

Lenten Reflections

2011



Journey to the Cross

Dear Friends:

I am profoundly grateful to Joslyn Grostic for overseeing the production of the 2011 Plymouth Church Lenten Reflections. Joslyn's keen mind, deep faith, and loving spirit were a gift to me as we worked on this project together. She caught the vision of connecting the Plymouth family through written expressions of faith, and gracefully handled a multitude of details in order to get the job done. I thank you, Joslyn, and all you writers who generously shared your thoughts and feelings in these pages. One of my pastoral care goals is to help people develop and practice their God language, not only in times of crisis, but in the round of daily life.

Specifically, I want to encourage all of us to talk more freely about where we find God and what God is doing in our lives. An effort like these Lenten Reflections provides a wonderful way for us to connect the story of our everyday lives to the great story of God's love for us.

May your times of reading, reflection, and prayer bless and sustain you as you journey through Lent.

Faithfully,

*Rev. Lois H. Annich
Minister of Pastoral Care*

This Lenten devotional is a compilation of meditations from members of our Plymouth community, designed to prepare our hearts and minds each day during the season of Lent. These writings reflect the diversity of our backgrounds and spiritual paths, while at the same time unifying us as Christians who walk the walk and talk the talk together.

In order to experience these meditations you'll need to have your Bible handy. Each day you are asked to first read the selected passage from the Bible and then read the devotion that describes how that passage impacted the writer. We hope these daily readings will draw us closer to our Bibles and to one another during Lent and beyond.

I was pleased to learn in the course of working on this project, that there is a longstanding tradition of writing Lenten devotionals at Plymouth. At some point there was a break in the chain. We are so fortunate to have some of our long-time members writing again for the new devotional. As we stand here in the present moment, we can remember our past as we look ahead to the future of our beautiful faith community.

We are blessed to have such a vibrant church here at Plymouth. We have so many gifts among us, and this devotional testifies to this fact.

Joslyn Grostic

March 9, 2011
Ash Wednesday

Read Psalm 143
Meditation from Rev. Lois H. Annich

What sorts of enemies do you think the Psalmist was facing? If this psalm can be rightly attributed to David we know he was constantly on the run from Saul, a madman obsessed with David's demise.

As I read the psalm, I think about Saul's relentless plotting against David and all the terror and heartache Saul generated for him and countless others. Before long my mind is flooded with other terrifying images, many of which are served up daily as we open our newspapers or scan the Internet. I am increasingly disquieted by the violence that characterizes modern life, but when I read Psalm 143, I remember that deliverance from enemies is an age-old dilemma.

Interestingly enough, the enemies from which I seek deliverance are not those who would physically hurt me. I am far more concerned about the enemies of the spirit that subtly sap my energies—enemies like anxiety, resentment, self-pity, greed, and poor self-care. Their corrosive effects can make me feel deeply disconnected from God, others, and myself.

This Lent I invite you to contemplate the “enemies” that undermine your relationship with God—habits that threaten your health and well-being, resentments that poison your relationships, or attachments that deaden your spirit. As you embark on 40 days of contemplation and prayer, know that you are being led through the midst of your “enemies” to a deeper, richer sense of God's presence and love. No matter what appears to crush or threaten you, place your trust, like the Psalmist, in the One who brings life out of death.

Save us, O God, from enemies within and without, and most of all, grant us deep trust in you no matter where our path may lie. Amen.

March 10, 2011

Read John 1:29-34

Meditation from Martha Brandt-Pollock

*There came a man, sent from God,
whose name was John. (Jn.1:6)*

You are Part of the Divine Design
But I am a lone voice in the wilderness

You are called to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah:
Prepare the highway—make straight the path!
But I am not the One

You are to bear witness to the Kingdom of God!
But I am not the One

But you are a lamp—you will light the way

With water you will bless and baptize Him
But I am not worthy

At the river you will hear the voice of God's grace
At the river you will know Him as the Son of God

Yes: I am the messenger
He is the Message

I called for repentance
He brings redemption

I offered to purify
He is the promise

I am a symbol
He is the sacrifice

I offer a sacrament
He is Salvation

March 11, 2011

Read John 1:35-42

Meditation from Rev. Adam Hange

“Fw: You gotta see this!”

It happens less and less these days, but sometimes I still open my email inbox and see a message with a “Fw: Funny Story” in the subject line. It’s usually from some friend or family member whom I love dearly.

When a forwarded email is from someone whom I barely knew I almost never open it. But, I’ll be honest: when it comes from someone close, if I think it’s safe, and especially if I am having a particularly humor-less day...I sometimes give in to my curiosity and open the email just to see what was so good that someone had to forward it to me.

Of course, this phenomenon is what all the social-media companies are banking on these days. “Going viral” is big business. We find books, stories, videos, and websites we like and then share them with those closest to us in our excitement. It’s free advertising for companies and the best kind...because it is personal.

Actually, if it were not for sharing like this we might very well have had eleven instead of the twelve disciples of Jesus we traditionally remember. Reading in today’s passage, Andrew heard about Jesus, and then guess what the first thing is that he did? He went to find his brother Simon. Simon Peter would become a pillar of the early church, but not if his brother hadn’t shared his new “Like” with him.

It’s always risky to share with your friends and family, but some things are just worth forwarding...and God’s love is one of them.

God help me to be as excited about you and bold to share you with my friends and family as I am to share the latest link or email.

March 12, 2011

Read Psalm 42:1-2
Meditation from Tim Tuthill

I

have

been

so

many

times

the Fool

I

fail

to

blush

that

now

I am

a

Fool

for

You

March 13, 2011

Read Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7



FIRST
SUNDAY
OF
LENT

March 14, 2011

Read John 2:1-12

Meditation from Charlene Nevans

Mary is a guest at a wedding, along with Jesus and his disciples. When the wine runs out, she wants to help her hosts solve this problem and avoid embarrassment. Uncertain of how to solve the problem, she calls on her son to help, certain he can solve the problem. But Jesus is surprised at her expectation of him. He responds that, as guests, it's not appropriate for them to get involved.

This is such a human story, revealing as much about Jesus' humanity as his divinity. It invites us to examine our own life situations and the choices we are called upon to make. Aren't we often surprised by what others expect of us? Don't we sometimes feel uncertain about how to respond or unprepared to act upon these requests?

Out of love and respect for a friend or family member, we may decide to respond and take on a challenging task. A shared concern may motivate us to join with others to address a problem within our community or church. The result of our action may surprise us or even feel miraculous. Often it's transformational in our lives and/or in the life of the community.

When we reflect on these situations, we may see that God's hand was guiding us toward this new path or challenging task. At first we were frightened by the risks involved or we felt unprepared for the task. But, trusting God's guidance, we took the first step and found we were capable of the task after all. We were supported in our efforts, synchronicities occurred, and we were inspired by the experience.

God of all of life, help us to listen for your guidance and watch for your outstretched hand as we continue along life's journey. Embolden us to meet each challenge, knowing that you are walking beside us.

