

Lenten Meditations

About this Guide

Lent is special season in the life of the Church. It is meant to be a time of self-examination and prayer in preparation for Easter. The roots of Lent are both scriptural—it mirrors the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert, after his baptism—and historical, rooted in the devotional practices of the earliest Christians. Lent knocks us out of step with the rest of the world and invites us to pause, look deeper, and be challenged by what we see.

These daily meditations have been prepared by the clergy who serve in varying capacities on the Cathedral Close of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. Wherever you are in your journey of faith, this offering is meant to invite you into this sacred season of reflection, repentance, and ultimately, renewal.

We invite you to download this guide and follow at your own pace. This guide was created as a daily model, and each reflection focuses on one piece of scripture from the Daily Office of the Episcopal Church. You will find the date on the top left corner, the full scripture passage listed in the middle, and the author of the reflection in the top right corner. Beneath is a brief selection from the scripture, along with a reflection on the full passage. An example is below.

Lenten Meditations

Date

Daily Scripture Passage

Author

Daily Pull Quote

Daily Reflection

You may notice that we skip Sundays in this guide. Each Sunday is a celebration of Christ's resurrection, a "mini Easter" feast within the larger Lenten fast. We encourage that Sundays are a day to be with your community in prayer. At the Cathedral, we gather on Sundays at 10:30am in person and online. You are always welcome to join us, and please keep an eye on our website for updates regarding the observance of the Lenten and Easter seasons at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

Lenten Meditations

February 14, 2024

Luke 18:9-14

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

— Luke 18:13b

In 1973, Dr. Karl Menninger published a book that became an international sensation: *Whatever Became of Sin?* It may be true that many individual and many institutions have given up on the notion of sin. Ash Wednesday, though, is proof that many people are painfully aware of how sinful they are.

People come to church on Ash Wednesday for many reasons. Some, for example, come because they always have, and it is an easy way to connect with the religion of their childhood. Some come for what others might call be called superstitious reasons (although one person’s superstition is another person’s piety). Woven through all those reasons, though, is a thread. They know something in their life is not right.

We will stand on the steps of the Cathedral all day today offering to dirty the faces of passersby and to tell them that they are going to die. It is serious business. Sometimes, people approach and try to make light of it even as they ask to receive the sign and be told the hard truth. Usually, though, they come with serious faces, because it is serious business.

Sometimes there is a moment of grace when someone speaks truths about themselves so tender that they are heartbreaking. Sometimes, it is about their own sinfulness, but just as often it is about the anguish that the world’s sinfulness has caused them.

The world is full of beauty, but it is also full of pain. On Ash Wednesday, we focus on the pain. It is right to acknowledge to God that each of us sins and hurts ourselves and others, and it is just as right to acknowledge before God that we are trapped in an unavoidable web of sin that over and over hurts us. We cannot escape the wounds inflicted by this wounded world. “Have mercy,” we cry, especially on Ash Wednesday.

Then, we hear the good news of God’s love and justification. Sinners though we are, living though we do in a sinful and weary world, God’s tender care for us never ceases, and when we stand before God as we do today vulnerable and honest, we open ourselves to God’s never-failing embrace.

Lenten Meditations

February 15, 2024

Psalm 37:1-18

The Rev. Canon Steven Lee, Vicar

Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; do not be jealous of those who do wrong.
— Psalm 37:1

The French literary theorist and philosopher René Girard developed the theory of “mimetic desire.”

Journalist Cynthia Haven describes the theory this way.

“We want what others want. We want it because they want it. These desires are shaped by our restless imitation of others. When the coveted goods are scarce, these desires pit us against one another—on an individual level, on a community level, and on a global scale as well. It causes divorces and it causes international wars. It causes children to fight over a five-buck toy in the sandbox.”

In order to reduce the conflict caused by mimetic desire, societies create scapegoats. A scapegoat functions as a “release valve,” by allowing a single innocent victim to bear the burden of a society’s violent urges.

Girard noted that this dynamic occurs in most myths across cultures—except in the Bible.

The Bible is the one religious text that exposes the scapegoating mechanism, especially in the story of Jesus. As another journalist put it, Jesus is the “ultimate scapegoat,” but the Cross “exposes scapegoating as a lie and thereby, if it is heeded, empties it of its power.”

As we witness the prevalence of scapegoating today in our politics and culture, so often exacerbated by social media, Girard’s insights reveal that Jesus shows us the way out of our own society’s violent urges and toward a path of true peace.

Lenten Meditations

February 16, 2024

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

The Rev. Canon Eva Suarez,
Canon for Community Engagement

Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair?
Is it not your ways that are unfair?” — Ezekiel 18:25

Ezekiel asks us to consider a false proverb: “the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”—a way of saying, children pay the consequences of their parent’s actions. You may be remembering those who questioned Jesus in John’s gospel—“who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Across the centuries, God’s answer is the same: we are accountable to our own choices, and our own actions. Sin (and blame) is not hereditary.

Yet I find myself thinking about systemic injustice, like the after-effects of slavery and Jim Crow, or the economic devastation of whole towns and neighborhoods in the wake of company business decisions to shut down factories.

Momentarily satisfied that I had poked a hole in divine logic, then it hit me: I was actually thinking of current human callousness, choices that have been doubled down on over decades, or perpetuated by our own hesitancy to upset the status quo. And across the centuries, again, God echoes back to me: is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? Too often, we want to blame “the sins of our fathers” for what is being done right now.

Ezekiel calls us to repentance, to turn away from transgression, and we should consider ways both large and small. How do we lift our voices to our politicians and other leaders, to stop them feeding our communities sour grapes under the guise of a full meal? And in our own lives, do we ever try to shift the consequences of our own failings on to others? Perhaps our own forgetfulness, our own mismanagement, or our own failure to adequately plan? This Lent, how can we claim our own sins, and set about repenting them?

Lenten Meditations

February 17, 2024

Philippians 4:10-20

Sister Hannah Spiers, ccn,
Community at the Crossing

I have learned to be content with whatever I have.

— Philippians 4:11b

It sounds like clickbait: “I have learned the secret of being content!”

At the end of this letter to the Philippians, Paul expresses gratitude. He takes the time to thank them, a real thank you for a need that they have met and for an encounter with consistent generosity.

But it appears that this gratitude is but a gateway to an even greater encounter that has affected Paul, that has taught him to be content ‘in any and all circumstances.’ A need is met, I am satisfied, I am no longer in want. But how can you be content not just when you are well-fed but when you are hungry? Not just when you have plenty but when you are in need?

The key word is ‘learned’. We learn not just through encounters but through relationship. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow his example—living a life in joyful surrender and dependence on the Father. This dependence comes through everyday moments, where we surrender ourselves to the present moment and the God who dwells there, laying down our ‘if only’s’ and ‘it would be better if’s,’ our ‘hungry’ and ‘in need.’ It is about knowing that, whatever the circumstances, “God alone is enough” (Teresa of Avila).

