



# Lenten Reflections

**Reflections on the Days of  
Lent and Holy Week**

**Written by the People of  
St. James' Parish**

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## March 22, 2008

### Holy Saturday

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

Romans 8:1-2

Today, Jesus’ crucified body is lying in the tomb. Tonight, at the Easter Vigil, our scripture readings will take us from the beginning of creation all the way through the death and resurrection of our Savior. Can we even begin to comprehend what was going on in the minds of Jesus’ loved ones? Their hearts clearly had been torn asunder by his horrifying and humiliating death on the cross. All sense of hope was gone! They had to have been totally devastated.

But, we live on this side of the Easter Vigil, and it is in light of that reality that Paul in his letter to the Church in Rome was able to write: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Do you understand what Paul is saying? “Therefore there is **no** condemnation.”

In his book, *The Applause of Heaven*, Max Lucado writes: “For those in Christ, these promises are not only a source of joy. They are also the foundations of true courage. You are guaranteed that your sins will be filtered through, hidden in, and screened out by the sacrifice of Jesus. When God looks at you, he doesn’t see you: he sees the One who surrounds you. That means that failure is not a concern for you. Your victory is secure. How could you not be courageous?”

The key words for us are “For those in Christ.” Throughout this Lent we have hopefully been “In Christ” through his wilderness experience, we have been “In Christ” during his crucifixion, and now by God’s Grace we are “In Christ Jesus” in the new life of the resurrection.

Bill Ticknor+

*The Worship and Music Committee of St. James’ Parish  
would like to thank Grace Episcopal Church of Charleston, South Carolina  
who provided the model for these reflections.*

March 21, 2008  
Good Friday

“Lord, why can’t I follow you now?”

John 13:37

During the Last Supper, Jesus patiently and repeatedly responds to the questions of his disciples. He washes their feet, yet is still being pestered by Simon Peter. Jesus talks to him as if to a little child, saying, “Where I am going you cannot come,” and returns to his primary message, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you.” But Simon Peter doesn’t listen. He persists, demanding to know why he cannot follow Jesus “right now.” Jesus, facing betrayal, torture and death, remains the comforter. He chides Peter, saying, “before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.” But yet he adds, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” And he promises, “where I am, there you may be also.”

How often have I been impatient and failed to listen? Too often. Have I missed messages like this? How often do we push on to ask for our own needs and fail to heed the important message of our Lord’s love and promise of eternal life with him?

I see around me people who can listen. What a blessed gift.

Val Hymes

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## Lenten Reflections

*The Holy Season of Lent, 2008*

My Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This series of reflections represents the thoughts of over forty St. James’ Parish individuals who accepted the challenge of reading Biblical passages and interpreting them for us in unique and meaningful ways. We have also asked current and several former clergy to make contributions. This is a project of the Worship and Music Committee—one of its members picked up a Lenten Reflections book while visiting a parish in South Carolina and brought it back as a model for us to follow.

I hope you will use this book to guide and encourage your thinking through this holiest of seasons. It can be used for personal reflection, but would also make an excellent way to begin a family discussion. However you choose to use this material, I trust it will inspire you to think about the journey Jesus took on our behalf—its tragic earthly ending and ultimate glorious gift to us all.

Bill Ticknor+  
Rector  
St. James’ Parish

Lenten Reflections

February 6, 2008  
Ash Wednesday

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret.”

Matthew 6:1-6

When Jesus says not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, he is teaching us that our motives for giving to God and to others must be pure. It is not for show or to do something for someone, if it will benefit us in return. We should do good deeds quietly or in secret with no thought of reward. Jesus says we should check our motives in three areas: generosity, prayer, and fasting.

This passage takes me back to a time as a small child when there was no money for Christmas. At that time our father was ill and was unable to work. My mother got a phone call from the local department store telling her to come to the store and do her Christmas shopping for her three children. We awoke Christmas morning with packages under the tree, never ever knowing who called the department store.

Betsy Hillery

March 20, 2008  
Maundy Thursday

“I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink anew in the kingdom of God.”

Mark 14:12-25

Jesus shared these words with His twelve disciples during The Last Supper. They broke bread and drank from the cup. Jesus told them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many... I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”

I think Jesus’ words were meant to prepare the disciples for His crucifixion. These twelve men had followed Jesus with unshakeable faith. They had heard Him preach and had witnessed Him perform many miracles. I would imagine, no matter how much Jesus may have reassured them that His crucifixion was God’s will, it was a painful and difficult thing for them to understand and to accept. I think Jesus’ words were meant to prepare them for His death, which He knew was imminent. He may have also hoped His words would comfort the disciples by reassuring them that He was not afraid—that He would have life everlasting in the kingdom of God. Jesus needed the disciples to believe in the kingdom of God, to know that it should not be feared so that they would continue to spread the word of God.

Kathy Dickinson

March 19, 2008

Wednesday, Holy Week

“But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and the inheritance will be ours.’ So, they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.”

Mark 12:1-11

In this parable, Jesus tells a story that challenges and shames the high priests of his time. When Jesus finishes, the priests are so insulted that they want to arrest him. Fearing the crowd’s reaction, they leave.

This parable, like others, raises questions in the reader’s mind: Whom do the characters represent? What is the message? Clearly, Mark wants us to believe that the tenants are the high priests themselves. In that sense, the parable illustrates their hypocrisy, and how their followers are headed to eternal condemnation. After killing the son, the tenants learn the inheritance will not be theirs, and that “the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

Another interpretation, however, might be that the tenants represent not just the scribes but all humankind. The tenants reject, harm, and even kill successive messengers sent by the owner, the last of which is his favored son. Doesn’t that describe how the world treated the prophets and Jesus himself? Could this parable also serve as a reminder of original sin?

Indirectly, the parable has positive and affirming messages—God is patient, forgiving, and willing to sacrifice His son for us. At its core, however, the parable (and this passage in particular) is a rather stern warning of humanity’s flaws. People are imperfect to begin with, and under weak or evil leadership, they will make astonishingly bad decisions and will never find salvation. Following God’s word is foremost a personal decision—a path that has to be chosen and walked by people as individuals.

