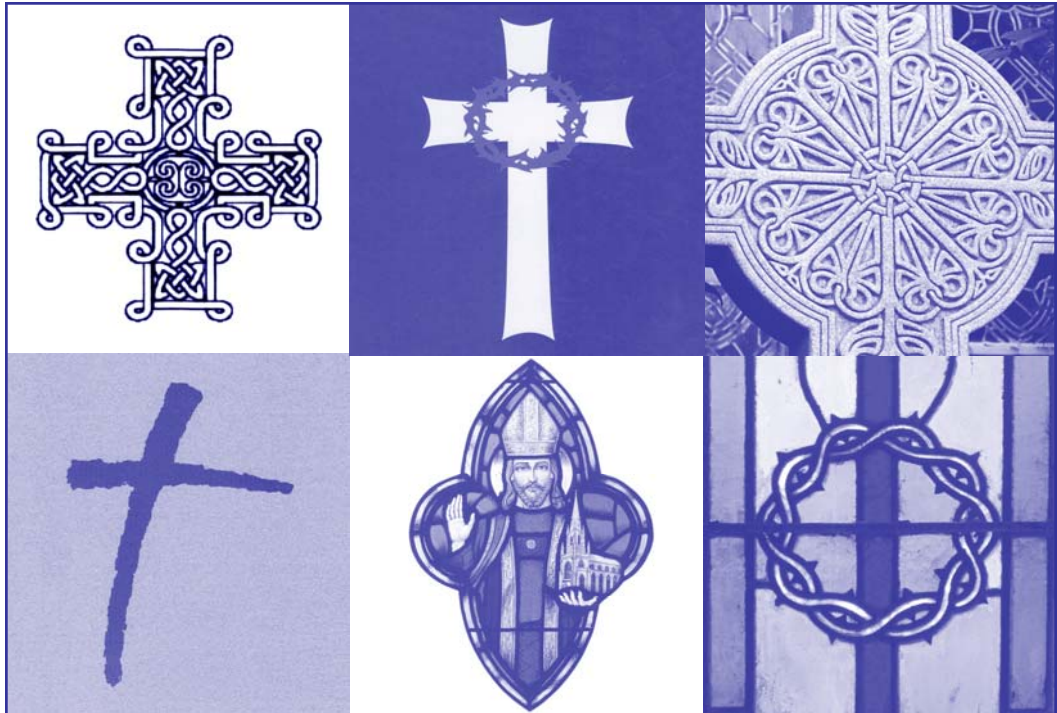


# Reflections on the Season of Lent



**2012**

*A Retrospective Collection of writings, 1998-2011*

**Grace Episcopal Church, Charleston, South Carolina**

---

# INTRODUCTION

**The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places:  
yea, I have a goodly heritage.  
*Psalm 16:7***

In the year of our Lord 2012 we find ourselves in a Lenten wilderness of sorts as we are forced out of our comfort zone and seek refuge, Sunday by Sunday, in different places of worship. Meanwhile, we wait on the healing of a beloved sanctuary.

It is during times like these that we depend, more than ever, upon our shared history and collective memory. Ours is a heritage built upon the lives of God's people lived out in many and diverse ways. All that rich and varied heritage serves to sustain us in our spiritual journey with all of its own challenges in our day.

This year we will mark the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *1662 Book of Common Prayer*. This liturgical text continues to serve as the official Prayer Book for the Church of England to this day. The rootedness of our faith is represented well by such a text. We plan to make use of this text during our Lenten services this year at Grace.

This year's book of Lenten meditations is another way we have chosen to honor our heritage as we present, or 're-present,' in the pages that follow a selection of writings taken from past Lenten booklets written by the Grace Church family since we began this creative enterprise in the year 1998.

May these messages remind us of all that has helped to bring us to our present day. In a word, it is the faith of those who have gone before us that helps sustain us in our day. Having read these pages and reflected on the meaning contained therein, I'm sure that we shall echo again the Psalmist's words:

Yea, we have a goodly heritage.

Faithfully,

**Michael+**

**The Reverend Canon J. Michael A. Wright, Rector**

# ASH WEDNESDAY

**Beware of practicing your piety before others.**

*Matthew 6:1-21*

Ash Wednesday is the Church at its most intimate. It is the one day of the Church year when I want to lock the doors, cover the windows and turn down the lights. I don't want anyone to see us – we are hanging out our dirty laundry for all to see . . . and I would rather we limit the exposure to family. It is the one time when we say, in rather dramatic fashion, “I am a sinner – a mortal sinner.” We are branded with ashes – a reminder of our mortal nature and sent out marked – if you will – to begin a period of 40 days and 40 nights where we contemplate our relationship to Christ and the world He came to save. It is all a bit too close. . . a bit too personal for me. The public me that I want to share is very different. I do not want to reveal to the world that I recognize sin as a real thing in my life or that I need a Savior. I am cool and in control. I am after all, as the poet says, the “master of my own destiny.” Or am I? As I feel the gritty ashes on my forehead I begin to grasp the very temporary nature of my being.

The Ash Wednesday cross of black ash on the foreheads of the faithful overlays the cross of Holy Baptism as a dusting of black ash from a fireplace dusts the white table cloth in a house heated with wood. We set aside 40 days and 40 nights to go about a deliberate washing away of the ashes to reveal the cross of baptism and all it promises. It is still there. It has never gone away. We cover the glorious cross of Holy Baptism from time to time – but it remains to be revealed again and again as the dust is washed away by the sacrificial love of the Christ of the Cross.

The Reverend Paul S. Winton  
2000

**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.**

*John 1:29-34*

On the second day of our journey through the desert of Lent, we meet the strange prophet-like creature of John the Baptist. We ask him the way to God, and he lifts his arm and points us to Christ, proclaiming in a loud voice, “Look! There goes the Lamb of God!”

But what does he mean by “The Lamb of God?” I don’t understand. Does he mean someone weak and timid, only another victim of the senseless violence in the world? How can a lamb conquer the power of sin in my life? But this is no ordinary lamb. In God’s paradoxical way, the Lamb who was slain overwhelms every force on earth and in heaven by his love.

For twelve centuries, at that hushed and holy moment in the Eucharist when the bread is broken, reminding us of Christ’s body broken for us, the Church has sung the anthem, *Agnus Dei*, or *Lamb of God*, in honor of this sacred mystery.

*O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.*

In the Revelation of John, we are shown a glimpse of heaven. The Lamb stands before the throne of God, and angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands are singing with full voice,

*Worthy are you, O Lamb that was slain, for with your blood you have redeemed for God, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, a kingdom of priests to serve our God!*

Lester Pittman  
1999

**Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.**

*Mark 1:1-4*

I love Lent. I know it is a penitential season. The hymns are often mournful, we forego hallelujahs and the Rite I worship directs us to focus on our “manifold sins and wickedness.” The altar is hung with somber purples and we await Jesus’ resurrection with “grievous sorrow for our misdoings.” But, still, I love it. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and all the way through Easter morning, when we enter the sanctuary and are dazzled by the bright white altar and the breathtaking flowers, I feel a tingle of excitement and anticipation.

As a child, I felt the same way, but for very different reasons. I ALWAYS gave up chocolate for Lent, and I was inevitably tested when my dear mother placed the several boxes of Girl Scout chocolate mint cookies, which mysteriously and tantalizingly appeared during Lent, in our freezer. I could hardly WAIT for Easter – the basket with the goodies from the bunny AND the freedom to eat some, if not all, of those cookies.

I still adore those cookies, but my Lenten thrill has a different source now. I still experience a deep sense of excitement and the anticipation of something glorious, but now it is the extraordinary news that Christ died for us and then actually rose from the dead! This is surely a hallelujah-inspiring reality. This very good news – as Mark’s book opens, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” – is astounding, thrilling, and true!! On Easter, I will have spent forty days on numerous occasions praying both for humble access and forgiveness, both things I need desperately, together with Grace Church’s congregation. We will have all had the marvelous opportunity to reflect on the “intolerable burden of our wickedness” and to join in the haunting minor harmonies of the beautiful Lenten hymns. We will all move together, bathed in God’s love for us, with barely suppressed joy, toward the resurrection, in which God demonstrated his deep love for us through the gift of His only-begotten Son, and to the Easter Eucharist, where “we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.” Thanks be to God, Amen.

