshippers across three centuries. When we sing "Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Alleluia," we participate in an experience that unites us in spite of differences in century and in language, culture, and finer points of belief. Together we will join on Easter to "Sing ye heav'ns, and earth reply, Alleluia!" Then let us say a prayer of thanksgiving for the life of Charles Wesley and the power of his hymns to kindle the fervor that will warm the faith that has cooled.

Sarah Collins

**Monday, March 5, 2012**

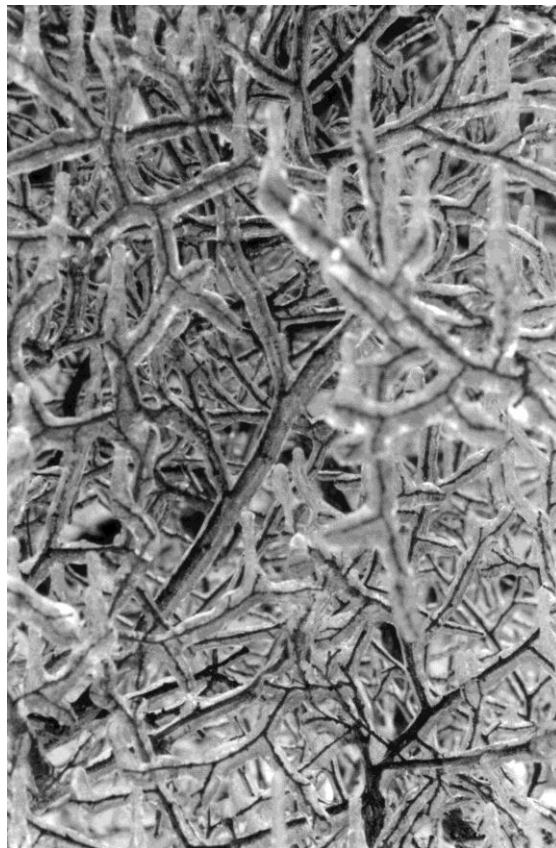
***Genesis 41: 46-57 \* 1 Corinthians 4:8-20 \* Mark 3:7-19a \* Psalm 64 or 65***

A wise priest once told me that Lent is not about giving something up; it is about taking things on.

That made me feel better about not giving up chocolate, but then left me stymied as to what I should take on.

After some thought and reflection, I realized I am not a patient person, and my tolerance for other people's dissenting opinions is almost nil. I know, this comes as a shock to those that know me. So for this Lenten season, I am making an effort to try to understand that people are who they are due to the journey that they have made through this life. Perhaps a person finds MTV's "The Jersey Shore" to be a quality program because they were raised by wolves. It could be that the person who finds the music of Ke\$ha inspirational suffered a hearing loss as a child. Maybe the people who don't realize the superiority of dark chocolate to milk chocolate were befriended by a cow early in life and are just trying to remain loyal to the dairy industry. You just never know these things.

John Wiersma



Photograph by Noah Fields

**Tuesday, March 6, 2012**

***Genesis 42:1-7 \* 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 \* Mark 3:19b-35 \* Psalm 68:1-20, 24-36***

Jesus's family "took charge of him" because people were saying, "he's gone mad." Good News Bible

Charles Menninger 1862 – 1952 and sons, and William Mayo 1861-1939 and sons are honored today.

Episcopalians celebrate those who lived a life of piety and purpose, though not canonized (in the usual sense) by any other church.

Drs. Mayo and Menninger founded ongoing institutions to assist healing and health. Dr. Mayo and his sons were responsible for founding the Mayo Clinic which at the outset was a not-for-profit hospital and clinic, and Dr. Menninger founded the clinic which bears his name and was the first group practice of psychiatry.

Dr. Mayo came to the aid of victims of an 1883 tornado, and during it, worked with sisters of St. Francis who were trained as teachers and not as nurses. We are reminded in Mark that a radically different way of living is required in His way of life and is often not understood by others. Drs. Menninger and Mayo followed this inspirational way to help lives of ordinary people to health and healing. Let us rededicate ourselves to these aims during this season of Lent..

Sharon Hilton

**Wednesday, March 7, 2012**

**Feast of Perpetua and her companions**

***Hebrews 10:32-39 \* Matthew 24:9-24 \* Psalm 34:1-8 or 124***

Perpetua was a young Roman mother who went to her death in the arena at the age of twenty two because she would not offer sacrifices to Emperor Septimius Severus. She left her infant son, resisted the appeals of her loving father, and risked her entire family's reputation because she would not renounce her belief that there was only one God, the maker of heaven and earth, creator of all things visible and invisible. The prison memoir that she wrote as she was facing judgment and execution recounts the vivid dreams that came to lift her spirits: a golden ladder reaching to heaven, a vast expanse of garden, a cake of cheese, a goblet of water, a green branch with golden apples. She died with her companions on this day in the year 203.

I hope that I will never have to face Perpetua's choices - life or death, my country or my conscience, my family or my friends. I do not know if I would have her courage.

The contemporary spiritual writer Nora Gallagher tells a story about a dinner conversation with the great activist bishop Daniel Corrigan that has given me a different way of thinking about what it might mean to give your life for your faith. "What would you die for?" a young priest asked the bishop at a retreat. "Water rights," he answered. "The boy sat back in his chair," Gallagher writes. "Dan smiled. 'Why not?' he asked. . . . 'You don't actually get up one morning and decide to die for something. You put your foot on a path and walk. One day you look back, maybe fifty years, and say 'That's what I gave my life for.'" (Nora Gallagher, [Things Seen and Unseen: A Year Lived in Faith](#) [New York: Vintage Books, 1998], pp. 13-14).

We do not always know where our paths will lead us at the start, but we know that God will be with us every step of the way. Lent gives us the chance every year to review our lives, to see if we have come where we wanted, to reflect on God's grace, to decide where we should continue on our current way and where we might want to head out in a new direction. This year, I am learning that these words from the Book of Common Prayer can be good traveling companions:

O GOD, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly; Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit of Wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Jean Pedersen

Friday, March 9, 2012

Feast of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa

*Wisdom 7:24-28 \* John 5:19-24 or John 14:23-26 \* Psalm 19:7-14 or Psalm 119:97-104*

**"He who sees the Church looks directly at Christ - Christ building and increasing by the addition of the elect."**

Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, Sermon 13.

