



Lenten Reflections

2024

Wednesday February 14 Ash Wednesday: Psalm 32 or 143; Amos 5:6-15; Hebrews 12:1-14

“Forty days and forty nights Thou wast fasting in the wild; forty days and forty nights tempted, and yet undefiled.” The words of this lenten hymn, by George Smytten, call to mind Jesus’ struggle in the wilderness as he wrestled with the work that lay before him; the many ways he would be tempted to abandon that work; and the price he would pay for holding fast. But hold fast Jesus did! Because his struggle served a much greater purpose in the working out of God’s love: that through Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension the life of God’s creation would become eternally part of the life of God’s own Spirit. Or, to put that another way: we became children of God because Jesus was prepared to do whatever it might take to be a true brother to us all--and all of creation was eternally thereby transformed.

It is thus quite fitting that Ash Wednesday falls this year on Valentine's Day, for even though Ash Wednesday is a day we traditionally observe with fasting and penitence, at the heart of this day--and in two distinct ways--ies a celebration of Love.

Ash Wednesday is, firstly, a celebration of God’s love for us. It is a reminder that our very creation was a deliberate and purposeful act of love; and a reminder that a genuine commitment to love can be costly. It was through Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, which we mirror through this season of Lent, that he began to experience all the ways that human community in its brokenness has turned from God to inflict suffering one on another. He experienced the hunger of poverty, and the temptation to serve only his own needs; he experienced the lure of fame, and the temptation to count himself above others; he experienced the enticement of power, and the temptation to force others to his will. But those are not the ways of love; they cannot serve God’s will; and they cannot build God’s Kingdom. And so Jesus turned from them, becoming the victim of those who did serve their own needs, count themselves above others, and force others to their will: so that we would have, almost paradoxically, a vision of something greater to follow.

Which means that Ash Wednesday is, secondly, a day for us to reflect on what it means to love God as God has loved us, recognizing that this can never be separated from the ways we love each other. And so the invitation of Lent, beginning today, is: to reflect on the ways we might not have followed Jesus’ example; to think about how we have each, in our own ways, given in to the temptations which diminish the lives of others; to choose to follow the way of God’s love more fully than before, remembering always, and even as we struggle, that God’s choice was to be eternally with us so that we could be, eternally, something more than we could ever ask or imagine.

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light

shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Is 58: 6-8
The Very Reverend Douglas Michael

Thursday February 15: Psalm 37:1-18; Habakkuk 3:1-10 (11-15), 16-18; Philippians 3:12-21

Why do bad things happen to good, or innocent, people while the wicked seem to flourish? This question has troubled philosophers, prophets, scholars and just ordinary people for ages, and it's a particularly pertinent one in our current world circumstances. There is much Biblical effort – not always successful -- to address it, and many Christian apologists struggle to justify the preponderance of evil in our lives. The two Old Testament Passages for today suggest that God is responsible for and will eventually rectify this injustice.

All three chapters of Habakkuk, written in the 7th Century B.C., ponder this question. “Why”, asks the prophet in chapter 1, “do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.” Habakkuk is referring to the Babylonians who threaten and eventually overcome Israel, and he wants God to intervene. Chapter 3, today's reading, is a great prayer that God will repeat the former marvelous deliverances of his chosen people and show the world his redemptive work.

Psalm 37 begins with a direct way to deal with the question of evil. In verses 1 and 2 the psalmist advises, “Do not fret because of the wicked;/do not be envious of wrongdoers,/ for they will soon fade like the grass/and wither like the green herb. // Trust in the LORD and do good;/live in the land and enjoy security. /Take delight in the LORD,/and he will give you the desires of your heart.” In verse 5 the psalmist promises “the wicked shall be cut off, /but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.”

Today, it's difficult to accept these reassurances that all will be well if we but trust in the Lord. Or to believe that we can rely on or even hope for divine intervention in destroying the evil we see in a world where 1,000's of innocent people, especially children, are dying daily and others are utterly destitute because of political wars. After all, that didn't happen in the 7th Century B.C. and hasn't happened since, though believers have had faith. History and our own experience tell us that these atrocities will not be addressed by a miraculous intervention by a divine entity that will wave a magic wand to save the good and punish the wicked. Or give us what we want.

Nor should we expect that. The wicked flourish and the good suffer in this world because we are all human beings with the freedom to pursue whatever paths we choose. More and more often the chosen path is the desire for personal comfort, wealth, and especially power, and pursuing those things can lead to evil actions. God is not going to abolish evil, and we cannot eradicate it individually. We can, however, act personally and locally to help make the world a place where innocent people are protected, the hungry fed, the homeless housed, the lonely consoled. It is up to us as

individuals and in groups to work at changing the dreadful state the world is currently in. God is on our side; faith can and will give us courage and comfort, but as for putting an end to war, or hunger, or destruction of the natural world, or any other man-made disaster, it's up to us to do something.

Eleanor Rogers

* * * * *

Friday February 16: Psalm 31, Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Philippians 4:1-9.

A Luminous Darkness

Two days after Ash Wednesday, we are in the early days of our Lenten journey. We are just beginning to descend into a full realization of what the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno, called “the tragic sense of life.” We are with Jesus on the road to Golgotha, surely as vivid a human image of darkness and death, as we have.

Our magnificent and oft-quoted Psalm for today, Psalm 31 is so immediate in its first- person cry of sorrow: “I am in distress... I am the scorn of all my adversaries... I have passed out of mind like one who is dead...I have become like a broken vessel.” But at the same time, David sings of God being our “rock of refuge,” our Redeemer, our Deliverer, an abundance of Goodness, our Shelterer, if we but “love the Lord.”

The Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel, who foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, berates those who say “that the way of the Lord is unfair,” who whine about life as a life of “sour grapes, which set the children’s teeth on edge.” More vivid images of our tendency to fatalistic pessimism, our inclination to unbelief. “Get a new heart and spirit” says Ezekiel, adding a ringing call to “turn then, and live.” A promise that in turning, we choose life over death.

St. Paul, writing from prison, sends a letter to the congregation at Philippi, In it he manages to rise above his own darkness and call on his friends there to “Rejoice... [and] again I will say Rejoice.” And from that same violent place of his incarceration, encourages “gentleness” and then, in a prayer that has come to be as memorable as any from this man of action: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

The Franciscan priest Richard Rohr reminds us of what another Spaniard, the poet St. John of the Cross, called this particular darkness we have descended into during the Season of Lent: it is a “luminous darkness,” that recognizes at once our deep suffering and estrangement from God, and the promise of the most intense and liberating joy.

Eric Friesen

* * * * *

Saturday February 17: : Psalms 30, 32; Ezekiel 39:21-29; Philippians 4:10-20

Often, when life gets burdensome, we turn to the psalms for comfort and guidance. In reading Psalms 30 and 32, the message of God’s love for us comes through as a reminder that whether

we are troubled or having a good day the constancy of this love is always there. In other words, life is enriched when we don't wait for calamities to seek out this assurance but to allow the gift of this love to surround and guide us daily.

Again, it is true that we observe the Lenten period as a time set aside for reflection on Christ's gift to us of his death on the cross that we might have life eternal. It appears that, as human beings, and Christians, we often need these "prompts" to remind us of our special and sometimes fragile relationship to God as we go about our daily lives. Time and again, the Bible reminds about this tenuous bond as in Ezekiel 39:21 – 29, when the Israelites are chastised by God for their unfaithfulness to Him. Instead of prolonging their misery and His wrath, He shows great compassion and forgiveness: "I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel,..."

Just as we are forgiven by God's grace for our transgressions, so should we forgive those "who trespass against us...". All too frequently, we find it difficult to repair relationships with our family members or neighbours when our dealings with them go awry. Emulating God's love for us can prove to be a test of our faith when it comes to us making peace in these trying circumstances. We sometimes need time and distance to work through conflict situations but if we are to love our neighbours as ourselves, as Christ asks us to do, we must continue to strive, with God's help, for resolution and compassion.

As Christians, we are a peaceful people. Living out our faith requires us to return time and again to God's message of love and reconciliation not just in Lent but throughout the year. Throughout his life on earth, Christ reiterated this message to us time and time again. As we await the risen Christ on Easter morning, let us give thanks for God's great gift of his son for us.

Jane Baldwin

* * * * *

Sunday February 18 Lent I: Psalms 63:1-8 (9-11), 98; Daniel 9:3-10; Hebrews 2:10-18

When the Pandemic hit and churches wisely closed for worship, I felt that I was able to live through a temporary ceasing of going to church and have my "God needs" met. I had often, through the benefit of the internet, augmented my Sunday worship with what some others had put online. I soon learned that this type of worship, good for some, did not "cut it" for me. I longed to be able to be in a building with prayer-filled walls and with others who needed to hear, feel and see God proclaimed through word, music and prayer.

It was when I read the first verse of today's Psalm 63 that I recalled that longing for church I had during the first months of Covid. David, or the unnamed poet or poets like him, wrote about a similar longing in very flowery language about 3000 years ago.

I also identified with the author in the second and subsequent verses when Faye and I discovered that there was a church of another denomination that was open for worship. After

making certain that all the health and safety protocols were being met, we ventured to this unfamiliar place and there, in a way I cannot explain, I met God in a manner that eased my longing as was that of the Psalmist's years earlier. All of this even though, as far as we could tell behind masks, we were part of a community where all but two of the others were unknown to us. Whatever was their reason for being there, I felt that part might well have been as was mine to meet a longing for God.

Although most of the Psalms and their poetic expressions of faith point us to God, there are some verses that I can neither find explanation nor want to read. Such are verses 9 to 11 of this 63rd Psalm. After I had finished the previous paragraphs, I read these brutal verses more to see why they might have been omitted from the suggested reading. I wished they had been omitted. The only explanation I could find was that David or the author of this Psalm saw his enemies as enemies of God. On the other hand, the prayer at the end of the Psalm in the Book of Alternative Services is a wonderful complementary to our suggested reading for today.

The Reverend Bob Hales

* * * * *

Monday February 19: Psalms 41, 52; Genesis 37:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-19

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 1, verses 10 to 19, he reflects upon divisions within the Church. Sadly, these divisions did not stop in Paul's time but have been continuous into our present time. Within our Christian community we have many denominations. Even within congregations we have conflicts and divisions. All of this has, in my opinion, diminished the core message of Jesus and has weakened the church founded in His name. I've often wondered if we have missed the core purpose of religion and the church. I have also considered the life and teachings of Jesus and whether there are central themes and concepts we have failed to capture.

As I read the news and reflect upon world issues of conflict between nations, challenging environmental issues, and the many within our society who need help to live a reasonable quality of life, I think the concept of "harmony" is missing. What would the world be like if nations lived in harmony with each other, if we lived in harmony with the environment and if individuals lived in harmony with each other?

In the Old Testament we have Moses and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments which were meant to guide us in our daily lives, but the overall concept was to create harmony within society. Our laws today are our best attempt to create harmony within today's society; if only we follow these laws.

The concept of harmony must start within each of us as individuals. If, as individuals we do not feel internal harmony, how can we be harmonious with our neighbors, our communities and the world? Are we not commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves? A perfect concept of harmony.

The church can be a wonderful place to help us to be more harmonious. Some may get it through the liturgy, some through the sermons and some through the music. All are interrelated.

Harmony does not mean we can't have different opinions, but if we ingrain the concept of harmony we have a greater level of acceptance and we act as one. In closing I would ask each of us to look at our church teachings through the lens of harmony.

During Lent, I reflect on Jesus on the cross as he calls out "Father, forgive them, as they know not what they do." Jesus did not look for revenge, He looked to create harmony. Surely we can do no less.

Larry Norman

* * * * *

Tuesday February 20: Psalm 45; Genesis 37:12-24; 1 Corinthians 1:20-31

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." (Isaiah 29:16, *The Message*)

I struggled with today's readings, finding them opaque and frustrating. What lesson, reprimand, or encouragement, was I to draw from them? The more I tried to reason, analyze, and see the three readings as a "problem" to solve, the more stuck and dispirited I became. The text spoke to me ("God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise") but not in the way I wanted or expected. Let me explain.

Looking back, I first really started engaging with scripture as a girl chorister at St. George's in the 1990s. I recall sitting in the choir stalls during the 9:15 a.m. services on Sundays, listening to the readings, following along in the BAS, and even, sometimes, following the sermon. Over time, the aspect of Christ that called to me most was how He turned the world upside down. He didn't just flip those tables in the temple--he spoke about an altogether upending of privilege. As well as God's closeness to and special love of those in distress. I loved Jesus the "trouble maker," the ally and advocate of the broken and alone. I love Him still.

For the people of first century Israel, Christ's topsy-turvy message made little sense. It seemed foolish and went against what they saw: the rich getting richer, political power remaining with the politically powerful. (Perhaps this sounds familiar to us, too.) They rejected Jesus, as well as the truth he spoke. In today's reading, Paul's letter to the Corinthians describes how the resurrection of Christ seemed just as foolish to some: "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (Corinthians 1:21, *The Message*). I understand how those Corinthians may have felt! The idea that an illiterate felon, a former refugee and a despised criminal, would be the one to redeem Israel and show the extent of God's love must have been beyond consideration.

