

# LENT†

February 2018

Greendale Clergy Group  
Worcester, Massachusetts

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2018  
Ash Wednesday

## Reclaiming the Being in Our Doing

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 (Isa. 58:1-12); Psalm 51:1-7; 2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**L**ent begins with readings from Hebrew and Christian scripture that are various expressions of a divine charge: “Let your doing reflect your being!” We hear it first in the preparatory cry of the Prophet, “Rend your hearts and not your clothing.” Another asks us to awaken, “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

The Psalmist responds, “You desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart.” Then Paul, in his second letter to the faithful in Corinth reminds us that even those who have endured “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger . . .” are to arm ourselves in response to this reality with the “weapons of righteousness” by “purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God.”

Finally, the author of the Gospel of Matthew beseeches those with ears to hear and hearts that understand, not simply to act like one is faithful, but to act out of the integrity of one’s relationship with God; giving alms for the sake of those who benefit from such gifting; treating your prayer like a dialogue between beloveds, in the quiet spaces of your life; preparing to fast in gladness not gloom; and, whatever is treasurable to you, let it reflect what you love and the one whose love you manifest in return. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

During this time of soulful and preparation, may all that you do be a true reflection of the person you are most called to be. AMEN?

– Aaron R. Payson

Thursday, Feb. 15, 2018

## Visible Words

Psalm 91:1-2,9-16; Exodus 5:10-23, Acts 7:30-34

**T**he Lenten texts draw us back to ancient stories of deliverance and rescue and one’s ability to see and hear when such rescue appears. Just as Moses was not first recognized as the one to open freedom to his people (Who made you a ruler and judge?), so Jesus is not recognized as a deliverer to his people, nor to many of us today.

The original call of Moses from the burning bush is of interest. First, it happens in the wilderness. The name of Horeb is literally “wasteland.” Moses’ encounter with God takes

place far removed from the sights and sounds of religious community. All of our expectations about a holy shrine or some theological elements lending themselves to a holy meeting are absent. The theophany occurs in an ordinary, everyday time and place.

If you go back and read Moses' original encounter with God in Exodus 3, a fascinating occurrence takes place. The angel of the Lord appears in a flame of fire out of a bush. Moses looks at the bush and notices that the bush, although ablaze, was not being consumed. Here is the line that captures my attention: "Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.'"

Moses had to "turn aside." How many times have we missed out on a theophany, an appearance of God, because we have failed to "turn aside"? If Moses had not taken that second look, if he had not wandered over and given himself to that extra look, God's message would not have been communicated. God's words would not have been heard. There would have been no hearing if the sight had not been attended to by his "turning aside."

God's messages come to us through multiple avenues and venues. Some are spectacular, some very ordinary. Communication is only successful as we give ourselves fully to the occasions when the Spirit decides to show up.

Prayer: Lord keep me awake to all of your nudgings, be they of "burning bushes" or "still small voices." Amen. – *Mark Nilson*

Friday, Feb. 16, 2018

## Out of the World

John 17:9-19 – *The Message*

**I**n Eugene Peterson's *Message* version of the gospel, we hear words attributed to Jesus say, "I'm not praying for the God-rejecting world, but for those you gave me, for they are yours by right." Then later, "I'm not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you guard them from evil intent."

We can make of this how Jesus understood the goodness of the created, you and I, apart from the tendencies of "the world"; those ambitions and intentions sprouting up from the human mind operating apart from Godly intent and subverting grace and mercy.

Jesus was going after people, who are the root of ambitions and intentions, for bringing about change; not hammering away at social forms and governmental mechanisms, because they are the product of the human mind.

Instead, Jesus speaks to all willing to stop and listen of the joy that can live in the hearts, minds and souls of those open to receiving the Word, making recipients holy and consecrating (enlivening) the core of their being. Insights, gifts, skills, all coming together for wholeness.

As we journey into this Lenten season, may we pause to consider how taking time from

“the world” for leaning into the Word (that is Jesus’ message) can help to complete our lives and enlighten our way forward.

– Andrew Borden

Saturday, Feb. 17, 2018

## There Is a Time for Everything

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; John 12:27-36

**T**ime. The Greek language has two terms for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is the immediate idea of time. It is what we use to plan our days, what we measure the moments of our life by. It is what we could call “our time.” *Kairos* is different. It is the sense of eternity. The sense of always now. It’s immeasurable. It always is. *Kairos* is what we could call “God’s time.”

In Scripture, as in our own lives, there is this constant tension between our time and God’s time. Life plods along seemingly in our control until something suddenly shifts, and we are reminded of our place in a much larger story. I think maybe the writer of Ecclesiastes was trying to communicate this as he presented his ideas on there being a time for everything. It may seem he is simply giving us a mere poetic take on the seeming balance of things. But perhaps he was reaching far more deeply into the mystery of time.

A mystery that I think can be, in a haunting way, a great help to us, especially when we cycle through times of profound suffering – times that always seem to pull the curtain back a bit on eternity. Even Jesus lived this tension. He functioned primarily in our time, but was certain God’s time was ever close. In the Gospel text for today, God’s time has fully come. The cross is just ahead and completely unavoidable. But notice Jesus does not shrink back. He does not beg for his time. For He knows that in all of God’s time, there is but one purpose: the redemption of the world.

All of us know this crashing down of God’s time. We are going along in our carefully choreographed lives. We create for ourselves success, safety, financial security, meaning and importance. And then it all changes in an instant. We go to work, where we have been for 15 years, and are handed a pink slip. We discover our spouse is having an affair or just doesn’t love us anymore. Our stock portfolios go from being a comfortable retirement nest to being worthless. The doctor tells us that the cough in our chest is not seasonal bronchitis, but stage 4 lung cancer. Suddenly, like Jesus, our horizon has shrunk to a cross.

That may be the very help we need to live into God’s time. The cross — as evil, as horrible, as brutal, as unfair as it was — saved the world. And Jesus bids us follow. Thankfully, the random evil in this world, designed to destroy us, in the end only serves to usher us into God’s time, into the amazing grace that redeems the world.

May this Lenten season be a time (chronos) during which we are open more fully to the mystery of time (kairos). – *David Gentleman*

Sunday, Feb. 18, 2018

## Simplicity

Luke 4:1-13

The three temptations of Christ have been famous throughout the history of the church because they speak to all of us. First, the devil tempted Jesus with bread. This can symbolize financial security, wealth, or, for the poorest among us, simply having enough food for the day. We've all heard Jesus' response many times: "Man does not live by bread alone." It isn't bad to want financial security. But how many of us believe that financial security would solve all of our problems?

Second, the devil tempted Jesus with power. In a way, he is saying, "Imagine how wonderful this world that you love would be if you were in control. I can make that happen." Jesus' response reminds the devil and us that we are not in this world to accumulate power. Our job is to reflect the glory of God. "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."

Third, he tempted Jesus with safety and security. On the day that I am writing this, there was a school shooting in Kentucky. I read that this was the 11th school shooting this year, and that 25 percent of parents are concerned that there will be a shooting in the schools that their children attend. Who can blame them? They want their children to be safe. But life is about more than safety. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

There is nothing wrong with wanting enough food to eat, with accepting a position of power, or with wanting safety and security. They become a problem when we are willing to give up who we are to get them.

– *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Monday, Feb. 19, 2018

## Remember Always, and in All Ways, Remember

Psalms 77; Job 4:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-10

The readings for this day from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures admit the human tendency toward self-loathing. Each of us has faced moments when

our world seems to fall apart around us and we seek answers that seem so elusive. What did I do to deserve this? How can this be? What have I done? It is a natural response to situations that seem to propel us furthest from the vision we have for ourselves, those we cherish and the world we serve. Yet it is this very response that serves as an emotional and spiritual barrier to our growth and potential.

We can get stuck thinking that we are being punished or held accountable for something we are not certain we have done or ultimately deserve. In the midst of our turning inward, we neglect the potential we have in the moment to bring the power of our faith to bear on whatever is happening. Spiritual courage would have us literally re-member ourselves back into our truest form. It is exactly at the moment of our deepest trial that we are bidden to call upon the strength and courage we have been witness to in the moments when we have known the blessings of the Spirit. To remember our genetic predisposition as children of God, and to bear witness to that truth in the face of every calamitous event that would seem to turn our faith into dust. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” entreats Paul in his letter to the Ephesians.

Herein lies one of the important gifts of Lent: To remember our deepest selves in the face of what would seem to have the power to destroy our own self-image. The challenge, then, is to remember that our self-image is a shared image, the *Imago Dei*. We are not alone, self-made or destroyable when we remember this important truth.

– Aaron R. Payson

Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2018

## Caution! Unpleasant Reading Ahead

Psalm 17, Zechariah 3:1-10, 2 Peter 2:4-21 – *The Message*

**T**his kind of reading isn't for the timid or weak-stomached. It's like reading the police blotter of ancient Rome, with all the lurid details: names, faces, violent weapons used, how many stitches, the lies, the name calling, and perversity.

God didn't let the rebel angels off the hook, but jailed them in hell till Judgment Day. Neither did he let the ancient ungodly world off. He wiped it out with a flood, rescuing only eight people.