This famous quotation of Gregory of Nyssa's clearly shows us how salvation through Christ happens through the Church, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As the "Communion of Saints" (the ninth article of the Apostles' Creed), Christ Himself becomes revealed as truth not IN a community, but AS a community.[1] Within this understanding, the liturgy must be viewed in the sense of making present or even the continuation of Christ's salvific life. Christ's life must be seen as liturgical and the church as participating in this very life through the liturgical process. Through the liturgy of the church we are infused with a new sharing in the divine life by Christ, the God-man, conjoining his own body with the body of the church.[2]

Humankind was created for communion, but everywhere is divided.[3] We are all divided, atomized and monetarized by social and secular concerns which, we are constantly taught to presume, are the actual, real and pragmatic concerns of humankind - with church and liturgy being relegated to the strictly private concerns of individuals on their own free time. As a consequence, we feel alienated from each other, we no longer feel "at home" in the world, and see the very foundations of social democracy (labor unions, social security, health care, pensions, education, social integration, human rights and world peace, etc) being dissolved in the name of market efficiency.

In this time of the Lent, may we keep Gregory of Nyssa's teachings in mind as we participate in the Sign of Peace and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, to help us come to a greater appreciation of our home within the communion of the church and the salvific role the church can and must play in the world.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395) was bishop of Nyssa, in south-central present-day Turkey, from 372 to 376, and from 378 until his death. He is venerated as a saint in Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy and Lutheranism. Gregory, his brother Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus are collectively known as the Cappadocian Fathers. Gregory is known for his contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity, his contributions to the Nicene Creed, his Origenian doctrine of Universal Salvation and his neo-Platonic philosophical orientation - particularly of that of Plotinus. He has been treated as a minor theologian until about 1950 when his eschatology as well as his prefiguration of postmodernism gained widespread attention.[4]

Laura A. Cushman  
Theodore W. Lechman

References

[1] *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, John D. Zizioulas, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985, p. 115.

[2] "Liturgy and the Senses", Catherine Pickstock, from *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*, John Milbank, Slavoj Zizek and Creston Davis, editors., 2010 Brazos Press, p. 128.

[3] "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies", William T. Cavanaugh, from *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, editors, 1999 Routledge, p. 182.

[4] Gregory of Nyssa, Wikipedia Entry, "[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory\\_of\\_Nyssa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Nyssa)", Feb 15, 2012.

**Saturday, March 10, 2012**

***Genesis 43:16-34 \* 1 Corinthians 7:10-24 \* Psalm 23 or 27***

**Psalm 27**

Psalmist David,

Why are you so confident that God will protect you,

Open His house to you,

Shelter you,

Lift you above your enemies,

Hear you when you call,

Offer an unconditional home,

And show HER goodness to you while you live?

Or,

Should YOU be seeking

How to serve

God?

Does S/HE live for you

or

You for HIM?

John Urban

**Monday, March 12, 2012**

**Feast of Gregory the Great, Bishop**

***1 Chronicles 25:1a, 6-8 \* Mark 10: 42-45 \* Psalm 57: 6-11 or Psalm 33:1-5, 20-21***

**Mark10:42-45**

**“But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.**

**Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.**

**And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.**

**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”**

Jesus had this thing about expecting the impossible from us. It’s ironic that the One Who created all things, including us, would seemingly not understand human nature. We have an obsession with authority. We model our societies, our government, even our family structures with authority in mind. We crave it, with all its trappings of fame, power and wealth. And it doesn’t need to be in the big things either. I have a “right” to exercise authority over my time, which is my own; my money which I have earned. But the ugliest “right” is the authority I exercise over who I think deserves my time and resources. I think that’s a good example of “lording” it over someone.

I was shamed into realizing how short I come by a news commentary about Elena Delle Donne. An extraordinary athlete, she most likely could have named her price at any college. Already the best high school basketball player in the country, her road was paved with promises of fame and glory. She left it all—to be with her older sister born deaf, blind and with cerebral palsy, and in the words of the commentator, “only knows her kid sister by the special way she touches her, by her hugs and kisses, and by her scent”.

“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.” It seems to me that Elena Delle Donne is destined for greatness.

<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/08/146514859/for-love-and-the-game-a-star-shines-in-delaware>

Joe Scoffitto

**Tuesday, March 13, 2012**

**Feast of James Theodore Holly, Bishop**

***Deuteronomy 6:20-25 \* Acts 8:26-39 \* John 4:31-38 \* Psalm 86:11-17***

What does being a disciple mean? What does being a disciple promise? Discipleship and the related idea of self-discipline are themes in today's scripture. I frequently think about self-discipline when, for example, I've said something I regret. But I've never thought much about discipleship except in its academic sense. I became a disciple in college when I finally discovered what I wanted to major in and settled down to read Homer in Greek with a professor who became my mentor. For me, this professor didn't just teach Greek – he taught life. When I studied with him, doing the work seemed a joy rather than anything that required a lot of self-discipline. In a first-century Christian context, I think of disciples as men and women<sup>1</sup> pouncing on Jesus's every word, asking "what does it mean, teacher?" Them - trying to understand, sometimes getting it right, sometimes getting it woefully wrong.

In Deuteronomy we hear much about the Israelites getting it wrong. So badly, in fact, that they almost lose Israel. The promise held out to them lies just across the River Jordan which, in verses 6:20-25, they have not yet crossed. There Moses reminds them that there are conditions for inhabiting this new land: to keep their Covenant with God and to keep the Ten Commandments. This new land requires following God's plan. One's old way of life won't work here. The Israelites finally do cross, but the joy one feels for this wandering people is mitigated by the grief of realizing that Moses is not allowed to join them:

"...the Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'Go up this mount...and look out over the land of Canaan that I am giving to the Israelites for their possession. On this mountain you shall die and be gathered to your father's kin, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor.... This is because both of you were unfaithful to me at the waters of Meribah-by-Kadesh...where you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites. You shall see the land from a distance but you may not enter the land I am giving to the Israelites....'" (Deut. 32:50-52)

This ending tempts a modern reader – at least this one –to attribute its harshness to a culture in which retribution, rather than compassion, was the expected response to failed faith. I see a message that your mentor can only take you so far. At some time it will be time for you, the disciple, to take the lead thus, for me, there's great poignancy in the continuation of leadership by Joshua. Just as Moses reluctantly picked up the yoke, so too must Joshua. So, too, must we.

Certainly the men and women who followed Bishop James Theodore Holly (1829-1911), the first African American bishop, to their promised land of Haiti were disciples. This was in 1861 - a time when some Americans of both races believed that the best hope of freedom for African-Americans was in the creation of a black nation in Africa or the Caribbean. In his first years in Haiti, Holly lost his wife and four children to the plague. Nonetheless he continued his ministry while caring for his two small sons. <sup>2</sup>

I think about my own new-found joy worshipping with the congregation of Christ Church after forty plus years of absence from both Christ Church and from any worship at all. I found my old way of living lacked something. Perhaps that makes me a disciple, as well.

Shirley Ricker

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<sup>1</sup> I'm thinking here of Luke's 70 disciples rather than just the 12. "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was to come." (Luke 10:1)

<sup>2</sup> Holly, James Theodore. "Facts about the Church's mission in Haiti: a concise statement."  
(<http://anglicanhistory.org/usa.jholly/facts1897.html>).

