

Lent



Episcopal Church of the Resurrection
Lenten Lectionary 2016

Episcopal Church of the Resurrection Pleasant Hill, CA Lenten Lectionary 2016

FOREWARD

The 2015 Church of the Resurrection Lenten Lectionary is a collection of commentaries based on the Daily Office Scripture Lessons for each day of Lent (except for Sundays). There is one reflection for each day beginning Thursday, February 11 (the day after Ash Wednesday) and continuing through Holy Saturday, March 26. The assigned passages, which you are encouraged to read first, are in bold print at the top of the entry. (If you do not have a Bible at home, a good online resource is bible.oremus.org).

The daily reflection is written by a member of the Church of the Resurrection community, and is intended as a resource for and the enhancement of your own Lenten journey. Writers were invited to comment or reflect on any or all of the daily readings as they felt moved.

A sincere thank you goes out to all of the contributors who wrote for this lectionary. Your reflection is a gift to the entire parish community. Thanks, also, to Tracy Barber for her time and effort in producing this as a book.

Lenten Lectionary
Thursday, February 11, 2016

Habakkuk 3:1-18
Philippians 3:12-21
John 17:1-8

All About Time

The Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk questions God when life doesn't make sense. Then he waits and he listens. He comes to peace and willingly waits on **God's time**. Habakkuk starts out complaining to God, but he does NOT stay there. His prayer ends brimming with faith and trust in God.

In John's gospel we hear Jesus' prayer to his Father: "Father, the **time has come**." Jesus has completed his earthly work. His time on earth is over. Jesus prays for all his followers left on Earth.

Paul writes from a jail cell and his work is under attack but his circumstances do not hinder his joy in knowing Jesus. He looks at his spiritual journey honestly by admitting he doesn't know everything, nor is he perfect. But Paul is clear about being on the right path! He has his eye on Jesus---God is beckoning him onward and Paul is off and running. Paul realizes that his old life before Jesus is no longer relevant and his whole value system has been inverted. Things he once viewed as important assets, he now sees as liabilities! Paul sees that the **time is right** to no longer live in the PAST but to live with eyes on the goal.

The prayers of Habakkuk and Jesus are like bookends focusing us on Paul's words! The **time is NOW** to live each day with our eyes focused not on ourselves or the past. Instead, Paul calls us to enter the race of believers who are called to spiritual maturity--knowing Jesus intimately and passionately.

Carol Held

Lenten Lectionary

Friday, February 12, 2016

Ezekiel 18: 1-4, 25-32

Philippians 4: 1-9

John 17: 9-19

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

The first reading from Ezekiel tells me that the sins of the father do not rain on the children, meaning each person will be punished according to his own sins. It states, "Behold, all souls are mine". My soul is God's, and therefore, I must take responsibility for my actions and not point a finger at someone else to blame. I will be judged by my actions and thoughts and not someone else's. Verses 25-32 make me see that I can turn away from my wrong doings and, with God's help, be renewed with a new heart and spirit. I like the idea of a new beginning.

Philippians 4: 1-9

These verses speak to me of unity and fellowship, and not being troubled or anxious. I want to remember to make my requests known to God through thanksgiving and prayer. I hope to remember to rejoice in the Lord. During this Lenten season I will try to dwell on "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely ... anything worthy of praise." When I pray for my loved ones going through an especially troubling period I will give thanks for the wonderful, memorable times in their past. Then, hopefully, the peace of God will be in their hearts and minds, too.

John 17: 9-19

In this Gospel reading Jesus prays for the disciples. It is his last prayer to God. He sees them as gifts from the Father to him. He says, "While I was with them, I was keeping them in your name ... and I guarded them". He prays that they will be joyful and sanctified in truth. He is asking God to watch over them. This is what I pray for each night as I lay in bed waiting to fall asleep. Keep them! Whether it means keep them safe, keep them healthy, keep them happy.... essentially I'm saying, God keep them in your loving arms so they may know your love and peace. Keep my children, grandchildren, loved ones and others who need my prayers with you.

Judy Whitney

Lenten Lectionary Saturday, February 13, 2016

Ezekiel 39:21-29
Phil 4: 10 – 20
John 17: 20 - 26

When I was a member of an Episcopal youth group a gazillion years ago, we were lucky enough to go on a diocesan youth retreat, something that was an unusual thing in those days. We camped for the long weekend at a large co-ed Y camp that some of us went to during summer months, so we expected it to seem like familiar territory. We were in for a surprise.

This was no sing-in-the-woods, pray in an outdoor chapel weekend. The gathering was led by a young missionary priest who, at our first meeting, asked us to hold out our hands, palms up. He walked around the circle we made and shook both hands of each of us and said, "Glad to meet you, Jesus!" That was *not* Episcopal talk fifty years ago! It's kind of pushing it even today.

Yes, we are the only hands Jesus has. If something needs doing, we're it. Discerning what that means in our own lives will always be individual, but paying attention first is how we learn what needs to be done, what part we need to play in getting something done or changed or publicized or, or, or...you fill in your gifts.

Today's readings are about listening to God and being thankful for the opportunity to serve, and to reflect God or Jesus in the right way for the circumstances at hand. Jesus said in John's gospel that he was thankful he could be the conduit for his Father and His Father's love to all believers. He was, indeed, being God's hands and voice in the world. In Philippians, we learn that the congregation shared in Paul's "misery" while he was in jail and he gave thanks for them. They saw a need and filled it, just as Paul saw a very different need and filled it.

Ann Willis Scott

Lenten Lectionary

Monday, February 15, 2016

Genesis 37:1-11
1 Corinthians 1:1-19
Mark 1:1-13

Each of these passages deals with what must really be a basic human need – to know where we stand in the “pecking order” wherever we are. This is true in families, at work, at school, in sports, in social groups, in the military, in performance groups – the list is way too long to itemize. Where we stand determines how we interact with others. Who’s the leader; who’s the follower? Who has power and who does not?

Our place in the order isn’t stagnant. It changes from group to group and, very often, from time to time. But we really seem to need to know what it is, or we become very uncomfortable. And, when someone wants to turn that order upside down, like Joseph did when he told his older brothers that someday they would bow down before him, this can really cause upset. I’m an older sister and, if my little sister ever said I would bow down before her, I am quite confident that my response would be similar to that of Joseph’s siblings: FAT CHANCE!

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he is also dealing with people who were struggling to figure out who, exactly, they should follow. Paul shares that the people of Corinth were breaking up into different factions according to who baptized them. He even says that he is glad he didn’t baptize anyone besides Crispus and Gaius so he would not be seen as a leader of one of the factions. Then he stops to take time to remember exactly who all he did baptize.

Paul knows he is a leader in the Corinth community and he is writing the letter as their leader, to try to get them to understand that they need to follow Christ, not some other individual in their midst. But by taking the time to stop and try to remember who else he might have baptized shows me that Paul, also, had a need to be the leader of specific individuals, to have a personal relationship with others as their leader. This makes Paul seem more human to me, especially since I feel like he does not recognize this very human need in himself.

And finally, there is wild and crazy John the Baptist, running around the countryside preparing the way for someone else...someone who is so powerful that John is not even worthy to untie his shoes.

John seems to be the only one in these passages who truly understands his place and function in the world...because he knows that he is preparing the way for none other than the Son of God. He accepts his role and does not appear to be upset to be Jesus’ front

man. He stands back after baptizing Jesus and supports him while Jesus prepares to begin his ministry. John does not try to compete with Jesus, and he is not jealous of Jesus. John has his own role in the story and he goes about it with purpose and integrity.

I pray that I can be more like crazy John the Baptist and be less concerned about my place in the pecking order of my own small world. Help me to focus instead on living out my own role in the story with purpose and integrity as I try to follow my true leader, Jesus Christ.

Barb Dawson

Lenten Lectionary
Tuesday, February 16, 2016

Genesis 37:12-24

1 Corinthians 1:20-31

Mark 1:14-28

Lenten Lectionary
Wednesday, February 17, 2016

Genesis 37:25-36
1 Corinthians 2:1-13
Mark 1:29-45

Genesis 37: 25 – 36

This passage shows me how people are able to even sell out their own families when left to their own devices. But what puzzles me is the tearing of clothes as a reaction to stress. It seems to me that in that day and age human life was held with little regard. Even people of would sell each other out in minute for their own interest. If someone felt they were of higher status than you, as a human being you were of little value to them. The only thing that was important was how they could profit from you. It would seem that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when he chose Judas, knowing that Judas could not resist the temptation to sell him out.

1 Corinthians 2:1 – 13

These passages speak to me about how we can trust in the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, God's wisdom. Even though we do not have capacity to fully understand God's wisdom, we can trust in God. But we cannot trust in humankind's ability to govern itself without God's help and wisdom. Through the Holy Spirit we can find God's truth as we are able to understand it.