Paul met the Lord “who strengthens me” (4:13) and satisfies “every need” (4:19)—and learned, through the generosity of those, that ultimately, his need is for God. As St Augustine of Hippo wrote, “our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

Dependence on God is the path to contentment.

Lenten Meditations

February 19, 2024

Mark 1:1-13

The Rev. Canon Eva Suarez,
Canon for Community Engagement

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

— Mark 1:12-13

Mark's gospel is brief, but ferocious—sparse, haunting, and always on the move. The same Spirit that descends like a dove immediately drives Jesus out into the wilderness. You could say there is an interesting logic to this, that Jesus is named and claimed as God's child at his baptism. He is grounded in his identity, which means he is ready for whatever comes next. We cannot begin a ministry without first knowing who we are.

I'm also struck by how Mark's gospel makes space for contemplation. Absent the familiar temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke, there's space for the mind to wander—how was Jesus tempted? If I were in the wilderness, what might tempt me? Mark says that Jesus is “with” the wild beasts—I've always assumed that meant danger, but does it? Perhaps this is a peaceful co-existence, a prefiguring of the lion laying down with the lamb. And the angels waited on him...rather than a divine waitstaff, the verb in that sentence is *diakoneó*, meaning to serve or to minister, the same root of our deacon. So even in his time of greatest temptation and privation, Jesus is in a relationship with heaven, with the angels who function as God's messengers.

All of us are subject to temptation, without a doubt. This season is meant to be a time for us to reflect and repent, to consider well who we are trying to be in this world. What would it mean to take some inspiration from Mark's Jesus—to be in harmony with the larger world, and to hear the message of our fundamental identity as God's children.

Lenten Meditations

February 20, 2024

Psalms 45, 47, and 48

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a try of joy.
— Psalm 47:1

For most of the year, including Lent, we pray the Psalms morning and evening in a seven-week rotation. Today, we're meant to pray Psalms 45, 47, and 48. They would have come up in the rotation today no matter which season we found ourselves in.

Nothing in any of them sounds like Lent. They are full of praise because the Church greets every morning's sunrise with delight. Day inevitably follows upon night, and (to borrow a phrase from another Psalm) we are glad. It is not only a cosmological fact, but also an existential fact. Day follows upon night.

In the middle of the night—cosmological or existential—there is no reason to believe that light will dawn except that we have seen it happen so many times. From experience, we know that it is true.

During Lent, we do not act as if we do not know. We know that God's forgiveness inevitably follows upon our sin and repentance. We know that the tomb is empty. We know that the risen Christ lives among us and in us. Lent is not a time for spiritual amnesia.

If anything, Lent is a time to clear away distractions that keep us from remembering the truth. We "give things up for Lent" to create a mental space to remember what we might otherwise forget. Day does inevitably follow night. Forgiveness does inevitably follow sin and repentance. Life does inevitably follow death. From experience, we know that it is true.

Lenten Meditations

February 21, 2024

Genesis 37: 25-36

The Rev. Rhonda Rubinson

When some Midianite traders passed by, his brothers drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. — Genesis 37:28

Oh, how our souls cry out in agony when we are betrayed by those closest to us...

Betrayal—for pieces of silver, no less—is one of the parallels between the stories of Joseph and Jesus: Joseph sold into slavery by his own brothers, Jesus handed over to temple authorities by a man Jesus himself chose as one of his spiritual family. There is a lesson in those betrayals: that a toxic combination of envy and lust—for money, power, even sexual satisfaction—can lead us to manipulate people and circumstances to gain personal advantage, and rid ourselves of troublesome competition.

We justify our behavior as somehow righting a wrong (“I deserve that promotion at work, not her”), redressing a personal injury (“My partner/husband/wife does not love me”), even performing a public service (“I can use my ill-gotten gains to help the less fortunate”). For those of us engaged in betrayal, Lent is a forceful reminder that we cannot excuse our actions at the expense of others. And for those of us suffering betrayal, we remember that the Bible tells us that what is meant for evil can be turned to good by God—but perhaps far in the future. In the moment, that knowledge may not blunt the pain of betrayal, but it does give us hope.

We can all be betrayers, and we can all suffer betrayal, yet our God stands ready to forgive and heal us, no matter what we have done or have suffered.

Lenten Meditations

February 22, 2024

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15

The Rev. Canon Victor Conrado,
Diocesan Canon for Congregational
Vitality and Formation

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: to the one group a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. — 1 Corinthians 2:15-16

Two people describing the same event may have different accounts. For instance, two witnesses of an accident may offer contradicting details.

It is that way in all of life. Some people view trials as a curse, others see them as an opportunity. Likewise, some view the Christian life as a “burden to carry,” while others view it as a privilege to celebrate. Reflect on how you perceive these things.

Believers are like sweet perfume, spreading the knowledge of Christ everywhere. Their lives emit a Christ-like fragrance that rises to God. Different smells capture our attention, some negative and others positive.

Paul warns us that not everyone is going to like what they smell in the believer. What some people find attractive others will find repulsive. Some people respond to the fragrance of Christ as a life-giving perfume. But there will be others who do not like what they smell. The message of God’s love offends them.

The call of Christ is an invitation to change the direction of one's life—to repent. It necessitates letting go of all self-saving aspirations. Some people try to avoid hearing this message.

Those who hate God's message of love may also hate its messengers. We cannot change that. But we can ensure that people respond to the message, not us. We can speak with love and show Christ's love through actions.

Lenten Meditations

February 23, 2024

Mark 2:13-22

The Rev. Canon Steven Lee, Vicar

When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” — Mark 2:17

In August 2013, just a few months after he had been elected to the papacy, Pope Francis met with the editor of a leading Italian Jesuit journal to give an interview.

This editor had the first question ready, but he decided not to follow his prepared script. Instead, the editor asked, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” referencing the Pope’s given name.

The Pope stared at the editor in silence and did not respond. The editor wondered aloud if the question had been appropriate to ask. The Pope nodded and then gave his answer.

“I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

The Pope’s answer points to an enduring truth of our faith that can so easily be forgotten or twisted. As followers of Jesus, we are not a “chosen elect” who may boast of our superior spirituality and use our faith as a weapon to put down other people.

Instead, we are sinners, like everyone else in the world. As followers of Jesus, we are sinners who are deeply aware of our brokenness and who acknowledge that we cannot heal ourselves. Our healing, our wholeness, must come from outside of ourselves.

When we gather in community as Christ’s Body, the Church, we are like sick patients coming to a hospital, as we look for relief from our great physician and friend, Jesus.