March 15, 2011

Read Psalm 48
Meditation from Mary Bright

Stand in awe of the truth of God's love
Told to us by generations before
Seen by us right here, right now
Unfailing, enduring

Tell this truth to those yet to come:
"This God, so magnificent, so strong
Invites each of us to claim relationship
For this God is OUR God
Forever and ever
He will be with us to the end."

*Lord, let my heart rest with confidence
Knowing you are with me always.*

March 16, 2011

Read Deuteronomy 9:13-21

Meditation from Andrew Cleminshaw

When I first read this passage, the golden calf that well known symbol of idolatry, seemed to signal the most promising theme. Then I continued to read and considered how near the descendants of Abraham came to being wiped off the face of the earth and replaced. Considering the jealous nature of God and the powerful injunction against worshipping idols found in the very Ten Commandments inscribed on the tablets Moses carried, it is remarkable that Moses's intercessory prayer saves the Israelites from God's wrath. Moreover, Moses does not, as he does in the Exodus version, resort to political calculation, asking God what the Egyptians and other neighboring groups would think if God killed off the Israelites after luring them into the desert. Here Moses prays and prays for forty days and forty nights, the Biblical equivalent of forever, forswearing food and drink. God hears, and God forgives. Even Aaron, the ringleader, the logical focal point of God's wrath, escapes on the wings of Moses's efforts.

Forgiveness, even when caught dancing around a pagan substitute deity, even when God dwells atop the nearby mountain, even when arguing through their actions that they would like to replace the Ark of the Covenant and center their worship on bovine statuary, if God forgives the Israelites in this situation, is there anything which God will not forgive? This passage presents the ultimate example of forgiveness, of accepting and moving on. What an amazing lesson for us, as we live our lives surrounded by our own and other people's inevitable mistakes.

*God, please grant me the gift of forgiveness.
As I live my imperfect life in this imperfect world
Let me not dwell upon humanity's fleeting flaws
But instead celebrate your eternal blessing and renewal.*

March 17, 2011

Read John 3:16-21

Meditation from Cindy Hill

As children, we are naturally afraid of the dark. We want to clearly see what's in our room . . . who's around our kitchen table . . . what's down the block. As children, it's the unknown, the unseen and the unspoken that scares us most. But we're told to "grow up" and stop being afraid of the dark.

Maybe that's because, as adults, we feel a little safer in the dark. In darkness, we can turn away from painful knowing, we're free from the consequences of risky sharing. In the dark, we feel safe, but we can also sense that darkness weighs a little more each year.

Jesus encourages us to "come to the light," to be known by ourselves, in our relationships and in our communities. Jesus, the master traveler, knows that when we walk in the light of truth, our paths lit by the Holy Spirit, darkness has no heavy hold on us.

I feel so blessed by the children of Plymouth Church. I think God wants us to walk as lightly as their little steps on the way to Children's Message. God wants us to curiously examine cold, squishy things under rocks and invent 5 new ways to play with a broken branch.

In these heavy verses about darkness, condemnation and evil, Jesus tells us that God *wants us to be afraid of the dark*, throw off those covers on our lives, *switch on the light!* It's the only way to illuminate Christ's transforming path from temporary human living to eternal spiritual life.

At the end of our days, as Christians, darkness won't weigh us down and we will be lifted up as the light-weight children of God we are, to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Loving Creator,

Help us to sense the warm light of your presence in the dark hours of our own lives. Help us also, to glow for those who stumble in the darkness, that they might find their way back to your healing light. Amen.

Friday, March 18

Read Psalm 40

Meditation from Gloria Sturghill

I grew up in the Baptist church and honestly don't remember doing much for Lent. I do remember that I started giving up something each year because I'd heard you were supposed to, and not so patiently waiting for Easter Sunday so I could have that thing again. I was one of those "Christmas and Easter only" people and never put much thought into it until after I joined Plymouth.

Each year during Lent, we are reminded of God's love for all of us. Psalm 40 is about David's praise to God for helping him through hardships, and also his sadness because he realizes it's easy to slip into sinful ways and become "surrounded by those who would harm you, put you to shame and confusion and desire your ruin." David realized you need God's love to keep you safe and to deliver you from that sin. Praise to God who will be there to lift you out of the "horrible pit of muck and mire," and who will be your strong foundation when you have faith and when you trust in God in your heart. I don't know about you, but I've had those times in my life where things are overwhelming. To know in your heart that God is always there and will bring you through is pretty powerful. Psalm 40 tells me that – just worship God and be open to all of the mysteries and wonders that surround us; let the world know about God's love for each of us.

Dear God, help us to be open to you, to listen with our hearts, to let your love of us be the foundation of our faith. Help us to remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us.

March 19, 2011

Read Psalm 139

Meditation from Aleksa Kaups

What does it mean to be everywhere, inescapable, forever? It doesn't make sense, not in a secular frame of mind. Air is everywhere, right? Except for where there's something else, like a rock, a piece of wood, or a person. So air isn't everywhere. And if air were inescapable, how could people drown? Or suffocate? They couldn't. So air isn't inescapable. And forever...that's like eternity; so big I can't begin to imagine. As soon as you think you've gotten to the end, there's still one more place you can go. I used to find this incredibly terrifying. I can't hide, and someone is going to know everything about me, even more than I know about myself.

Sounds like a stalker, right? I felt trapped. I could never be alone, having time for just me. I always had to share it with someone, and no matter what, they would always be there.

But here's the thing: God isn't some creepy old man hiding across the street. He's not a karmic police force chasing you across the globe. He's certainly not some hokey mind reader. He's so much more.

He's your best friend. He doesn't have to hide out, because He's got nothing to hide from. He doesn't have to chase you anywhere, because He's simply coming along. And He doesn't have to read your mind, because He already knew anything you were going to think. He's not going to leave you when the going gets tough, and friends like that are hard to find. He loves each of us more than anything, a thought I find comforting.

Dear Lord, thank you for loving us so much you would go anywhere for us, be everywhere for us, comforting us with your love. Thank you for being our best friend. Amen.

March 20, 2011

Read John 3:1-17



SECOND
SUNDAY
OF
LENT

March 21, 2011

Read Psalm 56

Meditation from Erica Barnhill

We live in an adversarial culture. We fight wars on drugs, on obesity, on “the family,” and (according to some) on Christmas. We play fake war on “Call of Duty” even as we ignore the real wars in which our country is engaged. We enthusiastically divide ourselves into red vs. blue, us vs. them, “middle class” vs. everyone else. Frequently our persecution is imagined; playground cries of “it’s not my fault” as children turn into grownups with guest spots on Dr. Phil or too-good-to-be-true gimmicks to help us lose weight or grow hair or become fabulously wealthy.

Our obsession with false adversaries can also drown out the genuine needs and struggles in our world, the things we’d rather pretend didn’t exist: real want, real pain, real violence. This is the persecution the psalmist describes: adversaries who “plan only evil,” who “plot,” “lie in ambush,” and watch “every move, hoping for [the psalmist’s] death.” Heavy stuff.