Mark 1:29 – 45

There are two things that stood out to me in these passages. The first is that Jesus did not let the demons speak. This suggests to me that that to hear the demons is to be overcome by them. Jesus, on the other hand, knows what they and has power over them. So when Jesus silences them, he is protecting all who are witnessing the event. The second thing that stood out to me was that the leper could not keep quiet about Jesus healing him. As a result, Jesus could not move in a city without being besieged by those who also wanted to be healed. Even though the leper was healed by Jesus, he still could not obey Jesus's request to speak only to the priests. Instead, he spread the word everywhere so that Jesus was crowded out of all the cities.

David Wurtzbacher

Lenten Lectionary
Thursday, February 18, 2016

Genesis 39:1-23

1 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:15

Mark 2:1-12

Lenten Lectionary

Friday, February 19, 2016

Genesis 40: 1-23

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Mark 2:13-22

The words of St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” are often used to convince believers that they should live holy lives, not drink and not smoke. That may be true, but I think this verse is more likely talking about the Church, the Body of Christ in the world. In Paul’s time there were many temples for all kinds of gods. But the followers of Jesus in community, together, symbolize the temple of the true God. Paul points out that God dwells in those who are open to God’s presence. But Paul’s focus is on the shared life of those in the community of faith rather than individuals. Why? Because the Holy Spirit lives in them. God dwells in their midst, in the fellowship and faith that they share.

Our church building is very important. It is wonderful that we are taking such great care of our facilities so that they stand strong now and in the future, too. However, I believe the most important part of our church is the people in our community of faith, the body of Christ in the world. Church facilities and people gathering together to worship are what it’s all about, but the most important part is what we do together to share the Good News of God’s love to the world. We do not need to boast about all of the great things we do, just simply follow Jesus’s example of what to do for others. God’s Holy Spirit resides in our church and in those who attend. We are good at taking that out into the world through our mission work and by living our beliefs throughout our days as we encounter the world. Our doors are open to all who enter. We are open and welcoming to others. It is great to see a lot of people attending on Sundays. But the bottom line is that what really matters is that the people who attend are changed and moved to live a Christ-like life.

Are the fruits and gifts of the Spirit visible in our life together? If so, then others will discover the one and only true God. It is my prayer that through our fellowship, shared faith, and our actions as a community of faith, others will come to know God’s love and be moved to bring that love to the world.

Laura Gianello

Lenten Lectionary

Saturday, February 20, 2016

Genesis 41: 1-13
1 Corinthians 4: 1-7
Mark 2:23-3:6

These passages give us some hints on how to make our time of Lent more special. In the part of Genesis cited here, we learn that Pharaoh was very patient. He waited two years for another dream that held a message from God. During Lent, we are asked to wait six weeks until Easter. As we patiently wait to celebrate, we have time to go a little deeper in our relationship with God, and grow in our faith as we prepare for an enriching Easter.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1-7, we learn that we are servants of God and guides into God's secrets, being stewards of God's mysteries. Good guides need to be reliable and have accurate knowledge. Lent can be a time for us to practice our Christian reliability and take time to learn more about our faith and our God. It can be a time to grow in our knowledge of what it means to live a life as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.

Mark 2:23-3:6 reminds us that the Sabbath is sacred and divine. It is a privilege to have a day to gather and worship together. It does not have to be a task or drudgery. Jesus showed through his actions that observing a Sabbath does not necessarily mean sitting around doing nothing. He healed on the Sabbath (Mark 2: 4-5), and the disciples were seen actively accompanying Jesus, supporting his work even on the Sabbath when it was against the law of the day to do anything. Disciples were seen "plucking the heads of grain". How often do we attend church, go through the motions mostly as observers? Sometimes I listen to the readings without really hearing them. I recite the parts of the service without giving it all much thought. Maybe we are also called to "pluck the heads of grain", to be more active in the Sunday worship services, to pay attention and wait patiently for God to speak to our hearts. During Lent, perhaps we can listen more attentively to the readings and take home a word or a phrase to think about. It is wonderful way to awaken that strong connection we already have with God.

Rich Gianello

Lenten Lectionary

Monday, February 22, 2016

Genesis 41:46-57

1 Corinthians 4:8-21

Mark 3:7-19a

Genesis 41: 46-57: During seven years of abundance, go to your friends and gather up the surplus and store up seven years-worth for the famine to come.

1 Corinthians 4: 8-21: Whether you are full like a king or homeless in rags you could have 10,000 guardians in Christ. You can be a fool or be wise, but all you really need is Christ.

Mark 3: 7-19a: Tell your friend the crowds are pressing on you and to get you a boat, then take a group to the mountain top and appoint twelve apostles to help you.

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Music Insert :

“I get by with a little help from my friends,
gonna try with a little help from my friends.”
- *The Beatles*

From these passages we are reminded that we cannot complete our journey on our own. We need others to be advocates, advisors, mentors, helpers and friends.

The season of Lent is a reminder for each of us to reflect upon ourselves, to do some internal evaluation, and to ponder changes or improvements that we could make. For some it may be putting an end to a bad habit, or committing to volunteering more often.

While each of us has different needs and introspections, we all need a friend to help us put any changes into action. We are shown that the Bible is an excellent resource for guidance, but voicing your intentions to a friend that can hold you accountable and will help you be successful.

So if someone asks you to get them a boat, or take a walk up a mountain, perhaps you are the friend that is supporting a change. If you ask for help with the changes you need or want to make, then stick with the friend that hears your needs and offers to help you.

As the slogan says, “A friend is one who knows that when you mess up you haven’t done a permanent job.”

Meg & Richard Coons

Lenten Lectionary
Tuesday, February 23, 2016

Genesis 41:1-17
1 Corinthians 5:1-8
Mark 3: 19-35

Many of us ask each other what we are giving up for Lent. As a child I always tried to give up sweets or chocolate. Since Valentine's Day often falls during Lent, I was not very successful. As an adult, I have taken a different direction and tried to make some sort of positive change during Lent, and I have been more successful. Eating more healthy food, walking 10,000 steps per day and volunteering are some choices I can make. Reading the passage from Genesis reminded me of something that is very difficult for many of us to do - to forgive.

This passage begins with Jacob sending ten of his sons to Egypt to get grain which they desperately needed due to a famine in Canaan. These are the same sons who sold their brother Joseph into slavery 22 years before and told their father he was dead. Their guilty consciences are revealed when they are unable to look at their father when Egypt is mentioned. Joseph is now governor of the land, and this is the first time he has seen them since they sold him. He recognizes them, but they have no idea who he is. He has a choice, to forgive or not. He accuses them of being spies and they swear to him that they are "honest" men. But that is not true. Joseph decides to test them by putting them in prison for three days until someone brings to Joseph the brother they had left behind.

Today's passage ends here, but if you are familiar with the story, you know that eventually Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and father. He forgives them and says it was God who brought him there for a divine purpose. I'm not sure I would be able to be gracious to anyone who took me from those I love. This is a huge act of forgiveness. Perhaps I can start small and show others the grace of forgiveness.

Kim McConnell

Lenten Lectionary Wednesday, February 24, 2015

Genesis 42:18-28

1 Corinthians 5:9-6:8

Mark 4:1-20

I chose to reflect and comment on Mark 4:1-20. This reading is the Parable of the Sower (one who scatters seeds on the ground for growing). To summarize the parable, the sower scatters seeds on four different kinds of ground. First, the seeds are scattered on a dirt footpath and quickly birds swoop down and eat the seeds. The second time, the sower casts seeds on ground that is full of rocks. Here, some of the seeds take hold and quickly sprout but when exposed to the sun, the sprouts quickly die because the roots did not take hold. Then the sower scatters seeds among thorns, but the thorns quickly take over not allowing the seeds to take hold. Finally, the seeds are scattered on good fertile ground and the seeds take hold yielding plentiful grain.

I think this parable is often used to judge what kind of 'ground' a person is on with God. Reflecting and thinking about which path is being followed in forming their relationship with God. It is perhaps a subtle reminder to improve one's life in faith. Lent is a perfect time to reflect and assess one's relationship with God.

However, after reading a commentary by Barbara Brown Taylor, I got a whole new take on this parable and how it spoke to me. Barbara Brown Taylor said that the story was not really about us and our shortfalls, but about the generosity of God. She called the sower being extravagant, willing to throw seeds all over creation, not worrying or fazed about the type of ground the seeds were being thrown upon, not stingy with how many seeds were being thrown, just throwing them everywhere. She says, "the Extravagant Sower who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity covering the whole creation with fertile seed of his truth. The more he sowed, the more he seemed to have."