Lenten Meditations

February 24, 2024

Psalm 55

The Rev. Canon Jeanne Person,
Cathedral trustee

O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee to a far-off place and make my lodging in the wilderness. — Psalm 55:7-8

When her abusive father, holding a liquor bottle, calls her to come into the house, Jenny grabs a young Forrest Gump's hand and runs with him into a corn field. She drops to her knees, pulling Forrest down, and begs him to pray with her, "Dear God, make me a bird so I can fly far, far away from here."

In anguish because of the world's clamorous horrors and afraid of death, the psalmist similarly prays to fly far away. Once praying, the psalmist reveals sorrow like Jenny's: someone close, who should have been trustworthy, has instead brought betrayal and harm. The psalmist confesses to God a yearning to flee into the wilderness to find peace and protection there.

It is natural to wish to flee wickedness, and it is right when we can find safety. The Desert Fathers and Mothers did, escaping the dangers for Christians, atrocities, and warfare of the 4th century Roman Empire to seek safety, silence, and spiritual peace in the Egyptian wilderness.

Yet we cannot always fly away. Nor will we always wish to – remember the saints who sacrificed their lives saving others from evil. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness were not about escape, but rather preparation. The Holy Spirit came upon him in baptism, then drove him into the desert to ready him to confront, not flee, the terrors of the world and death, towards creating new possibility for goodness and risen life.

We can pray with the psalmist when we genuinely need safety. What song might we pray with Jesus to share in his mission? Perhaps this cherished country song:

When troubles surround us
When evils come
The body grows weak
The spirit grows numb
When these things beset us
God doesn't forget us
He sends down His love
On the wings of a dove

Lenten Meditations

February 26, 2024

1 Corinthians 4:8-20 (21)

The Rev. Patrick Williams,
Chaplain to the Cathedral School

But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. — 1 Corinthians 4:19-20

Many today, including Christians, seem to have an unabashed thirst for amassing power, particularly in terms of our current political landscape. Yet the truth is that even those who believe themselves to be standing for a more loving and just world know that very little gets accomplished without power.

In speaking to the community at Corinth and talking about those who have become filled with arrogance, Paul contrasts power with talk. He makes clear that the ultimate measure of the community and its leadership is not in their talk but in their power.

For Paul, power does not lie in the eloquence or persuasiveness of speech nor in brute strength or military might. Power, for Paul, is derived from God in Christ. Moreover, power, as he will later say in 2 Corinthians, can only be made perfect in weakness. The question that Paul raises then, to the community at Corinth as well as to us, is not about the validity of power but rather the validity of the source of one's or a community's power.

How about you? What really is the source of your power? Lent beckons us to ponder the question: is the one who was powerless even unto death the source of our power? Perhaps before we find another thing to do or cause to champion, it would be worth asking ourselves what is the source of our power? Is it Jesus? For nothing more and nothing less than the kingdom of God is depending on it.

Lenten Meditations

February 27, 2024

Genesis 42:1-17

The Rev. Canon Steven Lee, Vicar

Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies. — Genesis 42:16

If you know the story of Joseph in Genesis, Joseph's behavior in this passage is not as strange as it might first seem. Joseph is testing his brothers to see if they have changed.

Earlier in the story, Joseph's brothers act out of their jealousy. They resent that their father has a special love for Joseph. They throw Joseph into a pit and leave him to die. Then, thinking better of it, they sell him into slavery. Returning home, they tell their father that wild animals have killed Joseph. They are not a model of brotherly love or filial piety.

The details of the story are shocking—to a point. We all come from families. No matter how well-adjusted our families may be (and for many of us, it is not a stretch to say that our families are the opposite and better described as “broken”), all families have conflicts. All of us have had fights with our parents, siblings, children, or members of our extended family, when we say deeply hurtful, and shocking, things. We may have even acted upon them.

But the story of Joseph's brothers should give us hope.

People can change. Reconciliation is possible.

Lenten Meditations

February 28, 2024

Mark 4:1-20

The Rev. Canon Nora Smith,
Diocesan Canon for Transition Ministry

And other (seeds) are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. — Mark 4:18-19

The cares of this world are many, and more every day. A dream of justice, mercy, and kindness struggles to break in. There is fear and cruelty; there is scarcity and selfishness, often right in our own communities.

What happens to the Word of God in this brokenness? How can it thrive among these thorns?

But suppose we choose to challenge the parable that insists nothing can grow in this environment? Instead of resigning ourselves to helplessness in the face of the cares of the world, what if we listen more deeply to the Word of God and seek enough space in our hearts, and energy in our minds and bodies, to push back against the things that overwhelm us. Suppose we plant ourselves as living witnesses to kindness and justice and not let cruelty and selfishness—those choking thorns—go unchallenged.

I think that even one persistent seed could make enough space for another, and then another. I wonder where, in the midst of so many stresses and worldly distractions I might find enough of the light and love of God to give me nourishment and help me thrive—even among the thorns.

Lenten Meditations

February 29, 2024

Psalm 71

The Rev. Rhonda Rubinson

You have showed me great troubles and adversities, but you will restore my life and bring me up again from the deep places of the earth. — Psalm 71:20

Psalm 71 invites us to ask ourselves: Is our relationship to God transactional, or is it covenantal?

A transactional relationship is based on present circumstance: in it one partner asks the other, “what can you do for me now?” It gives no weight to history; it presumes that inconstancy is not only possible but to be expected. Therefore we fear, sometimes rightly, that we could be abandoned by our partner at any time. A covenantal relationship is exactly the opposite: it presumes faithfulness no matter the circumstance; it is based on a sacred promise that is intended to be eternal; and it gives tremendous weight to history, presuming that constancy in the past will mean faithfulness, now and always.

Read Psalm 71 in its entirety, aloud if possible. Then read it again, and again. See how the elderly psalmist struggles in their present predicament, suffering unspecified attacks by “the wicked.” Feel the spasms of fear that “the wicked” might just triumph this time. But especially note the number of times the psalmist remembers the promises God made to Israel, and how God had consistently proved faithful, both in history and in the psalmist’s own life. This gives the psalmist (who in earlier, better times, had always delighted in praising God) the courage and faith to hope in and praise God even while neck-deep in their current trials. Could we do the same?

This Lent, we should ask ourselves: Is my relationship with God transactional, or is it covenantal?

Lenten Meditations

March 1, 2024

Genesis 43:1-15

The Rev. Canon Alissa Newton,
Canon to the Ordinary of the
Diocese of New York

Why did you treat me so badly?
— Genesis 43:6a

In the course of my life as a pastor I have sat with many people in pain as they ask the question, “why did this happen to me?”

It’s a good question, without many good answers to give in response. Israel is asking this question, when his sons tell him that in order to feed his people he must risk the life of his favorite child. From where the patriarch sits, out of grain and forced to beg, the emotional labor of watching Benjamin walk away feels impossible. Those of us who have read the whole story know something that Israel does not – that it is Joseph, his other favored child, who waits on the other side. Being willing to do the work of letting Benjamin go will save not only Israel and his sons, but their entire future.