Two thousand years later, people continue to question the "logic" of the Gospel, asking why a person had to die in order for them to live. Some question the very nature of God for requiring such a cruel act. Their questions make sense to me. When understood through a positivist,

modern lens, the resurrection seems foolish, if not frankly appalling. With my apologies to all the great apologists of the Church (no pun intended), I feel that in order to accept the Gospel, to walk with Christ, one must leave the world of human logic and embrace the “foolishness” of God.

In a sermon on this section of Corinthians, Christian Reformed Minister Douglass Bratt writes,

Yet we also remember that no amount of wisdom or cleverness will convert anyone to Christians’ ways of thinking about God and God’s ways. While Christianity makes sense to Christians, none of us thought our way into God’s kingdom. Even C.S. Lewis, who followed a largely intellectual path to his conversion, always credited the Holy Spirit for his transformation. (Bratt, D. [2021, March 7]. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 Commentary. Center for Excellence in Preaching. <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2021-03-01/1-corinthians-118-25-3/>)

And so, I end my reflection on today’s readings, reminded and encouraged by the topsy-turvy, upside-down, world-changing love of God. The miserable and afflicted receive the Lords’ blessing. The last shall be first. Those who hunger for justice will have their fill. And the message of the resurrection is just as world-defying. It is “God’s foolishness.” The resurrection does not make sense. It is shocking--and so it should be. We need neither the “wisdom” or the “signs” that some Corinthians requested (1:22) in order to believe. Neither is sufficient. Instead, we need God’s foolishness.

Borrowing again from Bratt (2021): As the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once wrote, ‘Remove from Christianity its ability to shock and it is altogether destroyed. It then becomes a tiny superficial thing, capable of neither inflicting deep wounds nor healing them.’ If God’s beloved people can get that through our heads, we can share what looks like foolishness with even the smartest, most sophisticated people we know.

“The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom (1st Cor 1:25, The Message).” Thanks be to God.

Reagan Gale

* * * * *

Wednesday February 21: Psalm 119:49-72; Genesis 37:25-36; 1 Corinthians 2:1-13

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians gives us lots to reflect on, particularly the association between the Spirit and what we may consider to be motivations dictated by our conscience. The dictionary defines conscience as: “the sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one’s own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good”. Personally, we believe that our conscience is the Holy Spirit influencing us or motivating us into actions “to do right or be good”.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is a huge influence in our lives, urging us and prodding us into positive actions. There are many situations in our lives where there does not seem to

be an answer to a problem or a resolution to a personal conflict. Despite our tears, our begging, and our prayers the issue does not get resolved. However, we are told that if we are patient and listen to God's message through the Holy Spirit and understand that God is also listening to the other person's needs, the answer will, and does, come to us.

We think that the Spirit not only helps us overcome problems but is also a significant positive force in urging us to respond to some need. Whether it be reaching out to someone in need or finding a way to help our community.

In our current environment of world conflict, environmental concerns and, closer to home, hunger and homelessness, Paul's message is as relevant to us today as it was then. We believe he is urging us to take time, to listen and think about what the Spirit is guiding us to do.

Chris and Marie McElvaine

* * * * *

Thursday February 22: Psalm 50; Genesis 39:1-23; 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15

As I write this on a cold, very rainy December day, I reflect back to this morning, when I drove by the Cathedral and parked on Johnson St. Under the portico were two Lunch by George clients, sitting on plastic, trying to keep dry in the pouring rain. In really cheerful moods!



For the many years I have worked at the Lunch Program, one of my biggest sadnesses has been the necessity to close for 2 weeks over Christmas. Rationally I know that, like myself, as a still-practicing RN in ICU, I need time off. I'm going away for Christmas. Our workers and volunteers at LbyG need that time too. Then I work back to Paul's line "For we have the mind of Christ," and I wonder how I would have His mind in any way, shape or form. But I think Paul is pointing me to the Holy Spirit, to the free gift of Grace that is the Spirit. How can I extend this Grace to our clients? Surely feeding them, keeping them clothed and dry would help. And we do that, most of the time. But alas, I am going away for Christmas, and they are here, stuck in the never ending struggle of poverty. Baby steps I guess, at least we are there the other 50 weeks of the year

But we are , according to Paul, “all coworkers in God’s service; we are God’s field, God’s building.” We serve in that field; let’s say that field is St. George’s. We are all partners; one plants, another waters. But it is God that makes things grow. We might have different styles, or a unique approach or mindset, but we are all working for the Gospel of Christ. Let’s allow that Gospel to take root and grow in us, and work as a team to find a way to extend ourselves as a downtown Cathedral, finding new ways to Outreach, to be His field, welcoming the poor and lonely into the body of our church.

Aveleigh Kyle

* * * * *

Friday February 23: Psalms 40, 54, Genesis 40:1-23, 1 Corinthians 3:16-23 Commemoration of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, Martyr, 156.

We are passing through the forty days of self-discipline, restraint and thoughtful reflection which make up Lent. Good Friday is five weeks from today, and without doubt that calls us to acknowledgement of the things done which we ought not to have done, and the things we ought to have done which stand neglected. In our personal lives, but also as a society, there really is a good deal of fuel for repentance.

But this is not the whole Lenten story. Much in today’s readings offers a different perspective; not a replacement for Lent’s penitence, but reassurance and support. For instance read again assurances that we share with our Jewish sisters and brothers:

My sins overtake me, so that I can no longer see. They are more numerous than the hairs of my head; my courage fails me.

LORD, may you not withhold your compassion from me; May your mercy and your faithfulness continually protect me. Psalm 40: 13, 12

Surely, I wait for the Lord: who bends down to me and hears my cry, Draws me up from the pit of destruction, out of the muddy clay, Sets my feet upon rock, steadies my steps, And puts a new song in my mouth, a hymn to our God. Psalm 40: 1-4

Behold, God is my helper: it is the Lord who sustains my life. Psalm 40: 1, 54:4

We cannot guess how many generations have drawn comfort from verses like these. The consciousness of failure and sin may be pervasive in Scripture, and an honest view agrees that it should be; but overwhelmingly it is balanced by reminders of God as the Helper and Sustainer.

In the Newer Testament, St. Paul shares the poetic vision which is so particularly his, to declare our unique status: “You are God’s temple, and the Spirit of the Lord dwells within you . . . For the temple of God is holy, and you are that temple.” (1 Cor. 3: 16, 17.5)

Later, as he does so frequently, Paul raises our eyes step by step to a higher promise, and an ultimate glory: “For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world

or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.” (1 Corinthians 3: 21.5-23)

Let Lent then be a time of reflection, and let that reflection look honestly at what you know to be wrong in action, in thought and in failure to act. But don’t forget that as temples of God we know something implied in today’s readings, and fully stated in John’s first Epistle: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (1 John 4:16)

Perhaps it is not coincidental that besides its place among the forty days of Lent, February 23 is St. Polycarp’s Day. Among the many things which make Polycarp (69 --165 CE) deserving of remembrance, scholarly opinion raises at least a strong possibility that he wrote some of the Epistles which are known not to be the work of Paul. He is reported to have been one of the bishops who assembled at Rome to determine the date of Easter, and he is one of the earliest Christian authors whose work survives. Polycarp was martyred for refusing to burn incense to the Roman emperor.

David Cameron

* * * * *

Saturday February 24: Genesis 41:1-13, Psalm 55, 1 Corinthians 4: 1-7

Deliverance. What we all hope for. What the world seems to need now more than ever in terms of our relationships with each other and the natural world. Our ability to think in relational terms – in terms of how everything and everyone in God’s universe are connected – has slipped away from us. Humankind is becoming increasingly disconnected. The results are observable on a daily basis -- loneliness, social isolation, fragmentation of communities, disconnection with the earth. At the heart of this lies fragmentation of the spiritual centre. Deliverance. We need deliverance.

Deliverance has been the prayer since the beginning of recorded history. In Genesis, we land in the middle of the story of Joseph, itself a story of deliverance on a number of levels. Joseph as been delivered from the pit, having been earlier betrayed by those closest to him as was the Psalmist. Pharaoh, once his dreams are explained, hopes to deliver Egypt from the grip of famine. He succeeds with Joseph’s help and, not just incidentally, Israel is also delivered from the famine. But the road to deliverance was not and is not always obvious or easy.

The hand of God is in all these events. Joseph and the Psalmist understand this as they move beyond their travail. But the greatest deliverance is yet to come. This is the good news. This is what Paul tries to remind the Corinthians of. He preaches the Word of the Cross, the ultimate deliverance for humankind, not just on a mundane level, but on a cosmic scale. The birth of a new world in which the connectedness of humankind with itself and with God is restored. The Corinthians shared much in common with current neo-liberal economic influenced world. Wealth, individual interests, continuing patterns of Greek worship, reinterpretation of Christianity, neglect of the needy etc., disconnectedness in all its forms

faced the apostles in their efforts to refocus the Corinthians on the message, the crucifixion, and what it stood for. We can stand to do some refocusing, too.

The road to our deliverance came paradoxically from Jesus's death on the cross, the kind of death a traitor died, betrayed as Joseph and the Psalmist were, by the forces of family, might, politics, and religion. A unique and unhappy event. Its ugliness can hardly be overestimated. A powerful religion issued from the most irreligious of circumstances. But as did the Corinthians, we often prefer to hear the happier more positive messages issuing from Christ's death and ascension. The significance of the Cross is Paul's main message.

We need to heed more the Word of the Cross. We cannot forget the darkness from which the light of Christ issued at the end of the day. It was that sacrifice, issuing from the most abominable of circumstances, that sparks the new world, brought to birth out of death where all, including the worst in each of us, will find grace and a new beginning. Through the Cross we are delivered. Amen.

Lynn Wilson

* * * * *

Sunday February 25 Lent II: Psalms 24, 29; Genesis 41: 14-45; Romans 6: 3-14 Freedom Sunday (Human Trafficking Awareness)

Today's reading from Genesis could be a script for a rags-to-riches movie: From Prison to the Palace. This genre is popular in our society. We admire the young entrepreneur who started out in his parents' basement and whose invention made him famous and wealthy. We may fantasize about getting that big break that would launch our career or of winning the lottery and all the things that we could do with that money. The story of Joseph in Genesis, however, is not one of how a fortuitous break changed someone's life forever. Nor is it a story of reward after suffering, even if that is what happened to Joseph.

This is a story about God's provenance. It is a story about God's working in a person's life from early days, perhaps even when that person did not recognize it. It is a story of humbleness, faithfulness and of allowing God to work in one's life. Joseph maintained his faith even when his brothers sold him into slavery. He maintained his integrity when he refused to sleep with Potifar's wife even though that decision landed him in prison. He maintained his humbleness telling Pharaoh that he could not interpret Pharaoh's dreams, but that God would give Pharaoh the answer that he desired. He did not bargain with Pharaoh for his release or complain of the injustices that he had suffered. He did not seek a reward if he could interpret the dreams. He did not suggest himself as the discerning and wise man who should be put in charge of the land of Egypt. He simply shared with Pharaoh God's message in the dreams.

Joseph was thirty years old when he was promoted to a rank second only to Pharaoh. It is quite likely and even probable that at that time, Joseph still did not see the entirety of God's plan. Nonetheless, he was promoted for a purpose. Joseph was a gifted administrator and he

used wisely the years of abundance to make preparation for the years of famine. His proficiency saved not only the Egyptians from starvation, but his own family as well.

Many of us in this congregation are well over thirty. From our vantage point it may be possible to look back and see how God has acted in our lives and used us for his purpose. However, it doesn't mean that God's purpose for us is over. There may be new things to do, new challenges to take on, new grace to share with those whom God brings into our lives, and new ways to be of service. This Lent as we take time to examine our lives, reflect and pray, let us open ourselves to where God may be leading us next in our journey of faith.

The Reverend Peter Case

* * * * *

Monday February 26: Psalm 56, 57, and 58 Genesis 42: 46-57 1 Corinthians 4:8-20
Commemoration of Florence Li Tim-Oi

The neighbourhood doesn't look like a waning winter season but like autumn. Orange and brown leaves are clinging to the trees and the summer songbirds have disappeared. Garden tasks are still incomplete as the days are becoming colder and darker. It is the last rush to prepare the garden for the winter. But today as you read this, you know that the days are growing longer, and the garden will soon spring to life again. We didn't time travel. We went through the natural cycle of the seasons from the writing of this reflection to reading it. The reflection was waiting like the garden over the winter to come alive.

Trust....

Psalms 56, 57 and 58 forcefully remind us of the suffering that is inevitable but not purposeless. David speaks of the pain and fear in life but always turns to God to for mercy, comfort, and justice. "In the Lord's word will I comfort me". "Yea, in God have I put my trust."

Trust....

Whether it is God shaping the nation of Israel through the trials of Joseph and his brothers or Paul admonishing the Corinthians to put their faith in the love of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, trust in God helps us to heal from fear and pain.