This spoke to me about the generosity of God and how we, in turn, might be extravagantly generous. Perhaps, it is a reminder in this season of Lent to be more generous with our love, kindness and caring, not letting anything stop us. It might mean giving something you have that you really like to someone else for them to enjoy. It might mean taking time to write a note to someone you really care about letting them know how much they mean to you or writing a note to someone you do not know well and telling them what you appreciate about them. It might mean being more generous with your time by helping someone out. It might especially mean being generous with your time to enjoy your friends and family, and letting them know how much they mean to you. I also think we need to seriously contemplate the talents and gifts God has given us and generously share those talents and gifts. By being extravagantly generous, we can get a glimpse of the profound generosity of God.

Deb Smith

Lenten Lectionary

Thursday, February 25, 2016

Genesis 42:29-38

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Mark 4:21-34

In his letter to the Corinthians, it sounds to me as though Paul is having a vigorous discussion with or within this community. This reading addresses sexual immorality, but as I read it, I felt Paul may have missed another immoral behavior, the one of substance abuse. Paul says, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body." But is it not also a sin to over indulge in alcohol or drug use, and is that not also a sin against our own body? Paul seems to ask this himself when he asks, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

Each week in our services at the offering we say, "All things come of you O God, and of your own we have given you." In today's passage from Corinthians, Paul says "You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies." In both of these statements, my understanding is that we are to take care of ourselves, and our own, and the better we do this, the more we can offer to God our gifts and honor.

I am often surprised when reading from the Gospels, even after several times. Sometimes what seemed so straightforward the first time appears to be more difficult the next. In today's Gospel, Jesus is speaking to a crowd by the lake. The crowd that gathers to him grows so large that he gets in a boat speaks to them from the lake. Jesus speaks to them in many parables, and included in this text are the Parables of a Lamp on a Stand, the Growing Seed, the Mustard Seed, and just before this section, the Sower.

The Parable of the Lamp on a Stand provokes much thought for me. Jesus asks, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?" To me this says we should use our light of our knowledge and our goodness, and not to try to keep them hidden or put away. But then, Jesus is taking on hidden things, and he seems to reflect on human behavior all the way back to the Garden of Eden when he says: "For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear." Jesus seems to be warning us that we cannot conceal our sins, as they will not remain concealed.

Yet I want to keep some things hidden. Like many people, I have secret passwords for my online bank account. I have also had friends tell me secret things they do not want to share with others. We often trust each other to keep at least some secrets, or some things hidden. But one of the central messages for Lent is repentance, turning away from the sins we may have hidden in our hearts. If we bring our sins out into the open, we can empty them from our hearts, and so give more room in our hearts for love of God. And then, the light from our lamp can fill the room.

Russ Bratburd

Lenten Lectionary

Friday, February 26, 2016

Genesis 43:1-15
1 Corinthians 7:1-9
Mark 4:35-41

Fortunately, selling one's siblings into slavery in Egypt doesn't really resonate with me. Neither does Paul's reluctant endorsement of marriage only because it may help one to avoid lust and fornication. But I can relate to being caught on the water in stormy weather, so I will focus on the story in Mark's Gospel for today. Unlike Matthew and Luke with their stories of the Nativity and childhood of Jesus, Mark begins his Gospel with a few verses about John the Baptist. He then introduces Jesus as a grown man being baptized by John, spending 40 days in the desert (his own private Lent?), and then beginning his public ministry near the Sea of Galilee.

Most people would classify the "Sea" of Galilee as a "lake" and not an especially large one at that. Lake Tahoe has about five times the surface area, and because it is much deeper, about 40 times the capacity. But, partly because the Sea of Galilee is relatively shallow, and partly because it is surrounded by often scalding desert mountains, it is frequently subjected to sudden squalls with changeable winds that produce steep, confused waves. Such conditions can be much more hazardous to a small, open fishing boat than the much taller but more regular waves experienced in the open ocean.

After a long and probably hot day of preaching and healing by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus tells his disciples that he would like to get away from the crowds for the evening by taking their boats to "the other side" of the sea/lake. They shove off, and the exhausted Jesus quickly falls asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat. (Few things are as annoying to someone straining to navigate a vessel through heavy weather—especially if sea sickness is looming—than the sight of a shipmate blissfully sleeping through the whole ordeal.) The boat starts taking on water. The panicking disciples wake Jesus saying, "Don't you care that we are sinking?" Jesus stands up, commands the wind and waves to be still, and they are: "There came a great calm."

Then he turns to the disciples and asks them, "Why are you afraid? Are you still without faith?" The key to this exchange is the relationship between faith and fear: If we really have faith in Jesus—"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25)—there is really nothing for us to fear.

Pete McCorkell

Lenten Lectionary

Saturday, February 27, 2016

Genesis 43:16-34
1 Corinthian 7:10-24
Mark 5:1-20

The reading from Genesis is part of a story I've known since I was a child – Judah and his brothers have already been given food once, and taken it back to Canaan. They now have to return and request more grain, and have to take Benjamin with them. Their father is not happy about that at all. Simeon has been left as hostage in Egypt. They are totally unaware that the man dispensing what they so greatly need is their brother Joseph, who received no mercy from them when he was much younger.

Perhaps the memory of how cruel they were to one of their brothers is a factor in their concern over whether they will be able to return to their father with either Benjamin or Simeon, let alone both. In addition, they think they are returning the money they had used to pay for the grain the first time (Joseph had secretly had the money placed in the brothers' sacks). It's no wonder to me that they are fearful of their reception. Once upon a time they were horrible to one of their own, and now they are paying the penalty. Miraculously, they are told not to worry about the money – the governor's steward received what was owed. They are reunited with Simeon, and Joseph treats Benjamin with great affection during the meal.

This story has always puzzled me. It is one of the tales where the "hero" behaves in a way that is not in keeping with the way I was taught to behave. Where is love, honesty, truthfulness, turning the other cheek? Joseph strings his brothers along, testing them to see if they have changed. He manipulates them in order to have them return with Benjamin. To some extent I can see why he wants to do this, but I don't think anyone would see me as a hero if I tested and manipulated those who had hurt me in the past, saying "they deserve it." Why cause them such anguish? Surely Joseph knows he is also causing his father pain.

Now, I understand this is an Old Testament story, taking place long before the birth of Christ. It is not meant to support any of Jesus' teachings. It is not meant to foreshadow any of Jesus' actions. And we do find out later in the story that the brothers have changed, and Joseph does forgive his brothers. But it still strikes me that some of the most memorable stories, the ones we teach our children, are stories about men who aren't always very nice people. This holds true for how we look up to actors, sports heroes, musicians, etc. But I do think that if Jesus were that son of Israel who was now the governor of Egypt, the story would have turned out much differently.

Davida Pugh

Lenten Lectionary

Monday, February 29, 2016

Genesis 44:18-34

1 Corinthians 7:25-31

Mark 5:21-43

I remember as a child going on the “Haunted Mansion” ride at Disneyland and being very anxious. It was not the ghosts or spooky setting that caused this anxiety, but rather the initial elevator ride. When we first walked into the house, we moved into a room and the doors close as the room begins to drop (i.e., an elevator). The room was packed full of people and my immediate reaction was to move to the outside wall. Of course, the “tour guides” told us to move to the center of the room in order to see all the pictures on the wall, but I was not having any of it. I needed the safety of the wall behind me. I did not want to be in the middle of that crush of people. I wanted to have space around me and not be with so many people.

As I was reading through each of the lessons for today, it occurred to me that the theme of community could be applied to each of them. This community is beyond the immediate place we live or work, and is rather the community of people that is around us and with us as we journey through life.

In thinking about the Hebrew Scripture reading in Genesis, I knew that it is just a little bit of the total story. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers many years earlier. They then come to his home in Egypt not realizing that this leader is their brother Joseph. As they leave, I'm sure they are thinking that their problems of famine in their homeland have been solved. But then their youngest brother, Benjamin, is accused of theft. The older brothers are beside themselves knowing they are going to lose another brother, and can't possibly imagine telling their father.

The New Testament reading from Corinthians also talks about relationships. Specifically, it talks about a marriage relationship and what that means to you as an individual and as a couple. Lastly, the Gospel reading is sort of two different stories smashed together. There is the story of the woman who is hemorrhaging but is healed when she touches Jesus' coat. Book-ending that story is the story of the father who comes to Jesus asking for his daughter to be healed. The father is clearly distraught over his daughter's illness, and Jesus quickly brings her back from death.

Each of these stories talks to me of community, the groups that we live in and surround us. Maybe another way to think about the community is to define it as those ties that bind us to the people that we live with and breathe with and move with in our journey through life. At times these relationships can bring sorrow and grief, and at other times they bring great joy. But as Christians we are called to wade in the messiness of living in community. In this messiness we find Christ, and in this messiness is where we are to do our work in the world. So yes – I need to leave the safety of the wall and wade into the middle of the room so that I can experience all that the “ride” has to offer.