The most useful question for Jacob/Israel to ask is not why, but how. How can he survive this risk? How can he trust God to care for his child? The answer to that question is easier to answer, for Israel and for us. This is a question that Lent can help with; how do we trust in God? How do we believe that there is a story bigger than the tragedies and uncertainties of our lives right now?

We practice. Whether we take on a discipline or let go of a cherished habit, Lent is an opportunity to practice the how of Christian life, a life that helps us discover what God is preparing for us on the other side of all the “why me” questions of our lives.

Lenten Meditations

March 2, 2024

Mark 5:1-20

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean

What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me. — Mark 5:7b

Of all the things the possessed man—the Gerasene Demoniac—could have asked Jesus, this seems the most unlikely. Mark tells us that the man was already so tormented that he howled day and night and intentionally injured himself. Mark says that the man was possessed by demons. We often colloquially speak of our “demons,” the voices in our heads that compel us in directions we would prefer not to go. While Mark would have understood “demon” in another sense, Mark recognized that something in the man was pushing him toward self-destruction.

“The devil you know is better than the devil you don’t,” we say. The Gerasene Demoniac believed that. He wanted to hold on to the devil he knew rather than take a chance on what Jesus wanted to give him. He could not imagine that Jesus was offering him, not another devil, not another tormenting demon, but freedom. The man was so trapped that he could not imagine that his life could be anything other than what it was. If anything, it could only be worse.

Jesus saw what the possessed man could not see: that torment was not the only option. Jesus could see what was possible for the man, and he wanted him to have it.

“Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you,” Jesus told the man after he had been liberated from him demons. Because if Jesus can do it for such a tormented self-destructive soul, Jesus can do it for anyone. He could do it for man’s friends. He can do it even for us. That is the “Good News,” and it is for everyone.

Lenten Meditations

March 4, 2024

1 Corinthians 7:25-31

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean

Those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that.

— 1 Corinthians 7:28b

The Everly Brothers recorded “Love Hurts” in 1960, and since then, several artists have produced their own versions.

“Some fools think of happiness
Blissfulness, togetherness
Some fools fool themselves, I guess
They're not foolin' me.

I know it isn't true
Love is just a lie
Made to make you blue
Love hurts.”

Paul, like the Everly Brothers, knew that love hurts, but Paul did not think that love is a lie. Paul foresaw a time of great distress, and he knew that the only thing more painful than going through distress alone is watching people we love go through it. So, Paul advised the Corinthian believers to spare themselves that anguish so they could more easily endure what was about to happen.

That may be good advice for people in a time of crisis, but it is no way to live in normal times. Avoiding love is not a healthy life strategy, especially for Christians. To feel the heart stir as your beloved suffers is heartbreaking, but it is also heart-building. Our spouses, our parents, our children, our friends will all suffer in life, and we will suffer profoundly seeing their pain, and that is proof that we would rather suffer than live only half a life.

In Jesus, God has become one like us, suffering even the pain of seeing the people he loved in pain. To love to the point of pain is to love like God. In his Gospel, John records Jesus saying, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another,” (John 13:34). It may hurt sometimes, but it is how we draw nearer to the Lord in the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The truth, not a lie.

Lenten Meditations

March 5, 2024

Genesis 45: 1-15

The Rev. Patrick Williams,
Chaplain to the Cathedral School

And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.
— Genesis 45:2

What Joseph does in today's passage seems like an almost superhuman act of magnanimity, to resist the temptation to seek retribution on his brothers.

I wonder if one way of understanding what is happening here is that Joseph was being overtaken by what he did not even know he was missing? I wonder if Joseph was being overtaken by love? A need for love and reconnection? Despite his incredible new status perhaps what he still longed for deep down was reconnection with and the love of his family, in order to heal and become whole?

And this could only happen through an act of forgiveness. Joseph would have to forgive his brothers and they would have to forgive themselves.

At the heart of the Christian faith lies God's divine act of love and forgiveness of humanity. It is on the basis of that act of mercy and love that we are to offer it to one another.

Offering and receiving forgiveness does not tend to come to us naturally, however. It is a virtue that must be practiced and developed. It is often scary, almost never easy, and yes, it may even overwhelm us and cause us to weep so loudly that everyone hears us.

Yet the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu continue to ring true, "without forgiveness, there is no future."

This Lenten season may we practice forgiveness not as a superhuman act but rather as a more fully human act of love that makes it possible for us to be reconciled and made whole.

Lenten Meditations

March 6, 2024

Psalm 119:97-120

The Rev. Canon Charles Simmons,
Diocesan Canon for Ministry

Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path.

— Psalm 119:105

Prayers for divine guidance were a recurrent theme of my early childhood. During my formative years in Sunday school, we often sang hymns that asked God to direct our steps. This language provided the orientation I needed to navigate the pitfalls of life on the periphery. It became so deeply rooted that I barely noticed its disappearance in my young adult years.

In retrospect, those were the years when I felt most confident in my navigational skills. While I still prayed for guidance, I was much less likely to see God's hand operative in my pursuits. It took the humility that comes with a procession of missteps to reawaken me to the prayers of my childhood.

Only now, the words of the Psalmist evoke a delight unimaginable to a naïve young man. "Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path." It is fitting that we say these words as part of the church's noonday prayers. After all, noonday is the season of life when we are most confident in our ability to see where we are going. Ironically, it is this confidence that renders us vulnerable to the perils lurking in the evening time.

We pray this Lenten season for divinely ordered steps.

Lenten Meditations

March 7, 2024

1 Corinthians 9:1-15

Fr. Jean-Sébastien Laurent, ccn,
Community at the Crossing

We endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.
— 1 Corinthians 9:12b

What a difficult passage to comment!

It is tempting either to skip it or read it in a very spiritual way. It is one of these puzzling passages where Paul boasts and gives himself as an example for the believers to follow. However, if we take the time to read it and to understand what the apostle really wants to say, we may actually find some encouragement for our Lenten journey.

Paul was a founder of communities. He preached the gospel to cities where the Christian faith did not yet exist and established its first church. It was a dangerous and unrewarding task. In this passage, Paul explains that he made it even more difficult and less rewarding by refusing a legitimate stipend from the local church, and provide for himself instead.

Paul wanted the Gospel to be free and accessible to everyone, because love is free. Of course, there are some material contingencies that we need to handle. However, the truth of the Gospel cannot be a matter of how much money we have, and no one should be excluded from receiving God's love. This is what Paul believed.'

What does it mean for our Lenten season? First, let us be thankful for the people who have freely ministered to us. Not only did they do their job: they gave themselves away so that I could get a chance to meet Jesus Christ. Second, let us remember the Lord's command: "you have received freely, give freely." (Matthew 10:8) May this generosity govern our actions today!