**Ann Stirling  
2000**

**The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee.  
And he found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'  
*John 1:43***

When we read Jesus' invitation, don't we, in all honesty, cringe a bit, fearful that if we truly commit and follow him, we might be required to give up everything dear and comfortable to us? That we might find ourselves in a mud hut with no running water, thousands of miles from our friends and families, trying to cheerfully proclaim the gospel, all the while fervently praying that we might "follow him" right back to our pew at Grace Church? Aren't we just a little concerned that we might get into more than we want with Jesus and find ourselves locked into a sort of permanent Lent?

Or might these words be truly the most comforting words we could ever hear? He has already promised us eternal life if we follow him, but what about the time in between? These earthly days are the ones we often find so important, as we seek to find happiness in relationships, careers and club memberships. It's easy to follow him to church most Sundays and to Bible studies and volunteering at the Tea Room. But what about the step of real faith and commitment, where we might reach out for his extended hand and in doing so find so much peace that we just can't help but share this with someone else?

Following Jesus is the path not to be feared. It is the way of our greatest blessing, our greatest joy and comfort. It is just one beginning step of a changed life. He will never abandon us, or leave us behind. He is always there, every moment of the day and night. "Follow me," he said. "Follow me."

Suzanne Boone  
2005

**'Thou art my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.'  
The spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. . . forty days tempted by Satan. . .  
he was with the wild beasts: and the angels ministered to him.**

***Mark 1:9-13***

In the wilderness Jesus is trying to discern what the Father is leading him toward, and at the same time to avoid the temptation to take all the credit for being the Father's "beloved Son." In a deserted place, Jesus is learning how to keep his head on straight.

Jesus is aided in this struggle by two elements of God's grace – natural and spiritual. He is surrounded by wild beasts that live a life in cooperation with the natural world, unburdened by self-consciousness. Observing nature can take our view away from ourselves to fix on the creator who invites us into full collaboration with Him to create the world in God's image. Jesus is also ministered to by the angels – he is surrounded by the spiritual presence of the Father's messengers who open his eyes and heart beyond the observable world to glimpse the grandeur of our intimate association with the Father.

This Lent can be a "time in the wilderness" for us – we can choose to take time alone to think, feel and pray about what God "has in mind for me." Observe the natural world of God the Creator; become sensitive to the spiritual support in your world – from God the Holy Spirit, from Grace Church, from friends, and from within yourself; and invite Jesus to walk with you; he will be strength for you because He has walked this way himself.

The Reverend Alastair Votaw  
2006



2009

**So, when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first, be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.**

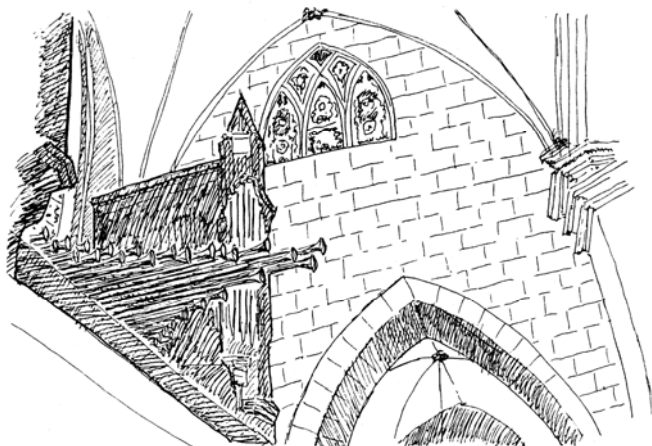
***Matthew 5:23-24***

Jesus' lesson in today's text is a part of his Sermon on the Mount, which contains the well-known Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and other directives relative to the conduct of a Christian. This sermon has been called "the divine constitution for the righteous government on earth".

Today, Christ talks of reconciliation – reconciliation with ANYONE with whom we may have had differences or anyone who may have ill feelings toward us. Christ tells us that our worship will not be acceptable to God until peace with all those persons has been made. Our humanness responds - Peace with ALL persons who have offended me? Peace with ALL persons I may have offended? But, but . . . We resist, but the answer remains: Yes, ALL!

Do we dare waste time missing out on the abundant life God desires for us by ignoring this directive from Christ? Why do we want to continue to harbor grudges or allow pettiness to have a place in our hearts if it keeps us outside God's kingdom? God yearns for us to know the fullness of life which is ours to enjoy. Let us openly embrace this wonderful gift!

**Beth Kiger  
2007**



*Bill Zobel, 1998*

**But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.**

*Luke 2:26-27*

It has been my practice during Lent to take on a new discipline, rather than the traditional giving up of a pleasure or indulgence. I have dabbled in yoga and explored focused meditative prayer. This practice has led me to focus more closely on my relationship with God in a purposeful way.

As I reflected on today's verse, I was encouraged to take on the discipline of service during this Lenten season. As a wife and the mother of teenage boys – sometimes it seems every minute is one of service to others. But, do I do this with a “glad heart”? Do I see my actions as an extension of Christ's call to be a servant to others? I'm afraid more often I tend to be a begrudging servant, doing what needs to be done, but not joyfully. But Christ directs us to become “one who serves” in order to live the life He intends. Christ, the man, has given us the perfect example of joyful service in His willing sacrifice of His life to fulfill the Father's will.

I am taking on the discipline of service this season not in a grand way, but in a more intimate way. As I do the little things like preparing meals, washing clothes and organizing activities, I will aim to do so with a joyful heart in the conscious knowledge of the fact that I am Christ's ambassador to my family and to the larger community. I hope that my small acts of joyful service to my family will reflect God's love of His children. I also hope that as I grow more deliberate in my actions, I will become more aware of God's constant presence in our world and will be able to reflect His joy to all people I encounter.

Christ has given us a simple directive to be of service to others. Can you imagine the impact on our lives if we listen and follow?

Lisa Short  
2011

**The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**

*Psalm 51:17*

When I was a child, my grandmother took me to a glass factory near our hometown. I remember the intense heat of the furnaces, the din of blowers circulating air, and the oddly beautiful heaps of broken glass dumped in colorful, sparkling mounds. I recall watching an artisan take a glowing glob of molten sandstone on the end of a long blowpipe, put it to his mouth and inflate the glass like a balloon. Continuously turning the pipe, he fashioned it into a graceful vase as the glass cooled. Sometimes upon inspection, a piece would be simply tossed back into the scrap pile. How sad the worker must have felt as his creation was smashed to pieces. Soon though, the bits and fragments were used again to become beautiful vessels in the artisan's hands.

Isn't this just what our Maker does with us? He labors over our creation, suffers for our brokenness, but breathes in us new life as we're given second, third, fourth chances as lovely vessels. A broken and contrite heart He does not despise, but loves, knowing that re-creation is sometimes only possible when we're reduced to scraps. He is there, gathering the pieces of what's left of us after lousy luck, bad decisions, poor health, or the intractable pain of loss. He will use them again in due time.

When we took our children to the same glass factory last year, I couldn't wait for them to see the mountains of colorful glass I remembered. But when we arrived, we found a new creation. Where scrap piles had been, exquisitely crafted glass flowers now grew, a wooden bridge crossed a gleaming glass stream, and intricate mosaic stepping stones formed a meandering path. Who could have imagined? A breathtaking garden made from millions of broken pieces.

God gives us endless new beginnings, second chances, purpose and meaning beyond the brokenness. Our re-creation might not be what we expect, but in the Artisan's hands, it will undoubtedly be beautiful.

**Sarah Tipton  
2008**

**This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign.**  
*Luke 11:29-32*

Jonah, a sinner who carried God's message to the Ninevites, was a sufficient sign for the Ninevites to repent, just as the word of Solomon, also a sinner, was enough to convert the heathen Queen of the South. Yet Jesus, the perfect Son of God, is not a great enough sign to make the "evil" generation repent.

But who is the evil generation? Is it referring to all heathens who lived during Jesus' time, or to the Jews, or the Christians? I believe it applies to everyone who has had the chance to embrace God but has turned away. The evil generation doubts God's existence and they demand more proof than the words of Jesus.

But in this passage is Jesus preaching against doubt? I think not! It is more the stubbornness of those insisting on proof. Sometimes I also doubt if there really is a God. How strange it seems that one day I will die. One day I will shut my eyes and the world will still continue but I won't be in it. Is there really a heaven? What a fairy tale, unreal, impossible idea heaven is.