And while this passage strikes me as a call for perspective when considering the scope of our problems, its message of comfort is not restricted to only those in the most dire of circumstances; instead, the psalmist says with confidence, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you; in God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can flesh do to me?” God doesn’t require that our troubles be catastrophic before calling on God -- rather, God’s love is a constant and sustaining presence in our lives.

Loving God, help me to grow in faith and trust in you, Creator and Sustainer. Amen.

March 22, 2011

Read Jeremiah 2:1-13
Meditation from Chris Karr

Wake up! The signs are right in front of you!

Otherwise, a new prophet will have to answer when our children, our children's children, lament:

“When did it all go wrong? Didn't they smell the dumpsters overflowing with half-eaten food? Who was paying attention when the fish disappeared and the crops failed? Didn't they notice the excrement from their bodies and factories and farms and wells spoiling paradise?

“When did our parents forget who was “Number One”? Why did they waste away their hours in self-absorbed preening? What good did they think all of that stuff would do them? Why didn't they spend time with us instead of buying us things? Why didn't they teach us to say “please” and “thank you” instead of “I want”? Why did they yell instead of listen? Mock instead of learn?

“Why didn't they demand change when their leaders spent trillions on wars and weapons while cutting the last dollars for the sick and elderly? How could they punish children through neglect and indifference for the perceived sins of their parents? How could they think it was right to systematically kill criminal after criminal and call it justice? And how could the supposedly righteous stand by in silence?”

“If only they had cried out to God! If only they had felt the Spirit. If only they had seen the face of Jesus in each other. If only they had accepted the unbelievable grace that could have saved them.”

Lord, forgive us and lead us out of the wasteland. Give me eyes to see You, ears to hear You, hands and voice to do Your will. Give us strength to build the Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

March 23, 2011

Read Jeremiah 3:6-18

Meditation from Heather Kimmel

I can be inconsistent. Despite promises to myself and God, I don't regularly attend worship or read the Bible. Sometimes, in prayer, I fall asleep before reaching "amen." With a baby and a husband in both work and school, Sunday mornings are a comical exercise in futility as we try to both catch up on lost sleep and get ourselves ready to leave the house for a total of less than two hours.

Truthfully, when faced with a destination not strictly requiring my presence, it's easy to give up and stay home. "Maybe next week I'll make it," I say to myself sometimes. But sometimes I say, "Why bother? Does anyone expect me to be there? Does God?"

Here's the crazy part: when I do come, the rewards are so much greater than the effort that I wonder why I consider it an effort at all. Even when I'm half-engaged, listening to the sermon with one ear and to Anna with the other, even when I have to leave before coffee hour, even when I can't come early and I miss the Adult Education classes I really wanted to go to, the rewards are great. When I worship in a group, my faith refreshes, I pray from my heart, and the Bible is made relevant-- so much so that I feel these words from Jeremiah entreating me: "Return, O faithless children, says the Lord, for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

Dear Lord, help me remember the great rewards awaiting me as I work to strengthen my faith, especially during this season of Lent. Help me remember you are merciful and welcome me with love. Amen.

March 24, 2011

Read John 5:19-29

Meditation from Joslyn Grostic

I was a devoutly religious child, riding my bike to church alone on Sundays, sitting attentively in the front row, finding comfort in making the sign of the cross: “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

By 15, I started developing the rational mind of adolescence. I asked my religious mentors questions, but found the answers one-dimensional. I was sad and angry, feeling the world I loved so much had let me down. I walked out of church, starting on a long and winding journey which eventually led me back.

Much of that journey was spent venerating logic and intellect. At a certain point I reached the end of the road and still felt something missing. I had let my head do all the talking, shutting out my heart’s voice. It’s no wonder, because the heart voice is much quieter. It doesn’t need to shout like my mind does. It carries wisdom, knowing from a deeper level. I began listening to my heart. Don’t get me wrong, I love logic and intellect, but it isn’t the final word. I connect with God through my heart, with the help of my mind.

John 5:19-29 embodies the Trinity. I can’t wrap my mind around the Trinity; it defies logic. I feel into the Trinity from my heart. As Richard Rohr says in The Naked Now, “the Father is the Father, but the Father is also the Son, and, in fact, he is the Father and the Son at the same time, which relationship is, in fact, the Holy Spirit. If actually encountered and meditated on, the doctrine of God as Trinity breaks down the binary system of the mind.” I happily embrace this mystery from my heart.

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

March 25, 2011

Read Romans 2:25-3:18
Meditation from Ry Snow

This passage has both positive and negative aspects, although, ultimately, it seems positive: hope, faith and trust in God.

One positive statement calls circumcision an “...*action of the heart, in the spirit...whose praise is not of men, but of God,*” implying that circumcision symbolizes, or actually is, an act of faith, a commitment to God, not merely a physical ritual. Although one has been circumcised, without spirit or heart, it is unacceptable in the eyes of God.

Even in negative portions, where Paul calls all men liars and sinners, and enumerates their many egregious sins, I find something positive. That is the exhortation -- not a prayer: “Let God be proved true.”

This entire section is especially appropriate for Lent, when we turn inwardly in preparation for the Resurrection. Here, some portions seem as applicable to the world of today as they were to the world of Paul and the Romans: “Destruction and misery are in their ways;... the way of peace they have not known;” and finally, “there is no fear of God before their eyes.” All negative, and rather depressing, observations.

Yet, isn't the message here asking us to ponder our negative thoughts and actions during this period? Doesn't it imply that we can seek serenity, courage, and wisdom? Finally, doesn't it suggest that we can ask for forgiveness for all our wrongs?

This, to me, is the true message of this passage, hopefully, preparing us to renew our faith on Easter.

May my heart and spirit be open to the Truth.

May I be forgiven for all harm I have inflicted, knowingly or unknowingly, and may I forgive all who have, knowingly or unknowingly, inflicted harm on me.

May I be granted serenity, courage, and wisdom, so that all beings and myself may experience peace and joy.

March 26, 2011

Read Jeremiah 5:20-31

Meditation from Tracy Williams

The rich and the powerful persuade us to be fearful about the wrong things. Dutifully taking their cue, the less powerful among us blame the weakest for our nation's present state. Immigrants are scapegoated, environmentalists impugned, the poor mocked, and unions threatened with evisceration. The wealthy use our continuing economic crisis to decide who the winners and losers will be for generations to come. We are like the people of Israel and Judah in *Jeremiah 5:20-31*, allowing ourselves to be deceived by false prophets, greedy men, and their hires. We blame the less fortunate "other" for our troubles. We are seduced by arguments about limiting employee benefits instead of asking, "How can benefits extend to us all?" Meanwhile, we barely grumble when yet another CEO is handed his golden parachute after bankrupting a company.