Lenten Meditations

March 8, 2024

Mark 6:47-56

The Rev. Canon Jeanne Person,
Cathedral Trustee

When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came toward them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. — Mark 6:48

There are moments when Jesus seems intentionally cruel. As in this story: Jesus sees the disciples straining to row against an adverse wind and even so, walking on the waters of the sea, intends to pass them by.

Is Jesus heartless?

According to the story, the disciples' own hearts were hardened after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, which had happened just before. Perhaps this is because they had not enjoyed a promised time apart for rest in a deserted place, for crowds had recognized them and followed them there. Now, after the crowds had been fed with the five loaves and two fish, Jesus was making the exhausted disciples cross over the sea in a boat, although night was falling.

Further, they did not understand about the loaves: Did they not understand that the miraculous feeding, despite the effort, was paradoxically a time apart for rest, with a feast of spiritual food, much like our Eucharistic liturgies today?

Jesus may have intended to pass by not because he was dismissive, cruel, or heartless, but rather to challenge the disciples' own hardness of heart. Their stoniness may have prevented them from recognizing Jesus as he walked on the sea, in contrast with the crowds on both shores who recognize him immediately.

When we, as individuals and as a Church, struggle against adverse winds, do we become overwrought and hard-hearted? Does this prevent us from recognizing Jesus coming to us, especially in people who at first terrify us?

May Jesus challenge us, urge us not to fear, and then come into our boats, hearts, churches, to calm the winds and bring a peace that will surpass our understanding.

Lenten Meditations

March 9, 2024

Psalms 87 & 90

The Rev. Canon Eva Suarez,
Canon for Community Engagement

Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God. You turn us back to the dust and say, "Go back, O child of earth." — Psalm 90:2-3

Ash Wednesday is a holy and humbling experience...to have dirt smeared on your forehead, with a reminder that life is fleeting, that one day you will die. I don't yet quite grasp the reality of it, even though I try. I am in my early 30's, reasonably healthy...I know my mortality, but I do not feel it.

Every year, I am amazed by the very elderly people that present themselves to receive their ashes. People who move very slowly and carefully, clearly smaller now than they once were, more delicate. I would imagine mortality feels quite real to them, nothing theoretical about the promise that we return to dust. But they come for the reminder anyway.

I often hear religion referred to as a crutch—nothing but a comfort, a security blanket, and a vaguely ridiculous one at that. The assumption is that faith makes life easier for people who cannot handle the unsentimental truth. When I meet people who feel that way, I assume they have never received ashes on Ash Wednesday.

One of the greatest gifts of the Christian life is the way God is constantly inviting us deeper into life—to see the world as it is, with all its beauty and potential and heartbreak and fragility. God is always inviting us to dare to see the world as God does: to love our neighbors, pray for our enemies, and be the salt and light of the world. And to know that we will die one day—that our time is limited and precious...we are dust. Beloved dust! But dust all the same.

Lenten Meditations

March 11, 2024

Genesis 49: 1-28

The Rt. Rev. Cathy Roskam, former
Bishop Suffragan of the Diocese of
New York

...this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing. — Genesis 49:28b

So your father is dying. You and your eleven siblings are waiting outside his bedroom door, when you all are summoned to his bedside. He says, “Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come.” Trepidation and hope wrestle in your heart. You have no choice. You must enter the room to receive a blessing. And then you listen carefully to everything your father says.

What then is the blessing? Is there another to follow this encounter? You know in your heart that the first blessing is the incontrovertible truth you have just heard in all your father has said.

In this penitential season of Lent, we turn to our own self examination with trepidation and hope. For penitence to be genuine, we look for the unvarnished truth about ourselves, both for the good and for the evil we have done. Sometimes we do this with the assistance of a spiritual director or a regular confessor, sometimes with a therapist or good friend who gives us truthful feedback, and always with the enlightenment and support of the Holy Spirit.

It is natural to feel some trepidation in this journey inward, but we need not fear the outcome because we put our hope in Christ and the blessing of his cross.

Lenten Meditations

March 12, 2024

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean

All who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves. — 1 Corinthians 11:29

Paul's account of the Eucharist is unique in a number of ways. First, it is the earliest account we have of Jesus' meal with his disciples the night before he died. Mark, in his Gospel, is the next to tell us about the supper, but that was perhaps 20 years later. Second, Paul does not just describe Jesus' last supper with his disciples. He describes the Corinthians' regular Lord's Supper. It is the only place in the New Testament that gives us a picture of the Church celebrating the Eucharist. Third, Paul draws ethical conclusions about participation in the Lord's Supper. It demands something of those who eat and drink.

A nineteenth-century French author wrote, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." Paul assured the Corinthians that what they were eating was the Body of Christ, that is to say, the very life of Christ. He might have written to them, "Tell me that you eat the Body of Christ and I can tell you that you are the Body of Christ."

Unfortunately the Corinthians did not see it. The Body of Christ was on the table, and the Body of Christ was around the table. Maybe the Corinthians saw the former, but they definitely did not see the latter, so they treated their dinner companions with disrespect if not with contempt.

Treating the Eucharistic Food and Drink as sacred things—as bearers of the Life of Christ—is easy. Treating the Eucharistic Assembly as a sacred thing—as a bearer of the Life of Christ—can be hard.

I worshipped with a congregation once that sat facing one another as we do at the Cathedral. At the very beginning of the liturgy, before even a word was said, they all bowed before the others. They began by acknowledging that the Body of Christ was in the room, and it was them, so the Body revered the Body. After that, the energy in the room shifted. "All who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves," Paul warned the Corinthians. In that wonderful congregation who welcomed me into their Eucharist, it was impossible not to discern the Body.

Lenten Meditations

March 13, 2024

Mark 8: 11-26

The Rev. Jacob Smith, Cathedral
Trustee and Rector of the Parish of
Calvary-St. George's

Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?

— Mark 8:17b

There is an inherent danger in the season of Lent. The danger of Lent lies in the focus on all of the things that I am doing to draw near to God: my fasting, my prayer life, and my piety over and above Christ, who so often draws us near to him through such methods. This is one of the reasons why throughout the Gospels, Jesus heals people in different ways: a word, a touch, and yes, even a walk outside the village with a little spit in the eyes.

Jesus knew if he healed only one way we would have a tendency, like with our Lenten disciplines, to focus on the method of the miracle, as opposed to Jesus, the one behind the miracle. When the method, or our discipline, is the focus like the blind man we tend to see only dimly. We lack clarity and any spiritual practice can quickly become a chore. However, fear not, for Christ is ever present with you, often at work despite yourself, to clear up your haziness, and often blindness, to see Jesus clearly through the gift of our often "my focused" Lenten disciplines. This understanding that the one behind the discipline, the one behind the method, is Christ for you, no matter what, is the beginning of all true spiritual sight, where we shall see as we have been seen and know as we have been known.