**Wednesday, March 14, 2012**

***Genesis 45: 16-28 \* 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13 \* Mark 6: 13-29 \* Psalm 81 or 82***

When I read today's lessons, I found strong themes of food, something I love. It made me think about how we observed Lent at home and at Christ Church when I was a child in the 1950s. At home, my parents always went on a diet, and we never had anything for dessert except grapefruit. My poor mother had to cut around each section in each half, and then we kids would just complain, "Oh, no, grapefruit again?" At home and at Sunday school children were instructed to "give up" something for Lent. I should have given up grapefruit, but I did as I was urged and gave up candy. My mother always said, "Just think how good it will taste on Easter," and it did, even those years, as I was getting older, when I cheated a bit. Later, I learned that what I am doing for Lent may be more rewarding than what I am giving up. This year I have the Christ Church Lent mediation booklet to enhance my Lenten "doing."

In any Episcopal Church choir there is at least one singer who says "Ugh, Lenten hymns are such a drag, they are so minor." You'll have to come to church to hear the minor key, but I leave you with verses 3 - 5 of Hymn 142.

As thou didst hunger bear and thirst, so teach us gracious Lord,  
to die to self and chiefly live by thy most holy word.

And through these days of penitence, and through thy Passiontide,  
yea, evermore, in life and death, Jesus! with us abide.

Abide with us, that so, this life of suffering overpast,  
an Easter of unending joy we may attain at last.

Claudia Frances Hernaman (1838 - 1898)

Mary Schultz

**March 16, 2012**

***Genesis 47:1-26 \* 1 Corinthians 9:16-27 \* Mark 6:47-56***

Some of you may know of my interest in the Old Testament, so I'll offer some thoughts I have had on Chapter 47 of Genesis. Joseph introduces his father, Jacob Israel, to his boss, Pharaoh, and continues his job of keeping Egypt functioning at a time of potential economic collapse.

Joseph's family has moved to Egypt. It's only for a little while, they won't be in the way, and they're not really blood-thirsty cannibals. From Pharaoh's point of view, he can afford to be nice about it, since, after all, "What are these Asiatics to you, O Amun, the wretches ignorant of god?"<sup>1</sup> Pharaoh generously offered posts of responsibility to the cowboys, as they seemed to him. He left it to Joseph to decide, since he always left everything to Joseph. As it was before, in the house of his owner Potiphar, everything prospered under Joseph's hand, from our point of view because he was *not* ignorant of God, and exceedingly blessed by God. Their conversation also followed the advice of the millennium or so previous (I think Joseph is around 2100 BC), from The Instruction Addressed to King Merikare: "Enrich the young men who follow you, Provide with goods, endow with fields, Reward them with herds."<sup>2</sup>

Jacob Israel was the ruler of the first part of Joseph's life, but Pharaoh ruled of the rest of it. Pharaoh asked a question that we only ask little children, "How old are you?" Whether it was rude or not, Jacob, being very old, took the opportunity to complain about his age, instead of boasting. The Greeks too tended to despair over old age rather than revere it. In terms of numerology, Jacob Israel's age, at this point (130) or at his death (147), was not a "perfect" number, and that may have been what he was upset about.

Joseph still had a big job to do. The dream oracle had predicted a famine of seven years, and earlier we were told that only two had passed. Up till around 2200 BC, the Fertile Crescent region had been experiencing what geologists call the Climatic Optimum, since about 5200 BC, with warm weather and steady, seasonal rains. With the climate disrupted, the great migrations had begun.<sup>3</sup> Pharaoh was counting on Joseph's administrative skills to pull the whole country through. Joseph ended up with all the people's herds of all kinds of cattle. For both the Hebrews and the Indo-Europeans, the word for cattle was synonymous with wealth, or, property.<sup>4</sup>

We should not look at this story as some precise historical note but read it more metaphorically. Here we are told why the land belongs to the king, because Joseph wangled it. Even in America, we talk about real estate. The "real" is derived from the word "royal," assuming that the land belongs to the crown. This is not always the case, however, as can be seen by the resistance put up by the Icelanders,<sup>5</sup> and in the Biblical prophecies warning the Israelites against the formation of a monarchy. Joseph also moved people around, a "divide and conquer" strategy, foreshadowing the story of the Babylonian captivity, and instituted a percentage tax system, foreshadowing the tithe and property exceptions made for the Levites.

Jennifer Anstey

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<sup>1</sup> Lichtheim, Miriam, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, Volume II*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 65

<sup>2</sup> Lichtheim, Miriam, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, Volume I*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975, p. 101

<sup>3</sup> Winkless, Nels III and Iben Browning, *Climate and the Affairs of Men*, Harper's Magazine Press, New York, 1975

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word for cow also means wealth; The Rig Veda's hymns constantly ask for wealth in numbers of cattle, horses and children

<sup>5</sup> *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, Penguin Books, New York, 1997, throughout (no authors, many translators)

**Saturday, March 17, 2012**

**Feast of St. Patrick**

***1 Thessalonians 2:2b-12 \* Matthew 28:16-20 \* Psalm 97:1-2, 7-12 or 96:1-7***

As a Padraic, Saint Patrick's Day has always been special day for me. Each year, my Saint Patrick's Day is filled with great traditional Irish music and time with my family and friends. While growing up it was common to arrive home from grade school and from high school during the weeks surrounding March 17<sup>th</sup> to find several of Rochester's finest traditional Irish musicians playing live in my living room. These musicians would be practicing tunes with my mother, a hammered dulcimer player, and having a splendid time. They would be preparing for the annual Irish music concert that my mother and father produced in Downtown Rochester from 1988 to 2008. While it made me happy to listen to the bright sounds of fiddles, banjos, guitars, and accordions, I felt the most joy in watching the smiles of the hundreds of Irish music fans who came to the concerts to hear and see these musicians, along with Irish dancers, each year. These concerts were a gift of love and music from my parents to the Rochester community.

My favorite Saint Patrick's Day hymn is *St. Patrick's Breastplate* with words attributed to St. Patrick. As a boy I first fell in love with this hymn because of its majestic melody and each of its seven long verses. As I grew I began to listen more closely to the words and learned more about St. Patrick's love of God and of Jesus Christ.

The verse of *St. Patrick's Breastplate*:

“Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me,

Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,

Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger,”

has become the most important to me as I daily discern my call to be a priest in the Episcopal Church. Like St. Patrick, who faithfully prayed and sang these words during his travels while introducing Christianity to the Irish people ca. 428 CE, I am also comforted to remember that Jesus Christ is always within me and is always all around me along my journey.