Jeremiah was compelled by God to speak truth to power. He had no choice about being a prophet. If we are truly honest with ourselves as Christians, we have no choice but to be instruments of God now. We must practice Jesus's devotion to the needy. We must divorce ourselves from the common fantasy of being like the rich and, instead, embrace our common reality: we're a lot closer to knowing the experience of being poor firsthand. None of us knows when our end will come, but we do know when a life well-lived begins. It is when we find the will to remember prayerfully what Jesus calls us to do for one another. It is within.

Most merciful and loving God, help me to live by your holy plan and not be lead astray by the ways of the world. Help me to remember and honor the least before the first, and to become an instrument of justice during these difficult times.

March 27, 2011

Read Romans 5:1-11



THIRD
SUNDAY
OF
LENT

March 28, 2011

Read Jeremiah 7:1-15

Meditation from Rev. Adam Hange

“I’m moving out!”- God

In a sense, the church building is just a building like any other building. It is made from brick, stone, wood and plaster like most any other structure in our community. The elements are all the same. It has a foundation, walls, windows and a roof. It might be more ornate than other buildings, depending on the tradition, but it remains only a building.

And yet there is a reason most people prefer a church with a steeple instead over a school gymnasium for a wedding. Both function in the same way. Both will keep you dry if it rains. But our emotional reactions to the buildings aren’t the same at all. This is because a structure that is specifically built as a place of worship is special to us, because it has been set aside to be a place of divine significance. It is more than a building. It is a symbol.

To me, the church building stands for justice, equality, acceptance, and community. It stands as a refuge, a beacon, and a garden in which to grow. It is to be a place of beauty, love, grace, joy, and peace. But when we fail to love our neighbor, when we fail to end the oppression of the weak, when we begin to follow after other gods of our own making, that building becomes a shell of what it could be. Throughout history, people of faith have built amazing structures which captivate and illuminate. Yet time and again God has threatened to “move out” if we forget our mission. So let us remember our mission.

God of love and justice, help us to create beauty both within and without the walls of your temple.

March 29, 2011

Read Psalm 78:1-39

Meditation from Jeannie Clarkson

Each time I read this passage, I'm struck by the imperative given to God's people to share their faith with their children and grandchildren. "We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." (v. 4)

It's always been a great regret in my life that I wasn't brought up in the church, and that God was never discussed in my family. At age 17, in a high school French class, I was asked to consider the existence of God. This spurred a fourteen year journey of questions, a variety of answers, church visits to many, many denominations until finally I arrived in a pew at Plymouth Church. I knew immediately that I had found my spiritual home.

Several years ago, my parents asked my siblings and me, "Why do you all go to church when you weren't raised in the church?" It was probably a rhetorical question, but they got a very thoughtful and definitive answer from all three of us. My sister (who is the youngest and gets away with anything) retorted, "Why didn't you give us a choice?"

Now that I'm an adult, I want to share my faith as God asks us to in Psalm 78. I don't have any children of my own, but I do have four nieces and three godchildren and all the youth of Plymouth Church. "[H]e commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God." (v. 5-7)

Dear Lord, help me to be the best Christian I can be, with a steadfast heart and a devoted spirit, and let me share my faith with the next generation. Amen.

March 30, 2011

Read John 8:12-20

Meditation from Roberta Gilles

CONFIDENCE. Jesus knows who He is. Jesus knows who sent Him. Jesus knows what He knows. Jesus does not back down to the “who do you think you are” attitude of the Pharisees. Standing firm in that knowledge Jesus invites us to follow Him into the light to keep us from stumbling in the darkness.

Some days I am surely in the light. Some days I am surely in the darkness. Most days I am confident. All days I am human.

JUDGMENT. Yes, I can relate to the Pharisees! Can you? I encourage you to pick up the New Century Hymnal some Sunday and turn to page 412. “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” Verse six says “*God is God’s own interpreter.*” Does that mean that we do not need to exercise good judgment? No, but it may remind us that our own humanness and lack of perspective may not necessarily be providing the information needed to rightly interpret those “who do you think you are” moments. Let’s leave some of that judgment to God and open our spirits and our eyes. Being guided by The Light the truth shall be made plain.

KNOWLEDGE. Jesus says to the Pharisees, “*You do not know me or my Father.*” Where are you in your relationship with Jesus? We are welcome on the path that is a journey to the Cross. Read the scripture. Be present in the temple, on the mountain top, in the streets. Witness the miracles.

BELIEVE. The day will come when you know Him so well. Maundy Thursday will come. Good Friday will come. The pain will be so exquisite that you can barely breathe.

REJOICE! Easter will come. The joy will be so exquisite that you can barely breathe.

Dear Lord,

What a friend we have in Jesus.

Blessed assurance Jesus is mine.

Amen

March 31, 2011

Read Jeremiah 10:23-24

Meditation from Kendalle Cobb

There have been times in my life when I have not been able to see how I was ever going to get to my goal. Jeremiah 10:23-24 reminds me that even though I cannot figure it out, God knows my strengths and my faults. God knows how best to use each of our gifts.

When I was 15, after recovering from ankle surgery, I gave up training to become a professional ballet dancer to pursue academics and a career in orthopedics. In retrospect, from my earliest days, my interests, my behaviors, and my attributes all pointed to becoming a family physician, but I did not see it. I am grateful that God shoves the path in my face until I get it.

Really, God consistently, lovingly, and gently provides clues to lead us to a future that maximizes our ability to share the gifts that we alone can bring to the world. God is not some never satisfied teacher or parent who wants us to cry “uncle.” It is easy to put on God this angry, sarcastic character, but God knows that negativity can incapacitate us. That is not what God wants for any of us. God wants us to thrive and to feel and spread God’s love wherever we go.

There are things that only we can do, and the great thing about God is that God knows the right path that is just for us. God is able to discern and judge our gifts, our talents, and to lead us where we are meant to be.

Loving and gracious God, keep us mindful that good things are in our future, even when we are scared and overwhelmed, and that You will use our gifts well and wisely.

April 1, 2011

Read Psalm 91

Meditation from Joanne Baranovic

How wonderful that we are loved and protected by God!
Remember the old song that tells how God holds each of us in His hands? Not just any god, but the God above all gods. Being held in the hands of God is such a source of comfort for my soul. I cannot be comforted by the god of money, the god of good times, or any other earthly god. I am comforted by the God above all gods.

My enemies may surround me and others may fall or fail before my eyes. But the God above all gods shelters and protects me from all evil. I live in the hands of God. Although there always has been much to fear – fear of war, disease, of isolation and loneliness - we are assured that the God above all gods sends his angels to be with us and protect us wherever we go. His angels hold our hands to keep us from slipping, or from stumbling against the rocks as we walk. His angels hold us up to the God above all gods to be abundantly blessed.

We can confidently walk through life content in the blessings bestowed upon us by the God above all gods. We are certain that because we love Him, He will rescue us; that because we trust in Him, He will make us great; that because we call on Him, He will answer.

Oh Lord God, thank you for your protection, love and salvation. You satisfy me with a full life and pour your blessings upon my soul.