The Pickart Family

February 7, 2008

“But, one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-21

How can we define perfection with any accuracy? How can we possibly ever comprehend or understand its complete meaning? That which is perfect today... will certainly be imperfect tomorrow!

Yet, God has given His word that we will receive  
**perfection!**

It is understood... yet oh, so hard to practice – the thought and action of doing God’s work every day! Our Lord has asked His children to live up to *what He is going to give us!* He will give us life everlasting, a promised home in Heaven! Continuing His work with blind faith is one of the most precious gifts we can give ourselves and should be made easier - knowing the prize that has already been assured us! With this promise, we must try to make every effort to make the world a better place for other people through our thoughts, words and deeds... no matter how strenuous the struggle!!

Ever-lasting life is certainly worth striving for, our reward is indescribable! It is up to each one of us to use the gifts and talents God gave us... In doing this we are assured our reward! Forget about what you did for God yesterday—focus on what you’ll do for God **today!**

**“Make Every Day Count!”**

Brooke E. Stuart

February 8, 2008

“But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed, and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.”

Ezekiel 18:21-32

God is unfair!

Who are we to even think these thoughts? It is written throughout the Bible that God is indeed fair. We are reminded perpetually, if we ask forgiveness and repent, we will be forgiven, and our sins will be washed clean; the operative phrase here is that we have to ask and be willing to repent.

We have to remember we are never alone, but that God knows what is in our hearts and minds, but we are still loved by Him. We have to make the effort to ask, seek and turn to God at all times, not just when troubles arise.

God deals with us in a very fair manner, but it is not our measure of fairness that He deals in but His own.

I have always said that, if we as humans were perfect, we would be sitting on the left side while Jesus is on the right.

No one human is free from sin, but we are free to chose not to sin; that is a great gift we have been given.

Jeanie Zseltvay

March 18, 2008  
Tuesday, Holy Week

“They heard I was groaning, with no one to comfort me.”

Lamentations 1:17-22

[v.21: “People heard my groaning, but there was no one to comfort me.” But see v.20: “...in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious...”]

I know in my heart when I am rebellious, not faithful or true, and I am feeling alone, like God has removed Himself from me; “...there is no one to comfort me...”. (I’ve heard that when I feel like God is far away, it’s not He that’s moved... it’s me!) God never leaves us. In Ch.3:19-23 we read “I remember...the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them and my soul is downcast...Yet this I call to mind... Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.”

Thanks be to God!

Patti Sachs

March 17, 2008  
Monday, Holy Week

“‘Have Faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go. Throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.’”

Mark 11:12-25

What does having faith in God mean? Jesus tells us that faith can move mountains. Many of the challenges we face each day seem like mountains we cannot climb, cross, or move. Our faith enables us to attempt new things, stretch our imagination and cast aside doubt and obstacles.

Our faith enables us to climb, cross and move mountains.

Very often we say things like “with God all things are possible” or “Let Go, Let God.” These words reflect the belief that with true faith God can do anything. But do we all believe these words or are they mere clichés we mimic. Do you have any doubt about God’s abilities? When we doubt, even for a second, we are showing weakness in our faith. We must strive to banish this doubt from our minds, hearts and actions. Our faith in God is what gets us through every crisis, every triumph and every sorrow. We must have faith in God with our whole heart.

The most powerful way we can show our faith in God is through prayer. God knows what our prayers are before we think them or say them. He knows what is in our heart. When praying we must believe that, if it is in God’s plan, everything we ask for will be received, Have faith in God, have no doubt in your heart and believe that what you ask for will come to pass. No obstacle will stand before a confiding faith in God.

Gladys Wilson

February 9, 2008

“Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land not leaving any behind.”

Ezekiel 39:21-29

In this prophecy from Ezekiel, the Lord has promised that Israel will be the avenue by which He manifests Himself to the world. Through the Jews He promises to show His face and pour out the Holy Spirit.

What an awesome God that keeps His promises! Israel was reunited. We saw His face in the face of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, God passed His Holy Spirit to live in those Jews who believed, and continues to live in those who believe today.

There is such peace in knowing that God will keep His promises to me, too. Praise God!

Nancy Wooddell

February 10, 2008  
The First Sunday of Lent

“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ 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 1:11-13

Unlike Matthew, Luke or John, Mark gives us a minimal description of Jesus’ baptism and temptation in the wilderness. There is no elaboration here; we have only the barest details. How was Jesus tempted? How did he respond? Were the beasts friendly or menacing? What did Jesus think of his baptism or God’s words? Mark allows our imaginations to fill in the details.

As we make our journey through life, we know there are many twists, turns, detours and surprises. We may find ourselves in an unfamiliar wilderness without a road map, where we cannot rely on our past experiences as a guide to the present. And if we ask ourselves “what would Jesus do?” Mark seems to give us little comfort.

But our God is a God of possibilities, not predictabilities. When we enter unfamiliar, even scary space, God allows us to fill in the details ourselves. Jesus did not enter the wilderness unprepared and abandoned by God. Nor will God desert us when we are in the wilderness.

At our baptism, God spoke to us also, to tell us that we are God’s children and how much God loves us. God delights in who we are and who we will become. God knows we will be scared, confused and tempted as we venture into new and unfamiliar places. But God will always be with us, whispering in our ear “you are my beloved child and you always make me happy!” With God’s love, we have nothing to fear.

Reverend Patrick Arey

March 16, 2008  
Palm Sunday

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Psalm 22

Palm Sunday – Jesus, with palms waving, returns to Jerusalem knowing what is ahead—his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal and his crucifixion. In his prayer for deliverance from suffering, the psalmist foretells our Lord’s anguish.

The words—a raw, naked plea for help—are repeated by Jesus on the cross. (MK. 15:34) Why does God not answer?

There are times when we feel alone, abandoned and facing problems we cannot solve. Despair can grow out of such a small problem. The despair is still great. Why does he not answer?

Perhaps he does and we do not listen as the psalmist sings, “In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved.”

*Our Lord trusts us to believe he is there with us in our anguish.*

Val Hymes.