Padraic Michael Collins-Bohrer

**Monday, March 19, 2012**

**Feast of St. Joseph**

***2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16 \* Romans 4:13-18 \* Luke 2:41-52 \* Psalm 89:1-29 or 89:1-4, 26-29***

He always seems to be in the background, and scripture doesn't record a single word of Jesus' "foster father", his "earthly father", his "human father", this man Joseph born in Bethlehem, c. 90 BCE<sup>1</sup>.

Luke's Gospel [1:26-38] tells us of Mary's visit by the angel Gabriel and her response "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And later [1:46-55] the Gospel records that beautiful Cantic we know as the Magnificat, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ...".

Matthew's Gospel [1:18-25] tells us that when Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary, found out that she was "with child", he wanted to resolve the situation "quietly". But Joseph was also visited by "an angel of the Lord" who "appeared to him in a dream" and told him that the child was "conceived ... of the Holy Spirit;" so he took Mary as his wife. But not a single word is recorded!

Both Mary and Joseph submitted to the will of God but the only spoken words scripture records are those of Mary. Why?

For that matter, why did Jesus need an "earthly father"? If we are willing to accept the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas<sup>2</sup> it was a necessary part of the plan for the incarnation because if Mary were unmarried, the Law would have subjected her to stoning. Also, the infant Jesus would need the care, nurturing, and protection of a human father.

Jesus' "heavenly father" wanted his son to have the support, the nurturing, and the protection that a human family could provide taking into consideration the mores of the time.

Joseph carries out his responsibilities as a "foster father" providing for his family, protecting his family, teaching Jesus the family trade, and worrying as every parent does until his death in Nazareth, 20 July 18 CE.

"Joseph was a pious Jew, a descendant of David, and a carpenter by trade. As Joseph the Carpenter, he is considered the patron saint of the working person, one who not only worked with his hands, but taught his trade to Jesus. The little that is told of him is testimony to the trust in God which values simple everyday duties, and gives an example of a loving husband and father."<sup>3</sup>

Jim Bement

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\\_Joseph](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Joseph)

<sup>2</sup> *The childhood of Christ* by Thomas Aquinas, Roland Potter (transl.), 2006 ISBN 0521029600, pgs. 110-120

<sup>3</sup> *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* · 2006, pg. 200

**Tuesday, March 20, 2012**

**Feast of Cuthbert, Bishop**

***2 Corinthians 6:1-10 \* Matthew 6:24-33 \* Psalm 23 or 1***

I chose this date because it was the feast day of St. Cuthbert of Northumbria, one of the medieval saints with a cool fact: while he was living as a hermit on the Farne islands, he got laws passed to protect the ducks that nested on the island. An early conservationist! Anyway, he was a shepherd before he joined the monastery and became a monk, so the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is perfect for the day of St. Cuthbert.

Just last week I showed my Bible as Literature class the film “King David.” The film shows David as a boy, fresh from taking care of his family’s flocks, playing his harp and singing this psalm to soothe King Saul. It’s a beautiful setting for the psalm, allowing me to see the shepherd David talking about things he knows well: the green pastures, the still waters, the paths the sheep follow, the rod and staff that he uses to guide and help his sheep.

We are made in the image of God, so who we are can also help us understand God. David is a good shepherd, and therefore he pictures God taking care of him in the same way that David takes pleasure in caring for his sheep. This idea—that the love of God can be glimpsed through ways in which we’ve experienced human love—has comforted me so often in times of sadness or when I am focusing on my own failings. I can look at what is best in me, for example, the deep love I have for my children, and be assured that it is exactly that kind of love, *and more*, that God feels for me. If God is the good shepherd to David, God is the good mother to me. If I can continue with the parent analogy, I’ve “prepared a table” plenty of times for the kids; I’ve anointed their heads (OK, with shampoo, not oil, but still . . .) and I’ve certainly filled their cups many, many times. I wanted to do it; it was part of how I showed how much I cherished them. For David, these are probably acts of hospitality, not those of a parent, but I still hear David basking in the care, the *physical* care, God provides. They are acts of love. This psalm encourages me to trust that God has that kind of love for me, and I should bask in it.

Deb Vanderbilt

**Wednesday, March 21, 2012**

**Feast of Thomas Ken, Bishop**

*Philippians 4:4-9 \* Luke 6:17-23 \* Psalm 34:1-8 or 145:8-13*

**Thomas Ken, Bishop of Bath and Wells (1637-1711)**

When I was approached last week to participate with a Meditation, I agreed to do something on Thomas Ken. At that time, his name was not familiar to me. Bishop Ken is remembered on the 21st of March in the Liturgical Calendar. The prayer associated with Ken, speaks of him as one who had the “grace and courage to bear witness to the truth before rulers and kings”. Sometimes this courage or saying what he thought to be true meant that Ken fell out of favor in the court. Ken was ordained in 1662. He lost his post as Royal Chaplain to Princess Mary when he publicly disagreed with her husband, William of Orange. Perhaps, his best-known act of dissent was when he refused to support King James the Second’s “Declaration of Indulgence”. Ken was one of the seven bishops who refused to publish the King’s decree which would have opened up various public offices to non-Anglicans. Ken and six other bishops were imprisoned in the Tower of London and then freed by an outraged mob. James the Second ended up fleeing into exile.

William of Orange, the new King of England and his wife, Mary then came into power. Here again, Ken chose not to take the path which would have made his life easier. Since he had already sworn an oath of allegiance to James the Second; under the circumstances, he claimed he could not swear another one to William and Mary. In 1691, because of this decision, Ken lost his position as Bishop of Bath and Wells. He then stepped out of the public realm and at age 54 went into retirement. He is celebrated in his Feast day prayer as one who “constantly defended what is right” and who was willing to “suffer for truth’s sake”.

Today, we are more familiar with Bishop Ken through the presence of his music in the liturgy. I will close with his doxology or song of praise. It is the final stanza of three of his most well-known hymns.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.

Praise Him, all creatures here below.

Praise him, above, ye heavenly host.

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Claire Talley

Friday, March 23, 2012

## Feast of Gregory, the Illuminator

*Acts 17:22-31 \* Matthew 5:11-16 \* Psalm 33:6-11 or 98: 1-4*

### Gregory, the Illuminator

As Paul wanders through the streets of Athens, confronted with pagan gods, he is taken aback by the inscription “To an unknown God.” Although Paul may have had very different intentions when introducing this “unknown God,” these words remind me of times when God has felt “unknown” to me. Do you recognize this God? The One that seems absent during difficult times, the One we seek in moments of loneliness and darkness.

Our faith can be uniquely challenged in moments of suffering and hopelessness. Whether confronted with the loss of a loved one, suffering of others, or our own health issues, our faith can be called into question. In these moments we are reminded that our faith can't fix the pain we are experiencing or remove the sense of abandonment that besets us.