2 Peter 2:4-5

God decreed destruction for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. A mound of ashes was all that was left – grim warning to anyone bent on an

ungodly life. But that good man Lot, driven nearly out of this mind by the sexual filth and perversity, was rescued. Surrounded by moral rot day after day after day, that righteous man was in constant torment. 2 Peter 2:6-8

I wonder how this reads in a Children's Bible?

I guess the thing to keep in mind is that things haven't changed much in this old world, and evil is just as rampant as in Peter's day – even in the church. We always want to think better of ourselves, but we can become just as corrupt as any family unit. God will take care of things, however. Let's just keep the faith.

I find myself thinking about that old book by Robert Fulghum, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," in which the author lists lessons we normally learn in early school (i.e. sharing, being kind to one another, cleaning up after ourselves, and living "a balanced life" of work, play, and learning) and opined that the world would be much improved if we just followed Ms. Johnson's lesson plans in JFK Elementary School.

Prayer: Lord, you will sort things out. Help me, day after day, to just follow Jesus. I've never been led wrong when I followed His way.

– Mark Nilson

Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2018

## Commitment

Mark 1:29-45 – The Message

Once we learn something, how good are we at sharing what we know? Back in the day, a friend had known for years that I work on my own vehicles. So, he asked me if I would "show him" how to change the oil, so he could begin doing it himself on his car. I was surprised he asked, because he had absolutely NO mechanical aptitude. But I was open to giving it a go, and agreed. I told him what to buy for supplies.

On the day appointed for the servicing, he showed up with the supplies and I set to work showing him what to do, and had him under the car. When we finished the job, he seemed to understand all the steps.

But that was it. He never tried to do this on his own. He had actually played me to get free labor in taking care of his vehicle that day.

Jesus was willing to help people serious about getting better, from whatever plagued them, and sincerely willing to keep on going in living into a relationship with God. But, when he found lots of people just coming out for "freebie" healing with no commitment, he packed up and moved on to the next place where some

folks might seriously engage.

If this sounds harsh, consider that he left people behind in the places he had been who could continue the work he had begun in helping those clamoring for him but who hadn't gotten to his hands-on help yet.

We're still in the same situation. Some people want the benefits of God without any commitment. God is still willing to come and meet us where we are with what we need, and anticipates we'll share what we know with others who might sincerely come to find out more about God.

May we be willing to share the grace and mercy from above with our fellow travelers in this journey called life, pray for what they learn about the Divine to stick and make a permanent difference in their lives.

– Andrew Borden

Thursday, Feb. 22, 2018

## Whom (What) Shall I Fear?

Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12

**L**ong before Lent became just an excuse to try to keep up our New Year's resolutions for another six weeks, it was a purposeful journey toward opening oneself to the approach of the Divine Other. A necessary part of such a journey was a willingness to look inward, a courageousness to see what lurked in the darker corners of our souls, and a resolve to let go of that which would prevent us from receiving God more fully.

Of course, often what we find inside are fears, and insecurities, and anxieties — born of both real and imagined threats to our way of life, or our very life itself. Certainly, we live in a time when there is so much to be afraid of. Man's collective inhumanity to man runs unabated, and it seems every day we are made aware of yet another reason to fear. But the sad irony of this situation is that when these fears are allowed to take hold, they become the very doors we hide behind. Sadly, in hiding from things (some of which may be worth hiding from), we end up keeping even the good away. And so the very thing we need — the Divine Other — is locked outside our doors.

Perhaps then what we really need this Lent is to find reason to let go of our fears, unlock our doors. Perhaps the place to start is with the words of the Psalmist. God knows, there is no ignoring the sometimes harsh reality of life in this world, but there is still reason to not be afraid. Not because the monsters aren't real — for many of them are — but because the Divine Other, the Uncreated, God loves us, and if God loves us, then it stands that even the darkest of nights is not the end of the story. Love wins, always.

May these ancient words be as real for us as they were to the one who wrote them. – David Gentleman



The LORD is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—  
of whom shall I be afraid...  
Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me,  
even then I will be confident.  
One thing I ask from the LORD,  
this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.  
For in the day of trouble  
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent  
and set me high upon a rock...  
I remain confident of this:  
I will see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.  
Wait for the LORD;  
be strong and take heart  
and wait for the LORD. Amen.

Friday, Feb. 23, 2018

## Their Glory Is Their Shame

Philippians 3:17-20

A few years ago, we had a church picnic/worship service. Our daughter was about 2 months old at the time, and when I went up to lead worship, I held her while she rested against my shoulder and slept. Someone emailed me to say it was nice to see me as a new proud father. I hadn't thought of myself as a proud father. I probably thought of myself as a helpless father, a father who doesn't know what he's doing, or a tired father. But was I proud? Someone took a picture of that moment, and when I saw myself I realized that yes, I did look proud. I just didn't know it.

This passage invites us to look deep within and ask an important question: What makes me proud? What is my glory? You may not even know it. You may have to ask a few friends or family members to find out. Someone might even need

to take a picture to prove it to you.

It is an important question to answer for Christians because our glory is not in the things of this world. Our glory is in the cross. It is in our weakness that we are strong. If our glory is in the stuff that we have accumulated, then we are enemies of the cross. We are like the folks that Paul wrote about whose gods are their stomachs.

So we must ask these questions of ourselves if we are going to take up our crosses and follow him. – *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Saturday, Feb. 24, 2018

## The Blessings of Storytelling, Seeing, and Silence

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:7-15; Mark 8:27-30

The readings for this day suggest at least three modes of adoration of that which is Holy. First, the Psalmist entreats us to praise the Divine, noting that by doing so consistently, “future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness.” The power of this story, as well as our own, is found in the telling. Lent is a time for us to remember ourselves into this larger story of faith. Finding ways to share that story inspires those who come after us to do the same.

The author of Genesis recounts a moment of awaking for Sarai’s servant Hagar, whose escape is halted by an encounter with the master of the universe who awakens her to her future, as mother of yet another people God will bless. The miracle of this moment, beyond the explication of future blessing, is that Hagar, perhaps for the first time in her life, feels she has truly been seen, that is, recognized for who she is and is to become. She is so moved by this moment that she names the place of this meeting “Well of the Living One, who sees me” (Beer Lahoi Roi).

Then the author of the Gospel of Mark gives us another vision, of a conversation between Jesus and his disciples, who are given the opportunity to share with Jesus who they think he is. Peter shares his heart, “You are the Messiah.” Another vision that weds present experience and future promise. Here, though, unlike the naming that happens in other places in scripture, Jesus asks that this “truth” remain secret. Silence, it turns out, in the presence of the Messiah, is the precondition for others to be able to experience this truth for themselves.

All three modes of response are important. To tell one’s story so that the lessons of one’s life and the truth of one’s heart be carried forward. Bearing witness to another’s blessedness is also a powerful testimony to one’s faith, in the other, and all that which is holy. And finally, so not to get in the way of another’s awakening, sometimes, silence is the best answer.

– *Aaron R. Payson*

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2018

## A Break in the Action

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalm 27, Philippians 3:17 – 4:1, Luke 9:28-36

**K**aroline Lewis writes, “We all want to experience transfiguration here and now, regardless of the terminology we choose to use. In the end, we want a sense of the transcendent, the numinous, the holy, something outside of ourselves that is the cause for awe and wonder.”

In this event that we call “The Transfiguration,” something happens between our experiences of Epiphany and Lent. Something is going public, something is changing and taking on a very different feel and form. Deep in winter’s grip --- the cold, the white and the gray – we need something like transfiguration to enliven our souls, to restart our spiritual centers from the sugar high and its predictable slump after the Christmas and New Year’s celebrations. Notice that Peter, James, and John all struggle with a sleep like “woosiness” from the mountain exposure.

What interests me is Peter’s desire to hold on to the moment. “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah...” (vs. 33). We are always trying to hang on to these exceptional experiences. “Dwellings” refers to permanence, something solid that one can hang on to. But Jesus is one who is on the move, with mission and much ministry yet to come. Jesus is about setting up camp, but moving forward to Jerusalem and the salvific work of the cross.

Perhaps “transfiguration” is not the word or state-of-being we most need. Perhaps the word that we are looking for is “transformation.” Transfiguration is the exposure that might be needed to prepare us for God, but transformation is the effect we are seeking. Transformation offers us the rawness and readiness for God’s new revelation to us. Transformation causes us to see with more than just our eyes and hear with more than just our ears. Transfiguration readies us, but transformation changes us.

Prayer: May the mountaintop experience we long for be the catalyst for new and deeper experiences with Christ. Pray for transformation.

– Mark Nilson

Monday, Feb. 26, 2018

## Driven

Mark 3:17-19a – The Message

**A**nthing worth doing is going to take some effort, planning, and patience. I used to work in engineering, and had responsibilities including design-

ing and setting up manufacturing lines. You can probably understand that if an employer turns over reins for purchasing equipment and allocating dollars for labor and training, then a positive end result in cash-flow and return-on-investment is expected.