But then I think, how strange that I exist and was given life with eyes and feelings and thoughts. And then I see that my existence is unreal and impossible enough to prove that there is an afterlife. It would be impossible if there wasn't one. So am I a worse sinner because I doubt? I think not! It is not the questioning of God but the rejection of him which God calls evil.



Anna Boatwright  
2002

**Lord, thou only art our King: help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee.**  
*Esther 14:1-6, 12-14 (from the Apochrypha)*

Who among us has not had a “bad hair day?” The barber chops off the comb-over or the humidity undoes every carefully sprayed curl. Seniors fret that their hair is turning white or gray. Men grimace with every hair left in their combs and brushes. An entire hair care industry thrives because women want theirs to bounce and be shiny.

This hair obsession is not new. As Queen, Esther uses expensive perfumes in her hair. She had maids to comb it and subjects to admire it. So, when Esther eschewed exotic fragrances and coated her hair with filthy ashes and foul smelling dung, the message was quite clear. She was beyond upset. She was desperately afraid.

In her state of distress, she turned in prayer to the LORD, her king and her only helper. The LORD heard her and answered her prayers.

When we experience a really bad hair day – when the car breaks down, the bills mount up and a close friend recommends Prozac, it is difficult to trust things will improve. Our human eyes cannot see how they can. Thankfully, God’s eyes can and do!

As we walk this Lent with Jesus toward his excruciating death, let us keep our eyes on God as Jesus did. Let us remember that a God who conquers death through resurrection because of his love for us, can certainly handle a bad hair day and much worse. Thanks be to God.

Elsa McDowell  
2003

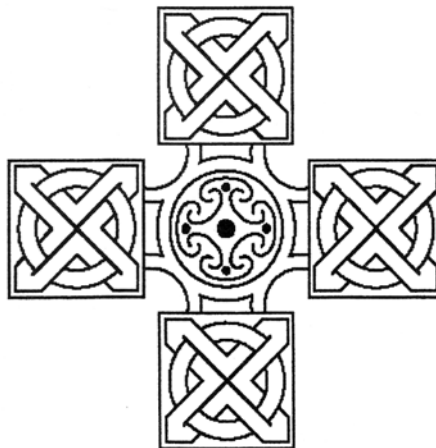
**Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath:  
to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'**

*Mark 2:23-3:6*

Here, Jesus has “broken” the strict Sabbath laws twice, the first time by plucking wheat to eat and then by healing a man with a withered hand in the synagogue. The Pharisees are so hidebound in their strictness and blind adherence to the law, that these incidents lead them to “plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” He was such a threat to the narrowness of their world, that they could see no other way but to get rid of him.

But what do we learn from Jesus’ actions? He ate and fed his followers and healed a man. These were clearly good things. Jesus demonstrates a sensitivity and flexibility when there are needs which must be met. His decision to do the right thing, rather than the “lawful” thing is an example of the outpouring of the love of God, not an infraction to be punished. Jesus’ compassion is a beacon to us and teaches us to recognize the boundaries of our belief while using good judgment and kindness toward others. God gave us the wisdom and intelligence to discern and to balance, rather than to adhere strictly to a set of rules. Jesus’ decision to behave caringly provides an example for us to follow to use these good gifts in our lives.

Nancy Stafford  
2006



2005

**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves,  
and take up their cross and follow me.**

**Mark 8:34**

Our parochial school went up in flames. The Jewish synagogue invited the school to use its facilities during reconstruction of the building. Soon after relocating, there was a special chapel service in the synagogue, with the rabbi as the honored guest. I was there also in my capacity as the Bishop, dressed in my usual purple shirt and pectoral cross on its gold chain. For practical reasons the cross was neatly tucked away in my shirt pocket. Such is a common custom among bishops because pectoral crosses can get caught on steering wheels, edges of furniture, etc. Later the rabbi sent me a message, “Tell the Bishop he does not have to hide his cross in the synagogue.” The rabbi preached a one-sentence sermon. What I thought was a very practical sartorial solution was perceived by a non-Christian as a denial of the cross – a basic core tenet of our faith.

The summons of Jesus is not to hide, ignore, or deny, but to take up one’s cross. His invitation is issued to the crowd (alternate translations use *people* or *everyone*). While Jesus includes disciples, his invitation was not just to them. All are summoned to discipleship. Here Jesus uses an “if-then” statement. He says, “If any want to become my followers, then let them . . . take up their cross and follow me.” In this case, the assertion of the first clause – “If any want to become my followers” – becomes true when the condition of the second clause is met – “taking up their cross.” Those who become followers or disciples will have taken up their cross.

Crosses can be demanding or they may be easy, but all can produce some joy as we journey into God’s future. Jesus reminded us that he came among us so that his followers would have complete joy. Why not let this Lenten season be a time of uncovering our crosses and willingly bearing them for the sake of the Gospel?

*Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.*

The Right Reverend John Clark Buchanan

2009

... unless a man has been born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.  
John 3:1-17

Jesus' words to Nicodemus about "being born from above" are pastoral words spoken to a man who wants to see God. His religion has not been satisfactory, it seems, and though he has made all of the appropriate observances, attended regular worship, made his required tithes and followed the traditions he has know since childhood, he wants more.

Nicodemus wants God.

Nicodemus is much like all of us, and Jesus would say similar words to anyone looking for a deeper relationship with God. Even trappings of religion, without God at their center, are empty and lifeless. So, Jesus invites Nicodemus into a new life that will give him what his heart desires.

But, it does not happen all at once. Being *born from above* involves a life-long 'birthing' process. The journey of faith, like any good gestation period, is a time of gradual formation. In the end, with much patience and prayer, we will not only see him face-to-face, but we will find ourselves in the loving arms of our Heavenly Father from whom we have been drawing life all along, though unable to see.

The Reverend Bruce J. Evenson  
1999



2009

**Those who love their life, lose it. And those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**

***John 12:25***

I relate better to the translation of The New English Bible, Oxford University Press, which cites this verse as: “The man who loves himself is lost; but, he who hates himself in this world will be kept safe for eternal life.” Jesus spoke these words after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They are meaningful to me as they focus me on my life, how I live it and how I can keep the knowledge and love of God foremost. I also look to other resources, which help me see my way:

“Because how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” *The Writing Life* by Annie Dillard

“My days are swifter than a shuttle and come to an end as the thread runs out.” Job 7, v. 6 (NEB)

Lent is my favorite season of the church year. It is a time to slow down and reflect more deeply on the meaning of the crucifixion, for without it we have nothing. It reminds us why we are Christians and highlights the price that was paid for our redemption. When we reflect upon and believe, rather than just say, the creed, the prayers and the sacrament and mystery of the Eucharist, it is awe-inspiring and radical.

When I am disciplined enough to do all this, I experience the elation found in one more quotation: “Satisfy us with thy love when morning breaks, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.” Psalm 90, v. 14 (NEB)

**Dale Tasker  
2007**

**But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.**  
*Matthew 20:17-28*

Mrs. Zebedee comes out looking bad in this episode – ambitious and pushy in the extreme to ask Jesus to put her two sons in places of honor to his left and right when he comes into his kingdom. But how human and how utterly maternal. Her sons, James and John, are splendid young men, excellent disciples, faithful followers of Jesus. And Jesus is well aware of that. She is not suggesting something outrageous here, just dropping a good word on behalf of her boys. Most mothers would do the same. Moms always want the very best for their children and always will; that’s part of being a mother.

Nor does Jesus rebuke her. She seems to be a follower herself, at least she has faith that Jesus will come into his kingdom. He responds, in effect, “I really wish I could promise you that, Mrs. Z., and I would if I could. But it’s just not up to me. You have to ask the one in charge of such things, and that’s God.” Then he takes the opportunity to point out that honors in God’s kingdom don’t depend on who you know but rather on how you live our life. Simply being one of the twelve chosen by Christ will not bring honors in heaven. Even being a favorite disciple (if there were such a thing) with a good word directly from Jesus would not count. Ultimately, it is how James and John (and you and I) incorporate Christ’s message into our lives by serving others that is important to God.

Maybe that night Mrs. Z. held her sons before God in a mother’s prayer: Father, look with favor on James and John and help them lead a life of service that is pleasing to you. She’s not such a pushy old girl after all, just a mom who wants a good thing for her boys.

