



FALLS CHURCH PRESBYTERIAN | LENT 2021

Pause for Lent

A Community Devotional



Pause for Lent: A Community Devotional

*Written by Members and Friends of Falls
Church Presbyterian*

This devotional is an invitation to find a moment to pause each day. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17th. In the forty days (and six Sundays) that follow, we pause from the busyness around us. We focus on the patterns of our daily life and look for where God might be breaking into the world around us. It is a time to draw closer to God. It is an opportunity to create new patterns and behaviors. You'll find that Sundays are not included in the following reflections. The Church recognizes Sunday as a day of rejoicing. Each Sunday is a "mini-Easter": a reminder of the joy and gift of resurrection. This is why the Church does not typically include Sundays in the days of Lent.

In the following pages, you'll be invited to pause for a moment each day and reflect. The scripture passages are from the daily lectionary and are from the New Revised Standard Version (NSRV) translation of the Bible.

Finally, many thanks to all our contributors. Without them, there would be nothing to fill these pages. The reflections have been written by members of our community, these pauses not only offer a moment to connect with God but also with each other. May their words not only bring you hope, peace, and love but challenge you to follow more closely to the one who calls each of us beloved.

February 17

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

¹“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflection | Ash

By: Becca Leland

Ashes, the “stuff” that’s left. The pile of ashes after roasting marshmallows or cozying up next to a fireplace. Taking last Palm Sundays palms and burning them to make ashes for Ash Wednesday to remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

Holy Action: What’s left in you? When you take away all the “things” what’s left? When God looks at you, God’s beloved, what is left? How do you feel knowing God embraces all of who you are? After almost a year of pandemic, what’s left?

February 18

Scripture Reading: John 1:29-34

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

Reflection | Baptize

By: Jenny Lansbury

I have a bit of a complicated relationship with baptism. My parents were raised Quaker. Quakers internalize the sacraments, viewing them as ongoing, spiritual acts, so neither of them experienced the physical sacrament until they decided to join a Southern Baptist church in the early 1960s. So I grew up with the story of how my mother watched my father go under the water (Baptists do full immersion, or dunking as my brother and I as children liked to refer to it) and the pastor almost dropped my dad when underestimating his weight. Mother entered the water with fear and trembling. As a Southern Baptist then, I was dunked at the age of 10 after I had made my profession of faith. I never really understood infant baptism, to be honest, even held it in a bit of contempt, being a good Baptist. That is, until my own daughter was baptized, also at the age of 10. By that time, we were at FCPC. When Tom Schmid met with us and explained prevenient grace, my eyes, as it were, were opened, and I understood how God's grace has always been there, even before we recognize it. When the waters flowed over Anna's head (Tom always used a LOT of water as the sign of the abundance of God's grace), I made my peace with baptism.

Holy Action: Each time you wash your hands today, pause and dwell on the abundance of God's grace, poured out for you.

February 19

Scripture Reading: John 1:35-42

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Reflection | Teach

By: Abbie Freeman

I come from a family of teachers. Both of my parents taught public school, as have all three of my sisters. I have never felt that calling. So, what am I called to do? Each of us must contemplate and pray for that discernment. For some it is easy because we are called inextricably like Andrew and Simon Peter. For others it is a struggle. What is Jesus calling you to do?

Prayer: God, help each of us to recognize our calling, what we should devote our lives to, understanding how we would teach others of Jesus' love in your name. Amen.

February 20

Scripture Reading: John 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Reflection | Trees

By: Myra Binns Bridgforth

Because of the Tree

Once again, to the question, how
are you making it through these days,
I reply, because of the tree.
Chinese red maple whose branches
whip against the window of this room,
stuck inside with thoughts, brought low,
annoying rounds of fret. Over
and over, I forget, about the tree.

I love how it looks and sounds
as it hits the window, as it lets go,
leaves that fall to ground and flow
like blood splashed on green grass.
Trusting the tree, its my way through,
its radiant beauty, it returns every year.
So hopeful. Showing how to be blown,
bashed, and still be.

Myra Binns Bridgforth
January 2021

February 22

Scripture Reading: 2:1-12

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."
⁴And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

Reflection | Celebrate

By: Rev. Rusty Lynn

In responding to this miracle story, found only in John's gospel, I am fascinated by the moment when the caterer tastes the water that has been turned into wine and declares his surprise to the groom that "most people serve the best wine first, but you are serving the best after the guests have been drinking for sometime and may have become drunk." He tastes the wine and is stunned by its excellent flavor, its bouquet.

I was able to get sober in December of 1974. I thank God for learning how to win by surrendering. I must admit that rarely, when drinking wine (my favorite was Chateaunuff-du-Ppape) did I ever learn the art of tasting, of savoring the flavor. I just wanted the effect of the alcohol. But, when I see a professional wine taster on television, I am impressed by how she relishes each aspect of the drink - the color, the darkness or light, the smell of the wine, the way it feels on the tongue, and finally the taste. This is a lesson in relishing, savoring, in pausing long enough to allow the wine to speak its message.