Whitney Wilson

Lenten Lectionary

Tuesday, March 1, 2016

Genesis 45:1-15
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Mark 6:13-29

*About 1994, the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat", came to San Francisco and thrilled thousands who attended the show. The music was awesome, the storyline followed the Genesis text perfectly and everyone who saw it left with their spirits soaring. We laughed and we cried-which is what any good story should evoke. The musical also renewed interest in the Old Testament story of Jacob, Joseph and his brothers.

Our passage today is that moment when Joseph can no longer restrain himself to keep his identity from his brothers. He watches the brothers "grovel" (if you know the musical you will recognize this word from one of the songs!), "terrified at his presence". He was, after all, the second most powerful man in Egypt! And you've see drawings of how they looked: face paint that made them look like serpents, wolves, angry birds, covered with gold and fine garments, designed to intimidate and frighten. These Hebrew men, now prisoners, so far away from home, had to be frightened out of their minds. And now, Joseph calls them to come close to him. After a bit they do so. And this frightening-looking man reveals himself to be their brother whom they thought was dead. "I am your brother Joseph-the one you sold into Egypt". What a verbal blow! "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." Pharaoh sends them back home to Jacob, loaded with food to save their lives. He invites Jacob and his entire clan to return to Egypt to live, and gives him the finest land. He even sends wagons for them to use to bring back the little ones so they do not have to walk. "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." This is the God whom we worship. He knows our needs before we are aware of them and often has plans in the works...slowly and carefully unfolding, to bless our lives and to save us. This is why we need to always live our lives with a spirit of thankfulness to God for his great love and plan for our lives. Perhaps next to the story of Jesus and the love story of the cross, this is the second greatest love story in the Bible.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul replies to the community's conundrum of eating meat sacrificed to pagan gods, and the impression that leaves with others. Paul assures the new believers that eating the meat is not so much the issue, but what they need to understand and consider is that they now are faced with loving those who have different opinions and personal convictions. **What a concept!** We would do well in these divisive times to love, respect and encourage others despite our differences. Yes, hold firm to your faith in the knowledge and love of Christ and yes, expect that we will at times need to agree to disagree.

Marks Gospel reading for today speaks to me about evangelism, both the rewards and the disappointments. One minute the apostles are healing the sick, casting out demons and preaching repentance to those who would listen, and the next John the Baptist is beheaded for speaking the truth. As believers, we each have different talents or gifts to make known the presence of God, be it a "thank you for working so hard" or a quiet moment of prayer for someone. In whatever form of "speaking the truth" we choose, it is the wellspring of grace for our world.

Steve Wilson

* Guest commentary by my spiritual wingman, Deacon Jon A. Skaug COTA Tucson, AZ

Lenten Lectionary

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Genesis 45:16-28
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Mark 6:13-29

“Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.” (1 Corinthians 8:2-3). It would be an understatement to say that we, as human beings, know very little. This fact, however, we have known for a long time - many are familiar with Socrates’s phrase “I know that I know nothing.” It is not for our lack of education, but rather that there is so much in this world that is incomprehensible to us.

From an historical perspective, in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, we are witnessing a dynamic shift in religion. Paul is preaching monotheism over the predominant polytheistic religions. He tells his audience, those who already know God, to not dine at the banquet meant for the old gods, because if they do those that still do not know God, who are struggling with the comprehension that there is only God, will be terrible confused. Why is someone who believes in God and Lord Jesus Christ participating in a ritual meant for the old idols?

The message that Paul is trying to convey is bigger than just not eating the meat meant for the idols. “For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to the idols?” (10). He’s directing those who believe in God and Jesus to show their belief in their actions. He wants the followers of Jesus to not only believe, but to act on their belief – to give knowledge of Christ to those who don’t already have it, or are struggling to comprehend it.

While we have knowledge of God, many (if not all) of us often deal with the struggle to comprehend Him (or Her..). Paul wants us to be role models for those who either do not believe or understand God. But that is difficult to do when we ourselves are dealing with the same struggle. There are many lessons that God (via the Bible) teaches us, and we, as modern Christians, often acknowledge their importance. But equally as often, we tend to ignore them. We simply do not know the way to always be the person God wants us to be – that is why we ask God to forgive our sins every Sunday in Church.

However, God understands all of this. While we will never know his intentions, we are told to believe that there is a greater plan in the works. In Genesis, Joseph’s envious brothers sell him to be an Egyptian slave. It is there that he realizes God’s plan. Earlier in Genesis 45, Joseph says, “So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt,” (8). In our reading,

rather than punish his brothers, Joseph gives them gifts to bring back to their father. He realizes that this was God's plan all along.

It's easy to look back at moments in our life and say, "I was a good Christian when I did x" and "this part of my life was really difficult, but it made me a better person at the end, and now I'm happier than I have ever been." It is in the difficult moments, and our day to day life where our faith is tested – where we cannot comprehend God – where we simply do not know.

God knows. God knows that we don't know it all, that we are struggling with it. And even in the short term, in each day, we must find a way to trust him, to not only look ahead, but to be a model for those that are struggling as well. And we must find a way to always know that he loves us.

Simon Tryzna

Lenten Lectionary

Thursday, March 3, 2016

Genesis 46:1-7
1 Corinthians 9:1-15
Mark 6:30-46

In the reading from Mark's Gospel appointed for today, the apostles have just told Jesus of the beheading of John the Baptist. "And he said to them, 'come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.'" Then Jesus and the apostles with him get into a boat to find a lonely place to be away from all the hustle and bustle of life. But as we know, the crowds continue to follow Jesus and his disciples. When they finally return to the shore a great crowd is waiting for them.

Jesus then takes "compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd." After preaching and teaching to the crowd, Jesus then performs the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two small fish.

I think much of my life is like that today. Every time I try to find time to sit, to rest, and to meditate, something comes along to interrupt me. It could be a crisis at home or at work that I perceive needs to be taken care of right that minute or my whole life or world will fall apart. I get so involved in what is going on in my world that I neglect the importance of my spiritual and religious well-being.

Lent gives me the chance to re-set my mindset. Lent gives me the opportunity to think in the moment. I do not need to dwell on what happened in the past and I definitely cannot control what is going to happen to me tomorrow, next week, next month or next year. But I do have control over what happens to me today, this minute.

When I have re-set my mindset, I seem to find more time throughout the day to really sit back to relax, to meditate and to pray. I have time to think of the importance of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection to my life. I then realize that I am no longer afraid of the future. I no longer worry what will happen tomorrow because I know that through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God will be there with me every step I take. I am no longer a lost sheep without a shepherd because Jesus, as my shepherd, took compassion upon me and made me one of his own.

David Turner

Lenten Lectionary

Friday, March 4, 2016

Genesis 47:1-16

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

Mark 6:47-56

Who is this man?

I think the question is asked and answered in each of the readings today.

In Genesis, Joseph kept his identity secret from his brothers. They didn't know him but he knew them immediately upon seeing them. He loved his father and was enormously happy to be reunited with him. He kept his family safe and saw to it they acquired property and food in Egypt. Joseph continued to work for Pharaoh's own good.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is trying to explain who he is, why he left and what he wants for the people of Corinth. He explains he must preach and needs no recompense. It is necessary for him to preach. He tries to think like other groups in Corinth so he can communicate with them. I think that's what he means by becoming a Jew so he may win over the Jews, to the weak he becomes weak, etc.. His goal is to share the gospel with all the different groups of people in Corinth.

Jesus' apostles don't seem to really know who he is. He is allowing them to know more about him all the time. Oftentimes, when it comes to bring someone back to life, Jesus does it in private. He wishes to keep his miracles quiet, hidden from the people. But the people cannot keep quiet about his miracles, and they spread the word so that he is constantly surrounded by huge crowds. The apostles did not understand about the loaves and fishes. Until they saw him walking on the water, they didn't realize truly who he was.

George and Georgie McLain

Lenten Lectionary Saturday, March 5, 2016

Genesis 47:27 – 48:7
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Mark 7:1-23

In Mark 7:1-23 the Pharisees criticize the disciples and ask Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with unclean hands?”

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being hypocrites and says, “You have let go the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” Jesus then tells the crowd, “Nothing outside of a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.” Apparently, the disciples don’t get Jesus’s parable on the first take. When he is alone with them Jesus has to further explain that “What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’”.

It is fifteen years ago, and I have been given a rare opportunity to accompany ten high risk youths into the walls of the infamous San Quentin Prison for a “Scared Straight” session. They are about to meet a special group of inmates, the Squires, who are incarcerated for life. They are murderers, rapists, drug traffickers and gang members who have succumbed to the evil in their hearts and done the unspeakable. They are dedicated to being “juvenile deterrents” and do not want to see teens live the life they have lived.