**Ginger Donehue**  
2002

**Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?'**

***Mark 4:30-32***

How can we really describe God's Kingdom? Any time we try to create a vision such as this, it springs from our life-long experiences, even those that happened before we were fully aware, such as our infant baptisms.

As we grow in the church, even as children, the various Bible stories begin to sink in and form the basis for our thinking faith. The seed of our love for God and our hopes to be included in His Kingdom begin to germinate.

But, just as a mustard seed, it starts small and can have many obstacles. Even with the obvious evidence of the wonders of God's earthly glories, there can be moments of doubt.

But the scriptures tell us to have faith and to believe and that God's Kingdom is and will be wonderful – a house of many rooms, for each and all of us; a place with God's love for us and our love for him fulfilled; the place where we will be reunited with loved ones who have gone before; the spot where sickness and pain are no more; and the sanctuary where hunger, homelessness, abuse and hatred do not exist. Truly a "heavenly" kingdom.

But even though I have not been visited by any trembling visions or burning bushes, I can see proof of God's kingdom every day. I look into the skies and reflect on the beauty and wonder of his earthly creations and feel awed by the greatness of his universe and his kingdom.

My faith is like the mustard seed. I nurture the seed and go to church where it is tended by God and others and I let it grow every day. I am ever more sure of God's continuing plan for each of us, not only a sojourn of love on earth, but also an ongoing journey that never ends, with his promise of eternal life and perpetual light and love, forever.

Bernie Nettles  
2004

**[Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves,  
'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.**

***Mark 4:25-41***

The story of the mustard seed – of all seeds – is a story of great potential waiting to be unlocked and expressed. On a good day, we can all hear that parable and see ourselves in that tiny seed, and remember the huge potential God has stored inside each of us. That's on a good day. But what about the kind of day the disciples had in chapter 4 of Mark's Gospel? They spent the day hearing parables about their potential as seeds of the Kingdom of God. They even got their own private explanation of the parables afterward. But as night approached, they still had to get on that boat. And as the wind rose and the waves got higher, they understandably had trouble keeping that sense of their own potential clearly in focus – as we all do, in our own storms.

So it's probably no accident that the first word Jesus uttered, when the disciples woke Him up to ask for help, is the same word we repeat over and over during the Holy Eucharist (usually as many as three times in just the last few minutes of worship): Peace.

We wish God's' Peace upon each other as we shake hands with people in the pews around us. We ask for it in our prayer after Communion. We have peace asked upon us during the Benediction, and are commanded to go forth in peace at the dismissal.

Like so many things we say routinely, "peace" is easier to say than to do. I catch myself thinking of peace as a goal – something I will achieve after I've finished doing everything, as soon as I get myself organized, or at least once I get the kids to bed. But the miracle Jesus performed when He calmed that storm is a reminder that God's Peace isn't our reward for finishing the trip – it's a gift God sends us to help us keep sailing. As we cross our own seas, freighted with this great potential that God has given us to carry, may God help us remember to ask Him to calm us, and have faith to expect that He will.

**Holly Behre  
2000**

**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.**

*Psalm 103:1*

To feel praise in one's heart and soul is easily recognized, but not always easily sustained. In our chaotic lives it can be difficult to remember to praise God in all circumstances, much less with all we are.

Stop to think for a moment. Most of us take for granted that our heart will continue to beat and that we will continue to breathe, all without our conscious direction. These are essential for our very lives, yet we pay little heed until they are threatened. The fact that these activities are part of complex systems to sustain us is a miracle we rarely recognize. Each breath, each heartbeat, stands as physical testimony to accompany the spiritual awareness of the awesome power of God. Even when our minds and souls are distracted, our bodies bear witness to the glories of their Creator. Praise be to God.

Laura Alberg  
2008

**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**

**So the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**

*Mark 2:23-3:6*

My childhood memories of Sundays in the 40's are so different from the way we spend them now. A typical afternoon, following Sunday School, church, and dinner would have my father reading the "funnies" to me, visiting relatives, or going for a ride, and, almost always ending with window-shopping on King Street. My mother never dreamed of threading a needle or setting up the ironing board, much less going to the movies (were they even open on Sundays back then?). Of course, all the stores were closed.

In those days of simpler times and fewer choices, keeping the Sabbath holy might have been a little easier, on the surface, at least. Maybe it was less difficult, also, for the Jews to observe the laws after Moses delivered God's commandments to them straight from Mt. Sinai, before Jewish tradition added so many regulations and requirements over the years. By the time Jesus came, it had become impossible to obey them all.

Today's passage from Mark's gospel tells of the Pharisees baiting and challenging Jesus on the laws at every opportunity, hastening His downfall. On each occasion, however, He explained the true meaning of the Sabbath, exposing their hypocritical and evil ways. While the Pharisees plotted His death, Jesus interpreted the scriptures and healed. Through his teachings, we learn what God intended when He created a day of rest for man – that on the Sabbath we be renewed spiritually, mentally, and physically, and that we use it to do all things that are good.

Angie Zervos  
2000

**Monday, Third Week of Lent**

**March 12**

**This child is not dead; she is only asleep.**  
*Mark 5:38-42*

I will confess at the outset that I was never an outstanding Sunday School student. As a consequence, I often come across Bible stories that are completely unfamiliar. This is one. I can't recall ever hearing this as a Gospel reading or listening to a sermon with this as a text. One would think that the restoration of life to a young girl at the point of death, amidst grieving parents, would rate highly in the hierarchy of miracles attributed to Jesus. But, this is treated with seeming nonchalance – the child leaps to her feet and Jesus asks the parents to feed her. He then continues on his way. Perhaps the words are more powerful than the deed: "She is not dead; she is only asleep."

Through the ages, one of the most powerful elements in the Christian message is that death is not to be feared – that the soul succeeds the body – that physical death is a transitory state – that what follows is "everlasting life." While none of us can know what lies beyond physical death, our experience tells us that waking always follows sleep – that dawn always follows darkness. Eternal sleep is foreign to our experience and is feared. In this story, Jesus challenges this human fear. You are not dead, you are only asleep. Awake and leap to your feet. There is no cause for grief. There is continuing life.

Ted Halkyard  
2004

### Is the Lord with us or not? *Exodus 17:1-7*

In this passage, the Israelites fear that they are adrift in the desert. There is too little water to sustain life for so many. Perhaps, they think that life in slavery to Pharaoh is better than dying of thirst. They are afraid and angry. In their fear and frustration, they clamor against Moses who in turn cries out to God for help. In doing so, Moses sets an example for the ages.

God instructs Moses to strike a rock at the base of Mt. Horeb (Sinai) from which springs life-giving water. In essence, we are being told that God is the rock of our salvation, our constant in the ever-shifting sands of time. We are being instructed to ask God for His peace and guidance rather than complaining, casting blame, worrying about things that are seemingly beyond our control, or wishing we could return to what seemed to be a better time.

“Is the Lord with us or not?” is a question that has echoed through the ages and which reverberates in our world today. As with the Israelites of old, each of us has faced or will face our own desert of despair. On the one hand, the fear might be on a personal level as it was with me when I knew I had to bring Mother home to die. I was terrified that I would not find the ability to cope and I prayed for strength. On the other hand, fear may stem from the daily assaults on our senses of stories, and images of war, of terrorist activities at home and abroad, of the uncertainties of our financial world.

“Is the Lord with us or not?” Indeed, He is with us! We have only to ask that He calm our fears, strengthen our resolve to face the problems that beset us, and guide us in finding solutions that will be beneficial to others. How do I know? I know because He came in the guise of my Grace Church family, in Lutheran hospice, in friends near and far whose love and support helped turn what could have been a devastating experience into a beautiful, meaningful period of my life.

Thanks be to God.

Meri Roberts Dame  
2003

**With the measure you use, it will be measured to you. . .**

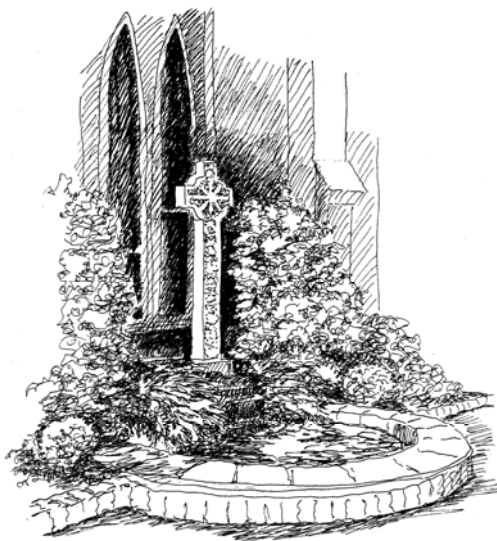
***Mark 4:25-41***

This passage brings to mind the old saying: “We reap what we sow.” We need to rely on our faith to believe that what we “sow,” even in the smallest deed, will “reap” great rewards. Christ used the parable of the tiny mustard seed to demonstrate this: the plan that grew from such a minute seed was so large that the birds could live there.