April 2, 2011

Read John 8:47-59

Meditation from Chris Grostic

“Who do you think you are?” – John 8:53

For ages, prophets and teachers have told us God is creator and ruler of heaven and earth, above all and beyond all, transcendent and awesome. We can experience this ourselves, in the grandeur of nature, say, or the wonder of worship. But we can also learn it and recite it as a belief, an idea disconnected from our lives.

For ages, prophets and teachers have told us God is also our deepest self, closer to us than we are to ourselves. This is the God that Moses met, the “I AM” from the depth of being that sent him back to the Israelites. (Exodus 3:14) This is the God that Pharisees confront in Jesus: “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58) Closer to us than we are to ourselves, the ever-present unborn and undying depth of our own very being.

We can learn and recite this, too. The Pharisees of John’s account learned scripture, recited the right beliefs about the God of Abraham and the prophets. They even seem humble – how dare someone claim to be “greater than our father Abraham!” Who do you think you are?

But at bottom is a truth that can’t be recited as a belief, only experienced, known, and embodied. And that truth is a wonder to which you and I are all invited. The Great I AM is your deepest self, closer to you than you are to yourself. Jesus refuses to tolerate that in you that would deny it, mincing no words: “If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you.” Accepting no belief as the final word, he calls you to discover your deepest self.

*Who do you think you are?
Be still and know.*

April 3, 2011

Read Ephesians 5:8-14



FOURTH
SUNDAY
OF
LENT

April 4, 2011

Read Jeremiah 16:10-21

Meditation from Sharon Midura

On first read it appears the vengeful Old Testament Yahweh is not Jesus' loving Abba. It isn't God who is confused, it's us. In this passage Jeremiah tells us God is sending the Israelites into exile. They broke their covenant by worshiping idols. Immediately following this pronouncement God reassures his people there will come a time when they will be able to return to the Promised Land.

What if we shift our thinking from vengeful punishment to loving discipline?

I believe God is using this as a teachable moment. Jeremiah's Prayer of Confidence shows us how. Jeremiah tells us seeking refuge in God gets us through trouble. Our parents prepared us for life by letting us make our own mistakes, learning from them, and growing stronger. God does the same here. After all, he already said the Israelites will come back home after they learned their lesson and turned from their idols. Saying sorry isn't enough. Repentance takes action, a radical change of heart, trusting in God. It's this trust that gives us the strength to stand up and start on the arduous journey back home. Otherwise, we are stuck in the insanity of repeating our mistakes, wallowing in self pity and despair.

Jesus was sacrificed for us. To live out the resurrection as the Truth, we need to keep faith with God as our refuge, just as Jesus did. By owning our mistakes, we can be transformed through repentance and walk more closely with our Abba in the Promised Land.

Dear Abba,

Please forgive me when I give up on you and become lost by turning to my own idols for comfort. Thank you for always leaving a light on so I can find my way back to the promised land. I'm unworthy of your grace that goes beyond all human understanding. Amen.

April 5, 2011

Read Romans 7:13-25

Meditation from Reggie Williams

We wrestle with our pasts. We all meant well, but fell short. We hurt others for gain. Ignored pleas for help. Gave in to pleasures of the night. In Romans 7:13-25, Paul openly struggled with his sins, acknowledging how sin was at the very core of his being. In doing so, he showed us a path to faith. Don't expect to find trumpets a-blowing and angels pirouetting about on that path, though. It's probably more like Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*. A well-meaning sinner exposed, he doggedly pursues the one he knows can save him. Blocked at every turn, he finally finds her, one vow away from marrying 1967's version of "The Bachelor." They dash away, and he is saved. But as they sit hand-in-hand, silent, his face says "Now what?"

A beautiful woman hitched her wagon to mine. If I am to be punished for my sins, she'll be punished too. Is that fair? These thoughts join my relentless worries about health and money. I sometimes hear myself uttering, "Help." The word leaves my lips, but no one hears. Or do they?

"You don't need help, Daddy!" my five-year old playfully reminds me.

I don't need help. I have help. We all do. With God's help, we will overcome the sin within. Paul in Romans, reminds us of God's presence. But we must be honest about our struggles with sin, help others at every turn, and acknowledge Jesus. God does not intend for us to submit to discontent. But He does intend for us to feel it and overcome it.

Stand with me, almighty God, as I wrestle with sin. Forgive me and bless those I have wronged. Give me the strength to be righteous and humble, and the desire to serve you always.

April 6, 2011

Read John 6:27-40

Meditation from Doris Vargo

I was in elementary school when I first heard the phrase “manna from heaven.” I did not know the Bible reading; I was not raised in a religious household, but the phrase came from a story I read, or perhaps from a song I heard. That was when music teachers in public school could use a song or even a hymn in class, without objection. I did not know what this “manna” was. I thought maybe it was oatmeal or whole wheat toast, surely something wholesome, good for you. I was not religious or spiritual but I loved fairy tales, even believed in magic up to a point. So the idea of someone or some power coming to the rescue of hungry people appealed to my sense of fairness. A world with “manna from heaven” must be a good world, I reasoned in my third grade mind.

As an adult, of course, I take a totally different meaning from those words. My faith is still evolving. But I believe that Jesus or God or something in the human spirit exhorts us, inspires us to feed the hungry and heed the cries of those who thirst for justice. I believe this is the Christian way and, indeed, the way of all who follow the laws of a God of love and forgiveness. I believe this is what God wants all humans to do and be on the path to everlasting life.

Lord, forgive us our shortcomings. Let us show the spirit which calls us to honor our neighbors everywhere. Let us be generous always and accept the spirit within us which fills us with God's Love.

April 7, 2011

Read Psalm 69
Meditation from Michael Parry

I love David, probably because he reminds me a bit of myself. It seems like David was always either at the height of joy and confidence, or in the depths of despair...either at the top of the mountain, or the bottom of the valley. Honestly, do you remember David ever saying “Ho hum, another boring day as King of Israel.”? If he were around today, we might diagnose him as having Bipolar Disorder.

Psalm 69 probes both of these extremes. Verses 1-21 are a cry to God for deliverance from foes that outnumber the hairs on his head (v. 4) although David seems to admit some responsibility for his circumstances (v. 5). In verses 22-29, it appears that David wants God to trap his enemies so that the consequences of their actions would fall on their own heads. Finally, in verses 30-36, David is back to praising God because he knows “the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his captive people.” David sees a future in which God has saved Zion and rebuilt the cities of Judah, in which the Children of Israel may settle and those who love his name may dwell.

During Lent, the comparison between the tribulations of our Lord Jesus and those of David are inescapable. Like David, Jesus was scorned, disgraced and shamed; even given vinegar for his thirst. We can take comfort in the knowledge that as tough as things get, we have something in common with David: an intercessor and advocate before God’s throne, pleading our case. And armed with that knowledge and assurance, it’s possible to spend more time on top of the mountain, and less time in the valley!