March 15, 2008

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

It is said that around the age of 35 our bodies begin to decline, leading us ultimately to the infirmities associated with aging. In essence, we are dying little by little every day. In the previous verse (4:16), Paul encourages the Christians at Corinth not to lose heart for “though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” But for Paul and others preaching the Gospel, the deterioration of their outer or physical bodies is not merely the result of natural processes but the sufferings they endure in spreading the good news. Yet, Paul indicates that his spirit is renewed daily and ours should be, too. While Paul refers to “light and momentary troubles,” in fact he and the apostles have suffered significantly. Paul has been beaten a number of times and once was stoned and left for dead. Paul is living out the life of Christ through his own sufferings and to refer to them as “light” and “momentary” is possible only because of his profound faith, the “unseen.” Likewise, as we experience trials and tribulations in our lives, through our faith we know that they will never outweigh the eternal blessings that await us.

I heard a story once about a man who was buried in his car. Do I believe that he is riding around heaven in four-wheeled glory? Not at all. For as Paul is pointing out in this passage, what is seen – all those details of our lives such as jobs, activities, families, possessions, relationships – are merely temporary. We can not take them with us when we die. But, because of Christ’s death on Calvary, we can be assured of heavenly blessings, unseen and eternal, because our Lord promised them to us.

Susan Whitehead

February 11, 2008

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

1 Corinthians 1:1-19

The first nine verses of 1 Corinthians 1 are Paul’s introduction to the entire letter. In these verses, we have been told that Paul is the author and that he is accompanied by Sosthenes (chief ruler of the synagogue at Corinth). Paul moves on to reiterate the call to Christian unity and then points out the ways in which this unity has broken down in the Corinthian church

Is it possible that as members of St. James’ Parish we all speak the same thing and that we can be “perfectly united” in our opinions and judgments? Surely it would be un-American for us all to have the same opinions. But this is precisely what Paul is pleading for.

Paul calls for no “divisions.” The Greek word for divisions is *schismata*, from which we get *schism*. The figurative meaning is “to tear or rip.” As it would be applied in this passage, it means to have a difference of opinion, or a division of judgment. This was the kind of thing that Paul was arguing against.

Our lack of unity will also severely hinder us in our mission to the world. People will not be drawn to any church where there is disunity reflected in many agendas. If there are people all going in different directions with no common mission which they share together, people will be put off. Conversely, people are attracted to a place where there is a common vision, where people sacrifice for the shared goals.

This kind of unity must be worked for, chosen, purposefully undertaken. I do not believe that this kind of unity simply happens. This kind of unity must be a decision of the will. This is precisely why it is a command.

Brenda White

February 12, 2008

“‘Come follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.”

Mark 1:14-28

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, what is the cost of discipleship? How do we “fish” for people?

This passage is Jesus’ call to the first disciples. The “Kingdom of God” is such a big concept that it requires additional workers, and Jesus begins his ministry by calling two brothers. Jesus’ command is not only issued to his first disciples, but to us all. It is issued with all the freedom and sovereignty of grace and given freely to us all, even though none of us are worthy to receive it. Jesus calls us to simple obedience, to accompany him wholeheartedly and constantly, sharing his life and destiny at the expense of all other engagements and commitments, letting go of earthly possessions, and following him is faith alone.

Carl Barth, one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, emphasizes in his book, *The Call to Discipleship*, that discipleship involves a detachment from the authority of possessions, foregoing the pursuit of personal glory.....which goes beyond actions to intentions.

We are all called to be Disciples, to go forth in the world, wherever we happen to be, and spread the “good news” about the “Kingdom of God,” that salvation is for everyone. In fact, when we are baptized, we promise to do just this.

Linda M. Stewart

March 14, 2008

“For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness...’”

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

In the above verse, Paul refers to the passage in Genesis to introduce how God has made His light shine in our hearts. Most of us probably feel satisfied with our lives most of the time, but we all have known or will know challenging times. Paul reminds us that when those times come, God has provided each of us with the “light” in our hearts, the light to know the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

Further in the passage Paul describes his trials and how although “hard pressed on every side,” he is “not crushed.” In our lives, the death of a loved one, illness, or disappointment in our personal or professional life can leave us feeling “hard pressed,” sometimes so overwhelmed we can hardly function. But Paul tells us not to “lose heart,” that God is with us. The power to overcome trying times comes not from us, but from God and He provides all that we need to overcome all our trials. Paul assures us that God does not allow his children to be “crushed,” “abandoned” or “destroyed.” God is there watching over us, ensuring that we can handle whatever happens. One of the great gifts from God is the steadfastness of His love and caring for each of His children. When you feel “hard pressed” or overwhelmed, ask God to “turn up” His light in your heart.

Taylor Milbradt

March 13, 2008

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Mark 10:17-31

Prior to this passage, a wealthy young man approaches Jesus, and asks what it will take to achieve salvation. Jesus reminds him to live his life according to the commandments; the young man replies that he has followed them since his youth. Jesus then tells him that in order to find the one thing that he is lacking, he must give away all of his material possessions. The young man asserts that he cannot do that, and walks away saddened by the experience.

The disciples were amazed by the command, and this passage was Jesus' response. At first glance it seems to be a proclamation against personal riches of any sort, but is that truly what Jesus is saying? Is he literally asking us to give away everything in order to achieve righteousness, and henceforth the Kingdom of Heaven?

Quite possibly, he is. But on the other hand, could Jesus be testing the young man? Could his request to adopt an ascetic lifestyle be an effort to see what was truly in the wealthy man's heart? The young man's immediate and adamant unwillingness to even entertain the idea makes clear to all where his true priorities lie. Despite having lived a righteous life, his wealth and material goods are more important to him than eternal salvation.

With the passing of two millennia, this scenario has only become more relevant than it was in the days when Mark witnessed it. The accumulation of money and stuff has become a goal, and distracts us from what is truly important. How can we claim God as our first love and priority when we are distracted by the trappings of the good life? If we claim to be Christians, we must clear our hearts and lives to make room for that which is truly important.

Tricia Hurlbutt

February 13, 2008

“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.”