My invitation to you is to savor, to relish, to bring your full awareness to what you are experiencing, and more. Learning to savor, to relish, to be open to the miracle that right now you are in the midst of.

If it true, and I believe it is, that Christ brings all opposites together, that God is in all of creation, then there is no limit to what we can relish and savor everyday when we stop long enough to taste and see the miracle that is always right here in our midst.

Thank you Jesus for showing us the way.

February 23

Scripture Reading | John 2:13-22

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Reflection | Temple

By: James Sledge

“Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

Clearly Jesus thinks the Temple is failing to fulfill its true purpose. That is all too common for religion. Christian faith has been used to support slavery and white supremacy, and our own congregation is largely segregated.

When a mob stormed the Capitol on January 6, someone waved a “Jesus Saves” flag, implying Jesus’ support for a violent insurrection rooted in racism, conspiracy theories, and lies. Surely not.

What then is the true purpose of Christian religion? Are our answers rooted in the way of Jesus or in assumptions we’ve picked up along the way? Many of us have assumptions about worship, church, and Christian life that are largely unexamined. The vendors Jesus chased from the Temple thought they were simply helping Passover pilgrims present the required offerings.

Prayer: O Lord, show us who and what we are to be and do.

February 24

Scripture Reading: John 2:23-3:15

23 When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone. 3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11 “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Reflection | Night

By: Paige Bach

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the night and says to him “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Nicodemus comes at night even though he knows the truth about Jesus. How often do we fall victims to the night? Doing what is right under the cover of darkness because we are too afraid to live fully in the light. We are called to live in the light, we are given life and light by being born in the spirit. We are people of the light. We get to bask in the rays of LIGHT.

Holy Action: What can you do this Lenten season to live fully in the light and no longer hide in the night? Who can you bring into the light with you?

February 25

Scripture Reading | John 3:16-21

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Reflection | Light

By: Jenny Lansbury

I'm one of those odd people who prefers standard time to the daylight savings version. In the dead of winter, most of my friends talk about how they can't wait for more daylight later in the day. But as an earlier riser, I like the sensation of being up in time to see the light dispel the darkness. That sensation of being unable to see, and then to see, is powerful on many levels. In truth, we really only know the power of light when we have stumbled around in the darkness, and haven't we all done that from time to time. How comforting, but also challenging, to know that we worship true Light.

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Holy Action: Find an interior room in your home with no windows and enter there when it is completely dark. Stand there for a moment absorbing the darkness and remembering a time when your soul was bathed in darkness rather than light. Then light a match or turn on your cell phone flashlight, taking in the way that the light dispels the darkness.

February 26

Scripture Reading | John 3:22-36

²²“After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. ²³John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized ²⁴—John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵Now a discussion about purification arose between John’s disciples and a Jew.

²⁶They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” ²⁷John answered, “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.’

²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. **For this reason my joy has been fulfilled.** ³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease.” ³¹The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³²He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. ³³Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. ³⁴He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.

Reflection | Joy

By: Bonnie Seklecki

One of God's greatest gifts to us is joy. Each and every day we are tasked with making life choices. One of the most important is to find joy each day. Our external circumstances shapes happiness, joy is found deep within.

Author and Priest Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote: "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing every day."

Holy Action: Ask yourself: "What is my heart's desire? What do I wish for myself, for my loved ones, and for the world?"

February 27

Scripture Reading | John 4:1-26

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” ² – although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized– ³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”
¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Reflection | Drink

By: Jenny Lansbury

What great imagery this passage holds! Jesus tired from his journey. A well in the desert...Jacob's well. Anyone who knows me well would tell you that I drink a lot of water and go virtually nowhere without my water bottle. Deprive me of it, and that is when I feel my thirstiest. Trying to breathe through these blasted masks just makes things worse, and it's not like you can just remove the mask and chug a bunch of water in the middle of a doctors' office or the grocery store. So I find the beautiful metaphor of the living water even more present during these mask-wearing days. *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty,"* Jesus tells the Samaritan woman. We don't get the end of the story in today's reading. But she goes into the city and brings others with her to meet Jesus, and *"many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony."* I can't help wondering if I would have been so bold and faithful.

Holy Action: Notice how much water you have to drink today to satisfy your thirst, and think of the living water when you do.



March 1

Scripture Reading | John 4:27-42

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

Reflection | Food

By: Alan Shankle

I told myself as I started writing about food that if I got stumped, I would just share some recipes.

I love food. LOVE IT.

Food has always been more than just fuel for my body. It is a way that I can connect with people. I love feeding people. It can bring joy to them in times of happiness, and comfort to them in times of sadness. I have to believe that I'm not alone in this. I know I am guilty of making too much food for events (back when we had events) and being "that guy" (Yes, of course we need 3 different types of dip for this thing. Why are you asking?) I never care, though. Feeding people feeds me.

Jesus confirms this in this passage. You can be fed without eating a single bit of food. You can feed your soul in taking pleasure in serving, and by doing the will of the Lord. Instead of providing fuel for the body, you are providing fuel for your soul.