Loving God, whether we’re in the deepest valley or on top of the highest mountain, may we always dwell in the shadow of your love and grace. Amen.

April 8, 2011

Romans 8:28-39

Meditation from Karen Schmauder

“If God is for us, who is against us?” Let me start counting. Just this morning an irate driver scowled as he passed me, dissatisfied with my speed. Later I saw the frown and eye rolling from the clerk watching me fumble for the change in the bottom of my purse. At the last election, several people gave me the silent treatment because I voted differently from them. And on numerous occasions, my kids have been furious at the “house rules.” I hate to admit it, but there is a list of others who don’t like things I have said or not said, done or not done. Although God has provided us with friendships and with persons in our lives who enjoy our company, have fun with us, and who almost never get angry with us, even our best friend is sometimes ‘against us.’

It’s comforting to know that God is never against us. Although it is sometimes hard to feel his hugs, He is always there, ready to love, comfort, forgive, guide, teach. He continually places something or someone positive in my life, such as a gorgeous sunrise, a child’s smile, someone’s compliment, and I know He is with me. Unlike so many of us, God never judges. He accepts me, flaws and all. He gives me everything I need through Jesus Christ. How comforting is that? Very! Deep down, I know that no one can separate us from God’s steadfast, everlasting love.

Dear God, may we remember, especially when we feel the sting of hatred and judgment from others, that you are here for us, loving and ready to accept us as we are. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

April 9, 2011

Read John 6:60-71
Meditation from Cindy Hill

I was going to write on Psalm 33, rejoicing in the Lord, with music and shouts of joy! But John 6:60-71 kept pestering me. Jesus had just been deserted by nearly all of his followers, who grew bewildered by his recent teachings. Jesus sat with his last twelve friends on earth. “Do you also want to go away?” he asked them gently.

That question reached across time to touch me. Jesus had just lost his large following. He was patiently preparing his Jewish disciples for a spiritual paradigm shift to come. Unknown to his disciples, Jesus was also preparing himself for betrayal, suffering and death on his own path.

As Jesus’ followers drifted away, Simon Peter struggled with doubts too. Nevertheless, the disciple lovingly reassured his friend and spiritual leader, “We have come to believe and know you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus’ God nature responded, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” In that one sentence, Jesus revealed that his relationships with each disciple were an essential part of his path. In one sentence, Jesus described his profound love for a flawed humanity that he knew would betray him.

On my own walk, I can feel as bewildered as Jesus’ followers, trying to understand the calls of God, the ways of the Spirit, and the teachings of Jesus. It stung me a bit when Jesus called Judas a “devil” since every one of us has betrayed ourselves or another. But Jesus tells us we are chosen, even as we struggle with sin and confusion. He shows us how a compassionate Love can keep us attuned to our own spiritual natures, even when the world turns away.

Thank you, Jesus. Because you lived a human life, we get to experience the profound love of our Creator.

April 10, 2011

Read John 11:1-45



FIFTH
SUNDAY
OF
LENT

April 11, 2011

Read Psalm 31

Meditation from Joslyn Grostic

Each day I try to stay close to God, or “plugged into the source.” When I’m plugged in, I’m awake. Everything is in Technicolor and I’m awash in gratitude for all that God gives me, even those things I wouldn’t have necessarily chosen for myself. How do I stay plugged in? There are a number of ways that work for me.

I try to start each day with contemplative prayer. Stilling my chattering mind helps me to start each day open to receiving God’s will, instead of starting the day focused on my own to-do list. Thanks to the Artist’s Way, I have reconnected to journaling. When I write without self-censorship I tap into my creative energy that comes from the Creator. I practice yoga. When I keep my physical body open, I am a better channel for God’s flow. Staying connected with positive people who are also focused on growing into God is essential. And then there is service: When I get outside of myself and help others, I realize that we’re all connected by God’s long thread of grace.

What does this have to do with Psalm 31? This love poem to God is written by someone who is saved by God’s love. The Psalmist woke up from his suffering and realized there is nothing to fear. I can relate. I didn’t always know how to plug into God. I yearned for something bigger than my small world of “false idols,” but I was stumbling in the dark trying to find it. God’s grace turned on the light. I feel the joy in the writer’s heart as he recognizes that God is his “rock of refuge”: that when he’s plugged into what is real, life lights up.

God, for this day, help me plug into the source.

April 12, 2011

Read Psalm 121

Meditation from Jeff Pollock

This Psalm always gives me a renewed sense of perspective. Our lives are heap full of troubles and travail. Despite all our best plans, events take a turn that we cannot control and screw things up. Force of will gets us only so far.

But as limited as we are, there is a God who is without limitation. And yet a God who cares about us and watches over us. Imagine a Lord who “makes heaven and earth” and yet still looks after you and me. God is so far beyond comprehension but the Psalmist says that God “will keep your life.” If God is our keeper, it suddenly gives us a different perspective. Our “going out and coming in” are kept by an eternal God from this time on and forevermore.

Dear God, Give us the eyes to see and the mind to know that you are both infinite and yet watching over each of us. We pray that you give us this perspective.

April 13, 2011

Read Psalm 119:145 -176
Meditation from Linda Tuthill

All We Like Sheep

He stands hunched, heart bowed
down with shame. How brash
he had been to vow steadfast love

for the Master and his teaching.
Now, with the third crow of the cock,
he cannot raise his eyes.

The deserter roosts in his own chest,
not in those he had suspected
would deny the Lord of Life.

Yesterday the Teacher's compassionate
gaze embraced him. Before the cross,
before the tomb swallowed

the punctured hands and lanced side,
destroying hopes for an earthly kingdom.
Had the promise evaporated?

*You are Peter the Rock; and on this rock
I will build my church.*

The sturdy foundation stone had turned
to rubble. And Peter can't yet grasp
how the Word outlasts human failings.

Beyond the tomb, Peter feels again
Christ's gaze upon him, hears
the three-times repeated question:

Do you love me?
And three times, remorseful Peter replies,
You know that I love you,

prepared now to do the Saviour's bidding:
Feed my lambs
Tend my sheep
Feed my sheep.

April 14, 2011

Read Psalm 131

Meditation from Rev. Lois H. Annich

I am hard pressed to add anything to this little gem of a psalm. It makes me think of the first verse of “Simple Gifts”--

*Tis the gift to be simple,
'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.*

As I meditate on the psalm I wonder why we complicate our lives so much. Why do we occupy ourselves with things “too great and too marvelous” for us?

I’ve learned the hard way that chaos and complications are sure signs that I’ve overstepped my boundaries. When my ego runs amuck I get embroiled in dramas and try to exert power where I have none. It’s seductive and ultimately destructive to think I can control other people and situations. It’s also a form of practical atheism— if I’m so high and mighty where in the world is God?