Mark 1:32-34

In this passage, Mark is trying to present Jesus as the Christ, the chosen one through the miracles He performs. The miracles are meant to authenticate who Jesus is. Jesus tells the leper not to say anything to anyone but the leper ignores this and goes out and spreads the word. Many people come to seek out Jesus for selfish and impure reasons, forcing Him to leave the town and stay out in the country. To seek Jesus for His ability to heal is simply not adequate. Jesus commands the people not to tell anyone who He is; perhaps He didn't want to be viewed merely as a miracle-worker. Why are you following Jesus? Are you in it to get something from Him, or are you in it for Him alone? How often do we fervently turn to God and beg Him to heal a sick loved one or offer up promises to be good or do better if only He will help us? Do we treat Jesus like a sample table? Only seeking Him out when we need Him and simply discarding Him when we don't? I believe this passage is designed to authenticate the true identity of Jesus and thus persuade you to embrace Him. Jesus desires for us to do more than merely seek Him out for our own selfish purpose. He wants us to consume, to purchase, to entirely buy in. Do you treat Jesus like a sample table?

Jean Davis

February 14, 2008

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,  
‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

Mark 2:1-12

Faith believes that something will occur when, so far, it has not. Personal faith is when you actually do something about that belief. You take action...you commit to that belief.

In this passage we see Jesus teaching in Capernaum to a packed audience. Thick crowds gathered on the news that Jesus had cast a demon out of a man in Capernaum and repeated that all through Galilee, just as Isaiah had prophesized. The town was buzzing.

Now a paraplegic carried by four men could not get in to see Jesus because of the crowd, so they lowered him on his stretcher through the roof. Jesus was impressed by their bold belief and healed him.

Do you think the four men and the paraplegic had good reason to commit themselves to the belief that Jesus would heal? I do. Look, they had all three ways we know something: objective evidence (they saw what others saw), subjective experience (they saw it themselves) and a consistent link with past records, in this case Isaiah’s prophecy.

It is no different today. We come to believe something is true when we have all three elements. In 1967, at university in New Zealand, I came to belief because of the historical, eye-witness record of Jesus actions, particularly His resurrection; the “ring of truth” that I felt when I read the Gospel accounts; and the weight of logic that linked the two through Jewish history. This is why I have faith in God through Jesus Christ.

Dean Lewis

March 12, 2008

“Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?”

Mark 10:1-16

“...as was his custom, he again taught them.” To teach is to change a life forever. Jesus wanted to change their lives forever. But to test him the Pharisees chose the subject: divorce. They asked “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Jeremiah 3:8, Jesus grounded in creation (Gen 1.27; 2.24) a restrictive interpretation permitting divorce but prohibiting remarriage. And he did this in a way that equalizes the rights of husband and wife. But remarriage was to be considered as adultery against the first spouse. The punishment for adultery could be death. So, to equate remarriage with adultery seems shocking to us.

Some who read this will have been divorced and remarried. Indeed, this is true of some clergy. So, how is it possible to be a faithful Christian—to wholeheartedly accept the life-changing teaching of Jesus—and yet to divorce and remarry?

In the Episcopal Church a priest must obtain his bishop’s permission in order to remarry a person who has been divorced. But remarriage is not prohibited. How would you personally justify this policy in view of this passage from Mark’s gospel? It is easy to see how a person could be accused of adultery if she or he divorced a spouse simply because another person seemed more attractive. But, isn’t it more commonly true that divorce occurs only after a marriage is long dead? After the obligations of intimacy and mutual support have long been abandoned?

John Huntington+

March 11, 2008

“The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

Psalm 121

For a better understanding of these verses, please read Psalm 121 in its entirety. From a historical perspective, the psalmist is looking to the mountains for assistance. The mountains were considered Holy places, because they were closer to God. The Priest reassures the psalmist that God will protect him from harm and watch over him.

This psalm may also have been written for the people of Israel, letting them know that God would watch out for them. As God does for Israel, so does God do for us if we allow him to do so. I personally feel very blessed and am so thankful for God being in my life.

God helps us and protects us in many different ways. His assistance may be from other people, through happenings, which some would say were coincidences (which really are not coincidences) and from the thoughts that God places in our minds. My mother always used to say, "Listen to the Angels! Follow what they say!" Some nonbelievers would say that you have a lot of good luck. I do not believe in good luck. You have the protection and the blessings from God. Make sure that you thank him daily for your protection, and for the many blessings that have been bestowed upon you.

Cynthia Stuart

February 15, 2008

“When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the ‘sinners’ and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners.’”

Mark 2:13-22

This passage is such a relief to me because it reassures me that I don't have to be "free of sin" or spiritually healthy for Jesus to want to be in my life. I don't have to "have it all together" first. I must, in fact, acknowledge that I am a sinner in need of the "Great Physician" to come and minister to me. God loves us all regardless and is willing to show us the way to salvation. An important part of the passage is to see that Jesus mentions the sick being in need of a doctor which implies that the sinner should not stay as they are but seek help and healing to improve their condition. Often in order to be restored to health we may need to go through unpleasant "treatments." Are we willing to say to the Lord, "Search me, show me my sins and renew me"? Feeling God's love for me should make me strive to become more Christ-like, but it is great to know He accepts me where I am—failures and all.

Another aspect of the passage is that Christ does not withdraw even though the Pharisees are offended by His associating with the sinners. Are we willing to do what Christ has called us to do even if it offends someone, or will we retreat from someone that needs us when the going gets tough? Jesus was willing to stay with the sinners that needed Him, even though He was ridiculed for doing so. Also, a study note I read mentioned that since Matthew was a tax collector, he probably had invited some of his colleagues to meet Jesus. These may have been some of the individuals referred to in this passage. Matthew appears not to have abandoned his fellow tax collectors but rather hoped for Jesus' power to heal their lives, if they are willing to seek the "Great Physician."

*During this time of reflection, let us seek the Lord's renewal in our lives and also do what we can to bring others to the love and healing of God.*

Laura Miller

February 16, 2008

“One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’ ... Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’”

Mark 2:23-27

As I reflect on this Bible passage, my impression of what Jesus was asking the men in the synagogue was not that an action one takes is good or evil, socially acceptable or not or even disturbs the status quo. Jesus is asking “What is the right thing to do?”

Always do the right thing!

In life’s journey that God has graciously given us, our path is often not as straight and smooth as we would like it. On occasion we find ourselves looking straight up the side of a mountain and wondering what in the world should we do next? This mountain is in our way, disturbing our straight path, making us take action which may be stressful, disagreeable or clearly require a lot more work!