Lenten Meditations

March 14, 2024

Psalm 69:1-23,31-38

The Rev. Rhonda Rubinson

I have grown weary with my crying; my throat is inflamed; my eyes have failed from looking for my God. I will praise the name of God in song; I will proclaim his greatness with Thanksgiving. — Psalm 69:4,32

Doubt is not a sin, it is a trial. Faith is not an emotion, it is a decision.

Psalm 69 is the one psalm that accurately prophesies Jesus' Passion, foretelling his agony while undergoing physical torture, the bitter rejection by those he came to save, and—worst of all—his suffering from the conviction that he has been abandoned by God. Yet Jesus still chooses faith even as he dies: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” While not literally echoing the praises at the end of the psalm, this statement is one of trust, of faith—after all, if God does not love or even care about his child's suffering, why would Jesus commend his soul to God? This powerful affirmation is what we can seek to emulate, even as we suffer trials in our lives.

We, too, can make the conscious decision to believe that God does care for us, no matter our circumstances. For many, this means rejecting the belief that our trials are God's terrible punishment upon us for our sins. The correction for that perilous spiritual path is Jesus' Passion. Though utterly sinless, Jesus still suffers the very worst that life has to offer, yet he makes the decision to choose faith on the cross, overcoming the powerful temptation to doubt.

We too can choose faith while suffering, even while tempted by doubt, and even while we do not feel in the least faithful. This, alongside our atonement, is the work of Lent.

Lenten Meditations

March 15, 2024

Exodus 2:1-22

The Rev. Canon Steven Lee, Vicar

He answered, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “Surely the thing is known.”

— Exodus 2:14

Our Exodus reading today does not tell us how people found out that Moses had killed the Egyptian. Moses had “looked this way and that,” and thought he was alone, when he committed murder. But people knew.

As I grow older, I have realized that my own deepest insecurities and fears are visible to the people around me. No matter how much I try to hide them, everyone around me already knows. Ironically, it is often the effort to hide or deny my weaknesses that in turn reveal them to others.

This is a humbling truth, but it is also a liberating one.

If we know we cannot hide whatever we feel most insecure about ourselves—if we realize that they are visible not only to God, but also to everyone around us—then we no longer have to pretend. We can put down our defenses. We might even begin to take ourselves (and our opinions) less seriously and less self-righteously. We might even admit (or, to use a churchy word, confess) these weakness to ourselves, to God, and to those around us, thereby releasing their power over us. We might even finally learn to walk humbly with our God.

Lenten Meditations

March 16, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

The Rev. Canon Eva Suarez,
Canon for Community Engagement

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. — 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

One of the most famous passages of scripture! A passage so familiar, and so synonymous with weddings, I would not be surprised if most people do not listen to it too closely. Love is patient, love is kind, mazel tov. Of course, this passage is not about human beings' love for each other, but about God's love for all of us.

To put a familiar piece of scripture in its less familiar context—the Christian community at Corinth was planning for anything but a wedding. Paul is writing to people who are deeply at odds with each other, arguing with each other, consumed by petty jealousies and disagreements about practice. In the previous chapter, Paul explains spiritual gifts, that the church is like one body with many members. Just like a body cannot decide it would be fine carrying on without an eye or a foot, no member of the community can decide another person has no purpose. God has given gifts to all of us. Then comes today's reading, this meditation on love.

It helps me to remember these words were written to a community in conflict. They are meant to be an instruction, a teaching the Corinthians need to learn to live by in order to flourish, to really be in relationship with God and each other. Yes, God's love never ends—but we can get in its way.

It is worth spending some time today pondering the virtues of love; what it truly means to be patient and kind, to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things—and endure them, too.

Lenten Meditations

March 18, 2024

Mark 9:30-41

The Rev. Dan Matthews,
Cathedral Trustee

Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” — Mark 9:35

The culture in which we live where winning and succeeding dominates the very way we think, it is not easy for us to hear these words of Jesus from scripture, “If you want to be first...you must be servant.”

I would like to unpack this well-known admonition from Him and place it in the middle of a common-place contemporary setting that happens to us almost every day. We casually meet up with someone, start a conversation and before we realize it, we are talking only about ourselves. “Let me tell you...” goes on and on. We eventually say farewell and then a short time later we realize that we failed to ask the other person a single thing about themselves. We never asked how they were doing, what they were engaged in, or where they may had been. We had done a lot of talking about ourselves but no real listening.

Being a true servant is listening to the other. Being a true servant is realizing—this is not about me. The more we focus on the other person and listen, the more we are actually following Jesus and loving our neighbor as He so often suggested—even if we never use that word servant to describe ourselves.

Lenten Meditations

March 19, 2024

Psalms 121, 122, 123

The Rev. Kyrie Kim,
Diocesan Minister for Asian Ministries

The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore. — Psalm 121:8

We live in a life of chaos. In the chaos, my feet and eyes lose where to go. What is right and what is wrong? What is true justice and peace? And which path should I follow?

And then we look at the hills. We look at the hills seeking the path, but cannot find the answer of where to look, and then find ourselves lost.

We focus our efforts on what we think is best at every moment of our lives, yet we find out later that it was my first choice and different from God's greater will, and we look for another choice and a place to rely on, but sooner or later, we will realize that it was just another choice made by myself. That is how we look at the hills.

But in the end, my gaze and my life will remain on the One who truly protects me.

Wherever we go, God will watch everything as we come and go. And He will always protect and guide us to follow the right path.

I trust in His guidance and entrust my life to the Lord.

May the Son of God, Lord Jesus Christ, be with us, consider our struggles, and guide us with His hands.

Lenten Meditations

March 20, 2024

Exodus 7:8-24

The Rev. Sam Owen, former Cathedral
Trustee and Rector of the Haitian
Church of the Good Samaritan

Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.
— Exodus 7:13

Surely, in these modern times, God does not send plagues any more, right? Sometimes it feels that way. Global pandemic, unprecedented storms, flooding, and extreme temperatures can make us wonder if these are modern divine retributions. Our polarized political discourse feels like our social fabric is shredding, threatening to send us into chaos.

Personally, I do not believe God is following us around with a clipboard, punishing us when we stray. No matter your opinion on God's role in our current times, perhaps we can all agree that life is hard. And life is scary. So much of what's happening in the world today seems beyond our control. We live in a time the likes of which mankind has never seen.

That may not be as bad as it sounds. When we do not have control, that is the best time to turn to God. With so much beyond our control, we can choose to ask God to help us.

In the Haitian Creole bible, the translation for repent is 'tounen vin jwenn Bondye,' which literally means 'turn, come find God.'

Scary and uncertain times can soften our own hearts that have hardened through anxiety and fear, so that God can enter. Seeking divine help allows us to tap into a power greater than ourselves. God has inscribed you on the palm of his hands (Isaiah 49:16).

Lent is a fine time to turn and come find God. We do not have to wait until the rivers turn to blood.