I suspect that many of us think that we have to do great deeds and often we don’t even attempt the much smaller ones. However, so often, it is the small, even insignificant efforts that have the greatest impact and reward. Speaking a kind word; giving a brief smile; passing on a small touch; or taking an extra small moment to help someone in need, may be the turning point to lead someone to a lifting of their depression, hope for their hopelessness and even to having a better day.

After the untimely death of my wife, it meant so much for friends and family to say, “Let me just hug you, sit and listen.” This almost inevitably meant much more and lifted my spirits more than those who came with grandiose words and deeds. We need to sustain our faith in God and “do all such good works as Christ would have us do,” even when they are very small indeed.

**Mac McTeer**  
2006



*Bill Zobel, 2002*

**The ways of the Lord are right: the righteous walk in them. . .**  
***Mark 6:30-32***

Just like the apostles, Jesus wants all of us to come to him in a quiet place to get some rest. I am sure I am not the only one who finds it difficult to get to that quiet place each and every day. As the mother of two young children, I find I have a hundred things to do and think about each day and they never all get done! In a book called *Diapers, Pacifiers, and other Holy Things*, Lorraine Pintus wrote a small poem that describes the life of most of the mothers I know:

Wash the clothes, dress the kids, mop the floor.  
Make the beds, feed the pets, go to the store.  
Read a story, write a letter, kiss a sore.  
When you're done, do it again.  
And do it again once more.  
Look around, so much to do.  
The house looks like an unkept zoo.  
You sigh a bit, 'cause you'll never be through.  
With "little things" that cry out to you.

Becoming a mother has made me realize, more than ever before, the awesome power of God. I stare at three amazing gifts from God whenever I look at my children and my husband. The blessing of family reminds me to nurture my relationship with God and to strive to make time with him a priority in my life. However, in all honesty, there are many days when I don't have a "formal" quiet time with God. But even on those days, I have discovered that I always have ample moments "alone" with my thoughts (and sometimes they are literally moments) that I can use to thank the Lord for all of his blessings, to pray, and to try and listen to him. Rocking my baby, quietly holding my two-year-old, or driving around two sleeping children are a few examples of my moments. No matter how busy we all are, we all have a little time each day to spend with God.

**Helen Britton**  
**2004**

**The gatekeepers had been assigned to their positions of trust by David and Samuel the seer.  
*1 Corinthians 9:19-23***

Have you ever worked really hard to do something good, and not gotten the recognition you deserved? Well, you are not alone. In fact, if you read the entire chapter from which this passage is taken, St. Paul felt exactly the same way about the work he was doing.

I was the oldest of four children. One Saturday when I was thirteen, my parents decided I was old enough to baby sit the others while they went out. I took this charge very seriously. I played games with each of my siblings, fixed them lunch, and even helped them get their chores done. When my parents came home, they were clearly relieved that everyone survived. My mother turned to the other children and suggested they say ‘thank you’ to me for giving up my Saturday to take such good care of them. “Why?” demanded my sister. “He didn’t do anything.” The others nodded in silent agreement. I was so enraged I told all three of them that they were self-centered boneheads, and ran upstairs to my bedroom in tears.

A while later, as I consoled myself in self-pity, there was a knock at my door. It was my father. He came to say that I had made him very proud that day. He now knew he could count on me to take care of things when he was away. He also said that if I expected other people to appreciate every good thing I did in life, I was going to be very disappointed. He and my mother knew what I had done, and that was all that really mattered. I that moment, I grew up a little bit and my relationship with my father was changed forever.

To me the whole message of Christianity is that we are supposed to give up our wants and needs to serve other people. However, when our good deeds only put distance between us and those we love, we should take it as a sign that something isn’t right. Much of that distance probably stems from our own expectations.

Jesus tells us to serve others, but never says we should expect others to be grateful or that our good deeds will even make a difference to them. It’s the doing of these acts of selflessness that is important, not the reaction of others or their consequences. Jesus seems to be saying that, as was the case with my dad, our reward for serving others is the possibility of being drawn into a closer, more mature relationship with God.

Steve Skardon  
2004

**The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**  
*Mark 12:28-34*

The scribe in this passage seems to deal with these commandments far more easily than I do. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Do I love myself? Looking in the mirror, I wonder how, indeed, I can love myself. There are far too many imperfections that I see, and many deeper ones that can't be viewed in a mirror.

For many years I was greatly blessed in my field of nursing. I worked on medical and surgical wards, in oncology units, in the emergency room, on an ambulance squad, in home health, and in Hospice care. In all those settings it was easy to see many of my patients as neighbors and to "love them as myself." As part of the Dominican Republic medical mission team 2000, it became crystal clear to me that those folks we were treating in our clinics were, indeed, our neighbors. And the love that flowed throughout was real and intense to everyone involved.

In order to love, we must give of ourselves. In order to give of ourselves, we must open ourselves up. That can be unnerving, leaving us vulnerable. It's much easier to talk about the weather, our jobs, our children, anything but our deeper selves. Somehow, loving seems easier when I am doing for others. Loving while just being is more difficult. For me, however, a powerful example of love through silence is the privilege of sitting and holding the hand of a patient who is dying. Just listening to the patient and the family can be sustaining, comforting, strengthening, and reaffirming. Dying is one of our most personal acts, and to be welcomed into the heart of a family at this point in their lives is an extraordinary privilege. Loving my neighbor in this situation demands the gift of just being.

There still remains the question of 'who is my neighbor'. Does Jesus mean those folks who live near us, or those with whom we have frequent contact? Does He mean those who practice one of the many and varied religions in the world today? Do my neighbors include the needy and poverty-stricken? And how about those who do us evil? Are they to be considered our neighbors?

My own idea of neighbor is anyone who seeks companionship, as well as anyone who seems to be in pain or need. We all recognize the value in living one day at a time. Perhaps if we can slow down our pace of life just enough to make one human contact at a time, the love and concern for our neighbor might be easier to manage.

Joan Halkyard  
2002

**The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any one of His people among you – may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.**  
*Ezra 1:2-3*

What a challenging pain it is to maintain a house. My wife, Kathy, and I have just completed some major work on our home. Last June, a home inspector told us that the dark stains on the ceiling came from dirt on our ceiling fans. We are not perfect housekeepers, but this seemed too much. It was even odder because the “dirt” spread after a major rain! Now we know the “dirt” came from a leaky roof. We have had the roof fixed and it was a joint relief not to have allowed our ceiling fan to get that filthy.

In our lives, we need to maintain not just our physical houses, but also our spiritual houses. In the cited portion of the last section of Second Chronicles, King Cyrus of Persia expresses his concern that the people of his kingdom, which then included the Israelites since Persia had come to power over Babylon, should build and maintain their spiritual lives. In the preceding verses we had already learned that God’s chosen people in exile had not done this. They did not maintain a spiritual Jerusalem in their hearts, just as the physical Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar when the Israelites were taken to Babylon.

In the past thirteen years of serving as the Crisis Chaplain, I have seen more spiritual Jerusalems than physical Jerusalems destroyed. (Thankfully, we do not have many church fires.) Many of us struggle to keep our spiritual lives alive and active, although others do not.

But, when our spiritual Jerusalem is attacked, the “holes” and “dirt” develop in our inner lives. When that happens, what do we fill these holes with? It is either things of God or things of the world. During this holy season of Lent, may we all be intentional about addressing our spiritual home in Jerusalem, so that we can be, not just filled, but overflowing, with God’s Life-giving Spirit.

**The Reverend Robinson Dewey**  
2003

**The miracles of God are evidence of God's compassion for us all.**

***Mark 6:47-56***

Can you imagine the wonder – and fear – the disciples experienced when they saw Jesus walking on the windswept waters? At first they did not recognize Him; but when they did realize that this was Jesus, they were amazed. They believed these extraordinary powers had to come directly from God.