Even without three different dips.

Holy Action: As you go through your day think about how you feed your soul, and if you are low on fuel, what is a good "fill up" that you can enjoy and share with others?

P.S.- I still have some pretty great recipes to share if you are interested. Feel free to feed.

March 2

Scripture Reading | John 4:43-54

⁴³ When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee ⁴⁴ (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). ⁴⁵ When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

⁴⁶ Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." ⁵³ The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. ⁵⁴ Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Reflection | Believe

By: James Sledge

Why do people “believe?” For that matter, what does it mean to believe? John’s gospel seems suspicious of belief related to miraculous “signs.” Jesus raises that issue here, but the “you” in his remark about “signs and wonders” is plural. Jesus speaks past the father, to us perhaps?

Jesus does not hesitate to perform a sign, and the complex relationship between belief and signs plays out in what follows. The royal official seems to believe in Jesus. He does as Jesus tells him. Only later does he learn that a miraculous sign accompanied Jesus’ words. Then he and his entire household believe.

But what do they believe, that Jesus can work miracles? Jesus has already critiqued that sort of belief. Apparently, the official and his household believe who Jesus is. They recognize him for who and what he truly is, something that signs and wonders can only point to.

March 3

Scripture Reading | John 5:1-18

¹After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” ⁹At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. ¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” ¹¹But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. ¹⁴Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. ¹⁷But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” ¹⁸For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

Reflection | Sabbath

By: Julie Kasten

How do we “do” Sabbath? How do we find relief? Hope? By not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

We don't need special knowledge, only awareness of what rest looks and feels like, and to allow ourselves time for reflection. Rest is for the weak? Without it we often get stuck, as if walking through mud. Rest gives mud time to dry out, so that we may slough it off and find renewal underneath.

Holy Action: What does Sabbath look like for me, how and where can I find my rest?

March 4

Scripture Reading | John 5:19-29

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Reflection | Hear

By: Shelly Skomra

“Amen, Amen, I say to you, what the Father knows, the Son also knows”.

As I thought about this passage, it hits you right where you breathe. Here we are, face to face with Christ as he openly shares the intimate and equal relationship he has with God and they are as one. Christ’s message is clear and it is direct. If we hear his message, understand his message, and most importantly, believe his message, we will have eternal life with him. How mind blowing is this. He is reaching out to the spiritually dead to bring them back to a spiritual life, a life that will last forever. He is not judging us but is walking with us through this life, and as we pass from death to life, and then in eternal life! Mind blown!

A few things I thought about:

- Do you really hear God?
- If you believe in God, then do you believe God?
- Do you believe everything God says or do you pick and choose what to believe?
- Do you have the faith to trust in God’s message?

March 5

Scripture Reading | John 5:30-47

³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³¹ “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. ³³ You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. ³⁹ “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹ I do not accept glory from human beings. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

Reflection | Testify

By: Noah Clark

I understand testify to mean the claims we make about other and how they affected our lives more specifically about this passage; the ways in which we have seen God make themselves known in our life through the works of Jesus Christ.

There are times where I wish God would give me a clear sign, like a billboard on the side of a highway. In these moments God seems far away like, they are impossible to see through all of life's junk. At times like these I need to take a moment to pause and seek out what testifies to me. When I look for God, I often find Them in the little things like the laughter of friends, the beauty of nature, and even in the love of a meal shared between to people. Sometimes God seems hard to find midst all life's chaos, but in times like these its important to step back and take a moment to breath.

Holy Action: Find a quiet place either outside or inside and take a moment to sit and relax allowing yourself to be present in the moment, then take note of how you see God in the space around you.

March 6

Scripture Reading | John 7:1-13

¹After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. ²Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. ³So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; ⁴for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” ⁵(For not even his brothers believed in him.) ⁶Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. ⁸Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” ⁹After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

¹⁰But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. ¹¹The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, “Where is he?” ¹²And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, “He is a good man,” others were saying, “No, he is deceiving the crowd.” ¹³Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

Reflection | Open

By: Mary Soule

What does open mean? An open mind, open heart, open home are all welcoming. They say, “come to me, and I will listen and not judge.” God is open to us, at all times, waiting to hear our prayers, to listen. But to receive that open grace, we must also be open to receiving it.

Holy Action: Take a moment today to be open to God, to say a prayer and listen. And take a moment to also be open to another person. To listen without judging.

March 8

Scripture Reading | John 7:14-36

¹⁴ About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. ¹⁵ The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" ¹⁶ Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. ¹⁸ Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him. ¹⁹ "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" ²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹ Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. ²³ If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." ²⁵ Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill?

²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? ²⁷ Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." ²⁸ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the

temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. ²⁹ I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” ³⁰ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?” ³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.” ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, ‘You will search for me and you will not find me’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come’?”

Reflection | Sent

By: Kerry Grannis

To be sent is to know, first, that you have a purpose, and, second, that there is a Sender who has dispatched you.