It is easy for us as “good Christian” people to every once in a while take the uncomplicated path around the mountain towards our destination... simply NOT “Do the right thing.” As challenging as “Do the right thing” is for us *at times* – we must trust in God and give Him our very best at *ALL times*! This is not easy... quite often strenuous, exhausting, complicated, baffling – the list goes on and on! **However, life is not a “cake walk!”**

To “Do the right thing” as a daily application will be rewarding and soul replenishing! God has promised His children the perfect reward but rewards are not freely given out... they are earned! A question becoming increasingly more popular every day... “What would Jesus do?” is the perfect question to ask ourselves any and every time we are face to face with a mountain and its obstacles... Climb, Climb, Climb over that mountaintop and

**“Always do the right thing!”**

Raphael Stuart

March 10, 2008

“Now John answered Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.’”

Mark 9:38-40

For me, this is an important statement about who Christ welcomes, and what He permits in His name. Christ expresses a straightforward, basic concept, much later plainly stated by St. Peter, who says, “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

The apostles try to protect Christ by forbidding a non-follower to cast out demons in Jesus’ name. But Christ needs no such protection. He accepts, nay, welcomes the non-follower’s actions, those works done in Christ’s name.

Jesus tells his followers not to forbid the man, because the results, the evidence of that man’s actions will keep him, or anyone who does “a mighty work” in Christ’s name, from speaking ill of Christ. Jesus plainly tells the apostles not to forbid him to continue, because “He that is not against us is for us.”

What a concept! It’s amazing in its simplicity. The point is not that the man casts out demons, but that he does so in Jesus’ name. Doing good works in Christ’s name is open to everyone, open to anyone.

Will not Christ accept all who honestly work in His name? Do your works with Jesus’ name on your lips and in your hearts, and be always acceptable to Him.

Greg Davis

March 9, 2008

## The Fifth Sunday of Lent

“‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel...’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

Jeremiah 31:31-34

God’s heart must be breaking. Is this what God had in mind when God said, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”? Bishop Mark Dyer often reminded his students at Virginia Seminary that schism is the greatest sin. When we fracture the body of Christ, we literally break God’s heart. Sadly a small number of Episcopalians have decided they alone know the truth and are attempting to break away from the Episcopal Church. This weighs heavy on my heart, since I now serve in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, one of four Dioceses that are seeking to separate from the Episcopal Church. Ironically, those who claim to be the “orthodox” Anglicans have abandoned a central tenet of Anglicanism: the ability to debate and to agree to disagree, coming together in common worship, not common theology.

It’s not just the Church that breaks God’s heart. Does the way we live our lives cause God to weep, or to rejoice? Do we put God first, or is God an afterthought? Do we give generously of our time, talent, and treasure, remembering that all that we have and all that we are comes from God?

The good news is that faithful Episcopalians in every Diocese are firmly committed to the Episcopal Church. The good news is that we try to live our lives as God intends. The very best news is that God forgives our iniquity, and remembers our sin no more.

The Rev. Lou Hays, Rector,  
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church,  
Mt. Lebanon, PA

February 17, 2008

## The Second Sunday of Lent

“Jesus also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, wherever he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know why. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.’”

Mark 4:26-28

In Biblical times, the preferred method of planting seeds was to walk through a field scattering seed by hand and letting them fall where they may. Some landed on rich, fertile soil and some on rocky, dry ground. Some grew, and some didn’t. The farmer tended to his fields as best he could, but he really didn’t understand the science of plant growth, nor did he have much control over what happened. So he prayed and waited for the grain to ripen, and when it did, he reaped the harvest and gave thanks for all that God had given him.

So it is with the seeds of the Gospel. We scatter the seeds far and wide and wait for them to grow. Like the farmer, we don’t understand how this happens—why some respond to the Gospel message and others do not. It isn’t for us to know. God is sovereign, and we accept that his plan for us is in place. So we pray, and we wait. And when it is time, we rejoice for the harvest, those people whose lives are transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, and give thanks and praise to Almighty God. And then, just as the farmer feeds his family, we go forth into the world to feed others through our words and actions.

Reverend Michelle Doran

February 18, 2008

“But, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace that you have been saved.”

Ephesians 2:4-10

I sometimes do not attribute value to things that are free, or given undeservedly. That may be why I struggle with God’s grace. Why would God forgive such a scoundrel as me, one who is dead in sin? God is always there for me, lifting me to new life through Jesus Christ . . . often many times in a single day. Why? Maybe the answer is my faith . . . that I love God with all my heart and all my soul, and I have faith that God is with me every day, at every moment, in all that I do. And for that I receive God’s gift of forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Tyler Webb

March 8, 2008

“After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive the evil spirit out?’ He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer.’”

Mark 9:28-29

The response of Jesus to his disciples that ‘This kind can come out only by prayer’ reminded me of what I already know, but do not always practice. I was like many people who pray when they are in need, struggling with a problem that just will not go away. I would thank God for the good in my life, but didn’t always invite him into my life everyday. Several years back, it finally dawned on me (a God Smack moment), that when I started my day with prayer, there was more peace in it. The negative things seemed less daunting, the good more joyous, and life in general on an even keel.

When our oldest son was presented with a life changing event in his life, I started to pray even harder for him. I wanted to give him comfort, and make things better, but I am only human. I called on God through prayer to give our son what he needed to heal, find peace, and have the desire in his heart to return to the church.

I know that it is only through the prayers that were offered up for him that he now attends church on a regular basis with a wonderful young woman who has agreed to be his wife. He is no longer without a true knowledge that God does listen to prayer and gives what He knows is the best for us. Jesus turned to prayer always, shouldn’t we?

Sharon McGlaughlin



March 7, 2008

“[The disciples] kept the matter to themselves, discussing what ‘rising from the dead’ meant.”

Mark 9:2-13

I feel that this passage deals entirely with faith. Jesus had told the disciples that He would rise from the dead. I'm sure they did not know what to make of such a statement. However, they knew Jesus and believed in Him. Sometimes, I think it's very hard to be a Christian, but we have to hold on to our faith, and one day all our questions will be answered.