Jesus' ministry was a combination of the spoken word and miracles. All of the miracles performed by Jesus were evidence of His compassion for humanity, His love for all. Jesus performed two types of miracles: healing and wonder. The healing miracles show what happens when we trust in the Lord. The miracles that inspire wonder show that our Lord's powers are the mighty acts of God.

Lord, we need your healing. Help us to see your miracles all around us. Help us to wonder.

Pam Ueberroth  
1998

**O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you: my soul thirsts for you. . .**

**Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.**

***Psalms 63:1-8***

St. Augustine of Hippo (d.430) composed a prayer that has been used and loved by millions of Christians. It goes as follows:

Thou hast made us for thyself, O God,  
And our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee.

Psalms 63 seems to anticipate that prayer, or we might say, is in the same "genre." King David acknowledges the God of Israel as his God and that he longs for Him just as arid land longs for or thirsts for water.

We know we are physical beings, but is that enough? After all, just as parched land is useless and produces nothing living, our physical beings without God are a travesty. No, it is not enough just to live in our skins. We are also of the spirit, and that side of us must be ministered to through being blessed by God, and to be faithful in righteous living means we too “bless God”. (v. 5)

There is much to ponder in the saying, “Man was meant to be possessed, and he will either be possessed by God or he will be ‘possessed’ by the world’s passing fancies.” Verses 7 and 8 of this psalm repeat that truth and echo the words of the much loved hymn, “O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come. . . under the shadow of thy throne, thy saints have dwelt secure.”

Just as our soul longs for God, so too our only true and lasting security comes from God.

The Reverend Donald S. McPhail  
2004

**Wednesday, Fourth Week of Lent**

**March 21**

**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**  
*John 2:23-3:15*

In this lesson, John reminds us that it is through Baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are born anew and will have everlasting life.

Ann and I visited the cave on the Island of Patmos in the Greek Isles, near Turkey, where John, with the help of a young disciple, who served as a scribe, wrote the Book of Revelation. Before visiting the cave, I thought it would be just another historic site like many others we had seen throughout Greece. I was wrong! It was a very moving experience. I felt the presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit in that place.

John asks, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Accepting and believing what you cannot see is hard, but if you accept and believe, your life will be different. The Holy Spirit through God’s grace is freely given. Will you receive it?

Bachman Smith, III  
1999

**You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free.**

***John 8:21-32***

Is this passage not the *essence* of Christianity? If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and authorized by God the Father to speak truth to us, and if we abide in his word and always try to do what is pleasing to him, then we are truly his disciples. To live by God's word and the example that Jesus set forth for us is to know spiritual freedom – both in this world and in the life to come.

I recently read an article which quoted the late Sarah Cannon, also known as the country comedienne Minnie Pearl. She said, "You gotta love people to make 'em laugh. . . and you really won't know anything about laughing until you have found peace with God and love him first." I believe she is saying the same thing this Bible reading says: To know and love God, to live by the guidelines he set for us, to accept Jesus as our Savior, is to live truth. The truth will make us free to love, free to laugh, free to live in peace – knowing that we will not die in our sin, but will have a life hereafter.

*Dear Father, thank you for being here for me even when I am not always faithful to you. Give me the power and strength to follow your way, to live by the truth, and to experience the freedom you have promised to all who believe. Amen.*

Jeannie King  
1999

**They all ate and were satisfied.**

***Mark 6:30-46***

Thirst and hunger for answers can lead to complete trust in God. The apostles return from spreading the word and Jesus sends them away to rest. He sees that their followers are lost and still hungry for more. He continues to teach this very large crowd. They wind up in the middle of nowhere. Jesus takes the five loaves of bread and the two fish they have and He blesses them. Five thousand eat and are satisfied. There are even leftovers. The money they had between them could not buy what their trust in God produced. They departed, both physically and spiritually fed.

Retta Dotterer  
2006

**O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous,  
you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God.**

*Psalm 7:9*

“...And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...”

We use these words every week to ask for God’s help. We appeal to God because we need his help and protection. But we are creatures of choice, and I’ve always believed that we have a responsibility to find a way to help God help us.

But how do we do this?

Sometimes a simple approach is a good place to start.

What happens if we simply choose not to be angry? What if we choose to be positive and supportive of those we love, especially our families?

What happens if we remain calm in the storm? If we choose to be kind when others are mean or negligent? Is this how we help God to help us?

The Lord tells us to love one another and to reflect his love and grace.

Simply choosing not to be angry when we feel we are fully justified to be lashing out at the world, our friends, family, or our loved ones... It’s a simple choice, and often a very difficult one. But perhaps it is one way that we help God to protect us and our families from the sin and evil in this world.

And please remember to be kind to yourself when you fail. We all do. But we need to allow ourselves the opportunity to be forgiven and to try again.

Derek Wade  
2008

**I am the resurrection and the life.**  
*John 11:17-44*

Reading the raising of Lazarus conjures up Sunday School skits with Lazarus wrapped in gauze; such a bizarre story until we take the time to contemplate the deeper meaning.

As I write this, it has been almost two months since the 9/11 disaster. Most days, I read the obits in the New York Times in “A Nation Challenged” section, and prayed for those dear people, mostly between the ages of 25-40 years, and for their families and children; for our country, and for wisdom and strength for our leaders.

Also, as I meditate on John’s gospel, the Feast of All Saints has just passed. On All Saints Sunday, I attended a packed family service at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Lake Forest, Illinois, with my oldest son and 6-year-old grandson. From the first row, we could see the bells, the junior and senior choirs, the trumpet, the magnificent procession, and the baptism of the newest “saint.” Worship in the Episcopal Church, at its best (and it so often is, at Grace), is an experience involving our physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional being. I couldn’t stop the tears during “For all the saints.” “O blessed communion, fellowship divine; we feebly struggle, they in glory shine.”

Yes, the departed shine in glory in the presence of the resurrected Christ, and all who have gone before us. On All Saints Sunday 2001, we glimpsed a bit of Heaven. Some day, we too, will come to that “ineffable joy,” when we let go the struggle on earth, and join the communion of Saints and the company of Heaven.

Jesus’ raising of Lazarus points us to the mystery of resurrection and the glory of God. The last three words in this Gospel are “let him go,” as in: All is well. God reigns in Heaven and on earth. As we participate in the resurrected life here on earth, each of us in his or her own way brings a glimpse of the heavenly Kingdom, and strengthens and sustains the faith, hope, and love of Christ in this world.

So, we let go of the past, while we pray for those who are still suffering. We must embrace the gift of the present moment, and carry on to build a better world, renewed by the presence of the Resurrected One. Alleluia.

The Reverend Mary Johnstone  
2002

**Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord;  
let it be with me according to your word.'**

*Luke 1:38*

As an obstetrician/gynecologist I devote much energy to helping women control when and if they will have children. And now as an expecting mother myself, I have an acute and deeply personal appreciation for the demands of pregnancy on one's body and one's psyche. These life experiences give me a fresh perspective on this passage where Mary responds to the news that she will give birth to the Christ child.

Were an angel to come to me today and inform me that I would be carrying a child outside of marriage and that this child's life would be devoted to a higher purpose after birth, I can only imagine the thoughts that would race through my head (not to mention the expletives that might fly out of my mouth). Certainly, I would fear the judgment of others at my unwed status. I would resent the intrusion of a stranger's will on my body. And I would undoubtedly mourn the fact that after my physical and emotional sacrifice, I would not have the opportunity to mother this child as I had always dreamed.

The example that Mary sets in this passage astounds me. Upon hearing this news, she selflessly committed herself to this service to the Lord without question. She didn't protest. She didn't request additional information or immediately begin endlessly analyzing the situation, as I feel certain that I would do. She didn't start running through a list of what if's for every possible scenario. Instead, she accepted the request and presented herself as an instrument of service with little concern for self. From this selfless act was born a man who changed all of our lives forever.

My Lenten prayer this day is that I may become a better instrument of service by following Mary's example and setting aside my fear of judgment and my resentment born out of concern for self.