1. To be sent means that your purpose is primary. The circumstances in which you find yourself may affect you the tactics you employ to accomplish your purpose, but do not alter your fundamental focus and intention
2. To be sent means that you have not defined your purpose independently—that you go on behalf of a Sender to whom you are connected and whose mission you have accepted.

Holy Action: Try to stay aware today of both your purpose and your Sender. You may want to meditate on these words, adapted from today's scripture: "I know God because I am from God and God sends me." Perhaps you might try the following exercise, or better yet, set a reminder on your watch or on your calendar to repeat it a few times today:

- Close your eyes and become aware of your center, the deepest part of you that is connected to God. You might imagine a thread—glittering and inseverable—that tethers your heart to the One who has sent you.

- You may know your purpose clearly, or you may not be sure, but you know that it has to do with love.
- Picture that love as a warm light that pulses through the thread from your Sender and fills your center. Feel it grow from your heart, illuminating you up to your fingertips, to the top of your head, through your feet to your toes until it is shining and visible from the outside.
- Rest in this image for a few more breaths as you return to the words: “I know God because I am from God and God sends me.”

March 9

Scripture Reading | John 7:37-52

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? ⁴² Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” ⁴³ So there was a division in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵ Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” ⁴⁶ The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” ⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? ⁴⁸ Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.” ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ⁵¹ “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” ⁵² They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

Reflection | Division

By: Theresa Cardinal Brown

How much of our division from others is just about us trying to prove our own beliefs right? We are people that hate to be wrong. We hate to believe that our own opinion could be in error, and we push back against being “corrected.” This starts when we are very young. We believe that by shouting our opinions louder that makes them more right. The longer we have a belief, the closer our identity is to that belief, the less we are open to challenge. Jesus' words divided the people. He was speaking a truth so different from what they had come to believe, and the lives that they had built around that belief that accepting what he had to say would mean total disruption. So the Jewish leaders went back to what they thought they knew: “A prophet does not come from Galilee.” But Jesus didn't come from Galilee. If they had looked deeper and opened themselves they may have learned of his birth in Bethlehem, where the prophets had said the descendent of David and King of Kings would come from. Like the leaders, we tend to seek out the “truth” in places that would confirm our biases and beliefs. We don't want to open ourselves to the idea that we might be wrong, especially if being wrong would have a huge impact on our world-view. But when we are so sure of our “right-ness,” we close ourselves off from the Spirit, who is the source of all truth. Uncomfortable truths can be divisive, unless we open ourselves to the possibility that our own beliefs may be based on inaccuracies, or even lies. Jesus came to heal divisions, but first he had to create divisions based on incorrect assumptions of truth. Before we stand so sure in our “right-ness” when faced with a challenge, we should pray to the Spirit, who is with us now because of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, to help us discern the truth and accept correction, even when doing so may mean changing how we have set up our world. But living into real truth is like a thirsty person drinking from living waters. Healing division starts with accepting the objective truth.

March 10

Scripture Reading | John 8:12-20

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” ¹⁴ Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” ¹⁹ Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰ He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

Reflection | Judge

By: Andrew Jonas

We all share at least one experience with a person standing in front of a group of judges for a contest, competition, or performance to find out that they won!

It's a great feeling!

They get a little bit of glory and recognition for their hard work. What they don't see are the other participants in the event who were judged and did not receive the satisfaction of winning. I think we all can relate to the second set of people more often than the winner.

The word "judgment" is very negative in our society. We judge each other for our clothes, how we speak, our sexual orientation, our gender, our skin color, our jobs...this list can go on-and-on. We pass this judgment in an attempt to make us feel better about our own decisions and qualities of life. However, that satisfaction only lasts a moment, and we feel the need to judge again. Imagine for a moment if we lived in a world where human judgment doesn't exist? Would that make everyone feel like the loser of a competition? Or would we all feel like the winner? Let's take a lesson from today's passage. We as humans, should not pass judgment, but leave judgment up to God.

March 11

Scripture Reading | John 8:21-32

²¹ Again he said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” ²² Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” ²³ He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.” ²⁵ They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all? ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” ²⁷ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. ²⁹ And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” ³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

³¹ Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Reflection | Truth

By: Anne Mugler

A GATE CALLED TRUTH

by Ann Weems

Just outside of Jerusalem

We came to a gate called Truth.

We called to the gatekeeper to let us in.

“The latch is not on,” he replied “Anyone who will can enter.” We went closer,

but seeing how great

and how heavy was the gate, we looked for a way around.

There must be a way around.

There are days I also feel there must be a way around the gate, as the poet Ann Weems writes. Why is truth, God’s truth, through Jesus so hard? The promise is that truth will set you free. But that call to truth is not always welcomed. It requires us to sit with ourselves long and hard, to gather strength to open the heavy gates, to participate in the work that Jesus may call us to do and to hear that call accurately. Some days I confess, I look around for another way. I avoid being set free.

March 12

Scripture Reading | John 8:33-47

³³ They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. ³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

Reflection | Free

By: Tom Edmonson

Jesus' listeners* ask what he means by saying they'll be made free. They reason that, as children of Abraham, they've never been anyone's slaves.