I think the disciples had an advantage regarding faith that we do not. They had Jesus right there. They could see, hear, and feel him. But Jesus didn't leave us to fend for ourselves; He is with us in the Eucharist, and through the Eucharist we are able to sustain all the hardships of life. He will never desert us. We just have to have faith.

Sharon Angel

February 19, 2008

“I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”

Mark 3:20-35

The Pharisees, once again, are reacting to Jesus' words and actions with false accusations. They attribute His power to heal and cast out demons to Satan. Their words could not have been more blasphemous! They are not just throwing doubt on Jesus, they are rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are taught that all we need to do is bring our sins to the foot of the cross, confess, repent, and we are forgiven them. Does that include every sin? Jesus tells us in Matthew 26:28, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” And in 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.”

Our words against God, His Son, others, even our thoughts, and actions are forgiven when we come to God through His Son, Jesus (John 6:37). So what does Jesus mean when He says blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven? The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of our sin, enable us to understand His Word, and to reveal Christ and His righteousness (John 16:8-13). To reject the Holy Spirit is to deny Him the opportunity to change our hearts forever, separating us from the One through whom mercy and forgiveness comes. It is true that God does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). However, to be indifferent to sin, to God and to the work of the Holy Spirit—and continue to do so to the end of life is to risk final condemnation.

Renee Wilson

February 20, 2008

“Then Jesus said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”

Mark 4:1-20

Jesus preached using parables so that His followers might understand the meaning of His words and teachings. In Mark 4:1-20, He explained that His words are like seeds and asked the listeners, what do you do with these seeds of mine? Do they fall by the path only to be swept away by the devil? Do they fall into cracks in the rocks where there is no opportunity for them to take root? Or do you sow them in fertile soil so that they will bear fruit, and fruit again?

Listening with understanding is crucial if we are to grow in His word. Some times we hear what WE want to hear. Jesus said that some of us are like thorn bushes. We may hear the message, but there are obstacles like worries about wealth, life, and personal desires that prevent the words from flourishing in our lives. Those who bear fruit are those who listen and *accept* His words as the truth and the light.

May you listen with an open heart, accept with an open mind, and bear fruit...for Him.

Linda Dennis

March 6, 2008

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for that of the Gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:31-37

It is hard to imagine that God loves us even more than the love we have for our own children. As a parent, I just cannot imagine how God could send his only son to this human world and allow him to suffer so much in order to save all of us. How awesome is God to love us enough to have done just that! As a human being, it is truly beyond my comprehension. How often do I, like the disciples in the Gospel reading today, just not get it? How often do I wonder how God can allow bad things to happen to good people, especially children? How often do I worry over what really is small stuff?

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" If I know the answer to that question, then why do I have such trouble yielding myself to God's will? How much time and energy do I spend trying to figure out and adapt to this human world in order to preserve my life and status and obtain more material things? Why don't I realize that all I am and all I have comes from God and it all belongs to God? Why don't I share more of my things and my life with others to serve him? If I lose my old self and accept my new life in God, I will have everlasting life. Maybe I will also be able to experience the kingdom of God on earth.

Marjie Mack

March 5, 2008

“Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.”

Genesis 50:15-26

**Do not be afraid.** These words were spoken by Joseph to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver and who feared retribution now that they were dependent upon him. Joseph recognizes that it was their intent to do him harm but that through God’s will good has come from their evil actions. He will not punish them.

Human history is full of wars and suffering caused by the all-too-human desire to get even, sometimes disguised as a desire for fairness or justice. Most of us have a hard place in our hearts where we nurture grudges against people who have deliberately tried to harm us, and we secretly wish they could be in our power, even if only for an instant, so that we could obtain justice. How much we could learn from Joseph!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” This is a jarring statement about the essential unfairness of life, where good things happen to bad people. How we deal with this unfairness is a measure of how well we have internalized this basic Christian message. In his *I Have a Dream* speech, August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King expressed his theological understanding of this principle: *un-earned suffering is redemptive*. And is not redemption the purpose of our lives?

Judy Huntington

February 21, 2008

"But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'"

Mark 8:33

Peter often didn’t seem to get it! Perhaps the other disciples were similarly confused. Jesus had been letting all of them know—prophesizing—the fate that been assigned to Him.

Jesus was Peter’s friend, as He is to all of us who choose to acknowledge Him, but in this instance Peter failed to accept the divinity of Christ as well as the mission to mankind that had been assigned to Him. In his desire to appeal to the fully secular Jesus, he, in effect, was asking Christ to reject His divine mission.

Peter reacted in a purely human way. We, too, sometimes fail in this way.

God has let us know through His Word and His Son that He loves us. He’s always aware of our problems and He cares about them. But, how often do we implore Christ to show his love by concentrating on our earthly dilemmas. In our pleas we sometimes fail to remember that His last command to us, just before His ascension, was to go forth and make disciples of all men: to evangelize, to do God’s work. Our day-to-day tasks and problems are certainly important, but shouldn’t our first prayers have to do with showing our love for Him by having the strength and courage to work on the commission He’s given to us?

Jesus rebuked Peter, just as He rebuked Satan when Satan tempted Jesus after Jesus’ baptism. How often are we deserving of our own rebuke?

Charlie Wolf

February 22, 2008

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.”

Mark 4:24-41

The pressures and temptations of today’s modern living make it difficult to take the time to appreciate the world around us as Jesus would want us to with generosity, tolerance, acceptance and love. I imagine that in the midst of people’s hectic daily schedules, it is easy to become caught up with cares and worries that deprive us of our spiritual growth and an intimate relationship with God. We find deepening our faith commitment very challenging. We need to remember that great things begin with tiny actions. The Kingdom will only grow with care and nourishment. We are not to retain God’s message within ourselves but to give it away and that same Message that has transformed our life will in turn influence someone else who will in turn influence another. If you doubt that such a glorious Kingdom could grow from such tiny beginnings, remember the mustard seed.