On that day, the boys are seated in a circle. Each has his turn with the Squires as they sit in the center circle surrounded by their peers. The Squires work in pairs and the interrogations begin. It is tough love at its most brutal; colorful language, raised voices, challenges, tenderness, tears and laughter. I am riveted. The true life stories of the Squires are trumped only by the youth’s naiveté and bravado and the direction it is taking them. I am heartbroken.

I watch lessons of wisdom being delivered by the prison elders. I hear reality delivered with compassion, concern and love. It is coming FROM INSIDE men’s hearts that used to beat with evil.

Sloan McDonald

Lenten Lectionary

Monday, March 7, 2016

Genesis 49:1-28

1 Corinthians 10:14 - 11: 1

Mark 7:24-37

A reflection on miracles during the season of Lent.

In Advent we are called to be a hope-full people, to wait, to anticipate. At Christmas our great expectations are flipped upside down in a manger and at Epiphany gifts are not what they seem. Each of these seasons leads us into an unbelievable experience of God. Easter proves to be epitome of impossibility--renewed life. Inserted into this cycle of magical events, Lent calls us to repent; make an about-face-turn and re-new our attention to God.

Where's the magic there? What if that's exactly what we are invited to do, look for it? What if our Lenten practice was to focus on finding the miraculous?

For Christmas my loving husband gave me a journal. My delight turned to insult when I discovered it wasn't a blank book to unload my thoughts, it was a prescription to be positive, a daily exercise to drive out my demons of negativity. I sat in bed that night with the introduction: "Five reasons you'll love The Five-Minute Journal", ready to negate each one. (Demons, what demons?!)

Talk about an "about-face-turn"! I made my first entry that night: "I'm grateful for a husband who cares about me and gives value to this kind of thing." I pledged to writing five days, starting then. Three gratitude's, three affirmations and three specifics on what would make today great. Five minutes. Morning and night. What better way to notice God's miracle work than by counting my blessings, starting the morning with "I am" scripts instead of to-do lists, writing down what will make my day?

We see what we are looking for. God has gifted us with the power to choose what to focus on. When I physically take note of what I am thankful for and write an "I AM" statement geared toward who I *want* to be, I am planting seeds in my brain that cannot help but bear fruit. When I see on paper what will make my day great, I am priming my positivity pump. By nature, I will look for the good and make choices that bring it to fruition.

At days end I post three amazing things that happened today, my miracle sightings. With this new lens I can see where grace is happening. My attention has shifted to look for the magnificence of the day, small and large, and my morning blessings and affirmations have carried me there.

Ready to re-turn, re-focus and re-find God? Start looking for a miracle. Take a few minutes, make a practice of anticipation, sow seeds to see and take note of the miracles in your day. It works like magic.

"Those who don't believe in magic will never find it." ~Roald Dahl

C.C. Kelly

Lenten Lectionary Tuesday, March 8, 2016

Genesis 49:29-50:14
I Corinthians 11:17-34
Mark 8:1-10

All three readings taken together form a mini-primer on Jesus' life, death, mission and remembrance. They all focus in a compassionate way on the very human needs of Jesus and his disciples and us, the people of today.

The story in Genesis is of Jacob/Israel's impending death and his instructions to his sons on where he is to be buried – along with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob's wife Leah in the Cave of the Patriarchs in the field of Machpelah in Canaan – and the sons' distress at his death. Although the sons are mournful to hear Jacob tell of his demise, they perhaps are encouraged by Jacob's having worked out where he would like to be buried. Burial, tombs and mourning for the dead are all earthly concerns dealing with earthly, physical bodies.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians upbraids the believers in Corinth on their abuse of the ceremonial Lord's Supper. Paul recounts what he has learned of the practices of the wealthy and the poor at such services and provides further remedial instruction on what Christ had taught. The wealthy, who had the luxury of arriving early at the ceremony, were taking advantage of the poor and eating their fill before the poorer members arrived and received nothing. Paul counsels all to remember the purpose of the gathering – to remember Christ in their sharing of bread and wine in fellowship and to remember each other with compassionate kindness. If that was not possible, Paul states that those who could not act with solemnity and abide by the "rules" would be judged by God and found wanting.

Finally, the Gospel of Mark also deals with purely human concerns – providing food for the large crowds that were following Jesus to hear him preach – yet it also deals with the resulting miracle of the gathering of seven basketsful of leavings once all were filled. The teaching comes from a position of abundance and not insufficiency. Jesus had compassion for the crowds, wished to feed them and did so from seemingly sparse provisions. We are truly blessed to have had God's son take our human form and be and live as fully human. Jesus knew a human's sadness at death, the need for mourning and burial. He knew of some people's willingness to unjustly take advantage of the poorer members of society and taught that, if they did not amend their ways, God would judge them. And he knew what true, physical and spiritual hunger were and was able to bless what physical food was available and provide abundantly – both spiritually and physically – for all. We look forward to Christ's rising from the tomb at Easter!

Theresa Nagle

Lenten Lectionary

Wednesday, March 9, 2016

Genesis 50:15-26

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Mark 8:11-26

Genesis 50:15-26

This week's lessons have to do with forgiveness, spiritual gifts and faith. In Genesis, Joseph's brothers claim that their father asked Joseph to forgive them. Joseph movingly weeps and the brothers kneel at his feet. Joseph is not fooled by their story but says "God intended (their evil) for good." This a powerful story about the beauty of forgiveness, even if you suspect those asking for forgiveness don't have the best intentions.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

I remember I was once asked to volunteer for a job that involved a lot of public speaking. Those who know me well, know that I get nervous speaking in front of large groups. I felt guilty saying no to the individual offering me this volunteer position, especially because someone was needed quickly. I meekly told her that I didn't think I was up to the job. I thought she would be mad or disappointed. Instead this wise friend said, "That's O.K. I know if you are saying "no" to this, it will free you up to say "yes" to something you are really good at and passionate about. Indeed, I took on a more behind-the-scenes position later that involved writing and not speaking. This passage reminds us that everyone has different gifts and that we should use the gifts we have, not the ones we don't have because "all these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Mark 8:11-26

In the book "The Dyslexia Empowerment Plan," Ben Foss who is severely dyslexic but still managed to attend university and create the Intel Reader, challenges his readers on the definition of "reading." Foss no longer says "reading" but rather "sight reading" (looking at words and reading them, "touch reading" (Braille) and ear reading (listening to books). He has changed the definition of reading from deciphering words and sentences to taking in information and comprehending it. Foss only "ear reads." In the same way, Jesus changes the definition of "seeing," which my dictionary defines as "viewing with the eyes." The disciples have no problem using their eyes, but they do have a problem with "perceiving." Jesus asks that they do not ask for "signs" but rather have faith in him. Seeing could now be defined as "believing with your heart and soul." Jesus says, "Why does this generation ask for a sign?" He could just as easily be talking about *this* generation.

These lessons are great reminders this Lenten season to practice forgiveness, use our spiritual gifts and have faith in God's love.

Amanda Szakats

Lenten Lectionary
Thursday, March 10, 2016

Exodus 1:6-22
1 Corinthians 12:12-26
Mark 8:27 – 9:1

Lenten Lectionary

Friday, March 11, 2016

Exodus 2:1-22

1 Corinthians 12:27 – 13:3

Mark 9:2-13

Who am I? Who is Jesus? Who are we?

Today's readings raise various questions about identity.

The first (Exodus 2:1-22) tells us the remarkable story of the early life of Moses. He was born of Hebrew parents. As an infant he was found floating in a basket by the daughter of Pharaoh, who adopts him. Through the machinations of his sister he is nursed by his birth mother. As a young adult he kills an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew and flees into exile when Pharaoh seeks to kill him. And he receives his wife as a reward for helping her family. Still in exile, he laments in the final words of the reading "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land." We can hardly doubt that Moses must have wondered "Who am I?" and indeed, in the next chapter of the Exodus story, he asks his God, "*Who am I* that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

The second reading, in terms of sequence of events (Mark 9:2-13), tells the story of the transfiguration of Jesus in which Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. Jesus is transfigured, his clothes become a dazzling white, and he is seen talking with Moses and Elijah. Peter addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" only to hear the voice from the cloud declare, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Assuredly, Jesus is not just another rabbi!

Finally, Paul's letter to the much divided church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:27 – 13:3) proclaims, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." The pronouncement is part of Paul's call for unity that uses the analogy of the various parts of the human body all being important parts to the whole. And it leads to the proclamation that "If [I] do not have love, I am nothing" (13:2).