It's good to be a child of Abraham. But John the Baptist warned that it's not enough. And Jesus told the Pharisees that "you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." (i.e., Christ; v. 24)

Jesus says that all who commit sin are slaves of sin (v. 34). But he assures us that, as the Son of God, he can free us from sin. Like Abraham, we must believe and obey him.

This passage jibes with John 3:16 and 14:15. It also agrees with Romans 6:22-23 (believers have "been freed from sin and enslaved to God.") In Galatians 5:13, Paul urges us not to use our freedom for self-indulgence but to become slaves to one another, and in 2 Corinthians 5:15, to live for Christ and no longer for ourselves.

Jesus frees us from sin so that we can serve him and each other.

[*I'm just curious about v. 31, which describes the listeners as "the Jews who *had* believed in him." (italics added) Does this refer to his "disciples" who turned away from him in perplexity or disgust when he spoke of believers' eating his flesh and drinking his blood? see John 6: 52-66]

March 13

Scripture Reading | John 8:47-59

47 Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

48 The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” 49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. 51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” 52 The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” 54 Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ 55 though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” 57 Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Reflection | Glory

By: Gail Ammons

Glory is a word that we use constantly in church. (Glory be to the father....Angels we have heard on high..... Give the glory to God etc.) The one that came to my mind immediately was the “glory of the Lord” song in the Messiah. What is glory and how is the glory of the Lord revealed?

Synonyms for glory are splendor, grandeur, majesty, greatness, impressiveness, gloriousness, nobility, pomp, stateliness, sumptuousness, opulence, beauty, elegance, brilliance, gorgeousness, splendidness.

As stated in the Daily Reflection produced by High Calling, when we think of God’s glory, we remember that God has all good things in greater quantity and quality than we can ever imagine. Notice, too, that God’s glory is solid and substantial. It isn’t mere reputation. It isn’t dependent on anyone or anything else. God’s glory reflects his essential nature.” We often describe God’s glory in something we have seen in nature where he reveals the same “goodness in greater quantity and quality than we can ever imagine.” It is amazing to think that God allows us to know and share in His glory through the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. He gives us the right to be called the children of God (John 1:12)

Holy Action: In this time of Lent, I wonder how I can share God’s essential nature with others in gratitude for the unimaginable gift he has given me.

March 15

Scripture Reading | John 6:1-15

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Reflection | Feast

By: Theresa Cardinal Brown

How does it feel when you know you have a full pantry, freezer and refrigerator when a snowstorm is coming? Does it feel good? A sense of abundance? How do you feel when you know a snowstorm is coming but you are low on milk, or toilet paper, or diapers? Nervous? A sense of scarcity? We see this reaction anytime the news reports call for snow and grocery store shelves start to empty.

Whether or not we feel our lives are abundant or full of scarcity affects our outlook and how we feel about others. When we feel like we have enough we are able to be generous, to put on a feast to feed others. But when we feel like we don't have enough, we look at others as competitors. What "they" get or what I give, means less for me and mine. The world is "feast or famine."

But we are looking at these things as the world looks at them. The world wants us to believe that everything is scarce and we are always on the verge of famine. Money, time, natural resources, food, government dollars. Giving to someone else means diminishing me. We are also told that about rights. If "they" get their rights to love and marry whom they want, or get government help to rise up out of poverty, or come to the country from a faraway place to provide an opportunity for their families when there is none at home, somehow that means my rights to live how I want are lessened.

This story of Jesus' miracle of feeding the Five Thousand tells us that worldview is not God's view. In fact, in God's world, there is *always* enough. The miracle is that when we give, others give, too, and God multiplies. And suddenly there is more than enough. We find coins in our couches, we find dollars in our budgets, we find a frozen loaf of bread we had forgotten about. We take all of the tidbits of vegetables and cans in our pantry and make a large batch of soup to feed more than our family. In short, there is *always* a feast.

Holy Action: How can we open our hearts to all of God's abundance and share that with others during this season of Lent?

March 16

Scripture Reading | John 6:16-27

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.

Reflection | Fear

By: Noah Clark

To me fear is that feeling when everything is out of control and you can't find hope in the midst of your circumstances.

As we go through this season of Lent and I read this passage I find myself reflecting on how when faced with things outside the normality of my comfort zone often that produces some sort of fear or anxiety within me. I imagine this is also how the Disciples must have felt in this passage as they see Jesus acting outside of their normal. Its because of this fear of the unknown that the disciples, Jesus' closest friends, did not recognize him; I wonder how much so this is for me when I see God acting outside my normal or my comfort zone do I let fear overwhelm me to the point where I lose recognition of the presence of God.

Holy Action: Take some time out of your day to practice stepping outside of your comfort zone and, in the midst of the uncomfortable, take a moment to look for where you see God at work.

March 17

Scripture Reading | John 6:28-40

²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸ for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

Reflection | Will

By: James Sledge

John's gospel is filled with rich symbolism pointing to who Jesus is. He says he is the bread that came down from heaven, speaking both of his origins and purpose. He has divine origins, and he comes to bring life. In this, Jesus does not act on his own. He embodies the "will" of the Father.