**Angela Dempsey-Fanning  
2011**

**Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God.  
2 Kings 4:18-21, 32-37**

It seems incredible that this particular Scripture and date were assigned to me, as I, too, am a widow, and April 8 is my youngest daughter's birthday – truly, a gift from God. I have always felt in my heart that God has blessed me far more than I deserve. But how can I question God's grace? I am truly thankful and pray daily that God will help me to be what he wants me to be – His obedient servant. Reading these scriptures helped me see and re-learn the same lesson:

First, the widow had lost her husband to death, ending the income that he earned. God is the “judge of widows” and sent Elisha to help her. All she had was a little oil, but “little is much when God is in it.” She was told to find and fill all the empty vessels she could with the oil she had. The amount of oil she received was only limited by the number of vessels she had, and that was controlled by her faith. She sold the oil, paid her debt and took care of herself and her two sons.

God will meet our needs if we trust and obey. This miracle reminds us of the greatest miracle of all: the gracious forgiveness of our debts to the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ. It cost Elisha nothing for God to provide the needed money to pay the widow's debt, but it cost Jesus Christ His life to be able to forgive our sins.

The Shunamite woman in the second story was a person of wealth and social standing who wanted to serve the Lord by serving His prophet, providing food and lodging for him and his servant. This reminds us of other scriptures such as “love thy neighbor,” “do unto others” and “do it unto the least of one of these.” She asked nothing in return. Because of this and her great faith in the Lord, she received not one, but three miracles.

First, she was barren and blessed with a son. Grace brought life where once there had been no life. Second, her son was brought back to life after being dead. The third miracle occurred when she was told there would be a seven-year famine, and she must leave. When she returned, Gehazi was there to vouch for her before the king and her property was returned to her.

Only God's grace can impart life and only God's grace can impart spiritual life to the dead sinner. It was God who performed these miracles, but He used Elisha to do it, and so it is with God when raising sinners from the dead.

**June Sassard  
2003**

## Wednesday, Fifth Week of Lent

March 28

**If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire  
and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us.**

*Daniel 3:17*

Serious illness strikes unexpectedly. Months and months of focus on the disease. Experts, doctors and surgeons trying to find a solution. Constant nausea and pain killers. Eventually you realize you have no control over this physical world and you give yourself up to God. It is, in a way, a release. A release of your soul. It is a path to the spirit of God. With all the efforts and prayers of my family at Grace Church he has delivered *me* from the furnace of blazing fire.

Jane MaDan  
2008

## Thursday, Fifth Week of Lent

March 29

**Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered  
and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

*Hebrews 4:12-13*

This passage confirms what we already know, which is that God is amazing and all powerful. Here is also one of many reasons to obey the word of God and to worship him. The things he has done for us are countless and yet he asks us to do little in return, only to obey and to love him.

But, let's face it: God is so extremely powerful, he is at least a bit frightening and intimidating. Even so, we know that he loves us. We're told to love one another as he loves us, and we're supposed to honor our mothers and fathers and so on, which can be extremely difficult. Every one of us will forget about these things several times in our lives and when we do, God sees this. I'm sure that some of us, at some point, would like to pretend that our sins didn't happen and that we could hide them from God, but as this verse says, we cannot hide from the eyes of God. This tells me that God sees us as we truly are; he sees us behind the masks that we like to wear to hide some of our inner feelings and intentions.

On this Earth we humans often do what we believe we have to do to survive and not all of those things are good in the eyes of God. However, God can always see into our hearts and can determine who we really are inside. When we love him and each other, even when we do wrong, God will still love us back.

Dorothy Behre  
2005

**Though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.**

*John 11:5-6*

“I will do that later... Perhaps I will tackle that tomorrow...” How easy it is to procrastinate! Time lines and time management have always been challenges for me.

The ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. We are more familiar with chronological time divided into seconds, minutes, hours. Someone has said that we sometimes seem to be at the mercy of our watches and clocks, and that time is measured in quantities.

*Kairos* is “real time” or, as it is sometimes called, “God's time.” Such moments are not recognized while we are experiencing God's time; only afterwards because it is outside chronological time. Meditation, prayer, contemplation, “just thinking,” and even reading when we “become” a character in the narrative” are only some of the things that occur in *kairos*. The instant we become aware of moments in *kairos* we return abruptly to *chronos*.

Perhaps music can illustrate both kinds of time. When one is concentrating on the printed page and playing it on an instrument with the notes perfectly sequenced, we are in clock-time or *chronos*. However when we know the music well (or are improvising) and are unaware of notes and are lost in time, we are in *kairos* and have become co-creators with the composer or with God. During such moments we *are* the music. When something jolts us back into clock-time we are astonished at the length of time in which we were totally unselfconscious!

Jesus' delay in going to see Martha and her sister and Lazarus was not procrastination, but for several reasons. Nonetheless, the accounting of the event reminds us that God's time is best!

Roy Scoggins  
2009

---

**At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech,  
that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.**

*Zephaniah 3:9*

We, each and every one of us, need to talk. We need to be heard. We need to know that we have been heard. But sometimes, in our need to be heard, we forget that others need to be heard as well. So often, especially in times of turmoil or tragedy, it is not our words that matter, but our presence. The world today is filled with so much noise that the noise and a barrage of information have become a strange source of comfort and diversion, or perhaps, a means of escape. We are in danger of becoming deadened to what is real and true in the eyes of eternity. Speech takes many forms. Pure speech, the speech about which the prophet Zephaniah writes, begins with listening.

“Hush the noise and cease your strife, and hear the angels sing. . .”

The Reverend Calhoun Walpole  
2011



**After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered...  
and they believed the scriptures and the word that Jesus had spoken.**

*John 2:22*

This passage reminds us that looking forward sometimes requires us to look back. Jesus gave his disciples numerous clues along the way about his impending death. Unfortunately, it was not until after his crucifixion and resurrection that they could begin to piece it all together. The disciples remembered and drew on their experiences with Jesus. They then believed the scriptures, and they believed in Jesus. However, it took his death and resurrection to confirm and strengthen their beliefs. Thus for the disciples to go forward and spread the positive news of Christ and his life, they had to look back and first place all of the pieces of the puzzle together.

We, as Christians, can also benefit from looking back to move forward in our own lives. We already have the benefit of history to a certain extent and knowing what the disciples did not know about Christ and his resurrection. We can utilize Jesus' life example and the scripture in conjunction with our own life experiences to learn more about ourselves and God and grow closer to Him.

During our journey with God, especially during Lent, we are invited to prepare our hearts for remembering Jesus' passion and celebrating his resurrection. We can all do this in numerous ways – one of which is by embracing the positive. Each year before Lent we should remind ourselves to actively look for the positive as opposed to only focusing on the self-deprivation normally equated with Lent. Instead of forgoing chocolate or caffeine, we can resolve to practice a positive trait. One example could be to have more patience and understanding with an individual or group of individuals in our lives. It can easily lead to a dramatic change in lifestyle.

We should all strive to be more cognizant of the world and the people around us and how we fit in among them according to God's plan for us. The season of Lent is as much about renewal and embracing challenges as it is sacrifice. Simply recognizing this can lead us to a more fulfilled life here on Earth and with our God in heaven.

Amy Mathisen  
2009

**[Jesus] overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.**

***Mark 11:15-19***

Mark portrays Our Lord as capable of anger. The story of the fig tree, followed immediately by His violent actions in overturning the tables and chasing the merchants from the temple, show just how angry our Lord could be.

His fury is due to the fact that the court outside the entrance to the temple had been transformed into a “merchandise mart.”

Was it because the priests had rigidly preached that one could properly worship only by sacrificing the purest of animals, guaranteed pure, without blemish? These priests who had seen and heard Jesus during His short ministry, kept the masses in religious bondage by insisting on archaic practices.

Was Jesus angry because He knew that in a short time He was going to lay down His life, the ultimate sacrifice, for those who continued to reject Him as their Savior?

Or, was His anger due to Israel’s long history of failing to recognize God’s real plan for them, their failure to accept God’s offer of a Messiah – in the line of David – to free them from the ancient bondage of the law?

By this almost violent act, Jesus was saying: “the sacrifice God really wants is for you to open your heart to Him.” We don’t have to be pure and clean or worship in a prescribed manner; we only need to accept Christ as our Savior and let Him make things right for us!

Vic Nichols  
1998

**And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”  
But I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;  
yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.”**

*Isaiah 49:3-4*

The work is done each day, each small task is completed, no matter how simple or seemingly mindless. Why? Why do we work to get each little job done: cards, flowers, phone calls, ordering candles, stuffing envelopes, visiting the sick, inquiring about a friend? Sometimes it seems we have “labored in vain.” But never is it “for nothing and vanity.” Each little thing brings our Lord into the life of someone else. Someone’s day is a little less lonely, a little more cheerful, the altar more glorious, information is shared, the sick are pulled into the fuller body of Christ, and we rejoice with the good news from a friend or share their pain.