The disciples’ skepticism of faith is as evident today as it was in that little boat. Those kinds of miracles aren’t so apparent today. We have to look deeper and use our faith to know that they exist. This becomes difficult when the troubles of our life take us on, testing our faith. Jesus did not promise us calm waters in our journey of faith. He did promise to be with us. You do not need to see Him to know that He is there. A reminder of this is the song “Have You Seen Jesus My Lord?” Have you ever looked at the sunset? Have you ever stood at the ocean? Then you’ve seen Jesus, my friend. Ultimately, it is your own heart that determines your response to Christ and not His spectacular miracles.

Cindy Carrier

March 4, 2008

“Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law...the Lord has become my fortress and my God the rock in whom I take refuge.”

Psalm 94

The Psalmist states that BLESSED is the person taught by the Lord. What a challenge to take time and LISTEN to what our God has to say! I know I struggle to get to that place in my personal prayer life. I seem to have no problem asking God for help, or giving God advice (you know when my prayer requests have my answers attached to them). There are even wonderful prayer times filled with worship, adoration and gratitude, but it is still me speaking. Silence, filled only with LISTENING, now there is the challenge!

In a world where self-help books, TV interviews, and computer blogs give the impression that it is so easy to attain wisdom within a few minutes, the temptation is there to avoid setting aside more than a short time each day to read and meditate on Scripture, and to avoid sitting quietly in God’s presence.

The Psalmist seems to know some helpful ways of getting to that listening place.

I will begin by asking the Lord to become my fortress, buffeting the thoughts, such as fear, anxiety, impatience, frustration, and daily schedule, which would distract me from listening. He also imagines God as the rock of his refuge, to give him comfort. My image of comfort is Jesus sitting in a rocking chair holding me on his lap at times of crisis in my life. Some times I get to rest my head on His chest listening to His heart beat, and that is all I need to achieve peace and attain the strength to survive the crisis.

This Lent I hope to climb on His lap and ask Him to teach me how to follow Him. Maybe we will read the Bible together and maybe some of the time I will just LISTEN. I hope you find the time to LISTEN too!

Maria Ciarochi

March 3, 2008

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.’ And they were amazed at him.”

Mark 12:17

Consider the mindset of those who were amazed. This passage takes place in Jerusalem after Palm Sunday. With his ministry nearing its completion, Jesus had come to the temple to teach, when the Pharisees confronted him. The Pharisee's power was being challenged by Christ's message of redemption and salvation by God through faith in him. They asked him by what authority he taught such truths that fly in the face of their laws. The Pharisees felt Christ's power came from Satan and hoped to catch Jesus in blasphemy. Jesus considered them a “brood of vipers.” Trying to trap him into an answer that would endanger him with either the Jews or the Romans, they asked “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? “ Taking a Denarius, Jesus recognized their hypocrisy and had them identify Caesar's image on the coin. He said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.”

Obey your earthly authority and give Caesar the coins he is due, but obey God and give him your heart and your faith that he is due. They realized he was not here to overthrow Rome. Jesus was telling them that his kingdom was not here on earth but in heaven. Now that truly is a reason to be amazed.

Give God your heart. Be ready to be amazed.

Woody Wooddell

February 23, 2008

"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."

Psalm 27

When I was younger and before I had done much Bible study, I thought this verse simply meant that we should all want to go to heaven, to live in the House of the Lord. It was only many years later that I began to take to heart the passage in Luke (17:21) that tells us that “the Kingdom of God is within you” and to recognize that these two ideas are connected in a very wonderful way. If with God's Grace we can grasp the Kingdom of God within us, we can live in the House of the Lord right now! When I was in the hospital undergoing a serious operation, one of my nurses told me that every breath we take is a gift from God, and I was powerfully reminded once again to dwell “in the house of the Lord” not at some vague and later time, but now, today.

Michael Ryan

February 24, 2008  
The Third Sunday of Lent

“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”

Romans 7:13-25

“I try to be good, but sometimes I just can't help myself.” I don't remember which of our daughters said it or what the circumstances were. Most parents hear similar words from their offspring, but when we examine the statement in the light of our quotation from Paul's letter to the Romans, we hear a different message. Each of us earnestly tries to obey God's law, and each of us is frequently frustrated at our inability to ignore the temptations assaulting us from every side. Indeed, we “delight in God's law,” but we also find many ways of delighting in the empty pleasures of the secular world.

Are we too hard on ourselves? Maybe, maybe not. God gave us pleasurable earthly pastimes for our enjoyment, so they can't be all bad. Where we go astray is in what balance we achieve between the worldly and the holy. We know we shouldn't devote every hour of our lives to fun and games, but we also should realize that we don't have to spend all of our time with our noses to the spiritual grindstone. Even the most strictly cloistered monks find time to have fun.

What's the right balance for you and me? That's a good question for reflection during this Lenten season. If we are honest with ourselves, we will probably find that we need to change by God's grace in some way. We might need to pray more. Maybe we will actually find that we have to play more.

Reverend Bob McCoy

March 2, 2008  
The Fourth Sunday of Lent

“The Unclean spirits, too, when they saw him, would fall down at his feet and cry aloud, ‘You are the Son of God.’”

Mark 3:7-12

“You are the Son of God” causes me to ask a question by changing a few words “are you a Son of God?” Our church and scripture tell us we are His children. But do we always act as if we are? Do we appear to those around us, at work, at home, or school wherever, whenever?

Maybe the story of a young business man and Apple Mary will help us to address this question.

The story goes back a few years when the train was the main mode of travel for business men. In the station that the young man used for his travel was the almost-blind Apple Mary and her apple stand. This was her only source of income.

One morning as he was hurrying thru the station to a big deal with a big commission, the young man, with the rushing of the crowd and his haste, bumped into Mary's apple cart and the apples went rolling. Mary was devastated; her source of livelihood was gone. But the young man stopped and crawled over the dirty floor. He retrieved and cleaned every apple and returned them to the cart. He missed his train, missing the big deal and the big commission, but he was about to receive the greatest reward a child of God could receive.

Mary, though almost blind, could see enough to realize what he had done and said to him, “WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU JESUS?”

He had acted as a child of God. The word for us is “GO AND DO LIKEWISE.”

*Lord, help us to break through to that area of human life where people can touch each other in love, for there we will find what you saw when you made us to be like you.*

Reverend Carl Rehling

March 1, 2008

“So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom...”