My work ethic led to on-time deliveries of processes and trained individuals capable of meeting or exceeding corporate goals. Some other engineers weren't so driven and dedicated to positive results, and after missing deadlines and quality standards, they weren't usually called back to continue. But those of us with proven track records were tapped over and over again to develop and deliver.

Jesus' team was developed from people who had proven aptitude and a willingness for developing an understanding of what God and faith are all about, and how faith impacts humanity and society. With a crowd full of choices, as described in this passage from Mark, we are told he made his final choices for leaders who could affect positive results in God's name: They had witnessed the power of God at work in and through Jesus, heard and taken to heart the discourse of scripture, and were then to be honed for deployment in the Word of the Almighty in saving humanity from itself.

The work was hard. It took much effort, planning and patience, and I believe those of us as persons of faith can attest that the work of the Word has certainly been worth doing, and doing well. But the work is not over, as each of us are called to continue witnessing and being grace and mercy; God hoping that our joy and our hope as people of faith is a driving force in making Christ and salvation known. – *Andrew Borden*

Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2018

## Remember

Psalm 105:1-15,42; Numbers 14:10b-24; I Corinthians 10:1-13

**R**emembering is one of the more important themes we find throughout Scripture, but it is not a call to just recollect a memory. It is something much grander. Consider God's own remembering.

The Psalmist tells us He remembered His holy promise to Abraham. That is not a simple mental exercise of merely remembering the establishment of the covenant. Obviously, God doesn't forget. It is an active participation in the covenant as ongoing and permanent. It is remembering the past so that the present and future are included in that past.

It can be the same for us. We must remember the past, and if it is a good past, then by remembering we bring forward that good and allow it to inform both our now and our future. If it is a bad past, we remember it to learn from it and to be

sure we change our present and our future. This is why a key element, some folks would tell you “the” key element, of the Jewish Seder celebration is the call to never let atrocities of the past happen again. By remembering, we participate in the now and future of that event. We are seeing this very idea play out in many areas of our current world. People are remembering atrocities, and in remembering are asking us all to participate in changing the now and the future.

It takes courage to live this way, which is precisely why the Psalmist sings out for us to remember what the Lord has done. When we remember the grace that has redeemed us, the grace that has carried us, we are opening ourselves to living into that grace again today and tomorrow. And God knows we need grace — not just then, but now and going forward. I like the way Dustin Crowe says it: “The gospel rhythm isn’t one-and-done, but rinse and repeat. Every time the gospel is proclaimed, we believe and embrace it again — in other words, we remember.”

What’s more, we don’t just remember for ourselves. We remember for others, especially and most importantly when they have grown weary and are unable to remember. Remembering that grace won once allows us to live that victory again for others who cannot live it for themselves. When death and darkness would blind our eyes, it is good to remember God, too, died once, but that wasn’t the end of the story. Resurrection was. Remembering that is living out that same promise of life. May this Lenten season be a time we all remember. – *David Gentleman*

Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2018

## Snow Days

2 Chronicles 2:1-22

**T**his year was the first time I had heard of a bomb cyclone. When we found out one was coming, I went out and bought bungee cords to tie down some loose items in my yard. We cooked some food and set out some lanterns because we weren’t sure if we would lose power.

The bomb cyclone sounded frightening. But it turned out to be just a regular snow day for us. And like so many snow days, a wonderful interruption. Our world got smaller, and it was just our little family together, without interference from the outside world.

The people of Israel in our passage were interrupted by a far greater danger than the bomb cyclone. They were anticipating a war. It was a war that they couldn’t win. With the enemies already close to the city, they were scheduled for destruction in a few days. Their purpose got very narrow. They needed to survive. So they gathered in Jerusalem to pray.

In verse 12, Jehoshaphat prayed what many of us have prayed: “We do not

know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” Yesterday they were going about their business. But today they could only pray for God’s help. Yesterday they were self-sufficient. Today they would need to trust in God. They were pulled out of their comfort zones and into the presence of God. It was a holy interruption.

I tend to think of Lent as holy interruption. It is a moment in our year when we stop to notice God. It is a spiritual “snow day.” It is an interruption. You might have ashes placed on your forehead, attend a Bible study in your church, or attend special services during Holy Week. Whatever you do, it is a time to be interrupted and notice that we are not alone and we are invited to put our trust in God. – *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Thursday, March 1, 2018

## The Lesson of Sea Glass and Stone

Psalm 19; Exodus 19:1-9a; 1 Peter 2:4-10

One of my very favorite summer activities is to awaken early, on a day when low tide meets the rising sun over Saco Bay, and wander the beach barefoot at the edge of the water. Shell fragments, glass and stone glisten in the early morning light, pushed onto shore by the evening tides.

There are treasures there in the water.

The ones I like best are those whose rough edges have been made smooth by the sand and the waves. Tossed about by the currents of time, these small fragments are made beautiful because they have wrestled with the elements. For their efforts, they take on a diamond-like luster. Their beauty is not in spite of the adversity they face, not because of some protected place in the universe, but precisely because of the courage to engage what could have obliterated them into only sand and sea, and now they shine and show their truest nature.

The lesson of the sea glass, stone and shell at low tide is at the heart of the readings for this day. The Psalmist sings the glory of the natural world as a mirror of divinity. The author of Exodus reminds us of those moments, in the midst of our own desert wanderings, when we are given a glimpse of our nature and potential as “treasured possessions” of the divine. Peter instills in us the faith to claim our place as those who, weathered by the elements and tormented by circumstance and fear-filled community, are critical components in the foundation of the coming kingdom. Shall we mourn our lot then, or remember our divinely inspired purpose? – *Aaron R. Payson*

Friday, March 2, 2018

## Roadtrip from Hell

Mark 4:35-41 – The Message

I used to travel to engineering conferences and give presentations as part of my responsibilities. This one trip, we were going back to one of my favorite spots, Park City, Utah, where the accommodations and the food were great.

On the flight out, an ailment I am kind of stuck with for life flared up. By the time we reached the resort, I was a bit uncomfortable. As the night progressed, not having medication with me, I was being overcome with chills and such. Wonderful.

However, being a person of faith, I knew that I was not alone, even though home and family were quite a ways off. I had encountered this stuff before, had prayed and learned to relax dealing with it, and made it through.

Jesus' companions were not so able to deal with the turbulence of their trip; there is no praying recorded as happening in the face of the storm, or taking a breath to calm down. Instead, they ran to Jesus to wake him out of a sound sleep in hope of a solution.

While the story is a commentary on our tendency to come unglued in the face of trials and tribulations, it is also an example for how to find a solution by reaching out to Jesus, to God, to the Spirit. The Almighty in reality is never asleep, but present to give us what we need (perhaps not what we want) in response to what we pray for.

May we trust this Love that ever meets us where we are, as we are.

– Andrew Borden

Saturday, March 3, 2018

## Parched

Psalms 63:1-8, Isaiah 5:1-7, Luke 6:43-45

Cape Town is a coastal city in South Africa. It's the second-most populous urban area in South Africa after Johannesburg. It is also the capital and primate city of the Western Cape province. As the seat of the parliament of South Africa, it serves as the legislative capital of the country. The city is famous for its harbor, its natural setting in the Cape Floristic Region, and for such well-known landmarks as Table Mountain and Cape Point. As of 2014, it is the 10th most populous city in Africa and home to 64 percent of the Western Cape's population. It is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, reflecting its role as a major destination for



immigrants and expatriates. Also in 2014, Cape Town was named the “World Design Capital” by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design. That same year, Cape Town was named the best place in the world to visit by both The New York Times and the British Daily Telegraph.

Quite the resume. What the description fails to report is that Cape Town is also going dry. In the third year of severe drought, if things do not drastically change, Cape Town will be in significant trouble. Rationing has done little to avert the problem. Projects for desalination stations are well behind schedule and will not be able to stem the tide (so to speak) of this environmental disaster. Easter, April 1, is the date when the tap will have to be shut off and people will be on their own.

Today’s psalm speaks of thirsting for God and places David out in the wilderness of Judah. If one has ever traveled in the Holy Land, one knows how dry things can get. Travel a bit south and east of Jerusalem to the Dead or Salt Sea, and one gets a quick education about how barren and deadly drought can be. A quick swim in the Dead Sea without immediately showering with fresh water, and your skin itches and shrivels in the saline cocktail.

Likewise, the soul shrivels without restoration from God’s presence. Deep in winter’s grasp, make sure you are replenishing your inner being with plenty of Spirit fluids.

Prayer: “Like a tree planted by the water, we will not be moved.”

– Mark Nilson

Sunday, March 4, 2018

## Empire or Compassion

Psalms 63:1-8; Isaiah 55:1-9; I Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Once upon a time, America was a beacon of compassion and cried out to all the world a most remarkable invitation: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” [Emma Lazarus] Much has changed since this invitation first went out, and many forces have colluded to lessen the authenticity of such an invitation.