Trust...

Florence Li Tim-Oi had trust. In the most difficult circumstances Florence Li Tim-Oi lived a life of trust and faith. It is fitting that the life of the Anglican Communion's first female priest should have been like all our lives, full of challenge and blessed with opportunities to serve God. Florence was made Deacon in 1941 and assigned to serve the Anglican community in Macao. Priested in 1944 she trusted that God had a plan for her. Although she surrendered her priest's license in 1946 during the difficult time of the Communists taking over mainland China, she kept her holy orders, her armor of faith for the next 39 years. Coming to Canada in 1983, she was reinstated as a priest and exercised that office with faith and dignity. Her trust in God and her faith in fulfilling his plan for her, became a living example of the power

of God working through women priests. Her trust in God created a pattern for other women like my daughter to follow in their own paths as female priests.

Just like the dormant garden on the edge of spring, trust can grow and even startle us with its power to sustain us. Prayer and service are the sunlight and the rains that nourish trust as the daily cycle of life progresses through challenge and opportunity.

Susan Everett

* * * * *

Tuesday February 27: Psalms 61, 62; Genesis 42:1-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8. Commemoration of George Herbert, priest and poet

On this day the church commemorates George Herbert (c.1593-1633), poet and priest, who throughout his life examined his relationship with God.

Psalm 61 is a cry to God for actual refuge by a leader who is far from a safe place. His example is a strongly built defence tower of that age, reaching up into the sky as a meeting point of earth and heaven. He promises to praise God every day as he “pays” his vows.

Psalm 62 is a statement of total trust in God’s steadfast love by a very lonely and troubled man who finds his fellow humans to be of little worth.

Genesis 42: 1-17 has remarkable parallels with today’s human condition. In Genesis 41 we meet a young Joseph who has an amazing God-given perception of climate change. He interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh to signal a seven-year cycle of agricultural plenty to be followed by a widespread drought and famine. He advised that grain be stored in large amounts during a time of plenty to avoid later famine.

Genesis 42 begins during the famine, with Jacob learning about the Egyptian stored grain and ordering Joseph’s brothers to go to Egypt to buy grain to feed the Israelites.

It is interesting to note Joseph’s prominent position in the Egyptian power structure. Neither the fact that he is an alien--a Hebrew--nor that he had been handed over as a hostage has prevented his rise to a position of great responsibility.

Leigh Smith

* * * * *

Wednesday February 28: Genesis 42-- 18 -28 , Psalm 72 I Corinthians 5 -9 6-8

When I read the passages in December , the Hamas- Israel war was one of the foremost new stories. When the passages are read today I fear the Hamas- Israel war will still be in the news just as the Ukraine war will be.

The passage that I returned to was the Genesis passage. I re-read it several times as well as the passages leading up to it and the passages following after it. I encourage you to read all of these passages. I was drawn to the passage for these reasons: the country in the reading is Egypt, it revolves around the complexities of family relationships and it was a biblical story I was familiar with from my childhood.

Joseph's coat of many colours plays a pivotal role in the story. His father, Jacob gave him the coat because he favoured and loved Joseph more than his other children. Surely if Jacob could have foreseen what this flawed love would do, he never would have given Joseph the coat. This act brewed hatred, jealousy and deceit in Joseph's brothers. This led to Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt and Jacob believing Joseph was dead.

The Midrash (ancient Jewish commentary) on the story of Joseph believe the gift of the coat was preordained as do some Christian writers.

Whatever your belief in this thought, Mothers and Fathers are to love their children equally just as God's love is for all of his children. God does not show favour to colour, age or creed. All of God's children are the same in his sight. We need to be very mindful of this. It is so easy to believe that we are the "FAVOURER ONE"

As starvation looms upon them Jacob sends his sons into Egypt to seek food but keeps his younger son Benjamin at home. When this was written Egypt was the doorway for sending food and succour into Gaza. Egypt is a passageway for people fleeing the horrors of the Gaza strip. As you read this it will be interesting to know if this role is still in place. It harkens back to the time of Joseph in my mind.

As a child I loved the story of Joseph for its coat of many colours and the happy ending. The family were all together in Egypt. I was not aware of deceit, jealousy, forgiveness, arrogance, hatred, flawed love and so much more. The story is complex and is part of both the Jewish and Christian history. It is far more than Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

I conclude with this thought-provoking passage from Devotions XVII by John Donne

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main; ...any man's death diminishes me, because
I am involved in mankind;

Mary Ann Steen

* * * * *

Thursday February 29: Psalm [70], 71; Genesis 42:29-38; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

The time it takes for the earth to rotate is 365 1/2 days but the calendar year is 365 days, hence once every four years to balance this we have this extra day of February 29th. It is said that anything we start on the 29th of February is sure of success.

Genesis 42: 29-38 I believe the lesson in this very well-known story is that Joseph's brothers are made to confront their sin with a little help from Joseph. Lent is the time of year we should be reflecting on our sins to try and become better persons, living our lives with love being first in our thoughts and deeds.

Psalm (70) 71 In these Psalms it is said they are the prayers of an aging King David in urgent need of God's rescue. David's enemies want to ruin him and with his aging body he is not able to respond with his strength of his past. These Psalms have a sense of urgency, asking God for

help but receiving no immediate answer. (from the Spoken Gospel). How many urgent prayers must have come out of Israel, Gaza, the Ukraine and others. As we age there seems to be a sense of urgency for most everything. We cannot deny that the end is coming and our time on earth is becoming much more precious. I love the Blessing at the end of our services “ Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey with us and so make haste to love and be swift to be kind.”

1st Corinthians 6:12-20 Our bodies are God’s creation to be used for God’s purposes. The selfishness and desires which can overcome us are distractions of that for which we were created. There are so many wonderful physical things we can experience these days. Sports of all kinds we have access to keep our bodies and minds healthy and fit. I am certain that hard work in any form as well helps us all concentrate on what God has created us for, to live together in love and harmony. On this very special day of the year do not miss the opportunity to show your love to someone. That love is sure to successfully bring something more positive in this world.

Ken Whatley

* * * * *

Friday March 1: Psalm 69:1-23 (24-30), 31-38, Genesis 43:1-15, 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. Commemoration of David, Bishop of Menevia, Wales, c. 54).

Today’s readings seem disparate. I can’t find a unifying thread from which to derive one single spiritual lesson, so I will look at them each on their own.

Genesis 43 describes the 2nd, famine-driven journey to Egypt in search of food by Jacob’s (“Israel’s”) sons, Joseph’s brothers. At this stage Joseph, still “incognito” to his own brothers, sees his youngest brother, Benjamin, and steps away after serving him to have a good cry before resuming his disguise. I love the story of Joseph, his brothers, and, the “technicoloured dream coat;” so the passage speaks to me beyond this brief excerpt.

The other two readings hold a bit more tension for me, so likely have more to teach me. In Psalm 69, lines 1-23, the psalm’s first 3 lines are a lament poured out to God from a sense of feeling overwhelmed, drowning in rising waters, unable to see God, which is relatable to me. But from lines 4 - 23, we hear of the psalmist’s ostracism and persecution, of how his dedication to God brings rejection and scorn upon him by his community - almost as Jesus experienced. However, unlike Jesus, the psalmist ends up wishing for punishment by God of his enemies and persecutors, praying to God to darken their eyes and bend their backs forever. These are feelings I simply can’t relate to; extreme piety, or the impulse to call upon God asking Him to avenge my enemies or evil. One thing that strikes me, however, which might pertain to my own challenges is that, even while the psalmist is obviously extremely and visibly devoted to God - wearing sackcloth and fasting, shunning societal and familial norms in pursuit of a holy life - he feels overwhelmed by the fear of his persecutors. At both the outset and close of the passage he despairs of having so many enemies; along with this is his sense of drowning in

waters, unable to connect to God. This causes me to wonder, is there a connection between his awareness of being so reviled and different, his pre-occupation with the viewpoint of others that he sees as his “enemies”, and his sense of disconnection from God? How could that dynamic apply to me? If I am too preoccupied by public opinion, or if I imagine those who may not agree with me or like me as “against” me or as my “enemies”, is that possibly a part of a package that leads me to feel far from God?

What about Paul’s 1st letter to the Corinthians. 7: 1-9? Paul’s letters are generally hard for me to take. His instructions to women and comments on homosexuality feel outworn and angering to me. Upon first glancing at this excerpt of Paul’s 1st letter, I bristled, wondering what relevance his comments on sexual immorality and marriage could possibly have to me. Yet, in this passage, which I have never read closely before, I am struck by how he challenges the male reader of his letter, citing the equality of power inherent in the act of intimacy with a woman, and conferring equal responsibility for management of sexual passions upon women as men. This is moving and surprising to me, as Paul offers what for me is a new idea: both partners lose their “authority”, giving it to the other, in the act of intimacy. That is an astonishing idea, made more powerful in its proclamation of ‘equality’ between the partners, which seems unusual for Paul and his time. However, Paul’s implication that celibacy, such as his, is spiritually significant, and indeed required for the highest spiritual path, is unconvincing to me. Any admiration I have for Paul is completely unrelated to his abstinence from the temptation of marriage to or intimacy with a woman (nor to a man, as I gather Bishop John Spong implies might have been Paul’s bent.) In fact I wonder if perhaps Paul’s very abstinence fed his misogyny or sense of superiority, as he chose not to give his authority up in intimacy to a woman as an equal. I am glad I do not live in an age where celibacy in Jesus’ name is extolled broadly as one of the highest spiritual goods; let alone in an age where homosexuality and sexual passion, in general, are demonized (as shown in Paul’s attitudes). On the other hand I imagine, hopefully, a future age, more evolved than our current ‘liberal’ times, where one’s sexual choices, including a choice of celibacy, are not seen as necessarily ‘outed’ to society, and are not the highest or most defining part of one’s identity.

Holly Gwynne-Timothy

* * * * *

Saturday March 2: Psalms 75 and 76, Genesis 43:26-34, 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

Writing on a warm December day, in the hope that March 2 will be warm also, it is hard to find much commonality or inspiration from these passages.

Therefore, we can think a bit about Joseph. This passage is only a part of the story we know. Jacob, who has twelve sons by several wives, sends Joseph, his favourite, out to find the others who are minding the flocks. Now Joseph has been a bit of a showoff, recounting dreams in which the brothers bow down to him. They are quite jealous because he is his father’s favourite

youngest son. Indeed, his father had given him a coat of many colours. Cue Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat

So, as we remember from the story, Joseph's brothers conspire to kill him when he arrives at the camp but decide to sell him to passing traders. Ishmaelites, or Midianites, as you choose. In any event, men with camels. Joseph winds up in Egypt and is sold to be a slave in the household of Potiphar, where he rises to be the steward of the household, and eventually to be a high ranking official for Pharaoh, because of his wisdom and prudence in advising the storage of food against a coming seven-year famine.

In due course, the famine causes Jacob to send the brothers to Egypt where he has heard that food is plentiful and can be bought. They bring money and are shown into the presence of Joseph, whom they do not at first recognize, although he knows them. They come twice, the second time bringing Benjamin, the youngest remaining brother, whom Joseph loves. That second time, Joseph welcomes his brothers, whom he has every reason to resent for their actions in selling him into slavery, and after weeping privately, sits with them at a meal.

I looked at this as an example of radical hospitality. Feeding the despised, in a time of desperate need, and setting the stage for the rescue of the Israelites from hunger. Now, also setting the stage for the enslavement of the Israelites by the Egyptians and eventually for the rescue of the people by Moses and the Exodus

All of this is part of the narrative of the people of Israel, telling the tales of coming to Egypt and leaving it again, with the protection of God. So, there is a larger narrative being told in the story.

But I invite you to think about the person, Joseph. A young man, beloved of his father, a dreamer and an interpreter of the dreams of others. Betrayed by older and jealous brothers, thrown on a camel, sold in the slave markets to Potiphar. Making his way by his intellect and his ability to predict events through dreams, and to offer sage advice in a large and foreign kingdom. Confronted, when the predicted famine occurs, by his brothers, who do not know him. Have they forgotten what they did to him?

He makes them welcome, after a few tests of their honesty, and sits down to a meal with them. The custom of life in the desert requires that a guest be treated well and given food and drink, but Joseph certainly might be forgiven, after the brutality of his treatment, if he had sent them away. He did not. He exercised love and compassion for them as his family.

We are required also to exercise radical hospitality as we welcome strangers, to our homes, to our land and to our churches. We are to feed them literally and figuratively. We have places in our world with more than seven years of famine, and travelers who are coming for a place where there is food.

Some of the hungry are right here and some are far away. The requirement is the same.

Feed the hungry.

Laurel Dempsey

Sunday March 3 Lent III: Psalms 93, 96; Genesis 44:1-17; Romans 8:1-10

The readings assigned for this third Sunday in Lent reveal a lot about God as King over all creation. This is established in all the readings, especially Psalms 93 and 96. These are part of what is known as the Royal Psalms, which declare the Kingship of God. They speak about Him as King over creation – He created the heavens and the earth and all that inhabits them. He is called the King of the Israelites as he is their saviour. He made a covenant with Abraham and promised him to be the father of their nation. He is the coming King who will eventually judge everyone.