Jesus does not come for his own sake. Rather, he comes so that God might be clearly seen. The gospel told us about this in its prologue where "the Word became flesh." That prologue closes with, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." (see John 1:1-18)

In Jesus, we not only get a clearer picture of God, we also get a glimpse into God's heart. We can see what God wishes for humanity, for us. The deeper we know Jesus, the clearer we will see God.

March 18

Scripture Reading | John 6:41-51

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Reflection | Bread

By: Tam Ayers

When I was reading through the passage for this prompt, I immediately thought of sourdough. Sourdough bread is more like living bread than most varieties: it takes time and care to cultivate a sourdough starter, and regular feeding to keep it alive and healthy. To me, this passage makes me think of how often I have shown love for people by giving them bread that I have baked. Jesus represents the promise of God's love, and sharing good bread can also be representative of love. During Lent, we are waiting for the death and resurrection of the Bread of Life, and just like bread that you bake, it takes time for the full promise to be realized.

Holy Action: What's something you need give time and care to cultivate in this season? Is there an area of your life that could use some extra attention? What might that look like?

March 19

Scripture Reading | John 6:52-59

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Reflection | Dispute

By: James Sledge

Jesus' words about being "living bread" that gives eternal life to those who eat it troubles many who hear them. They ask an obvious question. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" But Jesus only doubles down on this contentious point, saying that eating this bread is required for life.

In John's gospel, Jesus' disputes with others often provide an opportunity for Jesus to speak past his audience the readers of the gospel. That clearly happens here. Jesus is speaking about the eucharist to members of the church, seeming to address a dispute within the early Church that persists to this day.

Many would like to spiritualize Christianity, but John's gospel insists on a very bodily Jesus and on a very tangible, earthly sacrament that draws us deeper into relationship with this Jesus. The Word really did become flesh. Body can be vessel for the holy, and we, in our bodies, can experience life, eternal life, here and now.

March 20

Scripture Reading | John 6:60-71

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. 65 And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67 So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." 70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." 71 He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Reflection | Spirit

By: Avery Burns

What is spirit? For some people spirit, or the spirit world, makes its appearances through conjuring or séances, or other visions, even by tapping on a Ouija Board. It is vested with some kind of phantasmagorical magic. Yet, these people also believe and feel a communion with these images.

But for me, the Holy Spirit is the branch of our triune Christian faith that brings us the manifestation of the other two, God and Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit speaks to me. It transports God's Word and Love to me, and my praise, petition, love, and communion back to God. The Holy Spirit brings me the love and teachings of Jesus Christ. Without the Holy Spirit none of this would reach us. For the Holy Spirit breathes in and breathes out the Holy love of the divine, and the human presence. Hear the word of Jesus from John:63B "...the words I have spoken to you [the faithful disciples] are spirit and life." The Holy Spirit brings to us, and confers upon us, God's grace. Yes, it is a mystery, not magic or trickery, but the faith, or belief, in an unseen, but not unknown, presence. The mystery of communion, Holy, and human, is communicated to us only through the Holy Spirit. Spirit.

We pray.

Prayer: Loving and creating Lord, thank you for your love and presence and grace, through the Holy Spirit. We ask that you continue to keep us as your children. To love us. To care for us. To turn us away from evil. To turn us to Love and Justice. To bless us. Through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen

March 22

Scripture Reading | John 9:1-17

¹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

Reflection | Mud

By: Nancy Gehron

Mud is amazing. Some of our first records of humans were stored in its squishy softness and told the story of our upright stance. For tens of thousands of years humans have relied on mud made homes to keep us safe from predators and the elements. Whole villages were made from mud bricks and I have seen remarkable houses of worship made from mud, both Christian and Muslim. There are still entire villages consisting of nothing but mud huts, my daughter lived in one such humble abode for two years, protected by mud and love. But mud and me. It's like the secret sauce of my garden. I've spent 30 years playing with this same dirt, tilling it, preparing it, seeding it with the hope of magic for tomorrow. But that dirt won't do anything until the rain comes and makes it mud.

Holy Action: As it warms up during lent, make some mud and put your own magic seed in it! Get ready for something beautiful or tasty! Enjoy!

March 23

Scripture Reading | John 9:18-41

⁸ *The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.*

²³ *Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”*

²⁴ *So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.*

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Reflection | Sight

By: Noah Clark

Sight in this passage holds a double meaning in that on one hand it is literal referring to one’s ability to see on the other hand sight is used as a metaphor to represent understanding and knowledge.

Devo: in this season of lent I feel like we like to look ahead and skip over to the celebration of the resurrection.

However, in doing so we miss out on seeing the whole story, we miss seeing Jesus. We miss seeing the life and pain the joy and the suffering in this season we cannot overlook the story; we must also take time to reflect on the full depiction of Jesus Christ who lived, suffered, died, and rose again.