This Lent I’m trying to be as calm and quiet as a little baby at its mother’s breast. I’m trying to keep my eyes on God and not react to people and situations in grandiose or anxious ways. I’ve made a commitment to bring myself back to this image of peace, one day at a time, sometimes even one moment at a time. I can talk a good game about trusting God. This Lent I am challenging myself to live out that trust by resting in God.

*Loving God, you hold us close to your heart like a mother holds her child. Grant us grace to rest humbly and quietly in you.
Amen.*

April 15, 2011

John 12:1-10

Meditation from Chris Grostic

Why not sell everything you have and give it all to the poor?

Because you are meant for so much more.

Albert Einstein said that problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them. There's despair and hope in that. The despair: having created global social, economic, environmental, and even spiritual problems, it seems impossible that we'll ever find our way out. The hope: as our mothers and grandmothers did, we can dissolve our current threats if we can embrace new perspectives and grow into new ways of thinking and new modes of being in the world.

Making that move toward new ways of thinking and being requires a turn inward and a turn to each other. We must develop our own innate capacities, expanding our circle of care ever wider and diving into our spiritual source ever deeper. We must do the same as communities, from families to churches out to the Kosmos as a whole. And Jesus is our model. Always expanding wider the circle of care, always diving deeper into the Source of All Being, he challenges us

Spending time, energy, and money on our faith, on our spiritual practice, can certainly be a self-serving ego trip. After all, faith without action is dead. (James 2:17) But turning outward while never turning inward guarantees that our fundamental problems remain.

And so when Jesus shows up at our table – in contemplation, in conflict (with friends and enemies), in study, in love – we rightly pour out the finest we have, devoting the best of ourselves to embodying the further evolution of Spirit.

*Oh Source of Vision, Newness, and Creativity,
I open all that I am to your inspiration.*

April 16, 2011

Read Psalm 137
Meditation from Sally Menges

I need to share my evolving, creative process over the past days. Psalm 137 was always a favorite: I respond emotionally, intellectually, artistically, and spiritually to the river image. It provides a deep journey into a soul-seeking connectedness to a loving God.

This Psalm reminds me of Paulo Coelho's novel, By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept, a radiant story describing the redemptive, divine power of love. It embraces my present journey of 'weeping,' as I ask myself the questions of when, where, why, and how do I weep? Equally important, "Who weeps with me?" Happily, this has become a daily practice.

Then I searched our library for art books. These books reaffirmed my need for visual depictions of Christ's life -- Biblical scenes illustrating our Lenten journey, such as Jesus Bearing His Cross, His Crucifixion, The Disposition, Scenes of the Women at the Tomb, and, finally, The Resurrection and Ascension. Oh, the beauty these simple expressions of sorrowful weeping reveal. Music such as the 'The Messiah,' Requiems, and Missa Solemnis evoke comfort: weeping tears flow naturally as we listen to our heart's emotional response.

In Psalm 137, the psalmist, returning from Exile in Babylon, remembers the music, weeping, and his people's homesickness for Jerusalem and God's Temple. Such is our universal yearning to return home, safely and honestly. May we weep and live as Thy Will, not mine.

Prayer from Paulo Coelho:

"The more we love, the closer we come to spiritual experience. . . . They have been able to sing, to laugh, and to pray out loud; . . . They have been joyful ---because those who love conquer the world and have no fear of loss. . . . To love is to be in communion with the other and to discover in that other the spark of God."

April 17, 2011

Read Matthew 21:1-11



PALM SUNDAY

April 18, 2011

Read John 12:9-19

Meditation from Jim Riggs

The crowds welcomed Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem shouting, "Hosanna!" Later in this John passage Jesus speaks about His death, but the crowds did not know what would happen a few days later. Most of us have been there at some point in our lives. That moment when things seem right then the phone rings and we hear the news of the death of a loved one or our spouse/partner comes home from work to announce they have lost their job or we learn from a doctor the news of a diagnoses.

Being raised Lutheran we would sing this hymn every Holy Week:

"You have suffered great affliction and have borne it patiently, even death by crucifixion, fully to atone for me; for you chose to be tormented that my doom should be prevented. Thousand, thousand thanks are due, dearest Jesus, unto you."

(Christ the Life of All the Living)

For me, the good news in this John passage is each day we have the opportunity to welcome Jesus into our lives through our actions, our deeds, and our prayers. Even when we receive news that jolts us we know that Jesus died for us, Jesus still loves us, and Jesus walks with us. We can boldly proclaim, "thousand, thousand thanks are due, dearest Jesus, unto you!"

Holy and loving God, unlike the crowds many years ago we know what will happen to your Son this week. And we know it is "I" who crucified your Son. In our joyful times help us to show our thanks. In our sorrow, help us to know you do not leave us alone. Amen.

April 19, 2011

Read Psalm 6

Meditation from Norma Storer

I was more of a Psalm 23 person. It provided such comfort. The cursing, angry with God psalms did not sit well with me. I was brought up to respect my elders, not talk back to my parents, and control my anger. I never felt right yelling at God.

But while working at a hospital in Pennsylvania, I met Nicole, an angry teenager dying from AIDS. She was a star basketball player and college-bound student. Nicole was diagnosed with AIDS early in the epidemic, there was only one medication, and she did not tolerate the AZT. Her health deteriorated rapidly after her diagnosis. After gaining her trust, I learned she had endured abuse and rape from the same man who infected her mother. And her mother was dying.

After her mother's death, Nicole's health grew worse. With no one to care for her, she ended up in our in-patient hospice unit. Nicole had every reason to be angry. But Nicole had also been brought up in the church, had a strong faith, and knew her Bible. One day, when her eyesight was failing, Nikki asked me to read to her from her Bible. I started with Psalm 23. After the second verse she yelled, "STOP." She informed me in no uncertain terms the only Psalm she could take that day was Psalm 6. We read it over and over before she died. Some days it was only the first couple of verses; other days we read until the end. Psalm 6 is embedded in my soul. As Nicole yelled at God, "Why me, it's not fair," she never stopped believing God was with her in her fear, anger, and pain.

Nicole made clear that anger was part of any honest relationship, including one with God. Jesus, too, felt abandoned by God and alone on the cross. And while we know the cross was not the final word, we should beware, lest we fast-forward to the comfort and assurance, breaking with emotional honesty.

Dear God, when injustice reigns, our "mattresses are soaked with tears," and anger burns within, keep us faithful. Amen.

April 20, 2011

Read John 12:27-36
Meditation from Tim Tuthill

Madonna and Child

Halos

Small hands

Soft feet

 pierced-

Red nailprints

 fresh!

Mary smiles,

 a tear falls

 in-

 to

 for-

 ever

Based on Carpathian icon exhibit
Budapest, Hungary 1992

April 21 - Maundy Thursday

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Meditation from Dr. Shawnthea Monroe



Remember Me.

The night my grandmother Grace died, she looked at all of us gathered around her bed and cheerfully asked, “Who are you and why are you here?” She was almost 92 and her sharp mind was starting to go. We laughed. “We’re here to see you, Grace.” “Well isn’t that nice.” We made chatty small talk as we assessed her condition. Grace had been slowly declining for months and seemed frail and weak, but not in imminent danger. As we were leaving, my father said, “Goodnight mom. We love you.” She smiled and said, “I know you do. Remember that.”