Sometimes God's Kingdom is narrowly identified with the glorious coming of Jesus. God's present reign over creation is ignored. Sometimes the opposite is true. God's present rule can be emphasized so much that the coming of Jesus is almost disregarded. The Royal psalms consistently balance these two ideas. The Lord reigns but the Lord is also coming to establish his permanent rule. Both psalms proclaim the eternal reign of the Lord. Ps. 93 begins with "The Lord reigns. He is clothed with majesty. It ends with "holiness adorns Your house, O Lord forever." Psalm 96 states "The Lord reigns. The world also is firmly established. It goes on to reveal that there will be great jubilation: a time when the heavens will rejoice and all will be joyful. It ends by declaring "For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth." He shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His truth.

While I speak about God's Kingship as revealed in the Psalms, we should not overlook His presence in the life of those who call Him saviour. In the Genesis story of Joseph, God is working in the life of Jacob and his sons. Jacob's family was plagued by jealousy. His sons have colorful pasts. Two were married to Canaanite women. During this time the Canaanites worshiped many gods including Ba'al the storm God and Anat the goddess of war and strife. The brothers envied Joseph so much that they sold him into slavery. Now a great famine has spread across the lands and the brothers are forced to appeal to Pharoh's administrator for grain. Unbeknownst to them the administrator was their brother Joseph. Through a myriad of twists and turns, the brothers are reunited and they return to the God of Abraham. Despite the events of Joseph's life and the ensuing trials of his family, God remained faithful to the covenant he made with Abraham that He would make a great nation out of his descendants. Throughout time all persons who have inhabited our Earthly home have had to face trials and tribulations. As people of God we have not been spared. But what sets us apart from nonbelievers is that our Heavenly King has remained faithful to the promises he has made through Abraham. Throughout history He has remained vigilant over His people. Always willing to give new hope to those who turn to Him. Over 2000 years ago, this hope came in the form of a child who grew up teaching and healing in the name of His Father. Jesus the Christ, the incarnation of his father, suffered a horrible death on the cross to uphold those promises. He continues to hold out hope to all who follow in his footsteps.

Lent is a solemn season. It is a time when we commemorate the forty days Christ spent fasting in the desert and endured temptation by Satan. It is also a time for prayer and reflection. In his letter to the Romans, Paul urges us to live a life free from sin. He says that the law is able to punish us for the sins we commit, however only God can free us from sinning. What the law could not do, God did by sending His son amongst us.

I pray that as we travel through Lent, following the steps Christ took to Calvary, that we seek to get to know God better and open our hearts to Him and His Son, who together with the Holy Spirit have promised a life free from sin for all who follow him. Despite our paths, God our King has remained faithful to us. As the psalmist wrote: “for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth.”

The Reverend Gerald Moor

* * * * *

Monday March 4: Psalm 80; Genesis 44:18-34; 1 Corinthians 7:25-31

Here is the challenge: what are these disparate readings--the story of Joseph telling his brothers to leave Benjamin behind when they return home, and the brothers telling him to do so will kill their father; Paul's letter to the Corinthians lecturing them on virgins, sex and marriage; and a psalm lamenting God's abandonment after the people spurned His gifts--offering us today?

Perhaps it is about the flawed humanness of us all. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because of that very human trait, jealousy; and compounded this egregious action by lying to Jacob that his son is dead. Years later, when Joseph confronts his brothers, he plays with them, testing their resolve and remorse, again a very human reaction to a terrible betrayal.

Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth, teaching them about Jesus' good news and showing them the possibilities of a new life of salvation as believers. Yet, it didn't take long after his departure to learn that his flock had fractured and were fighting among themselves. How often do we see this happening in families, in organizations, in government, in the Church? We can't seem to help it! Thus, Paul's letter is to remind the Corinthians that they are losing the meaning of Jesus' message, that the rules of life are in place to further the worship of God and that our relationship with God is the most important and pure relationship.

In Psalm 80, the psalmist asks God how long He will be angry with His people's prayers. He laments that the Lord gave His people beautiful things and then took them away, because the people burned the stock given. The writer pleads for restoration, acknowledging the power of God to do this and promising that the people will not turn away from Him.

Thus, we have our flawed humanness, but we also have the Lord our God loving us through all our flaws, eager to comfort us, gently correct us and welcome us back to His arms. When Joseph hears how much his brothers care about their father he relents and reveals himself to them, showing unconditional forgiveness. Paul's letter is not a condemnation but a plea to

return to what they've been taught, because that way lies a new life and above all he wants them to experience the salvation of that life. The psalmist begs the Lord to "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we might be saved." The belief in the forgiveness of the Lord provides the comfort and the will to live in the way of God.

Jane Kirkpatrick

* * * * *

Tuesday March 5: Genesis 45, 1-15, Psalm 78, 1-39, 1 Corinthians 7, 12-40.

I have chosen to reflect on Psalm 78. This psalm is about the entry of the chosen people into the promised land. It is said God performed "gracious deeds" and "wondrous acts" for Israel. The deliverance from Egypt and the provision of food and drink during the journey to the promised land are examples of these acts directly performed by God in favour of God's people. But despite the fact that God performed these acts and gave laws and commandments to the people of Israel to be obeyed and taught to their children, they were rebellious and disobedient.

God was angry; he "attacked his people with fire" and "killed their strongest men, the best young men of Israel". Still, God was merciful and held back His anger. He brought them to God's holy land and drove out its inhabitants. (See also Joshua 3, 9). God divided the lands among the tribes of Israel and gave their homes to God's people. The people continued, however, to be rebellious and "put him to the test." God was angry again and "let them be killed by their enemies". Again, though, "the Lord woke up", pushing the enemies back, and so the Hebrews entered and occupied the land God promised them.

It is said that this is just a story and not literally true, like much other "history" in the Old Testament. If so, how is this story to be interpreted? For example, are the Israelites really special and the owners of the promised land, and did God really act the way he is said to have done, killing people, as the writers wrote? Whatever the answer, certainly the Jews at least have considered themselves down through the ages as chosen and given land allegedly promised to them.

They have paid dearly for being considered a chosen people. See Deuteronomy 7, 7-9, John 3, 16. They have been a dispossessed and persecuted people for much of their history, which has included four periods of exile. They were without the promised land or any part of it from the end of the Jewish-Roman war at Masada in 73 C.E. until the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 C.E. (1895 years). This creation of the State of Israel caused displacement of the Palestinian people and much conflict since, just as the peoples on the promised land at the time of the takeover by the Israelites were displaced, with conflict following down through the centuries.

The Israel/Hamas war is the latest conflict. Hamas is an organization whose purpose for existence is the recovery of the "Muslim land". The Hamas Covenant of August 1988, which contains the "Doctrine of Hamas," provides that Palestine (which includes Israel, "the

promised land”) is Muslim land and its liberation is an individual duty of all Moslems. One wonders if the special and chosen nature of the Jews as allegedly given them by God is one cause of the hatred and conflict the Jews and Moslems have suffered and inflicted and continue to suffer and inflict.

Eli Wiesel wrote a play called “The Trial of God” on his experience as a teenager in Auschwitz. He witnessed a trial. Three rabbis decided to indict God for allowing His children to be massacred. The trial lasted several nights and resulted in a unanimous verdict: the Lord God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, is guilty of crimes against creation and humankind. After “an infinity of silence” one of the rabbis said, “it’s time for evening prayers,” and the members of the tribunal recited an evening prayer service. Would it be justified for rabbis to indict God for “allowing His children” to be hated and persecuted over the centuries and beyond that to indulge themselves in the hatred and persecution of others?

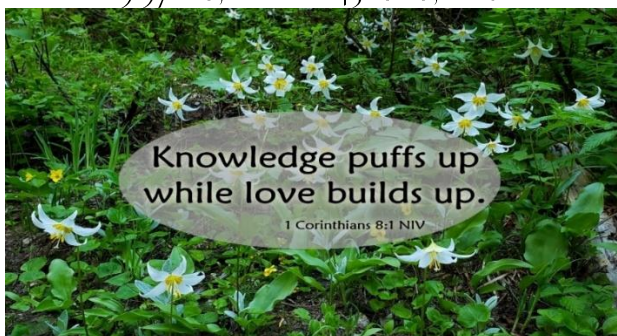
I find it strange that scripture tells us that God went to much trouble in providing the Jews with the land he promised them but does not explain why God seemingly has done little or nothing to keep them there! One could argue that God used the British to create the State of Israel in 1948, thus getting the promised land back to them and displacing the Palestinians. The result has been the troubles that we are witnessing today.

Notwithstanding what is said here about the role of God in the history of the Jews, I shall still, like the rabbis, go forth and say my prayers, because I remain persuaded that God is loving, just, good and compassionate in the light and life of Jesus Christ as evidenced in scripture and, if one has eyes to see, in nature and the universe.

Geoffrey Pratt

* * * * *

Wednesday March 6: Psalm 119:97-120; Genesis 45:16-28; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13



In preparing this reflection, I learned a new term-- “ultracrepidarian”. The word apparently comes from the 4th Century BC, when a shoemaker criticized the way the famous painter Apelles had rendered the foot of his subject in a painting. Apelles retorted, using the phrase “beyond the sole” (ultra crepidam in Latin), implying that the cobbler was making the

criticism outside of his sphere of knowledge. As Pliny the Elder said: “ne supra crepidam sutor judicare” – “let the cobbler not judge above the sandal.” In other words, an ultracrepidarian is one who expresses opinions or advice beyond one’s depth of knowledge. We are certainly all too familiar with this in these days of rampant misinformation in the news and on social media.

In the same way, we are all likely familiar with the proverb “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.” It originates from *An Essay on Criticism* by Alexander Pope in 1704. A source from the same period states “... a little knowledge is apt to puff them up, and make men giddy, but a greater share of it will set them right, and bring them to low and humble thoughts of themselves.” (*The Mystery of Phantasmagoria*, 1698).

Paul cautions about this very thing. In 1 Corinthians 8, he writes in verse 2: “Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.” He states that knowledge “puffs up.” It can lead to feelings of superiority, which can only serve to alienate those around us. A great teacher, in fact, is one who has depth of knowledge yet whose lessons can reach students with a clarity and simplicity that will enrich them.

Jesus modelled this in every way. Although he possessed superior knowledge and understanding, he never imparted this in an arrogant or sophisticated manner to those around him or to those he encountered. Quite the opposite--he stated things in simple terms that all could understand. Even the parables, despite the complexities of meaning behind them, were told in plain language, stories to which anyone could relate. This is the way of love that Paul refers to in verse 1. “Love builds up.” Love builds community.

As Paul proclaims later in his letter “If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (13:2). Gifts, such as knowledge, need to be used in service to others and if we are so blessed, we need to sprinkle our knowledge with a hefty dose of love, before putting our knowledge on display. Life isn’t about knowing all the answers. Loving God and being known by God eclipses all.

Anne Case

* * * * *

Thursday March 7: Palms 42, 43; Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34; 1 Corinthians 9:1-15.

As usual, whether my personal well feels full or empty, the two psalms are my favorite of the three readings for today and are my most nourishing starting point. The writer speaks from the foundations of his deeply subjective human experience. This rings true to me and immediately draws me in. I recognize myself in it. Psalm 42 begins with the writer's thirst and distress: his soul thirsts for God like a deer in the wilderness. He feels without hope; he recalls times of joy and praise; yet his soul "is cast down within me." He instructs his soul to hope: "hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." (Ps. 42:5 KJV.)

The psalmist writes, "Deep calleth unto deep." (Ps 42:7.) To me, the spiritual call comes as if from depths of our awareness, below the surface of our daily tasks but helping me understand and respond to those tasks more capably. And like the psalmist, my soul responds to the majesty and power of nature. Standing near a great waterfall like Victoria Falls or Niagara Falls awakens a deep response and expands our awareness. The physical points to the spiritual. In Psalm 43, the writer calls out for "judgement" (KJV) or "vindication" (NRSV). ("Judge me, O God;" "Vindicate me, O God.") The psalmist asserts his own godliness in contrast to the "ungodly" who surround and oppress him.

At first glance, I completely reject the spiritual pride that the writer so blatantly displays. The writer is evidently confident that he will receive a positive outcome from the divine judgment he is requesting. Yet in the meantime he notes his oppressors have the upper hand; he "must walk about mournfully." He calls on God to "send out your light and your truth."

The binary, "us vs. them", "me/good vs. them/the ungodly" is childlike. But, on further reflection, the psalmist, unlike me, may have indeed lived in an ungodly nation, subject to the control of deceitful and unjust men. It would be naive and dangerous to forget, because I live in a stable liberal democracy like Canada, there are not many who suffer targeted oppression and injustice, like the Russian lawyer, Alexei Navalny, now in prison.