Holy Action: Close your eyes and take time to try and imagine the image of a loved one. What characteristics stand out the most about this person are they physical traits or are they something less concrete.

March 24

Scripture Reading | John 10:1-18

¹“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Reflection | Voice

By: Sue Armstrong

In this passage, Jesus patiently tries to explain that He is the Good Shepherd, without a lot of resulting understanding of what he is saying. He first tries the analogy of a Gatekeeper of the sheepfold, whose sheep recognize his voice and follow only him, and not a stranger, because they do not know that voice. He tries a second time, again referencing himself as the gatekeeper, and saying those who enter through the gate by him will be saved and will find good pasture. Finally, he then calls Himself the good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep—saying he knows his own and they know him, just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father. But, he takes it a bit further in this teaching, saying that he has other sheep who do not belong to “this” fold, that he will bring them as well, they will listen to his voice, and there be one flock and one shepherd.

Despite this message foretelling of unity in Christ, Jesus’ ministry obviously begins to cause consternation with his own people, and we see the events that follow. But his voice is one of hope and love—that we all are beloved in God’s eyes, and we are blessed to be able to listen to the voice (even if it is still and small in our own hearts), no matter who we are or where we come from. In this Lenten season, let us listen that voice that tells us we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and beloved children of God.

March 25

Scripture Reading | John 10:19-42

¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?” ²¹ Others were saying, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” ²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; ²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.” ³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’ ³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled— ³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son?’ ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. ⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. ⁴¹ Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And many believed in him there.

Reflection | Follow

By: Paige Bach

I am NOT a follower. I don't do well with authority. I don't like changing my opinion on things I am passionate about. All of these things really set me up to be a crappy follower of Christ. Being in a relationship with God is all about being a follower. It is all about submitting myself to God's authority. It is all about being open to listening to God, and not sticking to my own thoughts and opinions. Despite what my nature tells me to be and do, I have committed my life to being a minister. One may say I'm a glutton for punishment, or that I am just setting myself up to fail. And maybe I am, but I have to say, I love my life. I love following God, and what God has called me to be and do. Is it hard? ABSO-FREAKING-LUTELY, but also totally worth it.

While I'm sure there are a few people out there that this is a piece of cake for, I have a feeling that most of you reading this are more like myself and struggle to be a follower. Regardless of how easy or hard it is for you, we are ALL called to be followers of Christ.

Holy Action: What makes it hard for you to be a follower of Christ? Dig into that this Lenten season, really focus on how you can be a follower of Christ despite that obstacle.

March 26

Scripture Reading | John 11:1-27

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” ¹¹After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” ¹²The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Reflection | Rise

By: Narra Geisinger

What RISE means to me, in three haiku poems:
Awake to the sun
Yes, a new day has begun
A clean slate for us!

We stumble and fall
Then we dust off and get up
Rise. Again, we rise!

You have gone and left.
Yet, You'll rise again, and live.
A resurrection.

Did you know that the term *Lazarus taxon*, named after the Biblical figure whom Jesus rose from the dead, denotes organisms that reappear in the fossil record after a period of apparent extinction? The most famous Lazarus taxon is the ancient coelacanth fish thought to have gone extinct over 66 million years ago, only to turn up in a South African fish market in 1938. (In the Bible, Lazarus was thankfully dead for less time.)

Holy Action: Think of someone dear to you who has passed away. Imagine them as a full human being in front of you - see their smile, feel their warmth. Help them rise through you -- do something they loved doing, or do something specific in their honor.



March 27

Scripture Reading | John 11:28-44

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you

sent me.”⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Reflection | Weep

By: Diane Maloney

I have always hated crying. I don't know why exactly. I'm sure there was a part of me that felt it was “weakness.” Maybe you are just like me and don't like crying or maybe you're like my fiancée who finds it enjoyable! As I was in seminary diving into the richness of the humanity of the person of Christ, I was struck by how human tears are. As Jesus learns of Lazarus' death he weeps. The idea of Jesus weeping spoke to me. Now when tears come to my eyes, I am reminded that Jesus wept. If the Savior of the entire world cried, you can too.

Fun fact: John 11:35 is one of the shortest verses of the bible! If you're looking to memorize Bible verses, start there.

Holy Action: As you go through your day think about the last time you had tears in your eyes, what does that moment remind you about your own humanity? Does it help connect you to God, your Creator?

March 28

Scripture Reading | John 12:9-19

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!”

¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵“Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify.

¹⁸It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

Reflection | Crowd

By: Jenny Lansbury

On October 27, 2019, I was in the midst of a great crowd of people, many of whom were there with a singular purpose in mind—to witness the Washington Nationals beat the Houston Astros in game 5 of the World Series. Unfortunately, it was not to be, at least not that night, but attending my first World Series game was a dream come true for me. Which tells you how much I love baseball and the Nats, because I hate crowds, simply hate them. I have lived in Northern Virginia for over 26 years and have never been to the National Mall on July 4 to see the fireworks. Mostly I think it is being packed in. But it might have something to do how quickly a crowd can turn or be worked into a frenzy, as we witnessed with startling reality on January 6. In our passage today, “the world has gone after” Jesus. But in a matter of days, they will be calling “Crucify him!” These days, many of us have forgotten what it feels like to be in anything that would resemble a crowd. Perhaps the next time we are, we’ll think about what it might be like to be in one that would go after Jesus.