As we approach Good Friday over the next seven days, we will have fresh opportunities to ask ourselves how we fit into the stories of the entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, Peter's denial of Jesus, Judas's betrayal, the apostles' inability to stay awake, the trial, and the crucifixion. It's another way of asking: Who am I? Who is Jesus? Who are we?

Jeff Strathmeyer

Lenten Lectionary

Saturday, March 12, 2016

Exodus 2:23 – 3:15

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Mark 9:14-29

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

1 Corinthians 13 is so well known that it's good to read it with fresh eyes. Paul's overall message is that love is more powerful than faith, knowledge, seeing the future or giving everything we have away. He's saying love is the most powerful force on earth. I like the way he describes love as rejoicing in the truth, as being kind, patient and able to suffer everything and still be itself. Love endures.

I've been blessed to experience this kind of love. I've seen the power of love span generations, continue after the death of those closest to us and turn seemingly impossible situations around. But then Paul says something confusing. He says that our ability to see things as they really are changes when we become adults, so that we "see through a glass darkly." I'm not sure if he's saying that children understand love better than adults or if he's saying that no matter what our age, we don't really understand love and the true nature of things until we die. Then, he says, we'll know a greater reality even as God has always known we are part of this greater reality.

As an adult, I'm well aware that I understand only a part of what is a much bigger picture. Sometimes, it seems like children get the true nature of love – this core of the bigger picture -- better than adults. So, there's a mystery here in Paul's message: when do any of us understand the breadth and depth of love, if it is the most powerful force in the universe?

Mark 9: 14-29

This is a dramatic story of Jesus healing the demon-possessed son of a man he meets in a huge crowd surrounding his disciples. When the possessed boy's father begs Jesus to heal him, Jesus says "If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes." I like the father's response: that he needs Jesus' help with his unbelief. That's exactly what I need sometimes, too.

At times, it's easy for me to believe God is guiding and supporting me. Then there are days when I get scared about the future, and my faith evaporates. These droughty times can get the best of me when I spend too much time worrying about stuff I can't control. So sometimes I am that "faithless generation" that Jesus complains about. And it's usually when I need faith the most.

Jesus went ahead and performed a miracle. He tells the spirit to come out and after the boy seems to be dead, Jesus brings him to life. When his disciples ask why they couldn't get rid of the demon, Jesus says that only prayer and fasting can accomplish this. I'm not sure about the fasting part, but I've seen prayer work miracles. I just know my own prayer life ebbs and flows. Maybe there's a new way for me to ask for help with unbelief in those dark times.

Sue Reynolds

Lenten Lectionary

Monday, March 14, 2016

Exodus 4:10-31

1 Corinthians 14: 1-19

Mark 9: 30-41

Scripture:

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward. (Mark 9:38-41)

Reflection:

Today's reading brought back to me some old memories. Many years ago I was living with my husband and children in a new home in Concord. The area became an attractive area for solicitors and people of faith to work door to door. At that time, there more women at home and willing to listen to people at their door. One late morning two well dressed young men arrived with a large book in each of their hands. They introduced themselves as missionaries of the Mormon Church and asked if I had a moment to speak with them. I said that I would be happy to, and that began many visits over the next several months. During these months I asked them questions and they provided answers, and in our areas of disagreement there were many areas not resolved. After one morning session, they thanked me for all of the time they had been given, but said that their time with me was finished and as they left they told me they would pray for me.

During another period of time a well dressed young woman with a child in tow knocked at my door, and when I answered she held up her copy of the Watchtower, a newsletter put out by her faith, the Jehovah's Witnesses. I told her that I was an Episcopalian, happy in my church and a Sunday School teacher. I did not want to take up her time for presentation of material in which I had no interest. We chatted briefly and then she left, only to return a few weeks later with several new issues of The Watchtower. This time, when I answered the door she said she had stopped by because the newsletters were packed with items that would be helpful to a Sunday School Teacher . . . and over the next year we visited several times. Because I was doing some door to door work for the new church in Pleasant Hill, I realized how hard it was to do what she had been doing and so I took the time to talk with her. One day she told me she would not see me again because she and her family were going to a Pacific island as missionaries. We said goodbye and that was the last I saw of her for about four years, until one day she arrived at my door with a tall teenage boy with her. She explained that her family did not like the missionary life and had given up and returned home.

In the meantime, a new neighbor moved in across the street that had several children, one of whom was the age of my youngest son. The boys became friends and so did the mom and I. She and I had many hours of conversation about faith, religion, God and "good works" She was very active in a church that I knew little about, The Church of the Nazarene. Our discussions took many hours and one day she came and said, "We are moving, but I want to thank you for showing me that Episcopalians are Christians, too."

Jean Meredith

Lenten Lectionary

Tuesday, March 15, 2016

Exodus 5:1-6:1

1 Corinthians 14: 20-40

Mark 9:42-50

I feel that the reading from Exodus speaks to facing an adversary directly, no matter the consequences, but with the faith that by doing so, liberation can occur.

At this point in the story of exodus, Moses asks Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Not only does Pharaoh deny his request, but he punishes the people by removing an element essential to their daily labor.

We know from the rest of the story that soon after, Egypt is punished by God and the Israelites are set free from their bondage. But if we set aside for a moment the plagues through which the Israelites are liberated, the story can become a parable for standing up in blind faith for a truth or belief, and having your resolve tested, even if what you are standing up against is the popular belief at that moment. Let's face it, we know and understand that what Moses was asking for was just, but at that time in Egypt it was acceptable to enslave one group of people for the gain of another (a trait that humans have sadly carried with them even into today's world).

I started to think how many stories throughout our own modern history (last 200 years) began just as Moses did with what is an inherently simple request: a request to be free. At some point in all our lives, we find ourselves at a cross road to either sit back idly and do nothing to change a wrong, or we trust our faith (in God, humanity, or both) and stand up to an adversary, be it a person or ideology. Our country and, more importantly, the entire world is made up of a rich tapestry of people who took the risk and stood up to an oppressive adversary. Today in our country we benefit from so many men and women: patriots, abolitionists, suffragists, those who fought for civil rights, and today, gay rights. Internationally, people fight for child labor, women's rights, and the right to religious freedom.

At most times throughout history, when these individuals carried the banner for what they faithfully believed to be moral and just, they did not necessarily represent the popular view of time. But because of these individuals, standing up again and again and resisting their adversary, and though persecuted again and again, hearts and minds changed and society changed. We remember these people and know their names (Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglas, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Medgar Evers, Bayard Rustin, Harvey Milk, etc.) and teach our children about their fights. But people are still standing throughout the world, pressing on, to face an adversary, and to fight for release from oppression. We know some of their names (Malala Yousafzai, Edip Yuksel, Shirin Ebadi)

and there are many more we may never know. But they, just as our own American heroes did, face persecution from their adversaries for standing up against a wrong.

Standing up to an adversary, though, does not always get your name in a history book, or postage stamp. We seldom hear of or even talk about the addict who stands against their addiction, some succeeding and some not; the son or daughter who stands up against the oppressor of domestic and violence and breaks the cycle of abuse; or the man or woman who breaks the deprecating bonds of sexual assault and says no more. They, too, face their adversary with the faith that they will succeed

Most of these hard won fights did not have the aid of miraculous plagues to punish their adversary. But hearts and minds changed because each of these men and women stood up, sometimes on faith alone, and made change happen.

Jeremy Carlson

Lenten Lectionary

Wednesday, March 16, 2016

Exodus 7:8-24

2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:6

Mark 10:1-16

In the passage from Mark, Jesus is seemingly addressing two different topics....or, is it really just one topic? In the first part (verses 2-12) Jesus responds twice to the same question regarding divorce, and he says: *“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery”*

....and in the second part of the passage (verses 13-16) he is blessing the little children, and he says: *“Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it”*.

Both of those are very strong statements, but let’s look a little deeper at them.

In the first part of the passage from Mark, Jesus’ statement is in response to the Pharisees, who approached him when he was surrounded by a crowd and asked him a question in an attempt to test him: They asked “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Jesus answered them by asking them “What did Moses command you?”, and the Pharisees answered “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her”, and Jesus said “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you”.