Separately, who in their heart does not aspire to live rightly; and who does not want the rewards that we believe will accompany living rightly? I certainly aspire to live well, even if I recoil from ever describing myself as living or aspiring to live a "righteous" life. The term "righteous," like the pejorative term "self-righteous," seems pompous and self-aggrandizing; blind to the need for a more morally honest humility that acknowledges the likelihood that we are deluded if we do not acknowledge our tendency to make mistakes - i.e., to sin. Yet, despite our best efforts, which of us does not feel mournful or oppressed at times? Which of us does not feel dragged down at times, and wish achingly for "light and truth"? Thus, the psalmist's apparently childlike binary psychology is one we can all share in, whether we do so in an obvious manner, in our inner thinking, like the psalmist who compares himself to his oppressors in an ungodly nation, or in a more subtle manner that avoids projecting the inward demons that oppress us onto individuals around us, and remembers that we too are not without fault.

If God is the name I give to all that lifts me to a higher state of being, in all my interactions inside myself and with others, then there is no better prayer than the one that ends Psalm 43: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."

Gordon Gwynne-Timothy

* * * * *

Friday March 8: Psalm 88, Genesis 47:1-26, 1 Corinthians 9:16-27. (NIV)

As a newer member of the St. George's faith community, I appreciate this unique opportunity to reflect on these bible passages and also to become more knowledgeable about the lectionary cycle.

A common thread I detected running through these three passages is one central to the Bible. The actions or words of the main character in each reading, in one way or another, speaks to me about salvation.

In the Genesis chapter, we learn how God's children are saved from starvation by Joseph who, in service to the pharaoh, strategically managed the 7 years of severe famine in Egypt. The people of Egypt and Canaan, over the course of the drought, had to give up all their money, then livestock, land and finally themselves as slaves to the pharaoh in exchange for the grain needed to survive. Talk about seeds of salvation!

A side note of interest is found in verses 22 and 26 in respect to church, state, and taxes. We learn that the priests' land did not belong to the pharaoh and that the priests received provisions from the state. Verse 26 also mentions that Joseph established a law that a fifth of all produce (20%) was owed to the pharaoh, but the priests and their land remained exempt. It is interesting to think about this in regard to tithing and the relationship between church and state today.

"O Lord, the God who saves me" is the opening line of Psalm 88. As I continued reading, though, I realized that this one is a woeful lamentation with no other praise to the Lord and little comfort or hope for the reader. It made me think of Job--another who dwelt on his afflictions and suffering yet still proclaimed God as his saviour. In this season approaching Good Friday, one might also see similarities between the psalmist and Christ. Like Jesus, the psalmist experienced the loss of friends, rejection, and abandonment and despaired that God had forsaken him as death approached. There are indeed many psalms that biblical scholars label 'Messianic' as they relate to Jesus and even foreshadow his death (see Psalm 22).

Verses 10-12 touch on the fact that people living before Jesus's time did not have the certainty that there was an afterlife, yet this is where I find a small element of hope in this psalm. In wondering what involvement God might have with His people after death, is the psalmist perhaps cracking open the door to that possibility? Fortunately, at least he has a relationship with God and knows that God is his salvation--as God is ours.

I did read a commentary on this psalm that focused on its cathartic benefit and assurance for those who are suffering. Such despairing psalms assure us that it is OK to bring our deepest troubles and anguish to the Lord and even if we don't sense His presence, He hears, understands, and is with us. After all, "If He has given His Son to suffer for you, He will surely hold your hand through any pain this life brings"

(<https://rootedministry.com/psalm-88-a-psalm-for-the-hopeless/>).

As we know, Paul's salvation was the result of his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus and his accepting Jesus' command to preach the Gospel to save others. In this passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he references that acceptance, but states in this passage that his reward comes not from doing something that was his duty, but in doing it voluntarily and for free. Paul had waived his biblical right to material support from the church--and this is one of the ways Paul demonstrates his love and commitment to Christ, the Church, and those he hopes to win for the Lord. Paul's allegiance is always first to Jesus, although he says he is a slave to all and, like a chameleon, he changes as required, according to the sort of person he is trying to win over. In the chapter's closing verses we find Paul making the familiar comparison of a Greek athlete-in-training to living the Christian life. Like the athlete we must be disciplined, but instead of just one winning a perishable crown, all Christians can win the prize and it is an everlasting one--Salvation.

Vicki Parrish

* * * * *

Saturday March 9: Psalms 87, 90; Genesis 47: 27-48:7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop, Teacher of the Faith c. 395

These passages speak strongly to me of God's love for his people, but a love that has some expectations in return. God does not reward evil, but rather rewards those who follow God's will. We are all tested, but many give an appearance of good, but it does not come from the heart, and God can also punish those who deliberately ignore his will. We all can follow God if we try, but "high living" can be a temptation to stray. Those who follow the ways of the world and do not respect the ways of God may find there is a price to pay. I am particularly moved by God's "adoption" of those who come to him. We are a nation of refugees, if not in the current generations, then in our ancestry. My own father came to Canada as a refugee, my mother came as a war bride, also displaced. But they embraced this country, as we do, and as our current influx of refugees is doing. Thanks be to God for all he does for us!

Theo Bruce

* * * * *

Sunday March 10 Lent IV: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22, Numbers 21.4-9, Ephesians 2.1-10, John 3.14-21
A Collect for today: Steadfast God, you reach out to us in mercy. When we rebel against your holy call and walk in disobedience, soften our hearts with the warmth of your love, so that we may know your Son alive within us, redeeming us, and raising us up into your eternal presence. Amen.

The wilderness accounts of the Exodus are filled with honest narratives of the Israelites complaining to Moses because they are wandering around, discontent, scared, or even worried they have made the wrong decision. In this story, it seems the Israelites are a bit angry! Despite being saved from a life in captivity, they are unhappy with the quantity and quality of their food and want to make sure not only Moses, but God, knows this as well. God's response may

seem unlikely--God sends snakes that kill--but the response reminds the Israelites that God has not abandoned them. Instead, they must trust in God to ensure they live. The Israelites realize their error and God reverses the punishment by using the same animal, now as a statue, to bring life out of death for the Israelites.,

As humans, we may become restless and even become complainers or blamers. How did it feel if you ever complained to or blamed God for something? Where is your wilderness?

We have been given a gift, and while we may think about this more in Advent and Christmastide, the reality is we live with and benefit from this gift every second of our lives. God's gift of love in the Incarnation and Resurrection brought us out of our sins and into the new redeemed life. And as the letter to the Ephesians says, Jesus' divinity and joining with humanity allows us, as children of God, to share in his divinity and have an eternal place with God. The letter further emphasizes the power in God for the redemption of creation. God has created us, called us good, and, through Christ, has allowed us to live into our new redeemed life. For the Ephesians, the beauty of this reality is in the union of community it suggests--we are "alive together" in Christ.

What does it mean to share in the divinity of Christ? What gift is God giving you today?

The Gospel reading shares the last part of a conversation with a Pharisee, Nicodemus. Just a few verses earlier, Nicodemus arrived in the darkness of the night to question the divinity of Jesus and to understand Jesus' relationship to God. Through his monologue, Jesus is bringing Nicodemus out of his confusion and darkness into the light that is seeing God in Christ. We don't hear about Nicodemus in our reading because Christ's light has overtaken the scene, and just like the serpent in the Numbers reading, the light of Christ brings new life through death. A death, because God's love and desire for the world is so immense, that God joined humanity by sending the Son so that the world might come to know God through Christ. We have been redeemed and given a new life in Christ and through this our lives have been forever enlightened. This is the crux of our Christian identity.

John 3:16 has become almost the slogan of the Christian faith, but what does it mean to you? How do you understand eternal life in Christ? Where is the light of Christ shining in your life?

The Venerable John Robertson

* * * * *

Monday March 11: Psalm 89:1-18, Genesis 49:1-28, and 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1.

From my reading of Psalm 89, I can extract a lot of meanings which are mainly based on the concept that God never lets his people down when they face hard times and obstacles.

No matter how much time gets hard on us, directing our prayers and beliefs towards God, who sent us his only son to save us, can vouch to save us from these tough experiences because evil will always be there to preclude us from the good path which disagrees our humble faith. Yet, when we pray and approach God during our difficulties, he will be there for us to save us

from everything because God treats the people who believe in him with mercy, as he is able to do the entirety.

The example that God showed us in the Psalm, was saving Moses and his people from the oppressive governor of Egypt, where God drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea after Moses and his people passed into the Sinai desert.

In the reading from Genesis 49, which speaks about Jacob and his twelve sons, we conclude that God knows everything about his people, the good and the bad. This was presented to us as God was aware of the bad actions of some of Jacob's sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi.

The good deeds help us get closer to God, Jesus and the church, in addition to our faith which can deliver us to salvation and eternal life. Therefore, we should all have good faith to get united with God, believing that he will always be by our side to help and save us from all difficulties especially when we ask and approach him. As mentioned in Luke 11:9 'So I say to you, ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.'

Sandra Nasseh

* * * * *

Tuesday March 12: Psalms 97, 99 [100]; Genesis 49:29-50:14; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Every Friday as we gather in silence on the steps of St. George's to await the noontime bells which precede the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, my silent prayer echoes to a great extent today's reading from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He writes about our body parts all being different, but making up one whole; and the body of Christ, us, all being different but sharing the same spirit.

As I pray for the reconciliation of all people, the elimination of opposing factions, and friendship and harmony throughout our Creator's world, I ask that all recognize You as the One Supreme Being, though with many names such as God, Allah, or Buddha, and in many forms. You have been revealed through different humans: Muhammad, Abraham, Christ, and in many other different ways. It really does not matter in which language we speak to you, nor with which rites we worship you, nor on which day of the week we especially remember you. Our important mission is carrying out your wishes on how we should live and how we should behave towards each other while respecting the differences which make up the whole.

St. Paul reminds us that each body part is important and that "some parts ... that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary." And so with people: "if one part is honoured, all the parts are glad." (I Corinthians 12. 26) And yet, how often we forget this.

Our Creator knew we would forget this and decided to show he had a sense of humour. He played a little game, and put us further to the test to see what we would do. He chose what we know as Jerusalem for the centre of three of the factions. On Temple Mount, the Jewish nation built its great temple, several times, with its special room where only the Chief Rabbi could meet with God; and from that same hilltop, Muhammed ascended into heaven. A few

hundred yards away, just outside the City Wall, is where Jesus was crucified. What a fun challenge: “How are my people going to deal with this?” We really have not done very well. But despite the different languages, and clothing styles, and skin colours, and rites and rituals, we do share the same spirit, as our Creator’s children.

The verse immediately after our reading in Paul’s letter (I Corinthians 13,1) is so well known to us in the King James version, but sounds even stronger in the New Living Translation (Tyndale House, 2007): “If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.” That is what we so often forget, and I am sure that St. Paul really meant all thers.

The Egyptians let Joseph take Jacob’s body home to where he wished to be buried with all the familiar rites (Genesis 50.6); Joseph is not forced to follow the local customs, because “The Lord reigneth” (Psalm 97.1); “thou, Lord, are high above all the earth” (97. 9), and “He is high above all the people” (Psalm 99.2).

Whatever your religion, the intent is the same: Do good: do unto others as you want them to do to you. Forgive them their faults as we hope they will forgive us ours. I have a vision that, when the Final Trumpet sounds, all who have been part of this world, and perhaps of other worlds, will gather in a mighty stadium with the atmosphere of a Stanley Cup seventh game. In one set of bleachers will be the Moslems, creating a wave and shouting the two-syllable call “Allll-ahhh, Allll-ahhh!” In bleachers on the other side will be the Jews chanting “Hey, Go, Je-ho-vah!” And on the floor, somewhat more sedate, will be the rest, led by the Anglicans, no doubt singing “Jerusalem”. But we will all be together, at last, all taking part in the same ritual, (in our own ways), all part of one Body, finally helping each other.

Peter Gower

* * * * *

Wednesday March 13: Psalm s 101, 109:1-4 (5-19), 20-30; Genesis 50:15-26; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
If I was ever asked to spend time on a desert island with a limited number of books, I would definitely take a copy of the prayer book with the psalms tucked in the back. I love the psalms. I have used them as a basis for my prayers for many years. I find snippets dancing through my mind in times of sorrow and joy. I return to them daily for spiritual sustenance, for wisdom and for a good challenge. Through many years I have come to understand that, for me, the psalms reflect my life in all its messy glory and not so glorious messiness. It can often be tempting not to read the psalms that are more than challenging, much like those set for today, but I have found great wisdom in these psalms so I commit to praying them whenever they come up with as open a heart as I can possibly manage.