Psalm 90

Upon reflection of the passage “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,” my first thoughts were of the Latin saying “carpe diem” or “seize the day.”

We must also reflect on the fact that our lifestyles today are very busy, and we can get caught up in maybe doing too much. The passage advises us to spend each day wisely. But, why or how do we do so?

The full passage of Psalm 90 wants us to understand that while God has a definite purpose and meaning for our lives, that some day that purpose here on earth will be completed. We don't know when that day will be or how it will come. But if we try to live each day trying to fulfill God's purpose for us, we will be ready to be with God when that day does come.

We need to also know that God's purpose varies for each of us and that purpose may vary each and every day, and it may vary during each day. We have a responsibility to God to do our best in whatever we do, including work, school, sports, and chores.

Now there will be days in which we will face problems. These “bad” or “tough” days are there for a Godly reason that we can not always understand. However, we should have faith, knowing that God is with us and will support us with His strength in doing His work each and every day and help us overcome these problems, if we do our part by doing our best and not giving-up.

Live each day wisely doing your best, knowing God is supporting you always.

Doug Ellmore

February 25, 2008

“Daughter, your faith has healed you...Don't be afraid, just believe.”

Mark 5:21-43

Two very different stories about two very different people—one a ruler in the synagogue, Jairus, and the other a poor woman whose name we don't even know. One seeking healing for his dying 12-year old daughter and one sought help for her own 12-year affliction. One was bold enough to ask Jesus directly; the other indirectly by touching his garment. Two different stories; one message—ask and believe.

We may not be able to physically reach out and touch Jesus with our hands, but we can reach out and touch Him with our prayers. When we do so in faith, He always takes the time to listen and respond. This parable reminds us that sometimes Jesus strengthens our faith in Him by meeting someone else's needs first and letting us witness, learn and grow—just as Jesus stopped along the way to heal the woman while Jairus and the crowds witnessed. He shows us that we can take our personal needs or those of others to Him in whatever way works for us. Jesus is approachable in every circumstance.

What troubling things are going on in your life right now? What's your fear? What's your need? What's your crisis? Take it to Jesus and *don't be afraid; just believe.*

Nancy Horkan

February 26, 2008

“Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor.”

Psalm 78:41-42

Psalm 78 is the story of the Israelite history from God bringing the Israelites out of Egypt to the time of Israel's return to captivity. This Psalm reads like a good story, instructing the reader regarding what God expects from His people and what His people can expect of Him. The Psalm is the story of how God is good to His people but they were not always good to God in return. The overall theme is that God did wonderful deeds for His people but they did not obey Him. In addition, the Psalm stresses the importance of passing on from one generation to the next generation the story of God's unconditional love for His people. The Psalm instructs that the family is responsible to teach its children about God's love. Failing to teach our children is not an option according to God.

The theme of Psalm 78 is still fundamental today – we know that trusting in God and following His commandments is the right thing to do but...we do what we want, not what God would want us to do! As in the Psalm, today God wants us to keep His covenant; however, we fight against this. Why? Is it not easier to just obey the commandments? Yes, it can seem easier but we are strong willed and our minds tell us what is best for us. We seem to go along living our lives doing as we please; but the commandments are always in the back of our mind; yet we feel we know best. It may take a situation in our family or community that ‘wakes us up’ and reminds us that God is always good to us and we are called to obey Him.

Psalm 78 is as significant today as it was when written 700BC years before Christ was born. The Psalm was meant to be an instruction on how to act in our relationship with God and what our responsibilities as people of God are to this relationship. How we should act in our relationship with God and our responsibilities to God have not changed over these many centuries.

Cathy Stasny

February 29, 2008

“They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.”

Mark 6:47-56

What does it take to know that 'You Know God'? In Jesus' time the people could talk and listen to him, observe his actions and question his intentions, be spellbound by his miracles. It was a 'hands-on' experience that left those fortunate enough to witness these events so much more ready to 'Jump on the Band-wagon' and follow him—no questions asked! Today, I envy those witnesses from long ago; you see, I'm like Thomas; I want to put my hand in his wounds but I can't, so I go thru life with the knowledge that his life is my GPS which directs my route and corrects my wrong turns. As long as I do not turn him off and BELIEVE in his guidance, I know I will reach my intended destination.

Charles McClunin



February 28, 2008

“They all ate and were satisfied.”

Mark 6:30-46

We have all heard the story—5 loaves and 2 fish to feed 5000 people. How is this possible? Do you believe it?

When confronted by these miraculous events, our own sensibilities are put to the test. When we look at the ministry of Jesus, we are continually asked to suspend judgment and to trust what we are told. The blind regain sight, the lame walk, water is turned to wine, and the greatest miracle of all - the dead are raised. How does one resolve the questions about miraculous events? How can they be explained? In a word—faith.

Faith is the power to believe without having seen, to trust in, and to simply accept the Word of God. Given our own rational thought processes and philosophical nature, skepticism and disbelief abound. After all, who wants to debate a miracle? How can you win that argument? How many of us carry doubts within us that keep us from proclaiming Christ as our Savior to our co-workers, friends and acquaintances? One of my favorite song lyrics' reads “Faith is a burden. It's brave and bittersweet. Hope is hard to hold to. Lord, I believe, only help my unbelief.” Explaining or being able to debate miracles is not required. We don't need to defend our faith. We simply need to nurture it and humbly ask that it be strengthened—“like a mustard seed waiting for some proof.”

*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*

Earl Buffalo

February 27, 2008

“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.”

Psalm 119:97-120

Psalm 119 is bound together through 176 verses, as the most extensive poem of the Psalter, utilizing one central theme—praise of the law.

Verses 97 through 110 have a central theme of praise for God's law which sustains the reader. The law is praised, not as a restrictive set of requirements, burdensome upon the believer, but as a joy, as an inspiration, as law to be praised and joyfully followed, sustaining faith, protecting against persecution and trouble. The law is praised as a shelter and shield and as a delight to be joyfully followed.

Verse 105, "your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path," has been embodied in the 1984 Christian praise hymn by Amy Grant in its opening verse, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." This psalm praises God's law as God's will which sustains the believer through the dark hours and better times, always providing a guide to the Psalmist and by extension to each of us today.

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