There is much debate as to what happened to our compassionate nation, and much argument as to who is to blame, and much handwringing over the lack of altruism among the nation’s leaders, and strong opinions on what needs to be done, and deep division over the very virtue of compassion itself. Some want us to be again that nation that welcomes all, while others reject the notion with extreme prejudice. It is a very interesting time, and as those who follow Christ, it makes



sense that we would rage against the turning away from those who most need our help.

But sometimes I wonder if our rage is misplaced. Perhaps we should not be so surprised at the complete shift in policy and evident lack of compassion at the highest levels of government. For maybe the deterioration of compassion is an inevitable reality within government. Maybe even the most altruistic of nations cannot maintain compassion, especially those nations that become empires. Empire and compassion just cannot co-exist. By definition they are determined to see different ends.

So maybe while it is still noble to want our nation to beckon back to a time when they led the way in caring for the forgotten, we should not be so anguished that it let us down. Maybe we should never have put our trust in empire in the first place. Yes, we put our motto — in God We Trust — on our currency, but isn't that just it? The U.S. dollar is not the currency of the Kingdom of God. Compassion, love, grace and mercy are, and no matter how much we claim to cling to God, maybe we cling to the almighty dollar instead. Somewhere along the line, we fooled ourselves into thinking we could control empire, but in the end it controlled us, and so our rage is misplaced.

We should rage instead against our own personal alignment with empire and change our minds about our allegiance to a kingdom that is not God's. For even if our great compassionate invitation to the world were to be authentic again, it couldn't last. It is still but a mere shadow of God's kingdom, a poor imitation of what real compassion is. Perhaps the only invitation we should heed is that from God, written so poetically by Isaiah: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare." As beautiful as Emma Lazarus' words may be, these are even more beautiful, for they are from a Kingdom that will not end, an empire that will always be compassionate — for all. — *David Gentleman*

Monday, March 5, 2018

## The Inner Judge

Romans 2:1-11

Someone once told me that the person who helped her understand God was her grandmother. I asked what this meant. She said that her grandmother would always repair holes in socks with tiny, careful stitches and would criticize other housewives who "darned" socks. Darning (and yes, I had to look up the word)

uses loose stitches to repair socks. The message was clear. God is perfect and expects perfection from all of us and is appalled by our imperfections.

This image of God is more common than you might think. Many of us have an inner judge who is always talking to us. While we are darning our socks, our inner judge reminds us of old Grandma, who would never approve. When we balance our checkbooks and the ledger is off by 10 cents, the inner judge reminds us of old Dad, who would spend hours searching for that 10-cent accounting mistake. The inner judge reminds us of all the ways that we fall short. We start to think that the inner judge is God.

Eventually, the inner judge comes out, and we start to judge others. Paul, along with Jesus, condemns us for our judgmental ways because God isn't really like that critical Grandma. Paul rightly reminds us that the gospel is a message of grace and mercy. The gospel proclaims that you are precious and beloved by God — even if you do require a little bit of forgiveness. The good news is that as you come to a deeper understanding of the gospel, the volume of that inner judge can get turned down, and you can recognize the grace that God has given you. Christians are not a people who have received judgment but mercy. When we internalize the mercy we've received, we extend mercy instead of judgment to one another. — *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

## Purifying the Temple

Psalm 84; 2 Chronicles 29:16-19; Hebrews 9:23-28

**T**he body — your body, my body — is a Holy Temple. “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty,” exclaims the Psalmist. Our souls yearn, our hearts cry out. “Blessed are those who dwell in your house, they are ever praising you.” This would suggest then, that every act of self-care is a form of prayer. The right amounts of exercise, rest, nutrition, hygiene, contemplation, and sensual contact with others and the world around us are acts of praise for the gift of our bodies. How often do we overlook this basic spiritual truth? As Lent proceeds, many of us reflect on things we have forgotten about ourselves, each other, and the world. Spring cleaning, if you will, is the outward response to such musings, when we muster the energy to repair the temple of our homes and, as many New Year's resolutions would attest, our bodies as well.

In the reading for this day, Hezekiah purifies the temple by opening its doors and repairing them; by removing all that defiled its sanctuary, placing into this context the ways the community inherited from generations gone before. To change old habits takes will and effort, and as demonstrated in 2 Chronicles, a

community of the committed — in other words, real change takes company.

As a faithful people, we are inspired by those who know true health, welfare, and peace. For us mere mortals, this awareness often comes and fades and comes again. Which is why we revisit this period of preparation every year. This year, may our resolve become as strong as our faith, and our desire as steadfast as that which inspires our worth-ship.

– Aaron R. Payson

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

## Warning! Hard Words Ahead

Psalm 39, Numbers 13:17-27, Luke 13:18-21

**N**umbers 13 is not a text you want to go into cold as you step into the pulpit to read. There are enough Lebo-hamaths, Ahimans, Sheshais, and Wadi Eshcols to test the pronunciation skills of the best linguists. Moses sends his troops in to do some reconnaissance work, to get a feel for the Promised Land, what resources are available, and what they might expect in push-back from those who currently call the area home. As they slip out, the team cuts down a branch of grapes, some figs and pomegranate samples as evidence of its fertile plains.

Meanwhile, Jesus tells a story about God's gardening prowess. "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it?" Jesus says that if you were to take the tiniest of seeds and plant it, because of God's goodness it grows into the one of the biggest bushes you will ever see. Earlier in the chapter, he uses an illustration of a fig tree planted in a landowner's vineyard. When he came looking for his fruit, he found none. Threatening to get rid of any infertility issues on his property, the landowner wanted to get out his chain saw. Instead, the gardener advocated for time and care before going to such extremes.

The point of all this is to say we all go through periods of time akin to barren fruit trees. We are unproductive, our lives giving no evidence of fruit. But God through Christ steps in and says, "Stop. Give them time to become productive." God intercedes, wanting to express love to us, nurturing us in through prayer and care that just might loosen up some of the soil around our roots, giving growth half a chance.

The Kingdom of God is like this: God can take nothing and make something of it all the time.

Prayer: God, loosen the soil around the hardpan dirt of my life and give me the hope that I, too, can be a productive inhabitant of your promised land. – *Mark Nilson*

Thursday, March 8, 2018

## Overwhelmed

Mark 6:30-46 – *The Message*

**H**ave you ever been overwhelmed?

In April 2007, my mom was in hospice after a third and what was to be final battle with cancer. I had just met with the candidacy committee and been granted ordination status, and I made my way back to tell my mother and the family. A short time after receiving the news that afternoon, she left this Earth.

The next day I had church responsibilities, and getting the youth prepped for departing the next morning for the April school vacation mission trip. That night, I became severely ill with chills and a fever. The stresses of the last couple of days had caught up with me.

However, the next morning I got myself ready and met the chaperones and youth and got us all on our way to our Maine destination. It was raining insanely, but we got to the site. Once the bus let us off and we got into our cabins, there was dinner, the evening program and then shut-eye. Moments after drifting off to sleep, we were awakened. Two of our kids had ignored protocol and disappeared into the night, and the forest, and the rain, with the animals and the streams and the light snow mixed in.

After an hour or two of search, about 1 a.m., we found the kids, and I had to counsel them before hitting the bunk for some shut-eye and our early morning appointment with work sites for the youth.

The next morning, we were back to “normal,” and the rest of the trip went without further incident.

There are times when there is more at stake than ourselves. And the reality for us not being alone, but with the promise of being lead and strength to carry on, becomes manifest.

Jesus found himself in overwhelming circumstances. But there was still need to be met, and he threw himself into the work. He kept on going until things were under control, and then he took a break.

Scripture reveals examples of how to deal with life circumstances while counseling us as to our responsibility not just to ourselves. In faith we learn to trust in Godly presence with us that makes what seem like overwhelming obstacles feel manageable.

May we increasingly find in our Lenten and Earthly journey the blessings from God, and the ways to share grace with the world despite what sometimes feel like overwhelming odds. – *Andrew Borden*

Friday, March 9, 2018

## Known

Psalm 32; Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15

Imagine that your entire life, from start to finish, is a movie. Everything from the outward actions to every single thought you have ever had is on film. And you have to watch it with someone. Who would you choose?

Probably no one — you may not even want to watch it. And that makes sense. Let's be honest, we all have more thoughts that are not known to others than we have thoughts that are known. We all have words and deeds in our life that only we or the one person or few people who actually saw or heard them know, while the rest of our relations know nothing about them.

Why? Fear. Fear of being misunderstood. Fear of being rejected. Fear of not being loved. This is the great tension that we live with, the tension that defines our brokenness maybe more than anything else. There is a primal, a good, a given-at-creation desire we all have: to be known, completely, without qualification. But that is in tension with another desire, ancient but not primal, that is not good, not given at creation: to hide from being known, because of fear. Yet it is exactly here that Paul says — but here is Good News! You are known — completely, unequivocally, without condition — and you are still loved, forever and always!

So maybe when Paul speaks of standing before God at the end of time, it is not a dictate of a coming terrifying reckoning. It is further confirmation of what Paul always says: We are known by God. But here is the difference between being known by God and being known by our friends and family. All of those secrets, those thoughts we are deathly ashamed of, the actions we never want anyone to know about, all of the things that our friends and family would probably rightly reject us for (as would we them), God would never reject us for. That's the point of grace. And that's exactly why the Psalmist was able to say blessed are those whose sin the Lord does not count against them.