Lenten Meditations

March 21, 2024

Mark 10:17-31

The Rev. Yamily Bass-Choate,
Diocesan Liaison for Global Mission

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, and follow me.”

— Mark 10:21

Whether we admit it or not, what God wants for us conflicts with the ways we have formed our lives around what we love: status, wealth, and power. Our sinful tendency to uphold racial, social, economic division, and hierarchy separate us from God and each other, loving something that does not love us back.

Jesus is calling upon us to discern self and to surrender to the love of God instead. Because Christ loved the rich man he told him to sell everything and give his money to the poor; for “the last will be first and the first will be last.” It seems richness and righteousness cannot go hand in hand. In telling the rich man to sell his possessions and give them to the poor, Christ is instructing him to reject and divest from his desire to maintain power.

Are God’s children comfortable with the growing homelessness, hunger, and violence permeating God’s creation under the direction of the most wealthy and powerful in society? Are we comfortable with our direct and indirect roles in that suffering? Christ tells us that this repayment of treasure in heaven comes with persecutions. It is no wonder we are devastated, like the rich man, to learn our riches gave us false security. Are we willing to be persecuted for working to bring about the kingdom, for our divestment from evil? Like the rich man, surrendering to the love of God means having faith we will be made whole, both as individuals and as a Christian community. It means putting the poor first.

Let us spiritually and financially divest from our roles in these structures which perpetuate the suffering of the poor. Let us discern self behind those pretenses and surrender to the love of God, so that when we follow Jesus we do not do so grieving and devastated, but rather overjoyed by the promise of eternal life.

Lenten Meditations

March 22, 2024

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

The Rev. Canon Steven Lee, Vicar

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. — 2 Corinthians 4:7

The prophet Jeremiah has a famous metaphor where he compares God to a potter and the nation of Israel to clay. This metaphor is easy to understand. God shapes our lives, as a potter shapes clay.

But what does it mean to compare humans to “clay jars,” as Paul does in our passage today?

The commentator R. Kent Hughes provides this helpful context:

“Clay jars were the throwaway containers of the ancient world, so that their life spans were generally a few years at the most... Earthenware jars were an anonymous part of everyday living as they were used for cooking and eating and drinking and storing leftovers... No one took note of clay jars any more than we would of a fast-food container. They were simply there for convenience. It was no great tragedy when such vessels were broken. They were cheap and easy to replace.”

But that is not the end of our story!

No matter what kind of container we feel that we are—no matter how broken or misshapen or leaky—we contain invaluable treasure inside us. Made in the image of God, we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ for a great purpose, which is, as the Prayer Book tells us, “to share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity.”

Lenten Meditations

March 23, 2024

Exodus 10:21-11:8

The Rev. Canon Eva Suarez,
Canon for Community Engagement

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.” — Exodus 10:21

I struggle with images of lightness and darkness in scripture. They are based in the natural world, the ecological realities of night and day. Yet these images have gone on to infect our language with a truly unhelpful dichotomy of lightness and whiteness as good, and darkness and blackness as bad. A hero “puts on the white hat.” a villain might have a “black heart.” In the broader fight for racial justice, this can sound minor. Yet while it is a subtle problem, it can be a profound one.

At the same time, I was so struck by the language in this text, “a darkness that can be felt.” It is purposeful hyperbole, translator Robert Alter says, meant to evoke “the claustrophobic palpability of absolute darkness.” We cannot quite fathom night in the ancient world, a time when candles and lanterns were precious and few. Nighttime could be treacherous...on a cloudy night, you simply could not see.

Yet beautiful things also happen in darkness. Seeds germinate in soil, animals hibernate, we see the stars. Our bodies are knit together in the womb. Resurrection begins in the mysterious darkness of a tomb.

Above all, this is God trying to send a message. Know me. Acknowledge me. Grasp my power. Do it at once. Pharaoh was not listening, could not listen—ultimately, not only to Moses, but to the sorrow of all his subjects, who had withstood much more than just thick darkness.

I invite you to spend some time today considering God’s messages to you, through darkness as well as light. The twinkling of a twilight sky, the harsh brightness of a waiting room, the muddy sky of a rainy day...where have you encountered God’s presence?

Lenten Meditations

March 25, 2024

Psalm 51:1-18

Sister Hannah Spiers, ccn,
Community at the Crossing

A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise
— Psalm 51:17

David has reached rock-bottom, faced with the consequences of his actions which have led to adultery and death. He knows where he came from—plucked from obscurity, not meriting kingship but receiving the anointing. Somewhere along the way, he gets lost.

This is a song of lamentation, poured from the soul of a man who sees clearly how he has fallen short. Almost half of the psalms are psalms of lamentation. They are songs which often start with a blunt outpouring of feelings about the present reality. They finish with praise.

True praise is that which has trod the path of lamentation. It is true praise because it is rooted in reality, because it has not been afraid to acknowledge the situation as it is and how it feels to be in it.

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (51:6). True praise confronts my brokenness and misery and chooses to acknowledge that God is still at work.

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (51:12). True worship recognizes that I am not my own source; it recognizes that something is lost and only God can restore it.

“A broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (51:16-17). True offering weighs my faults and beauty and humbly extends my hands to the One who still says, ‘come.’

David was lost and is found by the Almighty and All-Gentle—and this will be the pattern for the rest of his life. Our current reality, however broken or lost, is the first step of the journey through lamentation to true encounter with our God who saves.

Lenten Meditations

March 26, 2024

2 Corinthians 1:8-22

The Rev. Canon Steven Lee, Vicar

Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor; I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. — 2 Corinthians 1:15

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, which scholars tell us is likely his third or even fourth letter to that community, is among the most vulnerable writing in all of the New Testament.

In this letter, Paul reveals his anguish over the deteriorating relationship he has with this church community. Paul founded the church in Corinth, yet other missionaries who followed him did not respect Paul's teaching and taught in opposition to him.

To defend himself, Paul uses this letter to reassert his teaching authority and to justify his ministry among them. As he does this, Paul also exhibits insecurity, defensiveness, and anger.

Another result of this conflict is that Paul keeps changing his plans to visit Corinth. He does so in order to avoid stirring up trouble and causing pain.

What we can learn from Paul's example is that even the greatest apostles were human. They were very much like us. Paul had his difficult days and had to deal with difficult people who opposed him and treated him unfairly. He sometimes changed his travel plans to avoid conflict. He did not always respond opponents by "keeping his cool" or by bestowing an understanding grace. Sometimes, he got very angry.

But Paul always kept the faith. Even when he was most despairing, and even when circumstances did not bring out his best, Paul always sought to serve the God who had been revealed to him in Jesus Christ. That is an example that we can also follow.