Psalm 101 is not one that I come to easily. I remember, as a much younger woman, burning with the ardor of new faith, believing that I would “sing of loyalty and of justice” (v 1). I would be able to “know nothing of evil” (v 4). I knew that I would certainly stand in my own righteousness and would “destroy all the wicked in the land” (v 8). I suspect that I was more

than a little insufferable. After many hard knocks and more than a little experience of the love and care of friends I have found this psalm to be more a call to repentance. It reminds me of Jesus' challenge: let the one who is without sin cast the first stone. I have not hated the work of those who have fallen away; in fact I have been the one falling (v 3). I have had the haughty look and the arrogant heart (v 5) and will probably have them again. If I had to "cut off evil doers" (v 8) I would have to turn my anger on myself. It is a psalm that reminds me that I am human and I do things, feel things, that can separate me from God and from God's work.

The temptation could be to throw up my hands in despair. The temptation could also be to turn a blind eye to the fact that I do set before my eyes things that are base (v 3). However, for me, both choices would prove to be an escape. The third choice is to allow the presence of God to come near, to sit with the reality of my messy, ordinary, and imperfect life, and allow the Spirit to transform me. It is a challenging choice in many ways because it requires a level of honesty about myself with which I am not always comfortable.

Psalm 101 is certainly difficult to pray through, but psalm 109 is almost impossible. It presents us with images of vengeance and destruction in some utterly appalling and inhuman terms. However, pray through it I must. I know that there have been times in my life where I have wanted horrid things to happen to fellow human beings. We have also witnessed the incredible destruction that is rained down on people by those who use the weapons of war and the sword of anger and hate. We human beings seem to have an inexhaustible capacity, in great matters and small, to want vengeance and destruction on those we perceive to be in the wrong. My experience of life is present in this psalm too and the temptation to walk away from it and what it presents to me is often overwhelming.

Yet, even more than psalm 101, psalm 109 gives me an opportunity to pray with and through my own sin. It gives me an opportunity to pray in solidarity with those who are experiencing hell on earth. This psalm is definitely not comforting, but it is necessary.

Thus, as I pray through these difficult psalms during Lent, I trust that I can draw nearer to the presence of God. I hope that I can more fully understand that I am-- along with every other human person, with all our complicated messiness--a beloved child of God. I am also encouraged that despite all my human frailties I can be a person in the world that does bring blessing and kindness and gentleness.

Vanessa Michael

* * * * *

Thursday March 14: Psalm 69: 1-23 (24-30), 31-38; Exodus 1:6-22; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Occasionally we come across passages in the Bible that are contrary to a 21st century view of the world. Society has changed considerably since Biblical times; the modern welfare state, even with its many flaws, would be, I suspect, a marvellous thing to the writers of the Old Testament. The stories in these passages can often require some persistence to uncover their meaning.

Today's reading from Corinthians, however, is not one of those contemplative stories. No, this passage is so perfectly aligned with many modern values it could be used in university textbooks with only slight "sanitization." To me, this passage is all about teamwork. The comparison is about various parts of the body all co-existing and relying on one another in much the same way as a choir, sports team, or any group whose members rely on each other. I write this after having just last week served as a judge for an international undergraduate business student case competition at Queen's where teams of students were given a case and then five hours to prepare their response and proposed solution. The culmination of this activity is a presentation to a panel of judges

One of the elements that we scored was teamwork. Often teamwork can be difficult to really gauge during a presentation, as we are only able to observe the polished and prepared responses. In one particular team, though, I was able to witness "for the body is not one member, but many" live. One of the presenters was noticeably nervous and totally lost his place and train of thought multiple times. His partner merely picked up from where he left off and continued the presentation. It was noticeable that he had lost his place, but it was also noticeable that the team had functioned properly. In the debrief, every judge commended this group on their teamwork. Because of this teamwork, the group was able to make their pitch and, despite their presentation not being flawless, came in second place. That they were not in first place was less to do with the presentation itself and more about the content. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." This group initially suffered together but later rejoiced because they worked together.

Brad Barbeau

* * * * *

Friday March 15: Psalm 102, Exodus 2: 1 – 22, 1 Corinthians 12: 27 – 13:3

This is an interesting collection of readings that the Lectionary has gathered together. I have chosen (or been inspired?) to respond to the Exodus reading and it is worthy of a re-read. Though a well-known story, it yielded new meaning as I prepared for these reflections. This is the story of the birth and relinquishment of the baby who came to be named Moses. Born to a Hebrew woman, the baby was cared for by his mother for three months and hidden from the authorities in an effort to protect him.

What an excruciating decision she made in placing him in that handmade rough-hewn basket and setting him in a river to be carried away to an unknown fate! Or was it so unknown? Did she know or plan for Pharaoh's daughter to find the baby? Did she know that she would be found by Pharaoh's daughter's servant to come forward to nurse the infant? I wonder what name this Levite woman had given her son at his birth. How did she feel about him being adopted and taken as Pharaoh's grandson?

None of my musings are answered, as so often happens in biblical texts. If we are to look for the metaphor in an attempt to discern the message, what are we to make of this unusual entry, infancy and youth of the man who was to become such an important leader?

I remain troubled by the cursory look at Moses' early years. Our current understanding of healthy child development rests on the notion of maternal/infant bonding and emotional attachment. It is difficult to see how Moses had such a solid foundation.

The last half of the reading (verses 11 to 22) suggests a tumultuous youth. As a young adult he knew of his Hebrew roots. "He went out to his people and saw their forced labour." On seeing an Egyptian beating "one of his kinfolk, he looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." Wow!!! How are we to reconcile that act?! Do we simply dismiss this as a socially/culturally acceptable response of that time? Clearly there was shame felt by Moses as he hoped his murder of the Egyptian would remain unnoticed. Alas, he was chastened the very next day when he attempted to intervene between two feuding Hebrews. They accused Moses of hypocrisy and revealed that they knew of the murder of the Egyptian. Fearing retribution from Pharaoh, Moses fled and settled in Midian.

On the story goes from there, but I am still stuck back in the reeds as Pharaoh's daughter finds the crying infant in the basket. What a beginning for the man who would go on to lead his oppressed kinfolk out of Egypt to a Promised Land that he himself would never actually inhabit.

Modern day psychology would have a field day analyzing the story of this man! My daily interactions with our guests at the Lunch by George program have me considering the many different life stories of these folk. How do I reconcile my own behavior with what I know intellectually would be a better response? How do I see the tumultuous Moses story played out in my own life and the lives of many around me?

Whatever our birth story or early years, we may not be called to lead others to a Promised Land but we are all called to seek a path that ensures care, safety and compassion towards ourselves and our fellow travellers. More questions than answers, but an encouragement to ponder.

Debbie Docherty

* * * * *

Saturday March 16: Psalm 107:33-43, 108:1-6 (7-13); Exodus 2:23-3:15; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Today we are about midway through our Lenten journey and in our worldly lives, we can feel the promise of the coming spring weather. I think that both speak to anticipation of what is to come.

The passage in Exodus marks the intervention of God to relieve Israel from the oppression that they have suffered in slavery to the Egyptians. God reminds Moses that the Israelites are his chosen people and that through Moses, he will lead them to the promised land. The Psalm passages remind us of God's dominion over everything and that his will can transform the

world from desert to life-sustaining farmland. Psalm 108 is a song of praise to God for his generosity and care of the Israelites.

The passage in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is a well-worn passage used on many occasions where interpersonal relationships are involved. I am never surprised to hear it at a wedding, celebrating the new life of two people, or at a funeral, marking the end of an earthly life. Paul exhorts his readers to recognize the importance of love in one's life. Without that central virtue, many seemingly positive "gifts" are rendered worthless to the recipient. He starts by stating that the gift of oration and the ability to communicate with others has no value unless underpinned by love. The reference to the resounding gong or clanging cymbal makes me consider that these two items, when part of an orchestra, add to the musical experience while on their own they may in fact be offensive to a listener. This point is not lost on me being a member of the choir. So love then, has to be part of other things for them truly to have virtue.

Paul then gives us a list of many of the loftiest qualities that he insists are only valid if love is there. It's difficult to sit and write this piece without my mind going back to all of those things. Forgiveness, pride, patience, self-sacrifice are all there. They all seem sufficient in and of themselves but Paul warns us that if they do not come from a place where love reigns, our efforts are in vain.

One of the many themes that runs throughout Lent is that of repentance and forgiveness. This is truly an area where love must be central. Without that sense of love and respect a full and open confession cannot be offered. Similarly, no matter the strength of contrition, neither can complete forgiveness be given if the offended party does not experience a desire for resolution based on love. As we move forward in our journey through the darkness and cold of winter with its images of sin, pain and suffering we must lift our hearts to God, in love, to receive the true forgiveness that the Easter season really offers. The passage ends with Paul extolling the three greatest virtues, faith, hope and love, "and the greatest of these is love."

Tanis Fairley

* * * * *

Sunday March 17 Lent V: Psalm 118; Exodus 3:16-4:12; Romans 12:1-21

Today in our world there is an intense focus on the individual. In the reading from Romans, Paul does not focus on the individual but rather about the church being "one body" and that individually we are members of one another. Paul does not say that we are all the same. He is quite clear that not all the members have the same function. Each of us is very different but we are connected to one another and come together as one body. All together we are the Body of Christ.

The great difference in us who are members of the Body of Christ is in the gifts we have been given. God's generous grace has given each one of us gifts to be used to show God's love to the

world around us. The world just outside our door and the world in far off places. Paul lists several gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, generous giving, leadership, and compassion. But there are so many more gifts that people have and use to make our community and the world a better and happier place. Each one has unique and valuable gifts to share.

The gifts we are given are not for our own personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Sometimes we don't recognize gifts in ourselves. We think of gifts as being musical talent or the ability to teach. These are gifts that have been given to people who have taken specific training to develop and use them. We are grateful for their gifts. But there are many gifts that are used by people every day that are also of great value.

The gift of service is a gift that is often not noticed. Giving folks rides to appointments or to church is a gift of service. Phoning someone who is lonely and shut in is a gift of service. Sending a get well card is a gift of service. Helping an overburdened Mom with her baby is a gift of service. Washing dishes for someone who is unwell is a gift of service. There are people who just know when their gift of service is needed.

Paul says care for the needs of the saints and extend hospitality to strangers. We all have gifts that can be used in this. To see our gifts and decide to use them for others is the critical step. We are members of the Body of Christ, our family. We are members of one another. Can we do any less than care for one another as we would care for ourselves? The body needs endless care and it is our joy and our calling to use our gifts to do so.

I once served in a parish that had a wonderful mission statement. It is: "Use your gifts! Proclaim the Good News! Reach out to the World!" That pretty much says it all.

The Reverend Barbara Stewart

* * * * *

Monday 18 March 1 Corinthians 14:1-9 and Celebration of Saint Cyril.

When I got my Bible readings assignment for March 18, I looked at 1 Corinthians 14:1-9 and was somewhat lost as how to comment on its message. Then I looked at the Saints Day assigned for March 18. That gave me an idea about how it may speak to us and the Church today. The Saint was, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop, and Teacher of the faith, 386 AD.

Part of 1 Corinthians 14:1-9

"2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. 3 But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort, the one who prophesies edifies the church. - Prophecy is telling/teaching us how to live loving, caring, happy, Christian lives now, and preparing us for whatever lies ahead in our Christian life.

Intelligibility in Worship-I wondered, does our Liturgy speak in tongues for the person who is new to our church? The Anglican church, over many years, has developed a wonderful liturgical way of worship. We have moved from the Book of Common Prayer that was

developed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1549. Then the Anglican Church of Canada published the Book of Alternative Services. Note: this was not a new Book of Common Prayer and does not replace the Book of Common Prayer.

It seems to me, the present congregations, worshiping each Sunday all over our Diocese seem to be mostly elderly Anglicans, steeped in our traditional service routine. How do we bring new, young people into our churches to hear the Good News of Jesus' message when we carry on with the routine way we all know so well and don't help the new people to understand what we do and speak?

We have been using some new Liturgies that are speaking to us in more modern ways. I believe we need to teach (re-learn) what all forms of worship should mean to the person in the pew. Liturgy is not an entertainment; it is our way of learning and renewing our Christian faith and actions in our community. When we have been taught what our Eucharist service is about, we can teach (like Bishop Cyril) the new people around us about our Liturgies and what they mean to us.

A Collect is prayed at every one of services. A Collect prayer is meant to gather and focus our thoughts and prayers on the theme of our worship service that day.

A collect for Saint Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem and Teacher of the faith.

Strengthen, O Lord, the Bishops, Priests and People of your Church in their special calling to be teachers and ministers of the Sacraments, so that they, like your servant Cyril of Jerusalem, may effectively instruct your people in Christian faith and practice; and that we, taught by them, may enter more fully into the celebration of the Paschal mystery; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen
James Anderson

* * * * *

Tuesday 19 March Psalm 132; Isaiah 63:7-16; Matthew 1:18-25. St Joseph of Nazareth Matthew 1:19; Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. I wonder. Each time I hear the story of Joseph of Nazareth and his part in the gospel story, I am surprised, and I wonder. Why did he stay with Mary? What did it "cost" him in his family and community? Did he suffer ridicule for disclosing that an Angel had appeared to him in a dream, a preposterous sounding story?

Try to imagine a man in Jewish culture 2,000 years ago, following Joseph's example upon learning that the woman he had planned to marry was pregnant, and the child was not his. The verse I've quoted shows Joseph to be respectful of the spiritual and cultural law that would deal with such a calamity, but also shows how concerned he is for Mary's welfare, that she should not be disgraced. No judgment. No anger. Just quiet, humble service. And love.

I wonder how the integrity and love that Joseph displayed during that difficult time, and the others that followed, figured into the spirit of Jesus as he grew. The mystery we acknowledge

as the divine yet human nature of Jesus Christ must surely have been shaped by the presence, guidance and example of his earthly father. For his first 12 years (when humans are most impressionable) I wonder if Jesus grew up experiencing the humility and strength of character of Joseph. Did that influence his ministry and finally his passion? For me, the through-line is obvious. God used Joseph to show Jesus the power of humility, redemption and love.

One other thing is obvious to me in this context. When I see the volunteers of Lunch By George providing hot meals to a long line of cold clients during COVID lockdowns, I see Jesus. And when the Volunteers on the Refugee Sponsorship Committee lovingly prepare a home for a newcomer, I see Jesus there. It's not complicated. He showed us what to do. We in the St George's community are

surrounded by Saints, who humbly serve their neighbours in the name of Jesus. They are a powerful witness to faith, grace, humility and love, no less than Joseph of Nazareth.

Jann van Vugt

* * * * *

Wednesday March 20 Psalm 119:145-176; Exodus 7:8-24; 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6. Cuthbert Bishop of Lindisfarne, 687

When I was called to the bar more than fifty years ago I received two pieces of advice from my father, who recommended that I buy a black bowler hat as my 'trademar' and that I ask around if there were any openings that my articling mentor may have heard of. He recommended that I call a particular six-man firm that might be thinking of expanding. I immediately called their office and was surprised to make an appointment for an interview the very next day, which was a Saturday. When I arrived I was met by the Senior Partner, together with the Real Estate Partner. Within a matter of minutes I was hired to start on Monday at 10:00 a.m., and there I remained for the next 25 years!

My Senior's practice was largely devoted to Real Estate Development and at this time he had collected a group that pooled their finances to take advantage of developing large projects. After a few years they had done so well financially that they were thinking of splitting up and going their four separate ways. But the four projects were not obviously divisible. Because many businessmen are competitive they do not want others to know their business or problems.

How to wrap up 20 years of development profits while still operating independently? One evening, as our Senior was sitting with us, he said to me, "Miles, bring me your hat hanging on the rack. I have torn this sheet of paper into four sections. On each one I have listed the four properties, each one more or less of the same value. You each get a blind draw and keep the property you have drawn."

There was no complaint, all parties felt it was fair. Confrontation was avoided. Sometimes compromise is the best method of settlement. If only it could apply to the terrible conflicts afflicting our world now!

Miles O'Riley

* * * * *

Thursday March 21: Psalm 131, 132 [133]; Exodus 7:25-8:19; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. Thomas Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury, 1556

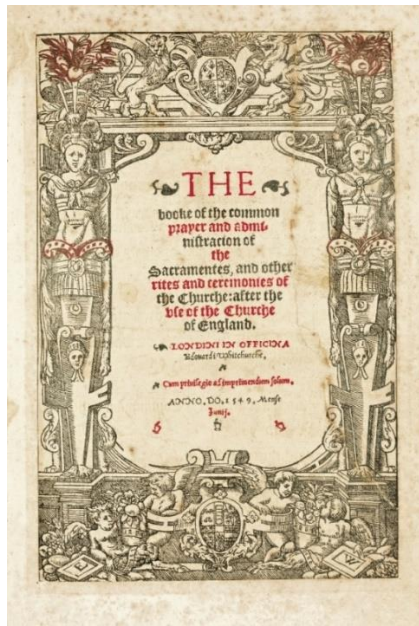
On this day in 1556 Archbishop Thomas Cranmer was burnt at the stake in Oxford. I have chosen to write about him rather than the assigned verses for today because he so greatly influenced how we worship and what we value as Anglicans.

The break of the English Church from the Church of Rome was not at all neat and tidy, with the pendulum swinging from one side to the other many times during the 16th and early 17th century, depending on King Henry VIII's marital wishes and those who wanted to keep their heads.

Thomas Cranmer was installed as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533. He had helped to build the case for the annulment of the marriage of the king to Catherine of Aragon which was one of the causes of the separation between the English Church and the Church of Rome. However, a protestant group against the Roman Catholic church was already assembling in Europe which Martin Luther had begun with his famous protest against of Indulgences in 1517. This group denied the real presence at the Eucharist, denounced the Pope as head of the church and only recognized three of the six Roman Catholic sacraments, Baptism, the Eucharist and Penance.

All these differing points of view led to a series of publications in 1536 espousing statements of the True Faith and often in opposition to the policies of Henry V^{III}. However Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell sided with the King.

In 1543 the Conservative clergy banded against Cranmer in a plot which he discovered. However, he forgave and reinstated them. King Henry showed his support of Cranmer by giving him a ring and Cranmer continued to make quiet efforts to reform the church. When Henry died in 1532 the "Reformers" became part of the Establishment led by Edward Seymour, Lord Protector, and English rather than Latin became the language of the liturgy. In 1549 the first Book of Common Prayer, compiled by Archbishop Cranmer, was used in Chertsey and Windsor and was then made compulsory for all churches. Unsurprisingly there was a rebellion against this new prayer book, but Cranmer held the line. The new book changed the doctrine of discipline in areas such as the Eucharist, clerical celibacy, the role of images in public worship and the veneration of Saints.



The Prayer Book we now know as the Book of Common Prayer went through a series of modifications until it was published in its present form in 1662 in the reign of Charles I, and it reflects the beauty of the language of the time.

Between the reigns of Henry and Elizabeth, Mary ascended the throne, and was a staunch defender of the Roman Catholic Church. She put Cranmer on trial for treason and heresy and he recanted his protestant views, but Mary wanted him executed and he was burnt at the stake in 1556. On the day of his execution, however, he withdrew his recantations and died a martyr to the Church of England and the English Reformation.

There's a lot to think about here, but what stands out for me is how difficult it is for the church to embrace change. In my time we have had difficult discussions on changes to the Prayer Book, the ordination of women and at the present time the issue of gender equality and the marriage of homosexual couples, all of which have resulted in divisions amongst us and break-away churches. These are not minor skirmishes but deeply held views that people are prepared to fight for, even though we no longer burn people at the stake.

It is worth our while to ponder what is important to us and what is worth fighting for. The Anglican church has a pretty wide tent but as our critics like to point out, if you stand for everything you stand for nothing. What do we stand for as Anglicans? What do we value most? What is unique? How do we live with differences of opinion in matters that are important to us?

What would Jesus do?

Ruth Oliver

* * * * *

Friday March 22: Psalm 22, Exodus 9:13-35, 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

First God created earth, and then he created human beings; he asked them to be grateful because this earth was created for the benefit of their happiness. Nevertheless, some deviated from what God commanded. Therefore, he sent his prophets to the earth to instruct and alert human beings to turn from wrong. As an example of that, we read in Exodus 9: “Then the Lord said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.’” Although Pharaoh promised Moses to implement God’s commands, he did not keep his promise, desiring only to maintain his great power.

But we know that God will never abandon his people, for he sent us his only son to bear our sins. The son endured pain and humiliation to erase our sins. And this shows how much God loves us.

Despite all God’s sacrifices, we still have people who incarnate Pharaoh's thoughts.

Therefore, all Christians should behave according to what Jesus commanded us, so that we represent a good human example to the world. And this was also commanded in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: spread the lessons of the Gospel among the people.

We should always remember the saying of Paul: “So then death is working in us, but life in you” And pray to God to give the power and faith to follow his command.

Simon Nasseh

* * * * *

Saturday March 23 Psalms 137:1-6 (7-9), 144; Exodus 10:21-11:8; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18. Gregory the Illuminator, Bp of Armenia, c. 322

I have found it very difficult to write this reflection. The Exodus account of the palpable darkness visited upon Egypt and the preparation for the Passover belongs to the larger narrative of the Israelites’ escape from Egypt and is best seen within that narrative. As for the letter to the Christians at Corinth, I fall too short of Paul’s confident assurance to write about that passage. Which leaves the psalms, and especially Psalm 137.

This communal lament, in which an individual speaks for the whole society, begins with 4 verses evoking a strong memory of the Babylonian captivity, that period after the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon’s Temple by the invading forces of Nebuchadnezzar II, when large numbers of Judeans were deported into slavery in Mesopotamia. The flow of the Tigris and the Euphrates and their tributaries mingles metaphorically with the flow of tears of the captive Hebrews, exiles from their homeland and from the holy place of their worship. At verse 5 begins a second memory, recalling the taunts of the Babylonians, who mocked the Hebrews, saying, “sing us your holy songs.” But the response was a despairing abdication from sacred music: we sat in mourning; we hung our instruments upon the trees;

how could we sing to God in this alien land? In these middle verses the powerful memory of the soul-destroying past gives way to a vow always to remember the homeland: if I fail to remember you, Jerusalem, may I lose my ability to write and speak (or sing). The self-imposed silence of the past becomes potentially permanent silence, imposed by failure of devotion. Thus far the psalm is strongly affecting; one responds to its pathos with sorrowful sympathy. Canadian Anglicans have not read the whole of Psalm 137 liturgically since the 1962 revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*. For that book, the church decided to omit the final three verses of the psalm, along with parts of several other psalms, and all of Psalm 58. Those deleted psalms were the so-called “cursing” or “imprecatory” ones: psalms filled with language of violence and hatred. (John Wesley had done the same in his version of the BCP, saying that some psalms were “highly improper for the mouths of a Christian Congregation.” The Roman Catholic Church in this country made similar excisions in its 1971 revision of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the United States have apparently always left the psalter whole.)

For in the last three verses this psalm turns from poignant memory to harsh cursing, and it expresses a desire for vengeance upon both the Babylonian invaders and the Edomite looters who came after them. The psalm cries out for *lex talionis*, the ancient Mesopotamian law of exact retaliation. The final verse is the worst of all: blessed be he who dashes your babies’ heads against stone walls.

Invasion, evacuation, destruction, enslavement, vengeance. The pattern is all too familiar. For two years Russia has waged devastating war on Ukraine, attempting to enslave Ukrainians at least politically and economically, if not physically, and to take possession of valuable Ukrainian land. In Afghanistan the restored Taliban enslaves its own people, denying education to women, causing protesters to disappear. The group Hamas, controlling Gaza, has killed many Israelis and captured others, deporting them into Gaza as hostages. In response Israel has invaded Gaza with terrifying force, killing huge numbers of people. No babies’ heads smashed against stone, but many children killed in bombing, premature babies dying because the hospital’s power is destroyed; whole families wiped out. Gaza is now ‘uninhabitable,’ according to one U.N. official. Those are only a few of the things happening in our time, to say nothing of the unspeakable horrors of the three millennia since Psalm 137 was written.

Is that all we human beings can do? Kill each other? Destroy each other’s civilizations? Is this our destiny? Will we never beat our swords into ploughshares? Are human beings actually incapable of living in peace? I have no answers. Here is the conclusion of a prayer which I find helpful. It was written by an 18th century Polish Hasidic Rabbi and incorporates sentences from Leviticus, Amos and Habakuk.

And so, we ask your compassion upon us; raise up, by us, what is written:

I shall place peace upon the earth

*and you shall lie down safe and undisturbed
and I shall banish evil beasts from the earth
and the sword shall not pass through your land.
but let justice come in waves like water
and righteousness flow like a river,
for the earth shall be full
of the knowledge of the Holy One
as the waters cover the sea.*

So may it be. And we say: Amen.

Phil Rogers

* * * * *

Sunday March 24 Sunday of the Passio (Palm Sunday): Psalms 24, 29, Zechariah 9:9-12, 1 Timothy 6:12-16



Pedro Orrente Entrada en Jerusalem 1620, The Hermitage, St Petersburg

“All glory, laud and honour!” the Palm Sunday hymn resounds today, picking up the mood of the readings.

The readings for the morning Office chosen for this theme--a redeeming king entering his capital to repossess it, claim his rightful throne, and liberate his people.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, he was re-enacting the ancient biblical myth of the Messiah's entrance to restore God's chosen people and the nation. Zechariah, at a time of national disaster 2500 years ago, prophesied the coming of a king who would not only triumph over the might of other nations but also usher in an era of peace for the whole world. This messianic promise was, however, to be fulfilled by a different kind of leader, a humble shepherd, exercising power for the welfare, not the oppression of the people, a life-giver not a life-exploiter, an epitome of the divine creator. Some 500 years later, Paul writing to his companion Timothy explicitly names such leadership qualities (and hence of the followers):

pursuit of right relationships, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness--not the characteristics that normally attach to a victorious figure! Much hope and expectation had been built around the arrival of the Messiah, a longing made keener by centuries of occupation of Israel by successive empires, Babylonian, Assyrian, Greek and Roman. It came to be seen as a divine apocalyptic military intervention.

The advent of the Messiah was so politically and religiously intertwined that it both nurtured fervent nationalist militarism and zealotry, and alternatively, fostered a pietistic passivity that shifted all responsibility to God. It also provoked a powerful backlash from establishment forces who benefited from the status quo.

So Jesus was poking a hornets' nest when he rode into town. The triumphal entry set the stage for a confrontation with the existing powers that swiftly moved from triumph to tragedy--today's second, and more powerful, theme set up in the eucharistic readings--the Passion of Christ.

Raising expectations and then challenging the terms creates dissonance. It goes badly. Crowds are fickle--populists take note! The cheering throngs spin into a jeering mob within days. By Friday, "Crown him!" had morphed into "Crucify him!"

And for most, the story ended (and ends) there, in disillusionment and death before they/we move on to the next shining hope. It was obvious that the status quo had won. Or did it?

These are not just ancient texts. They pose questions that all of us have to deal with at some point in our lives. "What informs our expectations?" "What happens to us when promises and expectations go horribly wrong?" "Is good ever going to triumph over evil?" "Can you trust any promises?" In other words, "Can you have hope?"

Zechariah evocatively names God's people "prisoners of hope". Like the other prophets, "the source of his hope is not in any of the political powers of his day but in God's own nature and purpose: that God keeps his promises" (Introductory Notes, "The Prophets" The Bible, NRSV. Thomas Nelson) and is faithful to his covenant with creation. We wait for Easter to witness that.

The Most Reverend Colin R. Johnson

* * * * *

Monday March 25: Psalm 51:1-18 (19-20); Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-1; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7
Annunciation of the Lord

During Holy Week in some Anglican churches, the evening Office of Tenebrae will be read. A greater part of all four chapters of the Lamentations of Jeremiah will be chanted in Plainsong, interspersed with choral reflections. Each of the nocturnal services will close with the singing of Psalm 51, "The Miserere." Parts of these two texts are included in today's readings.

This reflection will highlight the vision from all four chapters of the Lamentations, written an estimated six hundred years before the events portrayed actually occurred: It is a literal picture of the “Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world.”

To begin, fast forward this week to late Thursday night in Gethsemane (see Matthew 26.)

My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. (v.25)

He went a little further and fell on his face and prayed....Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. (v.39)

He went away a second time and prayed, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. (v.42)

"This cup." What was in that cup? Was it captivity, pain, torture, death? Such an answer would suggest that Jesus was no more than a martyr. No, Jeremiah's vision reveals a fuller explanation. Lamentations 1:12 reads, "Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which is done unto me wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

In Scripture, the inescapable fact of the wrath of God is not a fleeting emotional eruption. It is rather a fixed, unrelenting opposition to wickedness, an unwavering force against all enmity toward his goodness. It is also a feature of the redeeming love through which he created all.

Scripture also portrays the wrath of God as a death-dealing fluid. It is stored in vials. These vials can be opened and emptied and their contents poured out. They could fill a cup. (See Revelation 15:7 and chapter 16.) The wrath of God is expressed by his abandonment, by his absence, and by the desolation and forsakenness of its recipient.

At Gabbatha, the paved courtyard, Pontius Pilate, having proclaimed the innocence of Jesus with the backing of Roman law, confers the title of Jesus in writing: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS." He does so in Latin and Greek and Hebrew. He then cries out to the now nearly silenced crowd: "Ecce Homo"--"Behold the Man".

We do just that in Lamentations 3:1,ff: "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer...I was a derision to all my people...He hath filled me with bitterness and hath made me drunken with wormwood and I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord, remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall." The desolate cry from the cross was audible, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" On that Friday, he was Barabbas' substitute. Today he is ours.

Yet not even Jeremiah's sacred prophetic vision explains the "Mysterium tremendum" of the cross. It is still true that "We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains he had to bear, We only know it was for us he hung and suffered there."

Our only response is to take our cup, the chalice of salvation, as offered: "Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee, and be thankful."

Harley Smyth

Tuesday March 26: Psalms 6 and 12; Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:17-22; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22.

I was slightly surprised to find that there was no gospel reading for this Tuesday in Holy Week, but I noticed that popular commentaries often seemed to gloss over this day. A closer look at the Gospels made the omission a little more understandable. It was sometimes difficult or even contradictory to assign a specific action or parable to the first few days of the week. In general, however, commentators emphasize the generally angry and turbulent nature of the events reported: the cursing of the fig tree, the condemnation of the money-changers in the temple, and strictures against those without sufficient faith.

With these ideas in mind, I found the Psalms and the selection from the Lamentations of Jeremiah to be very fitting. Both Psalms (probably written between 1010 and 930 BCE) are apparently to be sung in the same key or mode and both bewail the evil in the world and seek the forgiveness and help of the Lord. In Psalm 6, David pleads “O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, / nor chasten me in thy wrath.” In Psalm 12, however, he pleads, “Help, Lord, for there is no longer any that is godly,” and then asks for revenge : “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips.”

The theme of vengeance against those who disobey the Lord (or the speaker) is naturally dominant in Lamentations. Speaking as Jerusalem or Zion after its defeat and the Captivity (586 BCE), Jeremiah says, “The Lord is in the right, / for I have rebelled against his word; / but hear all you peoples, / and behold my suffering.” Then he demands “Let all their evil doing come before thee / and deal with them / as thou hast dealt with me / because of all my transgressions.”

I carried those themes of suffering, transgressions, and punishments with me as I read the selection from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians (circa 55/56 AD). Paul does not want those in Corinth to be ignorant of his afflictions and sufferings, but he emphasizes that God “has delivered us from so deadly a peril.” He goes on to explain his own actions as being free from malice and motivated through the grace of God by “holiness and godly sincerity.”

In Verse 7, Paul has emphasized the comfort God brings, and added, “as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.” In Verse 18, Paul defends and sums up his teachings: “As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, whom we preached among you,... was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

In this letter of the New Testament there is no talk of vengeance and retribution, but of explanations, understanding, and mutual comfort.

Marion McKeown

Wednesday March 27: Psalm 55, Lamentations 2:1-9, 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11

Of the three readings the 55th Psalm felt more relatable to the current world situation. The first time I read it I felt like I could have been listening to News sources today. I hear and see what is happening far away but like residents living in war torn countries today, David is living in the midst of these types of threats and betrayals.

David's prayers are a desperate appeal to God for deliverance and a desire for peace. He feels betrayed by those he trusted and craves relief from the conspiracy and plotting against him. "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest".

Verses 9-15 outline David's prayer that God could frustrate the plans of the enemies, dividing them.

The Psalm ends with a confident, meditation on God's justice. While David's suffering was not taken away he was sustained and made strong enough to bear these burdens and trust in God.

Doreen Whatley

* * * * *

Thursday, March 28: Maundy Thursday: Psalm 102; Lamentations 2:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32

No matter how many times I try, the readings for Maundy Thursday remind me of the death and destruction brought to the Middle East before Christmas last year. The initial action of Hamas was yet another example of humankind's inhumanity to its neighbours. And the retribution which followed runs so counter to the teaching of Jesus.

Lamentations is traditionally read at the wailing wall in Jerusalem and is de rigeur in the Roman Catholic Church in the last three days of Holy Week. In our passage from Lamentations appointed for today there is the recognition that in the midst of despair and destruction God is still at the helm, that God is good. He is the Lord of hope and of faithfulness and of salvation. Indeed, God's compassions never fail despite what appears to be the converse.

That truth as delineated in Psalm 102 follows in the same vein. It is descriptive of the unforgivable iniquity of humankind, and yet God still "regards the prayer of the destitute." And it anticipates the time when "peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the Lord".

One of the things that has always struck me about Maundy Thursday is that in the Eucharistic liturgy the prayer of Consecration is changed slightly. As the celebrant intones "On this very night when he was handed over to suffering and death" we collectively join the generations of faithful and I suggest we can all hear Paul writing to the fledgling church in Corinth as he shares with them: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?" There is indeed one bread and we who are many are part of that one body because we all partake of the one bread. As we prepare to join with the universal family of God this coming

weekend, let us all proclaim the mystery of faith. “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

The Right Reverend George Bruce

* * * * *

Friday March 29 Good Friday: Psalm 22; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; John 13:36-38

Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus replied, ‘I am going where you cannot follow me now, but one day you will.’ Peter said, ‘Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ Jesus answered, ‘Will you really lay down your life for me? In very truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have denied me three times. John 13:36-38 There it is, laid out before all of us. Our willingness to promise out of love and loyalty, while at the same time, understanding that human frailty will betray us again and again. You and I know that this passage of scripture is especially poignant because Peter is making a declaration of love and loyalty to the Lord, and we all know from the story that we are living through this week, that he cannot, or will not keep it. Peter is you and I. We have made promises of love and loyalty to Jesus in our daily life and walk, in our baptism, every time we attend church and recite the creed that says “I believe”. And yet, like Peter, we know that we will probably run away from the promise if the opportunity calls for it.

In the early church they had quite a dilemma about what to do with those who had been baptized, but in the persecutions by the Roman state, had weakened and offered incense to the Emperor rather than accept the martyrdom which was on offer. The early church honoured its martyrs and so how could they forgive those who refused the final act of love and betrayed God by worshiping another simply to save their skin.

You might be shocked to know that there was a years-long debate on these matters and it was not clear whether one could be forgiven for this sin or any other after the sinless grace of baptism had been bestowed. Clearly, the church worked it out and lived up to the call of Jesus to forgive. Those who from fear had not lived up to their confession were restored to the body of Christ. Human weakness was not a fatal flaw, but rather something which the Grace of God would temper and change again and again and again.

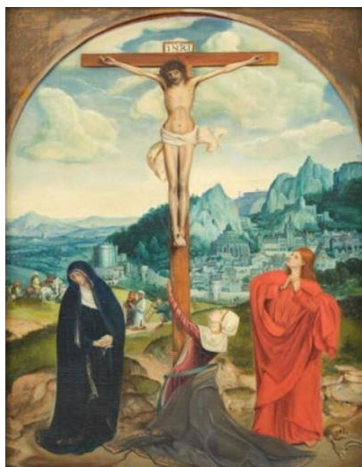
In my work, I have the privilege of confirming young and old into their faith by laying-on-of-hands and prayer. One of the things I always note is that human beings are terrible at promises. We break them all the time. From the simplest promise of a time commitment, to the most sacred vows of love and fidelity. It is in our nature to be too quick to let go of the commitments we have made because of fear, because of pain or even simply because of inconvenience. The point I make with young people is that they have made promises, and being human they will fail at them, but our faith is not in our ability to keep our promises, but rather, in the God who always keeps his promises.

This was the point the early church had to learn. It really isn’t about what we do for God. Whether it is our work, or our prayer, or any sort of commitment we make to God. God loves

us and accepts our promises as our best intentions and seeks to uphold us as we keep those promises. But God also knows that we are human and we will fail. We make promises not because we can unfailingly keep our word, but we make promises to God who unfailingly keeps his word. The blessings, mercy and grace that have been piled on us from the benefits of Good Friday and Easter Sunday are not dependent on our faithfulness. They are the fruits of his faithfulness.

So for this Good Friday, focus on the promises you have made and repent of the times you have not lived up to them, but also focus on the promises of Jesus to you and rest in the eternal and unbroken grace, mercy and love which he has promised to you and remember: He is faithful.

The Right Reverend William Cliff



Quentin Massys *Crucifixion* 1540
National Gallery of Canada

* * * * *

Saturday March 30 Holy Saturday: Psalm 88, Lamentations 3:37-58, Hebrews 4:1-16

I struggled with the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. As a faithful, gay Christian, I can hear these words being employed by people who wish to express intolerance of my life and a near 30-year relationship with my husband, recently deceased. And then some passages stood out.

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.

For me intolerance of sexual orientation does not seem to conform to faithfulness but more to disobedience, and for me this is reinforced by subsequent passages:

For the word of God is living and active.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

The Bible is the word of God, but it is also communicated with the historic limitations of earlier societies. As we evolve as a society, one can see that the word of God is indeed "living and active," and since "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." how could God create people who share loving and caring same-sex relationships, if God did not approve of them.

Christ died for us, all of us, including same-sex deceased loved ones and their widowers.

Edgar Tumak

Events During Lent

Ash Wednesday 14 February

12:15pm Said Eucharist with imposition of ashes

7:00pm Choral Eucharist with imposition of ashes

Friday 23 February

7:30pm Organ Concert, Edward Norman

Saturday 23 March

12:00pm – 4:30pm Bach Marathon

7:30pm Concert, Blackwood

Maundy Thursday 28 March

10:30am Said Eucharist

7:00pm Choral Eucharist

Good Friday 29 March

10:00am

3:00pm Concert, Stainer's *Crucifixion*

Saturday 30 March

8:00pm The Great Vigil of Easter

Sunday 31 March

8:00am Said Eucharist

10:30am Choral Eucharist

More details on all events are available on our website.

The Cathedral Church of St George

www.stgeorgescathedral.ca