How shocking was it to learn that even someone as saintly as Mother Teresa, an icon of charity and selflessness, felt the absence of God in her life and her work. In letters written while performing humanitarian works in Calcutta, India, the founder of the Missionaries of Charity and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize expressed doubts about the presence of God. Writing in confidence, she shared: “...As for me - the silence and the emptiness is so great, that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear. The tongue moves [in prayer] but does not speak...”<sup>1</sup>

I must admit, there have definitely been times when I wondered how God can allow injustices to exist. I have questioned how a supreme being can permit extraordinary suffering and tragedies to exist in the world, and in my own life. To read the sobering confessions of Mother Teresa reminds me of her complete humanness.

As I become more introspective over time, I now recognize that those times of profound spiritual crisis were indeed times of greatest spiritual awakening. I recognize now that the “unknown God” was always beside me. It was *me* who had closed my heart to the Mercy of God.

On this day, we celebrate Saint Gregory, the Illuminator, who brought Christianity to the Armenians, making it the first nation to adopt Christianity as an official religion in 301 AD. In his honor, we are reminded, as we are in the Acts, to remain open to the Spirit who ignites the light within us. Knowing that God is the author of new beginnings, of order out of chaos and light out of darkness, we can remain confident that this God of hope and grace will never abandon us, even when our path seems to take us into the very heart of difficulty and despair.

Christine Tompkins

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come be my Light*. (New York: Crown Publishing, 2007), 288.

**Saturday, March 24, 2012**

**Feast of Oscar Romero, Archbishop and Martyrs**

***Revelation 7:13-17 \* John 12:23-32 \* Psalm 31:15-24***

**Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, 1980, and the Martyrs of El Salvador**

“Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ will live like the grain of wheat that dies. It only apparently dies. If it were not to die, it would remain a solitary grain. The harvest comes because of the grain that dies. We know that every effort to improve society, above all when society is so full of injustice and sin, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us.”  
Oscar Romero, March 24, 1980

Oscar Romero was born in 1917 to a poor family in El Salvador. When he was 13, he left home to attend a seminary, first in El Salvador, and later in Rome. He was ordained in 1942, and remained in Rome to begin doctoral work, but was sent to San Miguel in El Salvador to serve as a priest. During his service as a priest, he was fairly conservative, and sometimes had poor relationships with other clergy. He was particularly concerned with personal piety and, in his notes from discussions with his psychiatrist, felt that he was never quite dedicated as he should be. In 1970, he was consecrated as the auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of San Salvador. In this position, he felt quite unsure of himself, and at a retreat he wrote (translated in James Brockman's biography of Romero) “I must be more natural and spontaneous in affection. I must overcome myself and express my opinions. Especially, I must defend the faith and the church's teaching with courage.” In 1974 he became the bishop of Santiago de Maria, a rural diocese that included his birthplace. Finally, on February 23, 1977 he was appointed as archbishop of San Salvador. He was considered to be the safe, uncontroversial choice as archbishop, as he was supported by the government and the more conservative voices of the church. The anti-government organizations and those in the liberation theology movement were disappointed in this choice.

At this time, the situation in El Salvador was very tense, due to class inequality issues and a poor economy. Most of the country was extremely poor, and almost half of the land was owned by just thirteen or fourteen families. The main export in the 1900s was coffee; in 1931, there was a crash in coffee prices, leading to unemployment and poverty. In late 1931, there was a military coup, which promoted the fascist vice president of the country to the presidency. In 1932, left wing and communist groups joined with some of the indigenous people to attempt to overthrow the new government. They started an uprising, killing about a hundred people, but they were quickly defeated by the army. The government announced a meeting in a public square to discuss the issues and invited members of the insurrection to attend; when they arrived, the army opened fire and killed tens of thousands (estimates range from 10,000 to 40,000) of people. The government then began employing death squads to hunt down anyone suspected of being part of the movement, and anyone who looked like an indigenous person. The conflict wound down over the next few decades, until more economic trouble arrived in 1970. The government used the army and special police, and supported death squads, in order to keep the population under control. The governments of El Salvador and the United States were concerned that a communist revolution would take hold throughout all of Latin America. Clergy and other religious leaders, union members and organizers, and suspected communists were killed for years. Out of its fear of communism, the United States supported the government with military advisors, military training in the United States, and money. In 1978, about 700 were killed by the government-aligned forces; the next year almost 1800 were killed. Finally, in October 1979, a military junta overthrew the government, promising to work for land reform and other popular policies. However, they made very limited changes, and suffered several changes in leadership, before finally dissolving in 1982. By this time, the country was in a civil war that would claim 75,000 lives.

As archbishop, Romero seemed to intend to continue the existing policies of the church: advocate for unity, and work with the poor, while maintaining good relationships with the government. However, only a few weeks after he was installed as archbishop, his close friend, a priest named Rutilio Grande, was riding with a couple of peasant farmers when they were attacked and killed by a death squad. A few weeks before Grande was killed, one of Grande's friends, another priest, was kidnapped and then expelled from the country. Grande gave a sermon where he said:

“I am fully aware that very soon the Bible and the Gospels will not be allowed to cross the border. All that will reach us will be the covers, since all the pages are subversive—against sin, it is said. So that if Jesus crosses the border at Chalatenango, they will not allow him to enter. They would accuse him, the man-God ... of being an agitator, of being a Jewish foreigner, who confuses the people with exotic and foreign ideas, anti-democratic ideas, and i.e., against the minorities. Ideas against God, because this is a clan of Cain's. Brothers, they would undoubtedly crucify him again. And they have said so.”

Romero went to celebrate a funeral mass for Grande. Romero said: "When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead, I thought: if they killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path". The people that Grande was trying to visit told Romero they were certain that God would send somebody to take up Grande's work. When Romero returned to the capital, he began to break with the government. He announced that he would not take part in any government function until Grande's death had been investigated. (This never happened.) He canceled all services at churches throughout the country the next Sunday, except for a single service in the capital, where 100,000 people attended. He spoke through his sermons and writings and radio shows, calling for peace and encouraging people to work together and stop the violence. The conflict still continued to worsen. He received death threats; these seemed to bother him greatly. At a retreat at the end of February 1980, he wrote

“...I ask him to make his love, his justice, his truth shine through me more easily. I am afraid of violence to myself. I have been notified of serious threats for this very week. I fear because of the weakness of my flesh, but I pray the Lord to give me serenity and perseverance -- and also humility, because I also feel tempted to vanity.  
“

He also wrote,

“Thus do I express my consecration to the heart of Jesus, who was ever a source of inspiration and joy in my life. Thus also I place under his loving providence all my life, and I accept with faith in him my death, however hard it be. I do not want to express an intention to him, such as that my death be for my country's peace or our church's flourishing. Christ's heart will know how to direct it to the purpose he wishes. For me to be happy and confident, it is sufficient to know with assurance that in him is my life and my death, that in spite of my sins I have placed my trust in him and I shall not be confounded, and others will carry on with greater wisdom and holiness the works of the church and the nation.”