If we are sure of the narrative of Scripture that says nothing can separate us from the love of God, then we can be sure God's knowing us is a good and beautiful thing that can change our lives. For we no longer need to pretend to be something we are not. We can accept what we are — thoughts and all — and let God know us, for He already does. And in that freedom, we can live as authentic human beings. So let's make some popcorn, and settle in with God to watch the movie of our lives. It's OK. He loves us. And He has already seen it anyway. — *David Gentleman*

Saturday, March 10, 2018

## Being Found

Luke 15:1-10

If you take a look at verse 10, you might notice that it seems a little odd and is easy to miss. “I tell you, there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.” The word repent is a funny word. It has been used by preachers to tell people that they ought to give up wild living and becoming good little boys and girls. A brief glance at the whole passage reveals that Jesus had a different understanding of repentance.

There are two stories. In the first, a shepherd has a hundred sheep and loses one. He leaves the ninety-nine until he finds it. This is something a shepherd would never do. If you have a hundred sheep and lose one, you need to stay with the ninety-nine because if you leave they will be exposed to predators. Everyone reading this would see that this guy doesn’t know how to run a business.

The foolish shepherd searches for the one sheep. He finds it, rejoices, and throws a party. Who throws a party for one sheep? The party would cost far more than that one sheep would ever earn.

Now skip to verse ten. “There is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.” The lost sheep is the sinner who repents. But how is this repentance?

We as Christians have for too long believed that our relationship to God is juridical. We commit sins. We “repent.” God forgives. God is the judge. We are the criminals. But here God is the shepherd willing to sacrifice all for one sheep. It didn’t matter if he was a naughty little sheep. It didn’t matter how much the sheep earned for him. He was valuable because the shepherd loved him. In this passage, repentance has a simple meaning. Repentance is when we come home to a loving God.

– Theodore J. DeMarco

Sunday, March 11, 2018

## On Snakes and Salvation

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

Wandering the desert doesn’t often bring the best out of the wanderer. The community complaint index in the account recorded in Numbers for this day is at an all-time high. You’d think that a compassionate response was in order; however, those inflicted with the dis-ease of discontent find themselves being bitten to death by snakes, and run to Moses to intercede on their behalf with the

master of the universe. Moses offers them a sign in the form of a bronze replica of the very threat they are facing. As an allegorical reading, we have here a proto-psycho-therapeutic attempt to teach people to face what they fear. As a response, they are given new life.

What actually threatened their life was not being bitten, but the fear of being bitten. Given an obstacle, an external challenge to their common goal, they succumbed to the consequence of their own loathing. “See, I told you things were bad!” Instead of calling forth the courage to respond to this threat, they turn to Moses to save them. His answer: Face what is most difficult, and live.

The Christian authors of today’s devotions take their cue exactly where the Hebrew authors leave off. The awareness from whence we come and who or what has claimed us ultimately is the foundation of courage. It is the gift of faith, not of our making; it serves as the essence of our response to what would test us most in life. It is that gift which is eternal and for which we ought to be most grateful. – Aaron R. Payson

Monday, March 12, 2018

## The Ground Will Cry Out!

Psalm 53, Leviticus 25:1-19, Revelation 19:9-10

*If the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready  
for battle? (1 Cor. 14:8)*

New Testament scholar Sharon H. Ringe begins an article on the biblical Jubilee with the confession: “As often as I have spoken about the biblical Jubilee, I still do so with trepidation, because I realize that I am first and foremost speaking to myself in indictment of the life I live by a combination of the good fortune of my birth and the choices I continue to make...” She goes on to document in both testaments the overriding test of a just society: the effect of all its systems upon the welfare of its poorest members.

The indictment Ringe feels is true for all of us. Biblically speaking, Jubilee is one of the most comprehensive and effective programs to ensure good for both the environment and its human communities. Leviticus 25:4 commands a restriction of land use of one fallow year in seven. Ecologically, it provides the land opportunity to repair itself and prevent its being stripped of valuable nutrients and rendered barren. The Jubilee practice of returning lands to original peoples prevents a permanent class of poverty.

Too much? You bet. Not even Israel took it seriously. It’s a very high ideal of justice to the poor. But, we say, it’s just impractical. There are no easy translations of ancient economic ethics to modern capitalistic societies. As one person put it,



“Human nature won’t stand for it: once we work hard to buy and improve our property, what’s the justice in giving it back to some original owner? Might as well think of giving Manhattan back to the Indians.”

And yet, one should struggle with the ethic, for a “bias for the poor” was not invented by some modern or post-modern personality but Jesus himself, as influenced by Amos and the Old Testament prophets.

Prayer: Lord, may the bugle sound of Jubilee further ring into our souls as we contemplate matters of money and manna. – *Mark Nilson*

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

## Disillusion

Mark 8:1-10 – *The Message*

**H**ave you ever heard the story of someone or some group that became disillusioned and simply gave up on ever trying again?

At one point in my engineering career, I took a position with a firm that was part of a larger corporation that Lee Iacocca had become head of after he left Chrysler Corp. The practices he had used to lean-out the car giant and provide for their massive turnaround in profitability had been unleashed on all of the corporate entities. At first, they had some major success. Iacocca soon left, but the management kept the practices in place for years.

After a while, you need to modify expectations, because the “low hanging fruit” conditions ripe for any kind of change, disappear, and the processes and structures remaining “untouched” are typically pretty functional, but with some longer-term, well-thought-out strategies, could benefit from changes.

The firm I found myself in was, from top to bottom, disillusioned and paranoid. So many changes had been made without much consultation/buy-in of the employees that trust was nearly gone. Coming in at the point that I did cast me as a new change-agent who could cause harm (many had lost their jobs and pensions).

I worked there for the better part of a year and then moved on. The damage done, the rampant disillusionment, had brought the firm very low, and everyone’s position was in jeopardy, with no salvation on the horizon.

The story in our text tells of a large mass of people who followed Jesus for three days. And our Lord noticed they were running low on energy and needed to be fed. The solution was a blessing of the meager loaves and fishes the disciples came up with that many theologians today feel instigated Godly good-will and loosed the crowd members for bringing out the food they had stashed in their



clothing to share all around.

Once the people saw that Jesus cared, that he was for them and was willing to share what he and the disciples had, they were moved. Their following of him was in large part due to a disillusionment with their societal models, and a fulfillment of their hopefulness for a future was manifest in this itinerant rabbi and the message of grace, mercy and inclusiveness he preached.

We can take heart from the stories of grace, and that our God knows what we need and works to bring about solutions and oversight that are best for situations. Perhaps they are not what we would choose, but they are what God feels are effective within the resources available.

May we live into continuing revelations for the Love that reaches out to meet and hold us close through thick and thin. – *Andrew Borden*

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

## A Widow's Ode

Psalm 53; 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9:10-17

In our OT reading today, we are invited into the story of a destitute widow who is about to lose her sons as payment for unpaid debt. In her hopelessness, she cries out for help from the prophet Elisha. In a foreshadowing of Christ's own miracle of making copious amounts of wine out of water, Elisha provides for the woman's need by miraculously making copious amounts of oil that she can sell to pay off her debts, keep her sons and have income for the future. Interestingly, the author ends the story without any real detail on the widow's reaction to the miracle. I like to imagine it may have sounded something like this:

In despair I wept, in darkness I cried out  
Shattered dreams, uncertain futures  
No justice, no freedom, no help  
In despair I wept, in darkness I cried out

In despair I wept, in darkness I cried out  
Surely the fatherless matter  
Surely there is hope for the widow  
In despair I wept, in darkness I cried out

Strains of redemption

Whispers of mercy  
A distant melody of grace

In joy I sang, in hope I cried out  
Oil of olives flowing like a river  
A jar running over  
In Joy I sang, in hope I cried out

In joy I sang, in hope I cried out  
The Lord is good  
My Lord is ever present to His children  
In Joy I sang, in hope I cried out

Songs of redemption  
Shouts of mercy  
A symphony of grace

I am loved ... forever

While it is certainly true that sometimes it can seem as though our darkness will go on forever and, our jars will never be full, I think the point of Lent is to maybe prepare in the midst of the desert for the rivers of life that will flow. Eternity comes, sometimes slowly, but it comes — and with it songs of redemption, shouts of mercy, and a symphony of grace.

– *David Gentleman*

Thursday, March 15, 2018

## By the Rivers of Babylon

Isaiah 43:1-17

**5**86 B.C.E. That was the year that the Babylonians marched into Jerusalem and destroyed the city. They knocked down stones, burned everything that they could, killed thousands, and sent most of the survivors into exile, where they were spread across the vast Babylonian Empire.

From 586 B.C.E. until about 515 is known as the time of exile. Psalm 137 beautifully captures the mood of those exilic years. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs. Our tormentors demanded songs of joy. They said, ‘Sing us one of those songs of Zion!’ How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?”