Holy Action: Close your eyes and imagine yourself with the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem. What does it feel like to be with all those people? What are the sights, sounds, tastes, smells? Are you happy and excited to be there? Or did you get dragged along by a friend, a little annoyed to be with all those people? How do you feel when you see Jesus entering? Sit for a couple of moments with the image of encountering Jesus.

March 30

Scripture Reading | John 12:20-26

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Reflection | Life

By: Gail Ammons

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

The seed is a wonderful analogy for Christians pondering losing their lives. The seed appears to be dead but with the right conditions, the single seed bears abundant fruit. John Piper in a Life Together 1995 sermon says that we must daily ask ourselves what in us must die in order to bear the fruit of Jesus’ love and glory. Jesus had to be crucified in order to gain eternal life. We die to old habits and desires and become servants in order to receive His honor.

Holy Action: What seed in us has the potential to bear much fruit? And what must we surrender in order to for that seed to grow?

March 31

Scripture Reading | John 12:27-36

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

Reflection | Darkness

By: David Schoonover

By the time this passage is reflected upon, our church will have been dark for over a year: a year of not hugging, singing, smiling, and worshipping with one another in our sacred space. In the theatre, going dark means that a venue is waiting for the next production to arrive.

That's what I keep thinking: we are just waiting for the light to overcome this darkness so we can be reunited with one another. While we are walking through this darkness, it seems like we do not know where we are going, almost as if we are a poor, wayfaring stranger.

However, with a little bit of hope, we can take a moment in the quiet of the night, light a candle, and remember that we can carry the light even when darkness surrounds us as we await our next production.

April 1

Scripture Reading | John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Reflection | Love

By: Jenny Lansbury

So, here we find ourselves again on Maundy Thursday. When I learned that word when I was young, I thought it was the funniest sounding word. I knew the date on the church calendar referred to the evening when Jesus washes the disciples feet, so I would generally connect it with that, thinking it must have something to do with foot washing. Cue an LOL emoji! Every year, it seems, I have to look it up. The word itself probably stems from the Latin *mandatum*, or *mandatum novum*. It relates to the English word, *commandment*, or a *new mandate*, for this is the same evening that Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment, that we love another, as Christ has loved us. So, while *Maundy* isn't an old-fashioned word for foot washing, Jesus's washing of his disciples' feet is intricately connected to this new commandment. We often think of that scene as an act of service and, of course, it is. But while that is part of the picture, this is also an act deeply rooted in love, a love that puts us on our knees, calling us to do the most menial, servant-like tasks. *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* It's not an easy love. But I don't think I'll have to look up the word *Maundy* ever again.

Holy Action: This evening before you sit down to supper, notice your feet. How do they feel after the day? They are probably not dusty, but I imagine they are tired. Now think about the kindness, the relief you would feel if someone brought a pan of warm water, knelt down and bathed your feet, dried them, then massaged them with a lotion or oil. Wouldn't this feel like an act of the most self-giving love?

April 2

Scripture Reading | John 13:36-38

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

Reflection | Denial

By: Paige Bach

I don't know about you, but I love confrontation. I cannot stand beating around the bush, being passive aggressive, or ignoring a problem. I believe that telling the truth is always the right answer, even if it is hard. All that being said, if I was Simon Peter in this situation, I don't think I would be feeling very good about being straight up called out by Jesus, even if it was the truth.

We all know that God always knows what's on our hearts and minds, yet I think far too often we try and hid our true selves from God. This is denying Christ, just as Simon Peter did. God knows us, we cannot hide from or fool God.

Holy Action: What have you been denying in your relationship with God? Confront it. Embrace it. Own it. And deny no more.

April 3

Scripture Reading | John 19:38-42

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Reflection | Dirt

By: Marnie Sarver

We have come to the last day of Lenten readings, and what do we end with? Dirt. In the NRSV, John 19:38-42 does not actually mention the word “dirt,” but Jesus is placed in the tomb, in the garden, so the connection to the ground, to dirt, is clear.

If you know me, you know I love flowers. Flowers grow in dirt, usually. So I spend time close to dirt. The dirt in the Fairfax Street flower bed - Merry Huley's lily bed - in particular. Like Christ who rose from the tomb to everlasting life, the life that lies in that dirt returns - year after glorious year. The daffodils, the azaleas, the hydrangeas, and several kinds of lilies emerge with blooms and fragrance. From dirt they come. To celebrate life. Reborn. Renewed. Restored. Resurrected. May it be ever thus for all of us.

Holy Action: Keep an eye on that plot of dirt, on Merry Huley's lily bed. Especially come June. When the Easter lilies that she planted will make you shout again for Easter joy.



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