He returned to his work and reading his sermons on the radio. On March 23, 1980, in his sermon, he asked the army to stop killing civilians:

“Brothers, you are from the same people; you kill your fellow peasants...No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is contrary to the will of God...In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people, I ask you—I implore you—I command you in the name of God: stop the repression!”

On the 24<sup>th</sup>, he was at a hospital chapel, celebrating a mass for the funeral of a friend's mother. While he was elevating the chalice, he was shot and killed.

His sermon that day was on today's gospel reading - the opening quotation came from that sermon. El Salvador did not see peace after Romero's death. A civil war ensued that lasted 12 years. Thousands of people were killed, including Romero, religious workers and priests before him, and after him, even those working to negotiate with the anti-government groups. While today there is no civil war in El Salvador, there is still much poverty and high crime. Most of the parties involved in the violence - the government forces, and the revolutionary forces - came together for peace. But many of those responsible for the violence have certainly not been put to shame - instead they have held positions in the new government.

Some of them were trained in the United States, at the School of the Americas, where they were instructed that, in order to preserve the national government, they should target for counterintelligence activities those "teams or hostile organizations whose objective is to create dissension or cause restlessness among the civilian population in the area of operations." I suppose talk like "lying lips" and "let the wicked be put to shame; let them be silent in the grave" could cause restlessness. While I know I should find today's readings to be comforting and encouraging - which I certainly do - they are sometimes haunting. This is perhaps my way of obsessing over personal piety (maybe the only thing I can count on having in common with Romero). It's hard to read

...the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.  
They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;  
the sun will not strike them,  
nor any scorching heat;  
for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life

while also knowing that my government printed a manual for the School of the Americas which stated that "indicators" of "insurgents carrying out psychological operations" include

- (a) Clergy embracing liberation theology
- (b) Clergy involved in activities concerning political, rural or labor discontent.
- (c) Adult men receiving refuge or food from clergy or help from them.

What can I do to keep this from happening again? What meaningful actions can I take to make sure I'm not helping to speak against the righteous?

Kyle Liddell

**Monday, March 26, 2012**

**Feast of The Annunciation**

*Isaiah 7:10-14 \* Hebrews 10:4-10 \* Luke 1:26-38 \* Psalm 45 or 40 or Canticle 3 or 15*

**March 26, the Feast of the Annunciation, transferred**

In the 1970's, I was a member of The Trees Community. By googling it, you can listen to our rendition of Psalm 45 (but be prepared for something unusual). We also sang an Annunciation song written by one of our members, (I cannot find it online at present), which begins,

"Came an angel in the night,  
A sudden bright and fiery light,  
Like a star thrown from the sky  
To the place where Mary prayed.  
'All hail, sweet Mary, why do you weep?  
God has looked upon you with favor  
His promises to keep.' "

Psalm 45 is a wedding song. The cast is a little hard to follow, but there are definitely bridesmaids. It has been read as a metaphor for Christ and His Bride, the Church. In "The Christ Tree," a musical meditation beginning with the soul's thirst for God in Psalm 42, we used Psalm 45 to represent the soul's "marriage" or commitment to God. The line that keeps coming back to me in thinking about this Lenten meditation is verse 11, " Listen daughter, forget your nation, your ancestral home. The king desires your beauty. He is your lord; bow down before him."

That is what Mary did when she said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." In the Magnificat, we see her full of hopes for her nation, but she did not realize that with this child, God was starting a new nation. We are part of that new Kingdom, brought into it by our baptism. As we prepare in Lent to renew our baptismal commitment, let us remember that God has looked upon us with favor--has desired the beauty of our souls; let us bow down before Him and, continually seeking the union of our will with His, say, "Let it be with me according to your word."

Christmas in Lent?

Mary Vukman

**Tuesday, March 27, 2012**

**Feast of Charles Henry Brent, Bishop**

***Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-12 \* Matthew 9:35-38 \* Psalm 122 or 133***

From the letter to the Church at Ephesus:

“ . . . Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.  
The gifts he gave were . . . to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body  
of Christ . . . “

Have we thought recently about the gifts we have all been given, to build up the body of Christ (the Church)? Perhaps we have been given the gift of teaching or maybe the gifts of a crafts person or artist. Let us remember that we are not only called to be present at worship on the Lord’s day, but to take action to build up the Church. During the Lenten period, let us all consider how we might use these gifts more purposefully to enrich the life of the Church and also how we might reach out to others with genuine hospitality.”

Wayne Least



Photograph by Noah Fields

**Friday, March 30, 2012**

***Exodus:10-21-11:8 \* 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 \* Mark: 10:46-52***

Have you ever noticed that God often finds it difficult to get our attention? It seems, rather often as well, to be just the reverse –God isn't listening to us! Unfortunately, both scenarios appear to occur with some frequency in our lives. These days, we can barely get our OWN attention, what with email, iPods, iPhones, 1100 TV channels – not to mention our jobs, our family and children, our church – the list is endless – and growing! Nevertheless, if we are to navigate through the life that has been given to us, we must make some time and effort to give God more than a few minutes of our time each day, or just on Sunday.

Consider today's readings listed above. In Exodus, the last two "Plagues of Egypt" are described – the plague of "Darkness" and the horrific plague of the "Death of the Firstborn". Moses and Pharaoh were contending furiously for the people of Israel's freedom, and eight plagues had not spoken to Pharaoh of God's will and determination. God WOULD lead His people into a new place as a nation, and also in due time bring the coming of Messiah, Who would lead the whole Creation out of bondage into freedom. It is often difficult at best to see God's Hand and Voice at work in our dangerous and corrupt World, but God has crashed through all the busyness and brokenness in this life by not only coming to us Himself in Jesus the Incarnate Word (second reading –) "...realizing that He Who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise us up with Jesus in our turn (v.14).... He also promises that though we often may feel plagued and baffled by life's heavy burdens and confusion, nevertheless "The temporary, light burden of our hardships is earning us forever an utterly incomparable eternal weight of Glory" (v. 17). Has he spoken to us? Yes! Are we listening?

Finally, in Mark's Gospel, the famous story of the healing of the blind man of Jericho. If ever there were "attention-getters" sent by God, it was in the miraculous healings of Jesus and His Disciples! This blind man WOULD be heard! "Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me" (v. 48). He was having trouble getting God's attention, and "many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet". Yet he persisted; Jesus heard, and answered.