It was a time of profound grief. Families were split apart, and there was little hope that they would ever be brought back together. Even if they could return to their beloved Jerusalem, what would they return to? The city was in ruins. No one would ever have the resources to restore Jerusalem. But in these years of anguish, the prophet spoke: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth — everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

God was calling them back home. 586 B.C.E. was a moment they never thought they could overcome. Their city had been burned to the ground. And yet here they were, just beginning to rise from the ashes.

– *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Friday, March 16, 2018

## Altars, Incense, and Priestly Power

Psalm 51:1-12; Exodus 30:1-10; Hebrews 4:14-5:4

**W**e begin our readings this day in humility, acknowledging our own “glorious incompleteness,” as a colleague once framed sin.

To witness to the ways in which each of us has “missed the mark” is the beginning of true wisdom. Only when we are able to confront our faults can we come to honor our potential. Only when we know this truth about ourselves, that perfection is illusory at best, can we have authentic sympathy for anyone else. Indeed, though we burn with the perfumed fire of faithful witness, like the incense on the ancient temple altar, we are but a fragile shadow of the perfection we seek to embody. It is this conscious awareness that gives us the insight to see others as they are, which is the primary prerequisite of true leadership.

So let part of our Lenten devotion be an admission of ourselves as “works in progress,” not by making excuses for all that we have failed to be, but through humble admission, take on the mantle of faithful leadership. – *Aaron R. Payson*

Saturday, March 17, 2018

## Fulfilling the Law

Psalm 126, Exodus 12:21-27, John 11:45-57

Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The gospel tells us one story (Matthew 5 – Sermon on the Mount) about Jesus saying to his followers: “You have heard it said, but I tell you...” In each case, six moral cases, the introduction is repeated (You have heard it said). In each case, the law is fulfilled, harder than easier, more radicalized than liberalized. Jesus is the new Moses, the new lawgiver who fulfills the old law by being even more stringent than the earlier one.

Holding onto traditions is valuable.

We bought our Chicago fixer-upper from Florence Levy. She raised six children in this modest home on the near north side of Chicago. Neighborhoods change over the years, but when she lived there and raised her children (her husband died at a relatively young age), it was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Today, the large Temple Shaare Tikvah closed and became a Jewish high school for girls, and the temple is in a smaller storefront synagogue on Peterson Avenue. But the neighborhood is still considered Jewish and Orthodox, with many attending to long skirts, wigs, and prayer shawls.

One of the treasures I still have from that home was an ornament on the door jam of the front door. On the doorposts of Jewish homes one can likely find a small casing. This is known as a *mezuzah* (Hebrew for “doorpost”) because it is placed on the doorposts of the house. Many people incorrectly believe the mezuzah is a good-luck charm. Nor does it have any connection with the lamb’s blood placed on the doorposts in Egypt; rather, it is placed to serve as a constant reminder of God’s presence and His commandments to the Jewish people. The commandment to place a mezuzah on the doorpost is derived from a passage in the Book of Deuteronomy commonly known as the Shema. In this passage, God commands the Jewish people to keep His words constantly in mind and heart by (among other things) writing them on the doorposts of their houses. The custom became to write the words of the Shema on a tiny scroll of parchment, on the back of which the name of God is also written, and then roll up the parchment and place it in a case so that the first letter of God’s name is visible.

Although it never carried the long history of my faith practice, its presence still reminded me of the importance of traditions and the surety of God’s omnipresence. – *Mark Nilson*

Prayer: “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One”

Sunday, March 18, 2018

## If It Weren't for the Trees, You Could See the Woods

John 8:46-59 – *The Message*

**W**hen a dog gets hold of a bone, it's usually best to steer clear. There is an inseparability between the two; a joy for the dog along with some obliviousness to what's going on around them.

Some people are like dogs in that they get hold of certain ideas and can't accept or "hear" anything that might challenge their standpoint. There becomes an inseparable bond between the psyche and object.

In the text for this day, Jesus is talking about the particular church leaders of the day who held the bone of tradition/interpretation of scripture and law in their mouths, without a deep appreciation for how it had developed, what it was originally meant to convey, and whether any of it had run its course over time. The guys Jesus had interactions with were very taken with themselves and the power they had and that "joy" of holding onto something that gave them authority (but no justice).

So Grace convicted them on the spot for the anti-Grace they conveyed with their words and attitude because they had no depth of understanding for what scripture and law were really about, only their absolutely literal interpretation without Godly inspiration.

They could not "see the trees for the woods."

Can we get this way? Are there ways of thinking and acting we hang onto that could use some review because they are at odds with grace and mercy in their purest sense?

This scripture points up the need each of us has for examining, or re-examining, those ideas and traditions we hold close, to be certain they are in line with where the Spirit is trying to lead us in faith. It is certain that some things will have to change over time, as life is never static, and neither is the way in which the Spirit works to meet us and the world.

May we have the wisdom to let God be God for us and the world, and for us not to hold onto ideas and concepts (as if they were gods to be worshipped) that the Spirit may lead us to examine, modify or shed for the sake of the development of the community of God. – *Andrew Borden*

Monday, March 19, 2018

## We Need Each Other

Psalms 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25

**D**uring those awkward days of teenage angst, one of my favorite songs by Aimee Mann included these despairing lyrics:

So I guess I'll give it up  
Yeah I guess I will  
What's the use in pushing  
When it's all uphill  
I can't be appointed Keeper of the flame  
Without two to carry  
It won't burn the same.

Now there is no way I could have been in any situation that warranted such despair for being so alone. It must have been teenage romance gone bad, combined with a bit of a martyr complex, that caused me to be so taken with this song. I honestly don't remember. But now, being quite a bit older and having experienced and/or witnessed the countless ways life in this broken world can be so tragic and unforgiving, I see the haunting way these lyrics could be an anthem for so many.

It can feel as if we are alone. It can feel as if no one else understands our suffering, our circumstances, our broken heart, our solitary laboring. It can feel as though our pain is singularly unique. It can feel as though we are the only one fighting the good fight; the only one trying to change the world; the only one trying to love in a culture of hate. It can feel as though we are the only one carrying the pain. Later in the song, Mann sings, "I wish you believed in life." Obviously, she too knew how lonely life could be.

This is exactly why we need the wisdom of the writer of Hebrews. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another." His words may be ancient, but they are as necessary today as they were then. We need each other, and when we forsake gathering together, we can be wont to give it all up.

This is exactly what I think church at its most authentic is — the coming together so we know we are not alone; the joining of hearts and hands and minds on a regular basis to encourage one another; the community gathering to spur each other onward, to speak love and hope and unity into lives that are often too weary to remember such wonderful ideals. When church is at its best, it is there for us. It is the people, not the building, not the agenda, not the system, but the people. People who have been beat up and beat down; people who have fought but have grown weary; people who are misaligned and misunderstood and sometimes just plain missed; people who need people. And so we come together, we sing songs to each other, we tell our stories, we read our ancient scriptures, we celebrate the Eucharist, and we are encouraged to keep the faith, to run the race, to hope in the promise that life is the final word. Death may meet us each day of the week, but once a week, or more, we can gather and speak life into each other and go back into our world restored, inspired, and holding firm to the hope of life. — *David Gentleman*

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

## When Horses Fail

Psalm 20

*“Some trust in chariots. Some trust in horses.  
But we trust in the name of the Lord.”*

Israel was a nation familiar with what happens when you trust in political alliances, human wisdom, horses, and wealth. King Solomon had all of these, and shortly after his death, the kingdom split in two. Both diminished quickly.

This passage has two meanings. First, it is a way of stating the greatness of Israel. Other nations trusted in the things of this world, but Israel was greater because she trusted in her God. But second, it is a reminder of past failures. They had trusted in worldly things, and it brought them to their knees.

Horses and chariots were great symbols of power. They were symbols of a strong infrastructure with the resources and management to purchase the necessary tools for war. If they had horses and chariots, they had a king. The king had an administration. He had someone to run the military, generals to manage smaller units, and soldiers trained to kill. These are tools that every nation needs. But they cannot be our salvation. The fact is that in life, sometimes horses fail. They may be impressive symbols and necessary tools. But our true hope is in God. – *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

## A Light in the Darkness

Psalm 119:9-16; Haggai 2:1-9; John 12:34-50

“This is what I know. You can be a candle in the darkness but you cannot force people to follow the light and their choice does not diminish the brightness of your flame.”

For me this sums up the readings for this day of Lent. We hear in the words of the Psalmist and the Prophet that the people of Israel were in the midst of a time of darkness, and the authors of these sacred texts spoke to this reality by reminding them of the true nature and necessity of their faithful witness, that such a time was not the conclusion of the world as they had come to know it. Indeed, because of their steadfastness, a new world was waiting to be born. The master of the universe was preparing, once again, to clean house. Those who testified to this would be the elements used in that sweeping reformation.

Similarly, the author of John's gospel greets those who, in their confusion

about the fate of Jesus, are reminded that death and darkness do not diminish the possibility of faithful witness, but are, in fact, the venue, when such witness is most necessary. As disciples of this faithful truth, we gain a similar perspective and reminder for our own dark times.