“And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

It is not about us, but it is God that will be glorified. If the work we do, either through the church or out in the world, is only for our own satisfaction and sense of well being then it is “vanity.” But I believe that most of us strive to do right and just and then He “will be glorified”.

And then each night as I lay my head on my pillow I can rest, more at peace. “Yet surely my right is with the Lord.” And “in the fullness of time” I know my reward is with my God. Because it is God and God alone. Amen. Alleluia.

Jean Bender  
2011

**The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced.**  
*Isaiah 50:7*

As my children grow older I realize they can't be protected and shielded from everything. Keeping children safe is a fundamental of parenting, and this is even more apparent when you go to a bookstore and find many books on baby-proofing your home to cyber-safety. When I hear a question such as, "Could someone break into our house while we are asleep?" I wish I could say, "Absolutely not." It would be nice to think that locks, seatbelts, and helmets are always a guarantee of safety, but sometimes they're not. I think it's also natural to want to prevent a child from feeling ashamed or isolated. A child who can grow up and know without question both the unconditional love of his or her parents and, more importantly, God's everlasting love and grace is well-equipped to weather both difficult and painful times. The one guarantee we all have as Christians is that no matter what happens or where we go, there is God. Whether we are a child or an adult, we have our times when we might be disappointed or feel ashamed; then there are times when we disappoint or make others ashamed. Even if we don't always seek out God, He is still there, loving us and wanting the best for us.

Liane Kerr  
2008



*Collin Kerr, 2007*

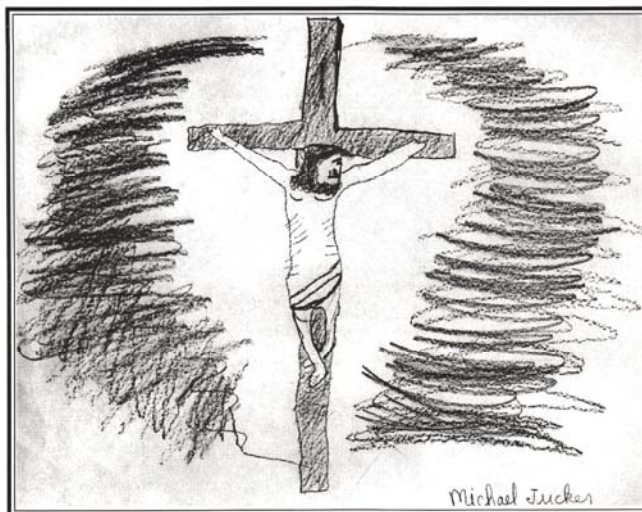
**Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.**  
*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*

Worship in New England Quaker meetings begins in silence. As the meeting sits together, communion occurs – a sharing of the common light of Christ within each person present. From this gathered silence, as from that sheer silence before Elijah’s cave in the wilderness, emerges a voice of Christ.

We share this same communion during Eucharist differently – through sound of collects for purity, reasoned homily, prayers, creed, confession and peace – the sounds of thanksgiving and praise – and the voice of Christ: this is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you; this is my body, which is given for you – the sound of footsteps moving together to share the cup of salvation, the bread of heaven.

And shared communion calls us into the world in peace. This vision – that we, who are many, are one body – calls us to our shared humanity and calls us to recognize that in Christ “there is no East or West, in him no North or South,” in him there is but one fellowship – neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither gay nor straight – one fellowship of love whom and which we are called to serve, with gladness and singleness of heart.

Walter Limehouse  
2005



2000

**And the angels tended him.*****Mark 1:1-13***

Last night they came for Him. We all knew it was inevitable, but we did not think He would just go like that. The centurions came crashing into our world, and instead of proving to them who He was, He just went with them. Surely, He will tell them, I kept thinking to myself.

I was unable to see into the High Priest's house, but I could hear their voices out on the street. He was so aggravatingly calm. Why did He not prove to them who He was?

Pilate has turned Him over to the crowd. They are all watching – surely now He will prove to them that He is the Savior! Why does He not do something? Now is the time! Show them!

The guards are whipping Him, mocking Him. He is our Messiah; why does He not show them? How can the Messiah let them do that to Him? Why does He not show us that He is the Messiah?

A stone in my sandal slows me as I follow the crowd to the Hill. I tear at it desperately; I do not want to miss seeing Him in His glory when He reveals to the world who He is. He must be waiting to the very end. That's it – He is building up to the suspense! I knew He would not let me down!

No! Stop pounding those nails! You are hurting Him! I want to make them stop, but I am afraid. I see Him writhing in pain, and I must admit I am horrified. How could God writhe in pain? I am in agony for us both; for Him to see Him with nails driven through His flesh and bones, and for me, to feel that the man I knew was God must not be after all.

The crowds are gone now, for the most part. His breathing is weak, and the blood runs in scarlet rivulets down His arms, dripping from His elbows. I feel so betrayed, so taken advantage of. I stifle the urge to scream at him, to tell Him He is a sham, a fake, a liar. My Messiah would not have taken this. No, He would not have let them do this to Him. He would have shown them. How could you do this to us? How could you do this to me? Come down. Show us. Come down, I tell you! Show us who you really are!

**Will Suggs  
2000**

**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*

St. Paul composes his Letter to the Romans as his summa, his highest statement and confession of faith. This letter will precede his arrival in Rome and announces to Christians everywhere and in every time the stunning reality of a new life in Christ Jesus. Having encountered the living Christ himself, Paul is dedicated to dispelling any reason not to receive the Good News.

After a rabbinical analysis of the Jewish Law and its ultimate failure, Paul writes that those who can't or don't follow the Law have still fallen short of God's intentions for human life. His proclamation rings out like a hammer hitting an anvil: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

It is clear for anyone to listen to, learn from and respond to: freedom is given through the power and reality of the Resurrection. Moving from the stark events of Good Friday and now anticipating the joy of Easter, this message provides the link. That which God has endured is now forgiven through God's love. Whatever terrible things humankind can perpetrate on one another are swept aside by forgiveness and mercy. There is a new day; a day of freedom; a release from the sin and guilt of the past and an invitation to begin again. Refreshed and renewed we can gather with joy and celebrate this new reality.

The Reverend Paul Gilbert  
2005

**If we have died with him, we shall live with him; if we hold firm, we shall reign with him.**

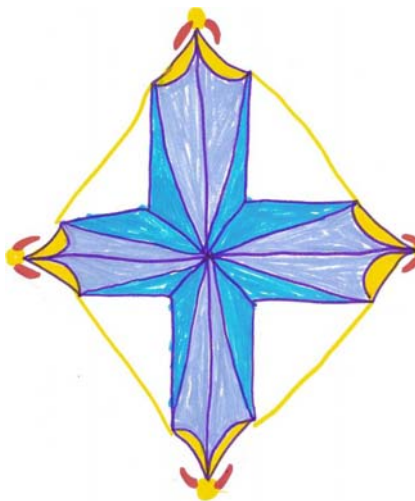
***2 Timothy 2:11***

At Easter we celebrate the victory of the cross. Easter never seeks to deny or minimize the cross. And so Easter is never just the happy ending to an otherwise sad and tragic story. For Christ did not simply escape from the powers of darkness and death; he triumphed over them on Good Friday as on Easter morning.

The Lenten season has ended. We do not only celebrate our arrival after a long and arduous journey at the miraculously empty tomb. We also give thanks for the pilgrimage that enabled us to make it this far. For those who arrive at the Easter garden without having earlier walked the way of the cross will probably miss most of the signs of hope contained therein. Small wonder bouncy bunnies and speckled eggs dominate the secular Easter observance. After all, what else is there in that garden?

Only those who walk the road with the crucified one will know to seek out those different places to discover his risen life. And so, to the back of the garden we go, and there we find all we need to make our wounded lives whole. Do we find life? Yes. But it is a life that we recognize redeems our very own lives: Wounded yet healed; broken yet whole; emptied yet full of life and light. Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**The Reverend Canon J. Michael A. Wright  
2008**



*Mary Kate Rumph, 2007*



**Grace Episcopal Church**  
98 Wentworth Street  
Charleston, South Carolina 29401