Getting a divorce was that easy? A man could just write a certificate of dismissal, give it to his wife and wham, bam they were divorced? Yes, that was pretty much the way it was. In researching marriage and divorce laws back in ancient times, I found that those laws were extremely liberal....liberal for men, but not for women. Back then, women were completely powerless in a marriage, and Deuteronomy Chapter 24 describes the marital standards that men operated under back in those days. All that needed to happen was for a man to find something “objectionable” about his wife and he could divorce her. So if a man came to the table for dinner, and the chicken was overcooked, and the veggies were mushy, and on top of that, his wife *hadn’t even prepared any dessert*, and he found all of that to be “objectionable” then he could simply scribble out a note saying “I divorce you”, give the note to his wife and send her (and their kids) out of the house for good. This action would end up taking away her financial security, her social standing, her connections to friends that she and her husband had, and it would bring shame upon her and likely result in her and her children living in the streets. With her gone, he was free to find a new wife. When Jesus responded to the Pharisees and spoke of their “hardness of heart” I think this is his way calling them out on their cavalier attitude about marriage -- essentially saying to them “I know that if you want to get out of your marriage quickly, you are going to find a reason to do so and the laws will support you”. However, Jesus needed to make a very strong point—and this statement does just that: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits

adultery”. While he is using the words “commits adultery” as a blanket statement about any circumstance in which someone gets divorced, I do not think that Jesus was mandating that two people who are in an overwhelmingly irreconcilable marriage should be mandated to stay in that marriage forever without the chance of re-marrying again. While it is God’s plan that a married couple should live together for their entire lives, that doesn’t always happen.

We’ve all been given second chances, and I for one am grateful for the second chance that my husband Phil and I have each been given in our life, as each of us had been married before and had experienced an irreconcilable circumstance in our marriage back in our early 20’s, which led to each of us getting divorced from our respective spouses. Yet, years later, God brought Phil and me together and blessed us each with a second chance at the happiness that comes from the sacred bond of marriage, by giving us the blessing of each other.

So, I think Jesus uses strong words in order to make a couple points. First, it is to offer protection to women, who had no power in the marriage relationship at that time, and second, he wants to make it LOUD and CLEAR that the bond of marriage is a very sacred bond – that when two people enter a marriage, it is a human connection and a spiritual connection that is not to be taken lightly. But I think it even goes beyond that – I think He is also pointing out that the sacred bond of marriage -- that human connection that we form with each other -- is a connection that also that forms *other* sacred connections, then strengthens those other connections, thereby forming community with each other. He wants to point out what happens when that community is broken—the detrimental impact that can occur to those human and spiritual connections when we take any of those connections lightly.

None of us is perfect. We all fall short of God’s standard for our conduct every day, whether in our sacred bond of marriage, or in our sacred connections with others in our family, or our friends, co-workers, those in our Church or community, or those that we meet during our days. We all sometimes fail. We break that connection by failing to be there for each other, or by failing to listen, or failing to step up to do something or to help someone who needs it because, well, life just gets in the way or we get busy or distracted or we are just too busy to even notice that they need us to be there for them. We also fail ourselves by not taking care of our spiritual, emotional and physical health, and in failing each other and ourselves, we fail God.

However, thankfully, with God, we always have a second chance.

In the second part of Mark’s passage, Jesus tells the disciples to let the little children come to him so that he can bless them, saying “*whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it*”. Each and every time we fail, and ask God for his mercy and forgiveness for that failure, we are admitting our failures and humbling ourselves before him. We are all children of God, and he scoops us up in his arms and forgives us, blessing us with another chance. We just need to be open to receiving that blessing that is given to us.

Mary Wolf

Lenten Lectionary

Thursday, March 17, 2016

Exodus 7:25-8:19
2 Corinthians 3:7-18
Mark 10:17-31

Today's Gospel tells the story of the man who asks Jesus, "What do I have to do to gain eternal life?" Jesus tells him, "You know the commandments: You shall not commit adultery. You shall not kill. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother." The man replies, "I have observed all these since I was a child." Mark tells us that "Jesus loved the man," and said to him, "There is one more thing you can do; Go, sell all your possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." On hearing this, the man's "face fell" and "he went away sad, for he had great possessions." Jesus then addresses his disciples using one of his most vivid metaphors: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

This story is bursting with important messages. First, the supplicant apparently already knew, or at least suspected, that just keeping the commandments of the Law of Moses was not enough to assure him the sort of eternal life that Jesus was offering. But surely a lifetime spent faithfully observing the Ten Commandments is enough to avoid eternal damnation. Are there different levels of joy in heaven, sort of like front row seats on the fifty yard line versus top row bleacher seats? How can we earn those primo seats?

Next, the traditional commandments listed by Jesus all deal with how we are to treat our fellow man. Curiously absent from his list are those directly pertaining to our relationship with God: to worship only the one true God, to refrain from taking his name in vain and to observe the Sabbath. Is that because we can only truly love God if we love and respect his creatures, our "neighbors"—that is, anyone with whom we have any interaction, however indirect or remote—and his creation? And conversely, if someone treats God's creatures and God's creation with love and respect, are they not loving and respecting the Creator even if their concept of "God" differs from ours?

And finally, is God a socialist, condemning any inequality in wealth or income? Not quite; it's not the creation of wealth that Jesus questions. Rather it is our attachment to, our inability to let go of our material possessions that is the problem. The 12th century renegade scholar, Peter Abelard, suggested that Jesus became man, suffered and died not so much to atone for the sins of mankind as to show us how to accept God's unconditional love; love which God will continue to offer regardless of our shortcomings. In Abelard's terms, our unwillingness to let go of our possessions means there is not enough room in our hearts to accept and enjoy the fullness of God's love.

Pete McCorkell

Lenten Lectionary
Friday, March 18, 2016

Exodus 9:13-35
2 Corinthians 4:8-12
Mark 10:32-45

Reading Mark 10:32-45, I was struck by the disciples' very human response of to Jesus' explaining that he would be condemned, killed, and rise again for the third time. Their response was childlike in its selfishness – "Ok, yeah, whatever, but can I be the one to sit next to you? Can I be the boss of these other guys?"

I wonder how many times I've missed opportunities to be part of Jesus' movement. How many times have I missed important messages from people I care about because I was too wrapped up in my own goals and desires? I sympathize with the disciples. Jesus calls us to be servants; set aside our ambitions and ego while we give to others. This is God's idea of leadership. What a tall order for us. We are so easily distracted and our minds are so full of the noise of living in the world. Besides, that whole servant thing is not too glamorous and it can be downright scary to get out of our comfort zone. God is one tough customer. It's a good thing Jesus gets what it's like to be human and keeps giving us an example no matter how many times we miss the call.

Kim Walsh

Lenten Lectionary
Saturday, March 19, 2016

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

I love Lent. Really.

I have always appreciated the opportunity Lent provides to dive in, to focus, and to come close to the divine.

Lent's symmetry with Advent is no accident. These are seasons in which we make way, we prepare. *How will I use this time to make way for God? For what God has in store for me? For living up to the potential I have?*

I spent years giving up chocolate, or sweets, or alcohol for Lent. But I feel I took fuller advantage of Lent's opportunity in the years that I took on a task. There was the year I committed to complete all my backlogged filing and update my resume; I really wanted a new career, and needed that push and discipline to prepare for the right prospect. There was the season I allowed myself to grieve over the loss of an important relationship, knowing that I would set that aside to rejoice in all the new possibility that Easter brings.

Since the release of his last album, closely followed by his subsequent passing, I've been listening to David Bowie all the time. Yesterday, I misheard lyrics from one of his songs: "The Bible's an action." Turns out, he was saying something about bubbles. (So that quote is really attributable to me, Lindsay Firth.) Nevertheless, the idea that "the Bible's an action" is a welcome one.

In Mark's passage, Jesus restores sight to the blind man Bartimaeus. "Rabbi," he says to Jesus, "I want to see!" This Lent, what will I do to allow my eyes to be opened to the lessons and gifts our teacher Jesus sets forth in all aspects of my life? What practice will help me open my eyes right now?

Lindsay Firth

Lenten Lectionary

Monday, March 21, 2016

Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12
2 Corinthians 1:1-7
Mark 11:12-25

What fruit do you bear?

The readings about the fig tree and the money changers in Mark have always caused me to struggle to understand not only the meaning but who Jesus really is. Parables can lead one to think deeper, but these two stories in Mark, when read back to back, make one think more about Jesus and how, despite being divine, he was truly human.

Jesus is going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and in viewing the fig tree his emotions of what he is about to see are revealed. The fig tree is full of leaves and looks natural and beautiful, but does not bear fruit. The people in the synagogue were all dressed like they were members of God's house – just as the fig tree looked like it was supposed to. But because those in the synagogue are not practicing the ways of God and leading meaningful lives - in fact going about making money and not focusing on Godly or spiritual matters and just going about their worldly life - they were not bearing the fruit of faith God's wishes for them on earth.

Mark's passage reveals the human side of Jesus. And perhaps that is the most surprising to me. The son of God shows emotions and feelings and passions about the word of God. He is not a placid, calm Buddhist monk or a saint in a reclusive life, but rather a human with emotions. Before going into the synagogue he prophetically notes for the apostles that the fig tree will wither because it will not bear fruit.