Lenten Meditations

March 27, 2024

Mark 12:1-11

The Rev. Canon Eva Suarez,
Canon for Community Engagement

He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." — Mark 12:6

Jesus has been walking a fine line so far, provoking religious and political leaders while endearing himself to the crowds who come to hear him preach. Now he borrows a scenario from the prophet Isaiah: a vineyard on a hill, where a man has cleared the land and built a fence, and a watchtower, and a wine press. And with that familiar scriptural setup, Jesus tells a story that is so deeply offensive to that same leadership class, unmistakably accusing them of being like those who have abused God's prophets all through history.

A pot on high heat, about to boil over; a rope pulled so taut it has no choice but to break; a highwire act while the wind is picking up speed—whatever metaphor you choose, even if we didn't already know the end of the story—there's no way Jesus can keep this up forever.

Perhaps this provocative parable can give some hint of just what is coming? First, the characters—we have these tenants who simply cannot be appeased. Yes, there is some precedent for their attempts to throw off the landlord—in a time before modern communications, it was not unheard of for tenants to take control from an absentee owner. But it becomes clear that is not the case! Because the landlord begins sending his slaves to collect his rent—more people than Jesus can seem to narrate, some assaulted, beaten, insulted, and many more simply murdered. If we cannot understand the tenants, what do we make of this landlord? Sending his beloved son to the same people who have beaten and killed his other messengers?

Jesus is borrowing this parable, in a sense, from the prophet Isaiah. And how does Isaiah's story begin? "Let me sing for my beloved, my love-song concerning his vineyard" (5:1).

Jesus' provocations, the rising anger, the roar of the crowd and the bloodshed of the tenants...how could this be a love song?

Stay tuned over the coming sacred days. We're all about to find out.

Lenten Meditations

March 28, 2024

John 14:12-25

The Rt. Rev Mary D. Glasspool,
Bishop Assistant

(Jesus said) Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. — John 13:12b-15

On Maundy Thursday we read or listen to the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples during the final meal Jesus will have on this earth. We may take away from it that Jesus set an example for us of loving service to others by demonstrating that kind of service in humbly washing his disciples' feet. We may even participate ourselves in the sacramental act of foot washing. But it is much more than this.

One can follow Jesus' example only if one has already experienced Jesus' loving service for oneself. Jesus' call was not simply to love and to serve. What Jesus said was "to love as I have loved you;" to serve as Christ has served us.

Can we imagine ourselves in that upper room, a follower of Jesus, and he comes round during supper and begins to wash our dirty feet? Can we imagine Jesus cleaning up after us when we have been sick, or being present to us when we are particularly ashamed or perhaps needy? Are we able to accept the help and presence of others at these times as Christ being present and serving us?

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you." — John 13:34

Centen Meditations

March 29, 2024

Psalm 22

The Rt. Rev. Allen K. Shin,
Bishop Suffragan

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
and are so far from my cry and from the words of my distress? — Psalm 22:1

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?”
The voice of one, crying out from the edge of life,
an ancient lament of suffering and despair,
echoing through the history of human struggles for justice,
now a despairing cry of the Beloved on the cross,
ringing hollow in the sheer silence of God.
The cries of the forsaken fill the silent hell of hopelessness;
their lives, offered up as living sacrifices,
crucified on the cross of salvation for the privileged few.
The arc is cut short and bends toward chaos.
A moral universe is not given but won by struggles for justice.
Hope cannot be imposed but be born of faith.
From the baptismal rebirth to the resurrection new life
the Beloved walks a road less traveled by,
driven by the Spirit of love and faith.
The crown of his life is a crown of thorns,
a mockery of all that is good and just,
a mockery of love itself.
Is this how the way of the Lord is prepared?
Is this how his paths are made straight?
How cruel that love must be crucified for the salvation of the world!
Salvation without justice is an empty promise.
A life without love is a hollow shell of despair.
Yet death is not bitter to the soul that loves.
The love crucified is the seed of resurrection.
The hope of salvation is with the crucified.

Lenten Meditations

March 30, 2024

Hebrews 4:1-16

The Rt. Rev. Matthew F. Heyd,
Bishop of New York

‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’ And again in this place it says, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience.

— Hebrews 4:4-6

There is nothing we can do.

We are always supposed to be doing something. Productivity serves as a cardinal virtue. Taking a break can feel like a sin. There’s even a book called *Four Thousand Weeks* that charts the average lifetime. The message: Time is slipping away. We have to do something—and do something important. I absolutely fall prey to this mindset.

It is Holy Saturday. Today reminds us, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. There is no time management system that assures our salvation.

This day represents the moment between. God’s terrible wonderful self-offering of Good Friday is done. It is complete. The majestic paschal pageantry of Easter is not yet.

Today, we wait.

Hebrews gives us a beautiful homily about the gift that we receive in Jesus Christ. This week centers us once more on the story of that gift. This passage recalls the rhythm of creation and the good news of our redemption, covenant promises that give us the chance to know peace within God’s grace.

Hebrews notes, we often are not ready to receive God’s own graceful rest. We wander away. We keep ourselves busy and distracted from the presence of God that is all around us—even today, with the quiet of the tomb. We have received the gift of the work of God’s salvation. There is nothing we can do. It is complete.

We might take this moment—this time in between—to rest in faith that the most important work has been done. We are granted peace, if we are willing to receive it.

Lenten Meditations

March 31, 2024

Luke 24:13-35

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean

They urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us."

— Luke 24:29a

The story of the disciples and Jesus encountering one another on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus is gorgeous in part because of its pathos. You can almost feel the longing the disciples felt when Jesus said he was going to leave them. "Stay with us," they pleaded. Later, in the story they tell us why. Being with him had set their hearts on fire.

Luke says this happened just days after Jesus had been crucified. All the disciples' hopes had been destroyed. He was gone, and the pain of the loss consumed them. It is amazing, then, that the disciples did not even recognize him when he drew near.

The story of the Emmaus road is the story of every group of disciples. It is our story. We long for him. He draws near. We do not see him for who he is. We see him for just a second. Then, just as quickly, he vanishes from our sight.

Note that the story does not say that he left. It says that he vanished from sight. Here is a footnote to add to Luke's Gospel: Actually, he was still there.

Easter Day gives us a good chance to see him. We have had the forty days of Lent to remove our blinders and rub the sleep out of our eyes. Maybe today we can be like the disciples at their Emmaus dinner table who finally saw. It will not last, though, because it never does. We will lose sight of him again, but it does not mean that he is gone.

On my better days, I look at people who beg on our streets, especially the ones who are emotionally distressed, and I wonder if they are the stranger on the road to Emmaus. Am I blind? Maybe instead I should take notice of the ordinary people in my ordinary life, the people who are easy to miss. Is this the person on life's road who is the Presence of God?

Christ is risen. Note that we do not say that he was risen, that he was resurrected. He is risen. He is resurrected. He lives among us, a stranger on life's road, walking along side us whether we recognize him or not.