Whatever Lent may be to each of us, it can be a time to pause, to be quiet, and both listen for God's Voice, and to speak to God as well of our failings, fears, hopes and promises. He knew our hearts intimately before we were even born, and has promised us He will never fail to hear us. In the joy of Easter that we await during this season, we will *know* that God has heard our prayers, and is coming to us through Jesus' glorious Resurrection. In that Great Day, He has spoken to us, and given us all that He has! Thanks be to God! He heard us! We hear Him!

Michael Gehl

**Saturday, March 31, 2012**

**Feast of John Donne, Priest**

***Wisdom 7: 24-8:1 \* John 5: 19-24 \* Psalm 27:5-11 or 16:5-11***

Today is the last Saturday before Holy Week begins. We have been invited to experience a Holy Lent, a time of reflection and penitence, preparation for the new life which bursts forth in Easter. The readings today take us to a place of darkness. The Psalmist in Psalm 42 expresses a deep yearning for God and a sense of God's absence:

As the deer longs for streams of water,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, the living God.  
When can I enter and see the face of God?  
My tears have been my bread day and night,  
as they ask me every day, "Where is your God?"

The psalmist desires an encounter with the living God, not a religious routine. He remembers times in his past that he experienced God's presence, but that time is not now. He is in a place of sorrow, isolation, emptiness, and those around him are not helping as they question his faith. In the midst of this spiritual darkness, the writer cries out to God, expressing his frustration and need:

I will say to God, my rock:  
"Why do you forget me?  
Why must I go about mourning  
with the enemy oppressing me?"  
It shatters my bones, when my adversaries reproach me,  
when they say to me every day: "Where is your God?"  
Why are you downcast, my soul,  
why do you groan within me?  
Wait for God, for I shall again praise him,  
my savior and my God.

The psalmist's words resonate with our own experiences of confusion and spiritual dryness. The Gospel story tells of the encounter of Bartimaeus with Jesus. Bartimaeus is blind, in physical darkness as opposed to the psalmists' emotional and spiritual darkness. He is isolated by his infirmity and forced to beg in order to survive. When he hears that Jesus is nearby, he cries out to him: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!!" Those around him try to silence him, to prevent his disturbing the Rabbi who is surrounded by a large crowd. Perhaps they thought blindness a punishment or his lot in life; either way not important enough to disturb the master. Bartimaeus is not deterred by the crowd's resistance and continues to cry out. Jesus, in the midst of the chatter and confusion, hears Bartimaeus call. He looks at the blind man with what must have been great tenderness and asks: "Bartimaeus, what do you want me to do for you"....and Bartimaeus asks to receive his sight. Jesus heals this blind man, and Bartimaeus' response is to follow Jesus.

In the coming week we will be remembering the events of Christ's passion and resurrection. The days leading up to Holy Saturday are days of darkness, when we are invited to remember the frailty of those walking with Jesus and with it our own vulnerability. What are the sources of darkness in our lives? What circumstances, relationships, losses, threats invite us to reflect on our frailty and need for God? Is there a felt absence of God in our suffering? What are the yearnings inside that compel us?

Thomas Merton said:

"This, then, is our desert: to live facing despair but not to consent. To trample it down under hope in the Cross. To wage war against despair unceasingly. That war is our wilderness. If we wage it courageously, we will find Christ at our side. If we cannot face it, we will never find him."

Out of this felt need comes a deeper thirst for the living God, the desire expressed by the Psalmist and Bartimaeus. Ritual is not enough. Theology is not enough. Even service to others is not enough. We approach Easter knowing that we will meet there the Christ who is as near as our own heart. And what then will we answer to His question: "What do you want me to do for you??"

Peg Kristoffersen



Photograph by Shirley Ricker

**Monday April 2, 2012**

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

In the way we listen to God, we must learn a new way. We must not try to listen for his word as the person we are today; arrogant, righteous, and wealthy. We have to listen for God's call as a servant; humble, willing and poor in spirit. For God calls not the mighty and powerful, whom he will readily strike down, but calls the lowly to be his presenters.

Look not to our laws for redemption, but to the blood of the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sins. The old ways have merit in their own right, but will not bring salvation.

Be mindful of placing value on the effort of those who serve God, be careful not to judge harshly those who spend their energy and money in praising Jesus. Do what you can in your own way. Love God the way he teaches us. Treat others as though they have the Holy Spirit within them.

Seek only the protection of God. Go about your way without regard to the judgment of others and the risk of losing our worldly things. Praise God for his providing us with everything we need, and protecting us from the temptations of our own sinful ways.

Listen. Pray. Do. Let the power of the way Jesus teaches us fill our ears, our muscles, and our will. To better live on this Earth in preparation for being welcomed to his Father's Heavenly Kingdom.

Joe McCutcheon



Photograph by Shirley Ricker

**Wednesday, April 4, 2012**

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

Can you place yourself into the time of Jesus, the late-spring like days of Passover? Smell the last traces of nard that Mary of Bethany had poured into Jesus' hair, not all that long ago? Feel the exhilaration of watching Lazarus come out of the tomb, then sit down and eat with you, like nothing had ever happened to him. Know in your heart that Passover is a party, God had certainly caused a triumph over Egypt and we walked out with all their stuff and we are celebrating. It's tomorrow after all. And Jesus is excited! He can't wait to celebrate with us (Luke 15:22) before He suffers.

Wait, before He suffers. The one who still smells like perfume, who raises dead people, is planning on partying with us, celebrating the lamb whose blood was/is on that doorpost. What is it like to sit at that table with Judas, to hear the words – go quickly, do what you have to do? What is it like to sip that cup – the one called Redemption, just after you've stuffed yourself with roast lamb. Ah, but that's tomorrow. And the suffering comes after tomorrow.

But it's today, and Jesus is still close by, there is still time for things to be done. Although we still can smell the perfume, feel the joy, revel in the merriment, we know the dark days are ahead. And we know the road gets rougher, steeper, and more difficult. Like one of the apostles, draw close to him today. After all, today is the day of salvation! Draw near while you still recognize him - because tomorrow we are going to the party, and the suffering comes after tomorrow.

Margaret Sconfitto



Photograph by Shirley Ricker

**Thursday, April 5, 2012**

**Maundy Thursday**

***Exodus 12: 1-10, 11-14 \* 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 \* John 13: 1-7, 31b-35 \* Psalm 116:1, 10-17***

“Maundy” Thursday is the day before the crucifixion. In other traditions this day is called Holy Thursday or Great Thursday. “Maundy” is from the Latin word *mandatum* which means *commandment*.