And once in the synagogue, Jesus gets mad. In fact, he shows his anger physically, because the money changers are ignoring the sacred place they are in to make a buck. In his passion, he turns over tables, strikes out, and calls people who are seemingly righteous thieves - not because they are stealing money from others - but because they are failing to worship and do the will of God. In short, those in the synagogue are not bearing the spiritual fruit that sacred places, divine thoughts and the worship of God are meant to bring to one's life. Hence, by not doing the sacred, they have stolen the fruit God wanted them to bear in their lives.

On the way out of the synagogue Jesus simply notes to the apostles that the fig tree has now withered. Jesus expresses his bitter feelings about the supposedly righteous in God's temple by showing that that which does not bear fruit will simply wither, even if it does look right.

For Lent this passage makes me think about this: How do I bear fruit for sacred purposes on earth?

Phil Matthews

Lenten Lectionary
Tuesday, March 22, 2016

Lamentations 1:17-22
2 Corinthians 1:8-22
Mark 11:27-33

Lamentations 1:17-22

The city laments its transgressions, begging. The Lord is not listening, not comforting. Lent is a time for us to “lament” our transgressions.

2 Corinthians 1:8-22

Paul begins with the assurance that God is faithful. Worldly wisdom is not the truth. Believers hold the power of God for truth. Be united. Paul is appealing to a church with many divisions of immorality. I wonder what St. Paul would think of our church today.

Mark 11:27-33

Jesus’ authority is challenged by the chief scribes. They want to know by whose authority he can do these things. Jesus says, “if you don’t know , I’m not telling you.” This speaks to followers even today. IF THE Holy Spirit is not leading us from within we will not know our Lord!

Mary Murphy

Lenten Lectionary
Wednesday, March 23, 2016

Lamentations 2:1-9
2 Corinthians 1:23 – 2:11
Mark 12:1-11

The Parable of the Tenants – Mark 12:1-11

When I first looked at this reading, I misread it and thought it was the Parable of the Talents. Oh great, this is an easy one; but no such luck! This parable is a bit tougher. Did you ever let someone borrow something from you? Something you really cared about and cherished only to have it returned broken or destroyed or not have it returned at all? How did you feel?

There is a movie called **27 Dresses**. The main characters are two sisters. The older sister is a “professional bridesmaid” and her younger sister is getting married to the older sister’s boss. The older sister had kept their deceased mother’s wedding dress in the hope that one day she would wear it on her wedding day. Since the younger sister was getting married first, the older sister lent her their mother’s dress. When the older sister went to her younger sister’s dress fitting, instead of using the dress “as is”, the younger sister had the dressmaker tear apart the old wedding dress and incorporate pieces of it into a brand new dress. The look on the older sister’s face as she looked at her sister’s dress and the dressmaker handed her the remainder pieces of her mother’s wedding dress shows the whole gamut of emotions: shock, hurt, betrayal, anger. The same way the owner of the vineyard felt when the tenants hurt and killed his slaves and finally his son. Just like the owner of the vineyard, the older sister destroyed her sister’s rehearsal dinner by letting everyone know what a phony her sister was.

Have you ever not taken care of something precious that was given to you? How can we be better receivers of the precious gifts we receive? How can we be better stewards?

Pat Smith

Lenten Lectionary

Maundy Thursday, March 24, 2016

Lamentations 2:10-18

1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32

Mark 14:12-24

In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us there is one bread, one body, one loaf, and that we, who are many, are one body for we share in that loaf. He further instructs that "everyone (in the church) ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves." I have never heard that it is possible to "eat and drink judgment on ourselves," but I think what Paul is saying is that we must keep in mind that, as Christians, we are part of something larger, indeed, much larger than ourselves, and that one of the most important messages from Jesus was to share with others, especially those who have less than we do.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus and the disciples are about to enter Jerusalem and to eat the Passover meal, which commemorates when God spared the Jews from death in Egypt. So, this meal would be very important to Jesus and the disciples. It will turn out to be their last supper together. This is a dark and disturbing time, for Jesus reveals that one of the Twelve will betray him. Jesus appears resigned to his fate and seems to feel pity toward his betrayer. The disciples are saddened, not only by this news, but also by each one's fear that he might be the one who betrays Jesus, and does not know it yet. Each one asks him, "Surely you don't mean me?" But even in the midst of these events, with his increasing awareness of the certain and overwhelming reality that his life's end is very close, Jesus shares the bread and the cup of wine with his disciples. He tells them the wine represents his blood that is poured out for many.

I wonder how the disciples are feeling as these events unfold. They have followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem for some time now. They have witnessed his miracles of plenty and of healing, seen his demonstrations of love, and heard his wisdom. The more they experienced of him, the more they believed that with Jesus, anything is possible. Physically, they are tired from their journey. But tired or not, their emotional state must be one of a terrible, bewildering shock as Jesus, their messiah, their savior, predicts his end. All this time, Jesus has been teaching them about entering a new spiritual life, and being free of spiritual bondage, but the disciples want to be free of Roman rule. Only now, they may be starting to understand they will not be free from the Romans.

What I try to take from this is that life is sometimes very challenging, especially when something or someone that I hold on to closely is coming to an end; and that it is always so important to remember why Jesus came into the world and that he offers to me a new spiritual life.

Russ Bratburd

Lenten Lectionary

Good Friday, March 25, 2016

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33
1 Peter 1:10-20
John 13:36-38

A Walk to Remember - Finding Good in Good Friday – John 13:36-38

Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” When I was in grade school, we did not have school on Good Friday. We only had one car and my father used it for work. So if my mother, brother, and I needed to go anywhere, we usually walked. We always attended the three-hour Good Friday service that began at noon. The walk from our house to our church was a little over a mile, up and down a hill, through a railroad underpass, past the small business district of our town and finally to the red doors of our church. Usually when we left our house the sun was shining. But as we got closer to our church and the noon hour, the clouds would appear. When the service concluded at three o’clock and we began our walk home, the sun would reappear. Now, I couldn’t tell anything about the Good Friday services I attended as a child, but I do remember the conversations my brother and I had with our mother during those walks. We would talk about Jesus and his disciples and how lonely Jesus must have been in the garden on Maundy Thursday evening, being betrayed by Judas and even Peter who denied him three times. Then whipped and beaten, and carrying a heavy cross, Jesus took his final walk.

Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward.” Each one of us has our own walk, our own journey. Our mother was a great student of the Bible and would read it every day. She always answered our questions and my brother and I would have great discussions with her. They are both gone now; their journeys on this earth have ended. I cherish the memories of those Good Friday walks.

What walks during your lifetime do you remember?

Pat Smith

Lenten Lectionary

Holy Saturday, March 26, 2016

Lamentations 3:37-58

Hebrews 4:1-16

I dearly love my children and wouldn't trade being a parent for anything, but the past ten years have taught me the value of rest. My four-year-old tears up and starts to scream if I suggest that it is time for a rest, but to me even just the word evokes a visceral memory of soft pillows, warm blankets, and the feeling of wellbeing you get after a nap or a good night's sleep – something I don't get often enough these days! There is something very bleak about God's statement in verse 5 of Hebrews: "They shall not enter my rest." Though the passages here from Lamentations are more straightforwardly despairing, there is something about the simple statement of rest denied that cuts deeper for me.

And the rest described in this passage is a good rest, too. It's not a quick nap before you get back to work, or a procrastination break with a project still hanging over your head. It's not a stressed-out attempt to reset so that you can face your problems with a clear head. It's the rest God took after finishing creation. How good would that feel? That sounds like a phenomenally good rest.

On the one hand, this reading makes sense for Holy Saturday, because it is about the Sabbath and Holy Saturday is a day of resting and waiting for Easter. There is nothing that can be done or changed; the women can't go and prepare Jesus's body for its final burial until the Sabbath is finished. But it is the kind of passage that needs Easter to give it its full meaning.

Why was rest previously denied? Lack of faith. In verse 3, the author proclaims that "we who have believed enter that rest". It is through faith and belief in Christ's resurrection that we can be justified and enter into God's peace. There is also a discussion of disobedience in the passage, reminding us that "faith alone" does not mean we are off the hook. If we believe, we ought to want to obey and do the right things, but luckily (verse 15), Jesus knows what we're going through.

It is hard to think about Easter as a time of rest. At our house, we make a meal that takes all day to cook and thirty minutes to eat. My husband spends all morning trying to stump the kids with the world's hardest Easter egg hunt. We don't have family nearby, but we always visit with friends. All great traditions, but hardly restful. But the Easter message is that wonderful rest at the end of travail. It's the last part of the Lamentations reading (verse 58), when the Lord has taken up our cause and redeemed our lives. In verse 16 of Hebrews, we are exhorted not only to "draw near to the throne of grace," but to do so "with confidence"! Maybe things won't always be easy, but we have been invited to participate in Christ's redemption and enter into God's rest. Happy Easter!

Laura Lisy-Wagner