The call came in the middle of the night. Grace had died in her sleep.

In the wake of her death, I often thought about that last conversation, her last words. “I know you do. Remember that.” I do remember – I remember Grace and how much she loved me and how much I loved her.

The disciples didn’t know that last supper was THE last supper, even though there were signs all around. The tragic and horrifying events of the coming day had yet to unfold. What they knew is they were all gathered around the table with Jesus, their beloved teacher. After the arrest, after the trial, after the torture, after the crucifixion – after...that’s when they thought about that last meal and his words. “Do this and remember me.” And they remembered.

To re-member literally means to put something back together. It’s the opposite of dismember. There are forces in this world that try to pull me apart, experiences that tear at my faith, people who break me down. Then I remember – I remember Grace and all the people I have loved, all the people who have loved me. And I remember Jesus, who, on the night he knew he would be handed over to suffer and die, looked with love at his disciples and said, “Remember me.” And I re-member.

By God’s grace and with those words we are made whole.

April 22, 2011 - Good Friday



1 Peter 1:10-20

Meditation from Bill Green

“Though all afflictions are evils in themselves, yet they are good for us, because they discover to us our disease and tend to our cure.” (John Tillotson, early Archbishop of Canterbury) This is very hard to accept. Is this to justify the ravages of suffering and injustice?

But the Cross gives us pause. There’s a sign of evil if ever there was one. It stands amid all the anguish of the world—and our own. Wherever anyone suffers, God suffers, and Jesus embodies that suffering. To get a sense of what this means, check the Web for Louis Armstrong or Lena Horne singing, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows my sorrow, nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows but Jesus, Glory hallelujah.”

The Bible says powerful enemies and sometimes suffering itself will be used to jolt God’s people into awareness of their plight. What is bad and wrong is used by God to bring about what is right and good. But not if the struggle is rationalized or romanticized, minimized or denied. Evil is real, pain is real, loss is real, injustice abounds. It is in the facing of these realities that the strongest hope is given us. God goes with us through dark valleys, not over, under, or around them.

The Cross is the focus of our sanctuary—and the focus of our faith, a faith that reverberates through the chaos and catastrophes of the years. It declares, as the poet put it: “death shall have no dominion.” Out of the agony of suffering comes the ecstasy of new life, stronger and better than we have known before. Out of Good Friday comes Easter.

Gracious God, may I see your Cross in evil and suffering, and find your promise of hope and new life. Amen.

April 23, 2011

Read Psalm 27

Meditation from Norma Nelson

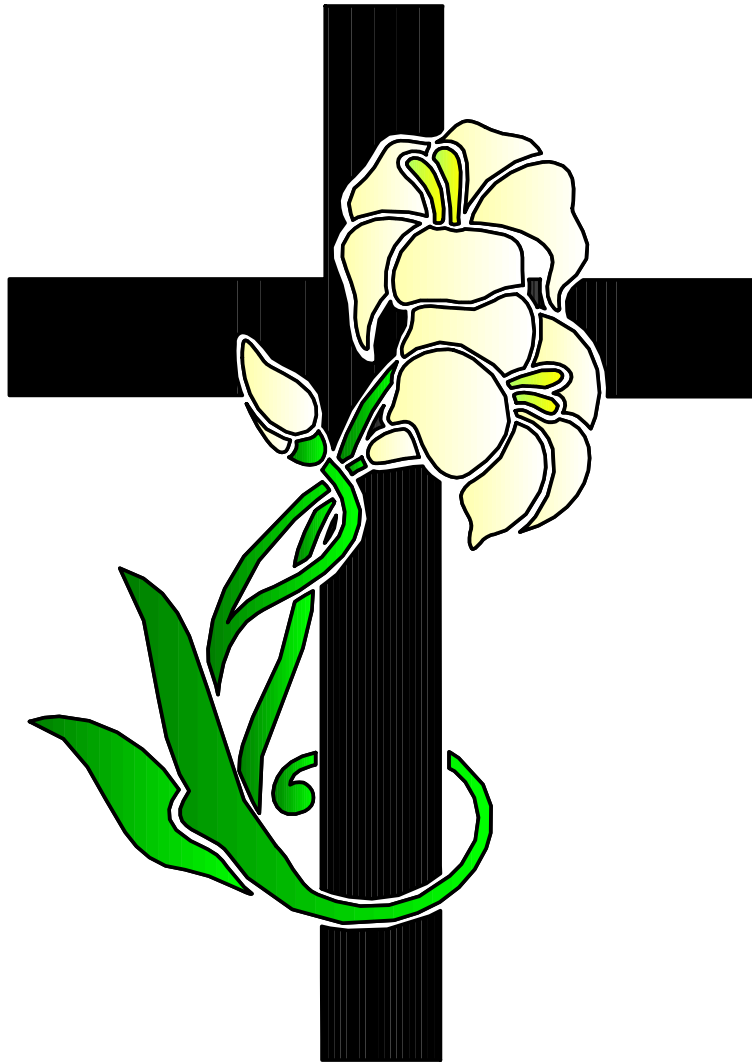
On this day before Easter, we contemplate Psalm 27, and wonder if Jesus, during his final hours, remembered David's confident words of faith. The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? . . . Wait for the Lord . . . and let your heart take courage David also said his enemies would stumble and fall. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, hanged himself; but what befell Jesus' other adversaries and foes who perpetrated his death by crucifixion? Why didn't God protect Jesus from them?

Christians, by prayerfully studying the Holy Bible, can reconcile the apparent contradiction between David's Psalm 27 message and Jesus' "Good Friday" reality of taunting, brutal beating and horrific death. Jesus knew he had a higher calling; knew and accepted his being as Savior of the world; and he asked only for God's forgiveness of his murderers and for God's will to be done with his life. Through many Biblical examples of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, Christians can interpret relevance and "do-ability" for their own lives in these challenging times.

As we approach the day when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, the Bible is replete with timeless lessons for us to consider, e.g.: Jesus is the light (John 8:12); God's protection (Ephesians 6:10); Trust (Proverbs 3:5-6); Retaliation (Matthew 5:39); Forgiveness (Colossians 3:13); Thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18); Understanding (Proverbs 2); Goodness of the Lord (Matthew 7:7-8); Patience (James 1:2-4); and, especially, Romans 12:19, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

Gracious and merciful God. We are eternally grateful for the words of your servants like David, and for the sacrifice of your son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Give us the desire, the will and the ability to share your word and abundant love, and guide the world's leaders to a peaceful, earthly coexistence for all creatures. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Easter Sunday



“Alleluia. Christ is Risen!”

My Own Reflections

Plymouth Church, U.C.C.
2860 Coventry Road
Shaker Heights, Ohio 44120-2200
www.plymouthchurchucc.org