In the Epistle appointed for Maundy Thursday St. Paul recalls:

Jesus, on the night before he died, took bread, gave thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body given for you. *Do this* in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, and said "*Do this*, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

And from the Gospel of John:

At a meal with his closest friends, Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, tied a towel around himself. Then Jesus poured water into a basin, began to wash the disciples' feet and, finally, wiped their feet with a towel that was tied around him. “For I have set you an example, that you also should *do* as I have done to you...I give you a new *commandment* that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Jesus is giving a new commandment...that we love one another. Jesus doesn't say “I think it would be nice if you loved one another.” He doesn't say, “You might want to think about loving one another.” His words are firm and imperative. “DO THIS to remember me” and “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Christians have done this – broken bread and shared wine – since the very beginning. Sharing the bread and wine of the Eucharist is commanded, but so, also, is washing others' feet and serving others after Jesus' example. These are both sacramental actions which point beyond themselves to the sacrifice which Jesus made on the cross and continues to make for us. “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” And, lest we forget, that love cost Jesus his life.

Reverend Marilyle Sweet Page

Friday, April 6, 2012

## Good Friday

*Isaiah 52:13-53; 12 \* Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9 \* Psalm 22*

There has never been a passion narrative in which I do not cringe at the congregation's line, "Crucify him!" Don't we all pull back at those lines, secretly imagining (or secretly longing) our hearts to be too pure for them? The irony of a pure heart is that it must first know itself to be impure. In my younger faith, I'd always figured I could safely answer "no" to the question our hymn puts to us: *were you there when they crucified my lord?* I was born, thankfully, long after the Holocaust and even longer after the crucifixion. I was there for neither.

I hadn't thought I'd had any part in the crucifixion of Jesus, but the more I long for a pure heart, the more I realize that that I am born with the same human capacity to be as murderous and monstrous as any Roman soldier or Nazi. I am born like Peter - with the same humanity that is capable of warming itself by a fire while an innocent civilian is being seized by the police to be brutalized and murdered. We are all born, like it or not, with the potential to abandon one another in death. We who "were not there" when they crucified our lord share in the fullness of a humanity whose shadow side is *inhumanity*, and we would be in grave danger to believe that only some people are actually capable of being cruel.

It is a heavy question for those who dare to ask it: the question of Good Friday, the question of this freedom we have been given to hurt one another, abandon one another, turn our backs on another's suffering... the freedom we have to conceive and invent "*crucifixion*." Is this freedom worth it? Worth the risk that came with it - the risk of inventing "crucifixion" and "slave labor" and "work camps" and "gas ovens?"

Archbishop Rowan Williams spoke once about memory and hope, saying that the only basis for real hope is the recovery of the past and whatever regret or shame we have buried there. He talked about Peter, about how "our apostasy never alters God's purposes," in fact, God's response to our apostasy is to turn and *return* to giving us new choices, new chances, new lives. The Jesus that foretold Peter's denial of him three times is the Christ who made it a point to revisit Peter, invite Peter, *three times* asking, "Peter, do you love me?" Three times, Peter answers that he loves Jesus - negating his three claims to the guard that he never knew Jesus!

Do you see how it works with God? Our cruelty and betrayal never affect God's relentless pursuit of us. We never turn God away from calling us into his embrace and into his future. To shout, as we have done, "crucify him!" is a prophetic proclamation of our human capacity but also of God's capacity: the God who returns with us to a past we would prefer to forget, who transforms the shame and guilt of a passion narrative into an Easter hope.

To shout "crucify him" in the presence of the *risen Christ* is to know ourselves as sinners reconciled. To shout - or sing - "crucify him" in the presence of the risen Christ is to participate in a human guilt that is conscious of itself - that recognizes itself and mourns its misuse of freedom. Then, and only then, can we know what it is to participate in the resurrection.

We may doubt whether this terrible freedom we've been given is worth it, but god doesn't seem to. For all we know, God was also looking straight into the future when he breathed into us the breath of

freedom, maybe even saw himself dying on a mountain called “the place of the skull” as he asked *himself* if our freedom would be worth it. Apparently, he answered himself, “yes.” The gift of human freedom, with all its saintly and demonic consequences, is a phenomenon into which God chose to enter and subject himself to. (And overcome.) The God we have crucified will yet return to us - in the very face of our inhumanity will he turn his own face , bright with mercy - and we will know, if only in a glimpse, what it is to have a pure heart and see God.

Reverend Ruth Ferguson

**Saturday, April 7, 2012**

**Holy Saturday**

***Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24 \* 1 Peter 4:1-8 \* John 19:38-42***

What do you do when your world falls apart? On Holy Saturday, the disciples must have been in a state of shock. Their beloved teacher who had healed so many, their Messiah, who had been greeted with palms as the Son of David on his entry into Jerusalem less than a week earlier, had been executed as a criminal! What should they do now? And what should we do when coping with disasters like the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or any other time we feel that our world has crumbled? The readings for today show us some possible responses.

Job was a pious and upright man, but sudden calamities had killed all his children, stripped him completely of his considerable wealth, and ruined his health. In today's reading he complains to God - an understandable response, though not particularly helpful except as a vent for his emotions.

In the Gospel reading, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus care for the body of Jesus, wrapping it with costly spices and placing it in Joseph's own new tomb. Their choice was to do what they could to help, in the midst of their own sorrow - an appropriate choice for followers of the One who had commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Peter's letter agrees with this approach, reminding us, "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins."

For all of us who wish to follow Jesus, I think that an extremely important example is the choice He made in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will but yours be done." This is difficult to say in the midst of a disaster, but in my experience it is a very helpful way to pray. Luke's Gospel says that after Jesus prayed this way in the garden, "an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength" (Luke 22:43). An example I like is a little child crying about a broken toy while holding onto it with all his might; his father can fix it for him only when he is willing to hand it over to him. It takes faith to entrust our problems to our Heavenly Father, but it does make it much more possible for Him to help us. I learned something about this as a freshman in college. I had a huge crush on a very nice boy, a friend of my cousin, and had been hoping he would write to me. But instead he sent me an invitation to his engagement party, and all my castles in the air came crashing down. (Years later, he became a state governor, and I realized that I could never have been the political hostess he needed!) Anyhow I went to the chapel and part of my prayer was approximately, "Lord, obviously you did not want what I wanted, but I'm sure you have a better plan for me, so please take charge of my life and help me to do what you want." Well, God answered my prayer by touching me with his love; I cannot really describe it, but for weeks afterwards I was riding my bike around campus singing the Gloria. Of course surrendering our will to God is an ongoing process, but I believe each step along that path brings help when we need it most.

The reading from Lamentations is the one that I find most helpful for desperate situations. Jeremiah had been persecuted for prophesying to Jerusalem about the approaching disaster; when the city was destroyed it would be understandable if he had felt it served them right. Instead he wrote in Lamentations, "My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people." However he also wrote, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

So when our world seems to have fallen apart, let us do what we can to be helpful and loving, ask our Lord to take charge of the whole situation and say with Jeremiah, "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases."

The resurrection is coming! Thanks be to God.

Lucy Alonzo