Like the Psalmist, we, too, must proclaim: “With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”

Let us to take council and comfort from Jesus. “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” – *Aaron R. Payson*

Thursday, March 22, 2018

## The Plot Is Set

Psalm 31:9-16, Leviticus 23:1-8, Luke 22:1-13

**T**he film “Jesus of Nazareth” is still my go-to video when teaching Confirmation. Although now a relic from 1977, it maintains a certain power, especially the scenes leading up to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

I didn’t realize it, but the film was born in controversy. Because director Franco Zeffirelli noted publicly that he intended to depict Jesus Christ as a human being rather than a religious icon, his expensive made-for-TV miniseries Jesus of Nazareth fell victim to protestors long before its April 3, 1977, debut. Despite the pullout of several sponsors, Jesus of Nazareth was aired as scheduled, sweeping the ratings in the process. In avoiding the usual overproduced Hollywood approach to the Gospels, Zeffirelli film offers one of the most sensitive and reverent portrayals of Jesus ever seen on film.

Ian McShane plays the complicated and tortured role of Judas. Torn with his own desire to push Jesus to act with greater strength and resolve to abolish Roman occupation and imperialism, Judas falls into the role of pawn to the Jewish elite. It seems we are always getting fed up with waiting for God/Jesus to take the world by storm. By Thursday, when Peter and John had gone per Jesus’ instructions to get things ready for Passover, the plot was set, and Judas had only to play out the role he settled for. Because of what he had done, it is assumed that Judas eventually gave the money he earned back and went out and hanged himself.

Frederick Buechner has some interesting thoughts about Judas and his lot in life: “There is a tradition in the early church that his suicide was based not on despair but on hope. If God was just, then he knew there was no question where he would be heading as soon as he’d breathed his last. Furthermore, if God was also merciful, he knew there was no question either that in a last-ditch effort to save the



souls of the damned as God's son, Jesus would be down there too. Thus the way Judas figured it, Hell might be the last chance he'd have of making it to Heaven, so to get there as soon as possible, he tied the rope around his neck and kicked away the stool. Who knows?

In any case, it's a scene to conjure with. Once again they met in the shadows, the two old friends, both of them a little worse for wear after all that had happened, only this time it was Jesus who was the one to give the kiss, and this time it wasn't the kiss of death that was given."

Prayer: May we all ponder this "old story" again to examine what role or roles we play in the plot set for crucifixion. – *Mark Nilson*

Friday, March 23, 2018

## Giving

Mark 10:32-45 – The Message

A couple of TV shows focus on hoarders, folks who collect stuff to the nth degree and fill homes, garages and barns until they are overflowing, and who cannot mentally deal with the idea of parting with anything.

This is not a normal condition. But we can all become attached to "things" at times and have difficulty letting go.

In the scripture for this day, the ending lines put the passage into perspective: Jesus explaining how he came to serve, to give, and not be served or get anything; giving away his life for humanity (those held hostage by stuff, by ideas that separate them from God, by anything).

Earlier in the text is the somewhat comical James and John dialogue with Jesus over whether they can rank with him in his glory. The two at the time had no clue what they were asking, no concept of the sequence of events that would lead to Jesus' death and what promoting his platform would mean for them. They were operating from the perspective of "getting" instead of waiting to be given whatever their allegiance in faith would bring.

All of us can stand to benefit from intentionally setting time aside to ponder what it means to be a person of faith, how it includes giving and not worrying about getting. Scripture tells us elsewhere how God will take care of our needs, not necessarily our wants, but our needs. This follows from Jesus' life model. The extension of the story of Jesus shows us the grace and mercy that went into his dying to prove God's Love for us; that Earthly tensions, wants and desires, selfishness and ego that led to his arrest and crucifixion also led to his resurrection and ascension, which bring life from death.

May we come to know more readily in our lives new understanding, hope, joy and peace from deemphasizing the “get” complex of the human psyche, for emphasizing the giving side that provides for the community of humanity. – Andrew Borden

Saturday, March 24, 2018

## Betrayal

Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13

These are the hard days of Lent. The newness of purpose to enter into the Christ story has faded. The long road of individual restraint has grown tedious. The elements of the narrative turn decidedly darker. Crucifixion Friday looms just ahead, and we begin to sense deeply the bitterness of it all. If our participation has been intentional enough, we may even begin to feel ever so slightly some of the sufferings of the Christ. And of the myriad ways He suffered, there may not have been a more piercing pain than that of betrayal.

Michael Card captures, I think, the poignancy of such hurt when he sings:

Why did it have to be a friend  
Who chose to betray the Lord?  
Why did he use a kiss to show them?  
That's not what a kiss is for  
Only a friend can betray a friend  
A stranger has nothing to gain  
And only a friend comes close enough  
To ever cause so much pain.

For those of us who have ever been betrayed, surely these words resonate, and surely this is the part of Christ's passion that can haunt us the most.

Over the centuries, the cross has been sterilized into just another church doctrine, and as such has lost much of the human meaning for us. We even wear crosses as jewelry — a sure sign we have forgotten the horror of crucifixion. But there is something about betrayal that always resonates. No matter how many times we read the story of Judas, we can touch that pain. For we know it too well. We have been betrayed and have betrayed — in both cases often for much less than 30 pieces of silver.

What are we to do with this part of the story – Christ's story and our own? Perhaps we embrace it. The greater mystery of the Christ event is that God entered our human suffering and in and through it brought redemption. This is no small idea. If God suffered, in our ways, then our suffering is forever connected to God's. Our suffering is taken up into God's and given meaning, purpose, dignity. We may

shun pain, rightfully so, and we should not seek it. But in this world there will be suffering, and when it comes, if we can hold onto this mystery that God suffers with us, and we suffer with God, then perhaps our suffering is no longer in vain.

If we can live into this mystery, I think it is there we will find the very courage to live love in this world – love so radical, so powerful, so divine that, like Christ, we would share a meal with even those who betray us. If we can do that, then not only have we risen from our own graves of pain and suffering, we have offered the world a resurrection hope that just might change it, too. – *David Gentleman*

Sunday, March 25, 2018  
Palm Sunday

## Mocking Kings

Luke 19:28-40

What was the meaning of the donkey? Most of us have heard that Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem to fulfill a prophecy. But the donkey was more than a simple fulfillment of prophecy. On the other side of Jerusalem, on that same day, representatives from the Roman government would enter the city in order to provide security during the feast. With so many Israelites getting together on the same day, there could be a problem and possibly a revolt. The emperor sent in his thugs with horses and chariots to remind the masses who was in charge. The donkey was a way of mocking the horses and chariots.

The emperor, like so many rulers and so many captains of industry, believed that he was in charge. Of course, the very message of Jesus opposed this idea. The kingdom of God was what mattered. Every other kingdom was (and is) a poor impersonation. The false king entered with horses, chariots, a huge staff of security guards, and weapons. The true king doesn't need those entrapments. He came in humbly, on a donkey. That's all he needed.

Many of us over the past several years have grieved the continued and increased oppression of the poor and the ongoing destruction of the environment. We have seen power become more absolute and absolute power corrupt absolutely. But our hope is that the principalities and powers that rule over our world are imposters. The true king entered Jerusalem on a donkey — mocking corrupt rulers of every time and place, and that message hasn't changed. We continue this message as we live in kingdoms of evil — the kingdom of God is here. – *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Monday, March 26, 2018  
Monday of Holy Week

## More of Than About

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11

When asked if I consider myself Christian, I often respond that my faith and witness are more of than about Jesus. You might ask, Why? Well, I often wonder if we basically get it wrong. Or perhaps not wrong so much as stopping short of the essential meaning behind the texts that have historically purported to highlight the singular and unique nature of Jesus. My point is not that Jesus' singular nature wasn't or isn't unique, but that I believe what the Hebraic and Christian authors in today's readings were truly attempting to do was remind us that the life of faith is about recognizing and accepting the truly singular nature of each of us who is called to witness to divine truth.

In this context, we are all "servants" as described by Isaiah. Each of us inherits our share of righteousness and capacity for steadfast love espoused by the Psalmist. Only with this consciousness do I truly understand the profundity of Paul's wisdom: "For this reason (the death of Jesus) he is the mediator of the new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance."

The question then is, "What did or do we inherit?" Faith? New Life? Yes.

For me, this becomes most obvious not so much as a reflection of Jesus as the one sacrificed for me, but the one whose death, demonstrated an ultimate commitment to divine truth. Therefore, what saves me is not so much his death, but his witness unto death as a constant reminder that to be faithful is to be vigilant, and to witness against a culture hell-bent on solving its most difficult problems through the use of strategic and systemic violence. Here Jesus' admonishment of Judas is most profound. While not denying the reality of death, Jesus recognizes the ultimate power of faithful witness that can transcend the very nature of death itself. Mary is such a witness, and Jesus recognizes her for who she is. Judas sees a transaction missed. Jesus is witness to a relationship and a love that not even death can interrupt. Might we all be such a witness.

– Aaron R. Payson

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

## Unsung Saints

Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 71:1-14, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, John 12:20-36

Cinda Lium is one of the most unique and beautiful people I have had the privilege of sharing life with. Cinda was part of my church – First Covenant Church in Seattle, Washington. Located downtown on the famed Pike Street (Pike Street Market) and like many urban centers suffering with burgeoning homelessness, sky-high addiction rates, and poverty, the church lacked no opportunities for outreach and ministry.

Cinda is a hallmark volunteer. She was the first one to open the door to our Neighborhood Breakfast guests. The line wrapped around the block and served the elderly poor. Each person was called by name and welcomed with a great smile. After church on Sunday, she walked down to Pioneer Square (literally the old skid row), where many inebriated residents spent their days. Cinda simply would offer to pray with them. Friday nights, more often than not, she was cooking burritos for the Teen Feed, which fed the teen runaway population of the city. And who made lunches to pass out to the guests of our Women's Shelter? You guessed it – Cinda.

When she was 14, Cinda was hit by a car and sustained a severe head injury. She was in a coma for three months, and when she regained consciousness she had to learn how to do everything again --- walk, talk, write. Some lasting disabilities have affected her whole life. To watch Cinda walk, you would think by her gate she was drunk, but that's just our Cinda.

A fellow parishioner once said about Cinda, "Instead of becoming bitter or using her limitations as a reason to not be involved, she chooses to take care of others. To know Cinda is to love her. She is an amazing person who gives of herself endlessly, and her life is an amazing story."

Prayer: God let me use everything I have been given for your glory.

– Mark Nilson

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

## Things

Mark 12:1-11 – The Message

This allegory starkly points up the values we can place upon things. A man gives his workers the opportunity to take care of a vineyard they developed. Instead of being grateful for the work and security it brought them, they selfishly decide to

keep it for themselves, with no respect for the one who was behind it all to begin with. The workers rejected honor and justice, grace and beneficence, instead embracing self-centeredness.

Of course, Jesus told this story to point out how the church of his day began with God, and how a majority of the people working in the church had taken it over. They made the teachings and scripture support their agendas of power and wealth instead of enlightening and lifting up the people who looked to them for hope and guidance. Finally, when God shows up in person, they refuse to recognize this and work to eliminate the threat to their way of living.

Sometimes scripture comforts us and sometimes it afflicts us, because we go off course, wander away and live counter to grace and mercy. The question is, do we get angry with God over feeling afflicted and work against God and the church or its leaders and the message that upsets us? Or do we work with God to turn things around and honor God with an improved way of living and doing things?

May we joyfully work in the vineyard and give God the honor and respect that eternal grace and mercy deserve, which we have been promised will meet us continually and we frequently do not deserve.

– Andrew Borden

Thursday, March 29, 2018

## Love One Another – Words of Comfort

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Exodus 12:1-14; I Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31-35

**I**magine you are near the end of your life. Your family and closest friends have gathered round. You are still clear of mind and able to speak. You have an opportunity to share your last thoughts with those you love the most, and to offer them all comfort in this time of sadness and uncertainty. What would you say? What words would you offer to help them through this good-bye? What final thoughts could they take with them to quiet their sorrow? And what words would you long to hear to soften your own leaving?

I have my own ideas and, like many of us, they all have to do with the idea of solace, encouragement, tenderness, understanding, eternity, thanks, hope, etc. – nothing Earth-shattering or Nobel Prize-winning, but heartfelt and soothing. This seems quite ordinary, universal, appropriate. Which is why the way the Christ approaches His last moments with His loved ones is so exceedingly strange.

They have gathered in an upstairs room to celebrate Passover. He washes their feet, says a few things, and then, as the hours move on and it nears time for them to finish the meal and head out to the garden, where God's time will come crashing down on all of them, Jesus says to them, "My children, I will be with you only

a little longer. You will look for me, and so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Strange, isn’t it? He’s leaving them, but instead of words of comfort, he exhorts them to love each other.

But maybe this isn’t strange at all. Maybe this is exactly what true comfort looks like: loving others. Think of it this way If the Kingdom of God is that place where life wins and death loses, and the Kingdom of God is where love rules and hate is not to be found, where forgiveness and mercy and grace are the currency of that love, then living love for others would mean we are ushering in the Kingdom of God here and now. If that is the case, then what greater comfort could we ever have in this world than living into that glorious Kingdom now?

Perhaps we should all reimagine what the command to love others really is. Maybe it is not a command at all, but the greatest words of comfort ever spoken. Shortly after this, Christ Himself suffered immensely, but was able to endure because he was living love. He was comforted even in His darkest hour. We can be, too. So as yet another season of Lent comes to an end, and we move out into a world desperately in search of peace, might we all covenant to offer these words of comfort to each other: Love One Another. – David Gentleman

Friday, March 30, 2018  
Good Friday

## Signs of Power

John 18:1-19:42

**T**his past year, our family went to an antiracism event near where we live. (No, this was not Worcester.) We were surprised at the massive police presence. I had been to events in the same city three and four times larger than this event with far fewer police officers. I also noticed some of the officers taking pictures. What was really odd was that they were taking pictures of children. What was going on? Of course, when we asked the police department after the event they denied taking photos. They also denied increased police presence. But I saw them there with their cameras in massive numbers.

What was this all about? As happens in so many American cities, our city was trying to intimidate people of color. It was a reminder of the police department’s power. This story happened in 2017. But it is an ancient story that has



repeated itself through the ages.

Every year when I read this story, I am moved by Mary the mother of Jesus at the cross weeping over the violent death of her son. What is more tragic is that in the lifetime of Jesus, there were thousands of mothers like Mary weeping as their sons were executed publicly, in hopes that young mothers would tell their sons to be careful about what they said or did. If they weren't careful, the Romans would come with crosses.

Good Friday is a day of grief and remembrance. It is a day to grieve the brutality of the Roman government and remember the love of God. It is a day to grieve the death of Mary's son, and to grieve a culture that continues to kill Mary's son time and again in order to maintain power. It is a day to remember that real power — God's power — is made perfect in weakness. — *Theodore J. DeMarco*

Saturday, March 31, 2018  
Holy Saturday

## Claiming the Body of Christ

Job 14:1-14 (Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24); Psalm 34:1-4, 15-16;  
1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66 (John 19:38-42)

When I read the texts for this holy day, my heart returns from hearing ancient lamentations to the cries of pain and rage that are so much a part of daily experience even now. "I am the one who sees affliction... he has driven and brought me into darkness ... against me alone he turns his hand ... ." This, too, is the essential nature of many modern movements, Black Lives Matter, #metoo, #timesup, Dreamers, and many more across the political spectrum. Out of an experience of violence, neglect, fear, and rage, come the stories of those who have suffered and been marginalized, and who are finding ways to powerfully tell their stories. We have been invited through these movements to bear witness, seek justice, and companion those whose bodies often bear the marks of violence, neglect, and impoverishment even as they tell us their story and share the truth as they have experienced it.

We are also given, through faith, the annual opportunity to bear the broken body of Christ, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and care for and witness to that which is itself a testament of faith and love. Moreover, we are asked to be vigilant, literally, in our own faithful witness, never to turn our backs on the hardest human experiences or most difficult truths.

And we are invited by Jesus himself to companion each other, as one body,



and manifest our witness with power, courage and steadfast love.

– Aaron R. Payson

Sunday, April 1, 2018  
Easter

## Resurrection Happens!

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24, Acts 10:34-43, John 20:1-18

**R**esurrection happens! And it happens again, again, and again! There is no better book to read on Resurrection Sunday than the book of Acts. Acts contains stories that can only be described as the completion of the gospel. On every page, in every story, in just about every paragraph and on every line, resurrection power is turned loose through the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

I love Frederick Buechner's thoughts on the word spirit:

The word *spirit* has come to mean something pale and shapeless, like an unmade bed. School spirit, the American spirit, the Christmas spirit, the spirit of '76, the Holy Spirit --- each of these points to something you know is supposed to get you to your feet cheering but which you somehow can't rise to. ... Like its counterparts in Hebrew and Greek, the Latin word *spiritus* originally meant breath (as in expire, respiratory, etc.), and breath is what you have when you're living and don't have when you're dead. Thus spirit = breath = life, the aliveness and power of your life, and to speak of a man's spirit (or soul) is to speak of the power of life that is in him.... God also has a spirit --- is Spirit, says the Apostle John (4:24). Thus God is the power of the power of life itself, has breathed and continues to breathe himself into his creation. In-spires it. The spirit of God, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, is highly contagious. When Peter and his friends were caught up in it at Jerusalem on Pentecost, everybody thought they were drunk even though the sun wasn't yet over the yardarm (Acts 2). They were.

Today, celebrate the spirit of Easter. Engage the Holy Spirit in bringing resurrection to some person, place, or thing that is caught in something less than life. Resurrection happens! – Mark Nilson

Prayer: To God be the glory!

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Rev. Andrew H. Borden, Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church

Rev. T.J. Demarco, Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church

Rev. David Gentleman, Pastor  
Cana Community Church

Rev. Mark Nilson, Senior Pastor  
Salem Covenant Church

Rev. Aaron Payson, Pastor  
The Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester