



40  
days  
of Lent

2019



## Introduction Lent 2019

Welcome to 2019's Lenten Lectionary. In past years, I've encouraged you to read particular psalms or prayers during Lent. This year my challenge to you is a bit different. I want to challenge you to read the Bible! Obviously, not the entire Bible during this one Lent, but a little each day for the rest of your lives.

The Bible has a wide range of writing styles, richness, and subjects. No matter what trials or joys I am facing, there is a Bible verse that helps me through the issue. For example, I am a long-time backpacker. Micah 3:19 is quoting a Psalm when he says, "The Lord God is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to go to the high places." As true for me today as it was for David with his sheep back then. Or Psalm 94:17-18 that I discovered after taking a wrong turn and being stuck on the edge of a cliff with no way back down except a 500 foot drop: "Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said my foot was slipping, your love, O Lord, supported me." Imagine my surprise about 10 years later when I read verse 19, as I was going through a great depression, "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul." I didn't notice that verse until I needed it!

How do you begin? Just pick up the Bible and let it fall open. Or start at Matthew and go through the New Testament cover to cover. And don't be afraid of the Old Testament. There are so many passages of joy, solace, consolation, that you can find comfort or affirmation for whatever issues you are facing.

Joining a Bible Study can help you to systematically study the Bible. Our Wednesday lunch group in Grace House is a good place to start. It doesn't matter how you do it-- Just Do It!

Let's get started by reading the Lenten scriptures. And enjoy the commentaries by several of our St. Timothy's friends who took the time to write their reactions to the daily readings.

Helen Coleman

Editor's note: These offerings are the gifts of our authors. Please enjoy them and tell the author about your reactions. As always, our contributors come from all parts of the theological spectrum, and that is a good thing. We each find our path to God, and God loves us each exactly as we are.

## March 7, 2019

Deuteronomy 7:6-11

Titus 1: 1-16

John 1: 29-34

I'm glad that the Lectionary writers were reminded that the three readings for the day we were assigned (or chose) to write about are not necessarily related. Some years, finding the relationships has been easier; this is NOT one of them.

Both the Old Testament reading (Deuteronomy 7: 6-11) and the Epistle (Titus 1: 1-16), contain instructions for how God's people are to behave. The Hebrews, in the Old Testament, are about to complete their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and enter the land that God has promised them when he led them out of slavery in Egypt. They are reminded of the love and care of God in bringing them on this journey, which many of them would not have remembered the beginning of. They are admonished to obey the instructions of this God who has loved them enough to choose them to be HIS people. They are told that that they - not some unknown descendent - will suffer the consequence of rejecting this God. They are promised that God will be with them if they obey his statutes and ordinances.

The Epistle reading is the beginning of Paul's letter to his disciple, Titus. As is typical of the beginning of Paul's letters, he states his credentials for preaching on how to love and follow Jesus. He then reminds Titus (a disciple like Timothy) of the responsibilities that Paul charged him with when he left him in Crete. Titus is to finish the projects that Paul and he had begun before Paul had to leave. He is to find and appoint elders in every town in Crete. Paul specifies the characteristics that these elders (predecessors of our current bishops) must have and those that they must not have. Paul lists a daunting set of characteristics: blameless, married only once, children must be believers, not accused of debauchery, not rebellious, hospitable, lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout and self-controlled. Paul also warns Titus regarding the character of the people of Crete – quoting a Cretan prophet as the expert on their character. Both the author of Deuteronomy (reportedly Moses) and Paul have high expectations of the behavior of their followers.

The Gospel reading (John 1: 29-34) talks about what John the Baptist said about Jesus after their first encounter when John baptized Jesus. John tells the reader that he had been told when he was sent to preach to the people that another, greater than he, was coming soon, and that he would recognize him by seeing the Spirit descending on this person and remaining. Perhaps the relationship of the Gospel reading to the other two readings is seeing that John the Baptist followed the command that he had been given in recognizing Jesus, baptizing him and telling his followers that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to the children of Israel – the promised one. All these readings remind me that there are behavior standards that we, as followers of God and Jesus, are expected to live up to.

Sally Potts

**March 8, 2019**

Deuteronomy 7:12-16

Titus 2:1-15

**John 1: 35-42**

In this passage John describes John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God'. Two of the bystanders recognize Jesus' divinity and decide to follow Jesus. One of the two, Andrew, leaves and returns with his brother Simon whom Jesus renames 'Peter'.

Understanding this passage requires one to reflect on what came before this story. John, the author, uses the first Chapter to set the stage for Jesus' ministry on earth. Excerpts from earlier verses establish the framework:

- 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....'
- 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him...'
- 'I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie...'
- 'The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, behold, the Lamb of God!'

The question we face daily is—whether we respond to the 'John the Baptists' we encounter who call us to recognize Jesus and follow Him. What are the 'John the Baptist' opportunities we've experienced and rejected, accepted or lost? And ultimately—are we going to simply accept our commission to serve, love and follow or wait for another opportunity?

Mike Oliver

**March 9, 2019**

Deuteronomy 7:17-26

**Titus 3:1-15**

John 1:43-51

**EPISTLE Titus 3:1-15 (NRSV)**

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned. When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing. And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you.

Paul's two letters to Timothy and one to Titus are considered the Pastoral Letters because Timothy and Titus are pastors of churches. More specifically, Paul outlines for Titus those Christian virtues.

Chapter three reveals again that Paul considered himself at one time as being foolish, disobedient, slave to his passions, envious, despicable and filled with hatred of others. Paul continues by saying he was saved not by any good works; rather by God's mercy. Verses 6-7 in the passage above stood out to me most: ***"This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."***

Just a few days prior to receiving this selection from Helen, I read the reflection in **Forward Day by Day** (Linda Buskirk) that creates an image for the reader of the "Reading of the Will." She talks of the scene in movies where those assembled heirs create quite a dysfunctional picture. I had to laugh and still chuckle when I think about those classic scenes in movies of those hopeful souls who are waiting to hear how much money she/he will receive from the deceased. Her message, however, is the same as Paul's when "God elevates each of us to the status of family – we are heirs."

Linda Buskirk goes on to write that *"God elevates each of us to the status of family-we are heirs. God wants us there, and Jesus has grabbed us by the hand and pulled us to our place at the table."* How awesome is that?

Jacqueline Chiavini

## March 11, 2019

Deuteronomy 8:11-20

Hebrew 2:11-18

John 2:1-12

“Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth’...But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish...because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.”

“Therefore he (Jesus) had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”

“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.”

I love this Lenten practice because it grounds me in what messages God is sending me in my journey of Lent. What might I give up? What might I add? What might I examine? What questions arise in these scriptures?

- All that I have, all that I am, all the I experience is from the hand of God, and I pray that my thoughts, feelings, experiences and actions give glory to God, who wishes only that I have an abundant life....full of God’s Spirit, which is always life giving, even in the midst of suffering and blessing. *Please Lord, let me be grateful for all parts of my life.*
- Because I have been tested by what I have suffered, like Jesus, I am able to help those who are being tested in the same ways. May I be, in the midst of suffering, mindful that God uses me to benefit others. *Please Lord, let me be bold in sharing the sufferings I have overcome to encourage others, that, they too, can triumph in their lives and experience the abundant life God desires for each of us.*
- Even though no one expects it, let me continue to serve the best I have. *Please Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit, which will enable me to always give the best I have, remembering that it is all God. I have only to empty myself and be God’s empty vessel.*

*I am learning to give thanks in any and all circumstances, grateful that my suffering helps another to triumph and know, in God’s power, all that flows through me is my best. Praise God for always loving us and this beautiful planet....praying for heaven on earth to prevail....for we know that darkness can never extinguish the light of God, which is love. AMEN*

Peg Miller

**March 12, 2019**

Deuteronomy 9:4-12

Hebrews 3:1-11

**John 2:13 -22**

The one thing (among others) that I appreciate about St. Timothy's is the way in which we try to modernize Bible passages so that it becomes relevant to us in our lives. In this passage Jesus traveled to a temple in Jerusalem. Before entering He is charged an admission fee by the Money changers. This temple alone supplied the sacrificial animals required for worship which the worshipers had to purchase. At first I assumed this was like the Danville Arts and Crafts festivals we have on the streets. Actually, it's more like charging admission to come to St. Timothy's where special bread and wine is provided at a cost. It's no wonder that Jesus violently protests the event by knocking down the tables, freeing the animals and scattering the coins; thus rendering the temple an "unsacred space".

People are surprised by Jesus' actions and ask him to give them a sign that proves his credibility. I don't think people here would be surprised by Jesus' actions today. In fact, I feel that a church like that might be questioned. However, when people are attached to tradition, they may continue allowing themselves to be exploited and churches such as these will only be able to serve those who can afford to pay the cost of being able to participate. In the New York Times, I recently discovered that the tradition of charging exorbitant fees for worship still exists today. The article stated that monthly church membership fees were set and if these fees were not paid one could be charged as high as \$2,970.00 for attendance during holy days

I prefer to be part of a church that accepts rich and poor alike. I believe that St. Timothy's is the type of church that Jesus was suggesting after his Resurrection three days after death. We are still here after 2,000 years later.

Respectfully,

Nora and Steve Hudson

**March 13, 2019**

**Deuteronomy 9: 13-21**

Hebrews 3: 12-19

John 2:23-3:15

Here we are at Mt Horeb, Moses has gone up and received the stone tablets of the covenant from God. Meanwhile the rest of “God’s chosen” are at the base of Horeb, making a graven image out of melted gold to worship...I guess parting the Red Sea and escaping from Egypt was easily forgotten. God was NOT PLEASED, telling Moses that they are, “indeed a stubborn people”, very quick to turn away from what the Lord commanded. God said that he was going to destroy the people. I can think of several words to replace stubborn! Moses begged, fasted, prayed, and lay prostrate for 40 days and 40 nights. God relented.

I can hear us saying...well, that would never happen to me, today in 2019. Okay, granted, it may difficult to get enough gold together to melt and make a Golden Calf to worship. But there are “golden calves” all around us...the biggest, the best, the most expensive, the most glamorous...I/we know about distractions. This is what gets our attention, and can keep us from serving God in our lives and community.

I stayed away from church for many years because I was mad with God for “giving” me the burden/hardship of raising a developmentally delayed son, Eric. I was mired in the day-to-day challenges, and it was difficult. Coping with the situation, and how society was 50 years ago, I would not wish this on anyone. If I had been able to put my anger aside and had found a supporting community like St. Timothy’s, it would have been a different story. Now at Three Score plus Ten Plus, I can see that my attitude kept me from sitting back and seeing what Eric accomplished. Thankfully now I can and I do rejoice in Eric and thank God for him and the happiness he gives to others with his laughter and joy with music. Eric Rocks!

So, for me this Lent the question is, what do I take from Scripture and apply it in 2019?

1. It is easy to be led away from God’s teachings...Moses leaves for a short time and BAM...society falls apart, forgetting God’s word and promises, falling into idolatry.
2. I must honor that still small voice that puts me on the right course, and not worry what others think about me or my actions.
3. Serve God with a joyful heart filled with the knowledge that God Loves AND Forgives.

Lenten Blessings,  
Patti Farris

**March 14, 2019**

**Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5**

Hebrews 4:1-10

John 3:16-21

*“Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; pay no attention to the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin” (Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5).*

In this passage Moses is telling God to calm down. Someone has rebelled against God and now he is angry and wants to destroy him. But Moses tells God to just hold on and take a deep breath. He goes on by saying not to let this one belligerent man get to him. Just take a step back and look at all of these amazing things and people you have created. Look at your all your amazing disciples! So what if ONE person doesn't worship you? Look at the thousands of people who DO worship you. Moses is just telling God to not let this one silly person get to you and bring you down.

Thank you, Moses - someone had to say it! I wish I had a Moses sitting on my shoulder to tell me this every time someone says something mean about me. It's funny how directly this quote correlates to me and my life. I am in high school, for heaven's sake! Kids are mean. Just the other day I was walking to Chemistry and two girls were talking about me behind my back. Even though I would love to just destroy those mean girls right then and there like God wanted to do, Moses is right. I shouldn't care about what people say. So what if these two mean girls, whom I don't even like, are saying mean things about me? I just need to think about all the nice things my amazing friends and family say about me 24/7! So the next time someone says something mean to you, just remember Moses sitting on your shoulder and don't listen to what they have to say!

Allison Geraci-Novy

**March 15, 2019**

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

**Hebrews 4:11-16**

John 3:22-36

In the Epistle for today, the author certainly did not pull back any punches in the letter to the Hebrews. The author says, “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” As I reflected on this, three things struck me.

First, in describing the Word of God as a sword or sharp knife, the author gives an image that the Word of God has the cutting power to separate things which seem completely intertwined, like my soul from my spirit. God is able to separate all the pieces of who really am, the good from the bad, giving me an accurate picture of what is in my heart, and what motivates me as a human. Only through understanding this picture, can I move forward in my relationship with God. That is, how can I really confess my sins unless I understand this picture?

Second, the active and living spirit “pierces” me to show me what’s inside. The image seems almost akin to a scene in *Game of Thrones*. The author is telling me that in order to get that clear picture of who I am, I can’t just gently scratch on surface of my being. I need to go deep. Exposing this reality may not be comfortable as it may challenge the way I have chosen to live my life, the way I see others, the way I wish to be perceived.

Third, the image of a two sided sword causes me to think about something that has both favorable and unfavorable consequences. Once I go through the process of understanding the sobering reality of who I am (the unfavorable), listening to the Word of God, through the teachings of Jesus, confessing my failures, and evolving myself to follow in His way, will lead me to a healing forgiveness and peace (the favorable).

I pray that God gives me the strength to listen to the Word, the strength to cut deep and see my true condition no matter how painful this process may be, and the strength to remove those things that hinder my journey with Him.

John Geraci

**March 16, 2019**

**Deuteronomy 11:18-28**

On my first reading of the Old Testament, my thought was, "Oh boy, I am in trouble." Then I learned that I was just the type of pilgrim that Moses was writing to on the eve of entering the promised land. I was the guy who thought, "Wow, we made it and now we have arrived, so I won't have to endure those strict rules any more. Land of milk and honey for me! No more mana! I am ready for the easy life." It is important to realize that the foregoing are my thoughts, imaginary thoughts, but thoughts none the less. Part of Orthodox Jewish custom is to wear a small box (a phylactery) containing passages from the law bound to their foreheads in literal observance to Deuteronomy 6:8 during prayer. I do not know the reason for this practice, but I am guessing that, as with all laws, they appeal and are stored in our memory which is typically thought to be part of our brain.

**Hebrews 5:1-10**

Jesus of Nazareth, as well as this writing, were a product of their time and of a culture which tended to define the relationship of the people to their God by rules which they meticulously documented. As a product of this history, the writer of Hebrews seems to offer a detailed list of qualifications for Jesus' Priesthood. For me Hebrews 5:1-10 continues the culture of rules-based, tightly regulated cerebral relationship of God and human kind.

**John 4:1-26**

As much as I feared the reading from Deuteronomy, this reading from John about the woman at the well is one of my favorites. I admit to being more than a little puzzled on why Jesus was alone; you would think that with the apparent acceptance of many who he had baptized, that there would have been disciples with him, and there may have been, but the focus is on a conversation that totally violated the social mores of that day. The woman reacted to Jesus' question in a manner that very much reflected the rules-based society they both lived in. Jesus, on the other hand responded in a way that was completely consistent with his teachings and behavior. Jesus addressed a person he saw as another child of God with respect in that he asked for a drink rather than demanding that she provide him with water, since he was a Jew and a man and therefore a step higher on the social structure ladder.

For me this conversation captures the different faith journey Jesus proclaimed, a move from the Orthodox phylactery and a cerebral faith to one based in our heart and love for God and for all of God's children. My prayer for 2019: is that we all mirror this simple message in our lives during the year, treat everyone you meet with love as a child of God, just as we all are.

Steve Mason

**March 18, 2019**

**Jeremiah 1:11-19**

Romans 1:1-15

John 4:27-42

Jeremiah was told by God, in about the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, to speak to his people about the wicked ways they were pursuing. It was a warning that carried dire consequences and was prompted by God's observing that his people were worshipping false gods and delighting in "things of their own hands." I take this last quote to mean that the people were more interested in being glad for the things which they could possess than in concentrating on worshipping God.

Many of my friends are at a point in life, as am I, when we have enough "stuff." Indeed, we have reached the point where we have very full cupboards, closets, drawers and shelves. We are now trying to weed out the things which we don't seem to use, and which are no longer providing any noticeable benefit in our lives. Boxes and bags are filled with our castoffs and donated. How did we let ourselves reach such a point? How did "things" get such a hold on us? People seem to like acquiring, and it is only later on that we see if our choices were necessary and/or appropriate.

In the reading of Jeremiah's words to the people of the cities of Judah, we hear Jeremiah sounding a warning bell about their not staying faithful to God, and that they are making idols and worshipping "works of their own hands." It was hard enough for the people to hear that they were being chastised because they had abandoned following God's word, but they probably were startled to hear that the things they prized which were "of their own making" were not as good an idea as they thought. If they had replaced their affection for God with an affection for their possessions, they were in trouble.

God warned Jeremiah to be strong when speaking these truths to the people; indeed, he was to "gird up his loins" and not to break down, or else he would meet a dreadful fate. He was to tell the people to abandon false idols and be less enamored of their possessions, or they would be invaded by peoples from the north and be scattered and enslaved.

Jeremiah tried, but to no avail. Since the people did not believe God would do such a thing, they ignored him. Twice they were conquered and taken into slavery. Generations passed before they could return to their homelands.

The writings of Jeremiah are not peasant and uplifting. They are a description of God in action, chastising his people and punishing them. Difficult and a bit scary to absorb. If we read the words Jeremiah spoke to his people and consider what we are doing now in not putting God first, we know what we need to do. More focus of God. Fewer man-made things in our "spiritual closets and drawers."

We are not being threatened with invasion and enslavement, but it is a good thing to consider this a lesson well-absorbed. Especially in Lent, we would do well to focus on de-cluttering, simplifying, and refreshing our spiritual "closets." Jeremiah would approve.

Patty Alexanderson

**March 19, 2019**

Jeremiah 2:1-13

**Romans 1:16-25**

**John 4:43-54**

This reading in Romans is a reminder that no matter what happens, what God is asking of me is to have faith—faith in His love, faith in His power and faith in a life everlasting. I know that I am wrought with frailties. There are moments when I have doubted and been conflicted. But, every time that I give myself over to Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to fill my heart, my faith is restored.

For me faith is a pathway, not a destination. Every day I must renew my faith and commitment to God. And when I waiver in my faith, all I have to do is look around me at all of God's people doing His work: supporting victims of manmade or natural disasters, working to find cures for devastating diseases, coming together to help the homeless and the hopeless. God provides all the reasons for us to have faith. We just need to stop and look at the power of the Holy Spirit because it is all around us.

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In John, Jesus went to Galilee and said, "a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country." His own hometown did not welcome Him or believe in Him. Then, a royal official asked him to heal his son. Jesus' response to the official was, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

Jesus told the man to go to his son and he would be healed. The official left and journeyed to his son. When he found that his son was healed, he believed.

I do not think Jesus wants us to only believe in him when he "proves" himself. Healing the child was not just an example of His power; it is an example of His grace which he wants to share with us. To share in God's grace, we must believe and have faith. God knows what we need better than we do.

Linda Clark

**March 20, 2019**

**All I need**

And now I believe  
The things I couldn't see  
I feel the spirit in the trees  
I feel the spirit in me

I know love is all I need  
So easy, yet so hard to be  
Please grow in me  
Please grow in me

I can walk with you  
I can walk with you  
I can walk with you  
Because you walk with me

Love is all we need  
So plain, yet so hard to be  
I can walk with you  
Because you walk with me

**Father of Song**

Father of song  
Stay with me all night long  
Father of lights  
Hold me in your arms tonight

As real the breeze  
Your spirit moves in me  
Please guide my hand  
Show me where to stand

Hold me tonight  
Show me what's right  
Please guide my hand  
Show me, where to stand

Father of song  
Stay with me all night long

**Eat this Bread**

I know who you are  
You set the stars  
I know your ways  
Be with me throughout my days

Come and eat this bread  
Come and drink this wine  
You are with me  
With me all the time

Like walls coming down  
I'll listen  
I'll listen and won't make a sound  
I'll be still  
I'll be still and know your will  
You know my name  
You know the number of my days  
I know your name  
Hold me in your grace

Michael Olden

*Editor's note: Mike loves to share his songs during communion at the 8:30 service. Join us sometime so you can hear him and Nick play and sing.*

**March 21, 2019**

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28

**Romans 2: 12-24**

**John 5:19-29**

Coming from a family of nine children may make me particularly aware of family references, but it is hard to miss the way that John recounts in the gospel how Jesus helps us understand the relationship between Himself and God the Father.

While in some ways we can find similarities between how we might normally understand the relationship between any father and son, here we may see even more unique aspects than those that are familiar. Jesus often uses analogy to help us better understand those things that are beyond human/earthly understandings. Perhaps this holds true here? And where is the Spirit in the conversation? (Perhaps the "voice" that is referenced twice?)

The Epistle theme is an interesting focus on "walking the talk", that feels particularly relevant during these divisive times. I cannot help but think of my seven brothers (less so my one dear sister!) as I read this passage. After so many (often bitter) arguments about all that troubles our country, and the world today, we often find ourselves on differing sides of the topic. (Sound familiar?!)

The Epistle challenges us to consider the possibility of our own hypocrisy. Why is it that hypocrisy seems so plain to see in others, yet when it involves us personally it can be allusive - or fully invisible? What we actually "do" speaks volumes compared to what words we speak. As Pastor Todd sometimes says, "blah, blah, blah..."

Wally DeYoung

**March 22, 2019**

**Jeremiah 5:1-9 (NRSV)**

Romans 2:25-3:18

**John 5:30-47 (NRSV)**

How well did we listen to our kindergarten teacher?

Understanding, and being able to follow what we know in our hearts to be the truth of the scriptures, or the authority of Jesus, is not easy. In Jeremiah, the prophet is running to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, searching for anyone who understands the magnitude of the calamity which the Jews have brought on to themselves because they have been unable to accept and live God's teaching. {2} Although they say, ' "As the LORD lives," yet they swear falsely.' Maybe they lack the will power to change because of social pressure, or are they too comfortable with their current status in life to change, as Father Steven Strane used to say here at St Tim's, in a velvet rut.

In John we also find disregard for God's teaching. Jesus is justifying his behavior, healing on the Sabbath, to Jewish leaders. His message to them is similar to Jeremiah's: that they know God's will as they have been taught in the scriptures, yet they cannot accept that Jesus is the savior whom they have read about in the scriptures. But Jesus is more explicit about the reason for their disbelief, "but I know you, that you do not have the love of God within you." Jesus is saying, like Jeremiah was saying to the Jews in Jerusalem hundreds of years earlier, "you don't get it, and you don't care."

When our kids were young and in grade school, we remember listening one day to the principal speak about the book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, which discussed the virtues and life-long benefits for adults who choose to follow the lessons that had been taught in kindergarten. We sat up straighter in our chairs. We were taken by the truth contained in the thought that almost everything we need to know to succeed in life we may have been taught by our kindergarten teacher, that is, if we understood what we were taught and we cared: sit up straight, be kind, be neat, don't fuss with your neighbors, and share.

Truly, while we are adults, we are also children of God!

Spencer and Rena Fulweiler

**March 23, 2019**

Jeremiah 5:20-3

Romans 3: 19-31

**John 7 1:13**

“Oh foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see,  
...ears but do not hear,”

Could this not be all of us in our nation  
of conflict and turmoil so very near?

Do we not have faith in our God “who gives the rain in its season  
...autumn rain and spring rain,”

“And keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest”  
will be for our gain.

During times of confusion and discontent,  
we must remember God’s gift of grace,

And realize that ‘boasting’ is excluded  
“by the law of faith” in its place.

“Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”  
we strive to follow his plan

To “show ourselves to the world” and be like Jesus-  
fair, kind and loving to every man!

Through scriptures I realize that good and right  
are not the extreme challenges for me,

It is remembering that God’s love is for everyone everywhere  
in all that I do and see!

During Lent- my simple vow is to try  
to follow the words of a favorite hymn every day-

“To see God more clearly, love Him more dearly,  
and follow Him more nearly --day by day.”

Margaret Batesole

**March 25, 2019**

Jeremiah 7:1-15

**Romans 4:1-12**

John 7: 14-36

“What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin." Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.”

**Romans 4:1-12**

Justification, righteousness, blessedness, forgiveness, trust, faith, circumcision, uncircumcision. WOW! Talk about some heavy duty concepts and precepts!

Paul really likes Abraham. What's not to like about the father of many nations? Abraham kept the laws, entered into a covenant with God, and was ever so faithful. The question Paul attempts to answer is whether or not righteousness can be obtained through hard works. Paul's conclusion is that although hard work is important, we are considered righteous if we have faith in the Lord.

Faith...that seems pretty simple compared to rules and regulations that the Law requires. The Pharisees spent their days trying to follow all those laws and to demonstrate their efforts to others. Faith. My feeling is that all who read this daily lectionary have faith. That faith deems us righteous.

I would like to offer another very heady concept. Grace. Christ's Grace. Our faith in Christ allows His Grace to be recognized and experienced by us. His mercy is not a result of works, dedication to following rules, the practice of following daily rituals, circumcision or uncircumcision. God's mercy and grace are given to us through His love and our faith in that love. Now, that is Good News!

Jacqueline Chiavini

## March 26, 2019

Jeremiah 7:21-34: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God."

Romans 4:12-25: Paul says that Abraham "was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised."

John 7:37-52: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink."

All three passages today spoke to me about faith. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah reminds the Israelites to obey the voice of God. Paul's letter to the Romans brought back hope for the people. Talking to Jewish Christians who were hiding from the government in Rome, Paul reminds them that "the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or his descendants through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." He tells them that this promise is for all, whether they are adherents of the law or those who share the faith.

To me, this passage reminds us that God is reaching out to all people, not just those of Abraham's line. You and I have the ability to find God's loving presence; we just need faith. There's that word again: faith. I remember the faith of my childhood. I was one of the lucky ones who always knew God was there for me. Through all of the disasters I lived through, God was with me hand in hand. Faith gave me the courage to keep moving forward.

Most of my life, my faith has been constant. But there was a period when my faith was really tested. I was in deep depression and suicidal. I knew God was there, but for the first time in my life, I couldn't feel Him. Every day, every hour, almost every minute, I cried out, "Where are you, God? Why can't I sense Your presence?"

And God returned to me. Not with miracles, but with friendship. The loving presence of my friends, my husband, my daughter, eventually breached that emotional wall so that I could see God in each one of them. He was using those who loved me most to help remind me that I am and always will be His beloved child.

How about you? Are you struggling with your faith? Jesus showed us the way with everything He said and did. Today's lesson from John makes that clear. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink." We will find all that God has given us through our trust in Jesus.

Helen Coleman

## March 27, 2019

Jeremiah 8:18 - 9:6

Romans 5: 1-11

John 8: 12-20

The theme running through all these readings is the redemptive quality of God's love. The pieces go from Jeremiah warning us what to expect if we live a life without God, through Paul's epistle to the Romans explaining how we can be saved from God's wrath by reconciliation with him, to John's account of Jesus speaking of himself as the conduit for the forgiveness and love of God to the Pharisees in the temple.

In isolation, Jeremiah's writing paints the stereotypical Old Testament fire and brimstone relationship with God. I have never been comfortable with this view of God as the ultimate emotional blackmailer. I am troubled by the idea of God keeping a running tally of our bad behavior to use against us. Paul's proclamation to the Romans is more inviting. He speaks of the gift of God being grace, in itself a good thing, giving us forgiveness through salvation. A much more empathic view of God. And finally, Jesus own description of himself as a force for good all around us: the light.

I have always loved the allegorical painting by William Holman Hunt called "The Light of the World". It portrays Jesus outside a house, knocking on the front door at nighttime, holding a lamp. The light is just strong enough to show his face which is calm and steady. His body language in the painting show his compassion and kindness.

When I reflected on these three readings, I realized the final one has a distinguishing feature. It is the only one where Jesus comes unbidden. For Jeremiah we have to earn God's love and even for Paul, it is a choice. But Jesus' words are so declaratory; he is always there for us. He is the light of the world because his love for us is unconditional. He is the light in the darkness; when nothing else is left, there is always Jesus.

Caroline Fea

**Thursday, March 28, 2019**

Jeremiah 10:11-24

**Romans 5:12-21**

John 8:21-32

Romans is an incredible letter by Paul to a Jewish people he had not yet met. In it he encapsulates his inimitable and profound beliefs hoping to bring the Roman Jews to begin to accept Christ before Paul even visits them. A cornerstone of his belief is that we are liberated from sin by the completely selfless sacrifice of the son of God.

If we believe in Christ and live in the light of his presence, then sin has no hold over us nor does death. In Paul's view, informed by the Holy Spirit, Christ's sacrifice made law unnecessary since we are made righteous by God's great gift of his son and our belief in its redemptive power. Adam's original sin is washed away by Christ's death and resurrection as our Baptism confirms.

I am convinced by Paul's passionate argument, yet my faith in grace is weakened because I primarily live in the world's presence rather than in Christ's and often judge myself by the world's standards—certainly a kind of law. Lent tears me away from this form of law and unnecessary suffering and frees me to once again... if only for moments... become who God intended me to be. This is one reason that Lent is a blessing rather than a burden— it creates time to focus on being a truly free child of God again. May we all find true freedom through our faith in Christ and obedience to his will this Lenten season and always!

Gil Jardine

**Friday, March 29, 2019**

Jeremiah 11:1-8  
Romans 6:1-11  
John 8:33-47

In reading over these scriptures there is great guidance for me in my life, and for my Lenten journey of both letting go of things in my life and of adding new things to my life.

As I turned 75 this March, I thought that I would be letting go of the work I do at Options. As Tom turned 70 this spring, he thought he and Davida would be free to travel more once he stepped down from being the Executive Director at Options. When Davida died last May, those plans have changed, and it currently looks like there is no one to take over Tom's Executive Director position at Options. While my position isn't that critical, I do play a role in the Woman's Program, as a senior counselor and therapist and as support for Kim, the Women's Coordinator. ***"Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you."*** At this point I am turning Options over to God and attempting to be faithful to God's will in this matter, knowing that God will provide all that I need.

One of the things that I am attempting to add to my life is increased computer skills, which are demanded in my work. Alameda County has a computer system and I have to submit all my paperwork on it. Then recently, when I went to recertify my Drug and Alcohol certification, I discovered that it is now all on line (no more paper allowed). ***"We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin."*** As I confronted my recertification, thank the Lord for Bob, who is no longer working full time as a CFO, and is very skilled in what I needed to do on the computer. Of course, that didn't prevent me from resorting to my two-year-old, fit throwing self, who thinks being angry and sad accomplishes things. Thank God, for this helpmate of mine for the past 56 years, and for his infinite patience and love of me, even when my old self resurrects. In this challenging area of my life, God is faithful in providing others to help me do what I don't know how to do.

***"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed....Whoever is from God hears the words of God."*** In this respect I am so grateful for the Daily Bread, which I read daily, for my daily journaling, for Henri Nouwen's *You Are the Beloved*, *EFM*, *Stephen Ministry*, my spiritual director, my work, my family and *St. Timothy's* for continuing to remind me that I am free indeed, and I am the beloved of God, who loved me even before I was born, and, no matter what, continues to love me, in all the ways that I am.

**May your Lenten journey be richly blessed.**

Peg Miller

## March 30, 2019

Jeremiah 13:1-11 – A spoiled loincloth is like God's people?

**Romans 6:12-23** –Do not let sin exercise dominion over you.

John 8:47-59 –Old traditions challenged; Jesus teaches a new way.

### Transformation is not an Easy Path

One must wonder, "Why have a Faith?" Faith just doesn't make sense on the surface, and it runs contrary to normal or logical thinking. There is that reptilian side of the brain that reduces humans to intelligent self-possessed creatures. There are so many people today with no faith. (There always have been a lot in the population; it just wasn't so popular to express it as it is now.) Fortunately, there is another side of the brain that is more altruistic. This altruistic side is where faith can be found, and its power developed. But like anything, it is a trait that requires effort to be developed, just like effort to learn advanced math and science. There are many ways to develop this altruistic side of the brain. Following Jesus is just one way. I would expect that, because you are reading this, you are working on that process, just I am. Churches help in this process. These three Bible readings call attention to the relationship between humanity and God. This relationship with God is about a transformation, both then and now.

Why does God want transformation? God's incessant call to people is to learn how to love one another and act in a loving way. Easy to say; hard to do. If you agree that God wants a better world, I doubt that God is particularly concerned about which faith tradition, if any, individuals choose. There are many roads to the same place. In our western world we are most familiar with the teachings of Jesus. Jesus' example is our community's most frequent path to learning how to transform. We have work to do. The path, as followers of the teachings of Jesus, is set in learning about those teachings ourselves, acting on those teachings, and sharing what we have learned with others. Our call is "to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ." (BCP p366)

It is worth pondering, "How do we help in this transformation of the world?" First, we must rise above that reptilian side of our own brain and conquer our own weaknesses. Being aware of our weaknesses is a good start, and doing something about our own faults, is the first, and perhaps most difficult, change. Second, we must think about what we can do to improve the world. This is the doing side of faith, the show-me side, called outreach. It is a visible and outward sign of transformation. Finally, there is that baptismal call to communicate that faith to someone else. There are so many people who do not know how to get into touch with their faith side that this, too, is a difficult challenge of transformation. This final part is Evangelism; this is a challenging task as much as, and even greater than, doing good works.

God's transformation is: (1) to change yourself in love; (2) to change something in the world for better (outreach); (3) help someone else to personally change in love (Evangelism). Then repeat, repeat, repeat.....

Jim Coleman

**April 1, 2019**

Jeremiah 16:10-21

Romans 7:1-12

**John 6:1-15**

**GOSPEL** John 6:1-15 (NRSV)

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When 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?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus 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. Then 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When 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." When 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.*

The Gospel story of Jesus feeding the crowd with five loaves and two fish helps to remind me that God has provided all that we need to live, even if it sometimes doesn't feel like it. Reading it with my children it struck me that this story is about one of the first lessons all children must learn, how to share.

Today, as we were driving down the road, my son said to me, "Mommy, God gave us the earth and everything on it so we can always live here." We discussed whether that was true. We agreed that, by the grace of God, we have all that we need here on earth, but only if we share with one another and treat the gifts god has given us with respect. Some people have so much, and others, so little. Similarly, the earth's resources are abundant, but some people/countries abuse the earth and take far more than their fair share or leave the resources unusable for future generations.

We also discussed how lucky we were that our family had always had enough to eat and a roof over our heads, but how, through no fault of their own, others were not as lucky. We decided that God gave us these gifts and trusted that we would take only what we needed and share the rest.

Meghan Goldman

**April 2, 2019**

Jeremiah 17: 19-27

**Romans 7:13-25**

John 6: 16-27

*Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin. Romans 7: 13-25*

Paul's letter to the Romans really struck a chord with me this year. "I don't do what I know I should do, but I do do all the things I know I shouldn't do. That fleshy part of me does exactly opposite what I want to do, and then I feel incredibly guilty." I get incredibly mixed up as to what Paul is saying, and yet, I can totally agree with him.

I think this portion of Romans shows Paul as human as the rest of us. He is working so hard to show us his own turmoil in following Christ that his sentences get convoluted. I can totally sympathize with him. An easy example for me is eating. I know what is healthy for me, and yet I pick up the chocolate just before a meal. I'm sure many of you have your own bad habits that cause you grief.

But I think Paul would want us to dig deeper than this. I say a mean thing that I wish I'd never said. I can't take it back, and that wound in my friend severs our friendship just a little bit. Enough snarky comments and our friendship suffers. I could say a kind word, but keep quiet. My friend continues to suffer, thinking she is alone. I could have said something loving, but chose not to.

And here is where Paul brings us to the punch line. "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" He reminds his readers in Rome and he reminds us today that, thanks be to God, we have Jesus to help us when we get stuck in our sinful rut. A prayer of contrition and of asking God to be with us can get us out of that rut and living a life in sync with God.

Helen Coleman

**April 3, 2019**

Jeremiah 18:1-11

At this point in history the people of Israel were much given to the worship of idols. Jeremiah was told by God to go the potter's house and listen for His words. Jeremiah watched the potter shaping a clay vessel. The vessel lost its intended shape so the potter began again to form it into another. The Lord began to speak to Jeremiah that Israel was like that clay. Like clay He could break it if it did not turn from evil or if he had planned good for that nation he would change his mind. The imagery changes at this point from the concrete and He says, "I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you." This is a powerful contrast to the message in John 6 that tells us no one will be turned away. They are exhorted to turn from their evil ways and to obey the commandment: Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." There is a threat that harm may come to them if they do not follow God's word.

Romans 8:1-11

The opening verses of this chapter set forth almost all the tenets of Christian belief. Paul has realized that he had misunderstood the nature of man's relationship with God --- it is not what man could achieve, but on what God purposed to give. We live in a new sphere. We are in a new world governed by the mercy of God. Christ's death on the cross has set us free from the law of flesh and death. Human lives can be transformed. Paul uses legal imagery in this passage, and sin leaves the court deprived of its powers. To set the minds on things of the flesh is death but those who set their minds on the Spirit have Life and Peace. The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God and does not submit to God's law. But if Christ is in you the spirit is Life because of righteousness. What animates the Christian is Christ's spirit dwelling within. If the spirit of God is in you he will give life to your mortal body through his spirit that dwells in you. Human life must have some meaning and that significance lies in something beyond itself.

John 6-23-40

In this passage a huge crowd is standing before Jesus. Some of them had been present when Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. and they want another miracle, or "sign". But Jesus refuses to grant this request. He wants them to understand that the bread he offers is for the spirit not the belly. They argue that God sent down manna from heaven for Moses and his people. He tells them that God is giving them the true bread from heaven and it will give life to the world. John's gospel is opposite to the teaching of Judaism. His belief is that Christ's teachings have replaced those of the old testament. Christ is the bread of the world. The work they must do for this bread is to believe in him whom God has sent. Jesus tells them that they have seen and do not believe. But if they do have faith, they will never again hunger or thirst for he will feed their souls. The doors have opened to infinite possibilities. The message of the Old Testament has been replaced by Christ--God incarnate. I believe that it means that Christ's message is for the world, not just for the Jews. It means that man should not work selfishly for goods and riches, but to do as Jesus does and do God's will, not his own. This will give mankind a Life abundant. And further, it is God's will that no one will be turned away or lost, but will be raised up at the last day and given eternal life. This is a very important message. John does not use the parables, but has Jesus speak directly. This passage is very significant in that it tells us how to live and have life more abundantly, and of God's great compassion and his unending love and forgiveness for us.

Joan Pugsle

**April 4, 2019**

Jeremiah 22:13-23

Romans 8:12-27

John 6:41-51

Jesus tells us that he is the living bread that comes from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that he will give for the life of the world is his flesh. This is important to me (Thomas) because I know I will have eternal life. This is the real deal for me. You do have to do something to get this promise of eternal life. You have to believe Jesus and follow his teachings.

What does it mean to follow Jesus's teachings? Jeremiah discusses how wrong it is to not pay someone who does an honest day's work. We do our best to listen to what Jesus has to say. Jesus wants us to help others whenever we can, with humility and not boasting about it. In Boy Scouts, we try to do Good Turns Daily, but we don't always think about it. We just do it. Cheating is not allowed, and Jesus doesn't want us to focus on a dishonest gain. Our hearts need to be in the right place. God searches our hearts, and knows what is in them, and helps redirect them as necessary.

As we read the gospel, Cathy began to sing. It is one of her favorite hymns. Verse 44 is the perfect way to end our thoughts,

*"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."*

Thomas and Cathy Hager

**April 5, 2019**

**Jeremiah 23:1-8 (NRSV)**

**Romans 8:28-39 (NRSV)**

John 6:52-59 (NRSV)

The image of sheep, flocks, and shepherds are familiar in our Bible readings. Today's passages share a common theme of telling us that we are called to be in community and that our leaders are called to care for and connect the community with God's direction. We are reminded that God sent his own Son to save us, so we are never separated from God's love.

There are great challenges in life as stated in the Romans passage, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" We are assured in Jeremiah, "Then I myself will gather the remnants of my flock," and "bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply."

Human connections are integral to life. We gain strength and comfort from one another. Leaders who recognize that together we have more than when we separate and scatter, help us to hear God's words to love and care for one another. We are called to God's purpose in our daily lives to nurture His fold.

Lisa Kanazawa

**April 6, 2019**

**Jeremiah 23:9-15 (NRSV)**

Romans 9:1-18

John 6:60-71

*Concerning the prophets: My heart is crushed within me, all my bones shake; I have become like a drunkard, like one overcome by wine, because of the LORD and because of his holy words. For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course has been evil, and their might is not right. Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness, says the LORD. Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall; for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, says the LORD. In the prophets of Samaria I saw a disgusting thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a more shocking thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: "I am going to make them eat wormwood, and give them poisoned water to drink; for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land."*

I read Jeremiah's description of life and I think, "Ooof! That sounds rough." Jeremiah reads like a litany of hell on earth (the prolonged list or tedious account definition of "litany"): adultery, dry land, curses, intoxication, and general "wickedness" and "evil," even among the supposedly blessed and certainly established.

Doesn't the world feel like Jeremiah sometimes? It is easy to see what is not working in our personal environments or the world generally. Today, it is easy to get caught up in the rush and stress and disappointments and unhappiness of everyday life. How much more work can I handle at the office? Why is health insurance not covering this medicine? Am I a good partner? Am I a good parent? How can I afford to live in California? When did the US become so partisan? Why are there so many cars on the road? Why do we seem so angry, even over the trivial stuff? Why are we so mean to each other? As the not-always-good state of everyday life swirls in our heads and hearts, we easily are, frankly, less Christian in our values and actions than we should be.

In Jeremiah, the Lord basically says, "Enough!" I read it as one the Lord's, "I'm going to turn this car around RIGHT NOW!" moments. When I view it from this angle, I feel hope when I read Jeremiah. I am hopefully that our struggles – both individually and collectively - will find resolution and relief. I am hopeful that we find connection over division. I am hopeful that we take the deep breaths that life requires and roll with the punches. Personally, I am hopeful that I will be able to see past the muck immediately in front of me and find ways in which I can be a better person in my everyday life and a better global citizen.

I am ready for my wormwood. Are you?

Allison Fletcher

**April 8, 2019**

Jeremiah 24:1-10

Romans 9:19-33

**John 9:1-17**

Many years ago, the company I worked for performed a handicap awareness project we all participated in. We were taken in groups to a shopping mall where some of us were blindfolded, (myself included), some of us were put in wheelchairs, and others were the “guides” or wheelchair caregivers. (This was before the ADA stepped in to enforce wheelchair ramps, elevators, enlarged bathroom facilities, etc.). We were sent on specific missions with increasing degrees of difficulty. Those in wheelchairs spoke of how difficult it was ordering food at high counters, dining in restaurants with little space to move in, getting up to the second level, and maneuvering in tight aisles. A tough trip indeed.

Us “blind” people were equally frustrated, annoyed, unhappy with our need for dependency, angry even, and depressed with the inability to see where we were going. It was nearly impossible to shop for what we were told to buy and to experience the beauty of those things we take for granted: the smile on a baby, beautiful Christmas decorations, rich colors on display. Funny how in this blindness, it never occurred to me that what was missing was light -- the light of the world in Jesus Christ.

The unnamed man in question in John 9:1-17 may have known that he was missing something in life, but really he could not even have known or been able to conceive of *what* he was missing. Jesus heals this man, but then disappears. In verse 12 the people ask who had given this man his sight back and he candidly says he doesn't know, since he had quite literally never laid eyes on Jesus. The Pharisees try to disgrace Jesus by saying he couldn't be the Son of God; he does not observe the Sabbath. The pressure is building for the man to renounce Jesus as a sinner who breaks the traditions of the Pharisees. But things are becoming clearer to him. Whoever healed him is more than “the man they call Jesus”. He must be a prophet. This man knew suffering and opposition, yet he had the light of the world within him. Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound.

Mary Harrison

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**April 9, 2019**

**Jeremiah 25:8-17.**

Romans 10:1-13

John 9:18-41

Good heavens. I usually try to stay away from Old Testament readings because I seem to relate more to the Good News of the New Testament.

I went back to read more of Jeremiah, and it is mostly the same message. The people of Judah's behavior is unacceptable to the Lord, and while they might be fooling themselves, they are not fooling the Lord. Because of their behavior, worshipping wooden idols and other stuff, the wrath of God is going to come down on them. That reference to the wine stopped me cold.

Isn't that what we tell ourselves? I'd better be good, or I will be smoted. Or smited. I am not sure, reading much of Jeremiah that even if we do toe the line, we would be spared from being the objects of horror and hissing. What did Jiminy Cricket tell Pinocchio? Bad things can and will happen if you continue on this course. And we have all seen that bad things can and do happen to good, well-meaning loving people.

Here is what I make out of all of this. There are days, weeks, months or maybe even longer when it may feel exactly like God is punishing us, a very heavy, awful feeling. The people of Jeremiah's time did not know the Good News, the message that seemed to finally get a lot of attention. God loves us. He is with us. No need to follow wooden idols.

We live with the wonderful gift of God's grace. We can live into this grace no matter what happens with God's help.

Jane Butterfield

**April 10, 2019**

Jeremiah 25:30-38 – Yech! Those of advanced Theology degrees– explain to me sometime

**Romans 10:14-21** – And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

John 10:1-18 – “I am the gate”-- why Jesus is so central to our Faith.

### **Where is God, I can't see him?**

Perhaps Paul was dealing with the question, “Where is God?” for the church in Rome. Today, just as then in brutal Rome, we can see people lost and broken and sometimes be that way ourselves. Paul asks, “And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” Paul was making a case for Evangelism. Even a wee small voice can give light to God, when He is hidden from the mind from someone lost; and change the world a bit for the better.

Where is God, I can't see him/her/it? This question of Faith has troubled people throughout the ages. I awoke one night, looked up at the ceiling and noticed that the ceiling fan was missing a blade! I knew that this couldn't be true, but I could not see the fifth blade. In the dim light I could see the other four blades as dark outlines of fan blades, but the fifth was missing! Then it came to me that our view of God is a bit like my missing fan blade. It was there, just as God is always there. I just couldn't see the blade because, in the low light of the deep night, its angle reflected the same amount and tone of the dim grayish stray light as the ceiling above. Thus, it just seemingly disappeared by blending into the background. The fan blade was really there, just not visible.

Sometimes this is what happens with our vision of God in our lives. Perhaps something causes us to become so engulfed in the blinding darkness around us that God just fades into the dulled background of life's activities, causing our vision of God to not register a presence with us. How sad this is for someone who feels that God is gone and has abandoned them or feels that they never knew the Love of God in their life.

The good news is this: As even the smallest amount of light from a different source would illuminate that missing fan blade, so can even the smallest word or deed of Love illuminate God. A small act can provide the contrast between life's depressing din of dingy background stuff, and an image of God and hope appears. So, the reason for the following line in our Baptismal Covenant is to call us to be that light in the darkness.

*Q-“Will you proclaim the good news of God in Christ in word and deed?”  
A-“I will with God's help!”*

Go be that light to the world by what you say and do.

Jim Coleman

**April 11, 2019**

Jeremiah 26:1-16

Romans 11:1-12

**John 10:19-42**

FDR's statement that the "only thing we have to fear is fear itself" resonates in these passages. In each of them, people nervous over things they fail to understand lash out in fear of the unknown. The Gospel tells the story of a group in turmoil, unsure of who or what is in their midst and they demand clarification. Some fear they are in the presence of someone crazed and yet others point out that he has healed—a trait not normally associated with being a bit nuts.

Jesus replies that he actually has told them of his mission and status as God's promised Messiah, but that they continue to resist believing his statements; probably because they, like us, want simple, easy to grasp, answers that stem from our own experience and capabilities. Jesus was not the cultural expectation of the Messiah, making acceptance of his unorthodox message confusing and at odds with the religious establishment. So he tries a different tack by saying that if "you do not believe me, believe the works". But that too, despite its baseline appeal, is scary, as infirmity or illness was seen as being somehow linked to one's heritage or behavior and being healed for free cast some doubt on that whole worldview—a bias we humans still carry today--we want life to be fair. We still resist those who upend our firmly held beliefs and biases and change continues to be a challenge for all of us.

So the Gospel really reflects the problems that we still face today. Are we willing to believe things which are contrary to our cultural norms? Are we able to understand the radical message of the Gospel that says all are loved and equal in God's sight? Do we, as pledged at Baptism, really "respect the dignity of every human being" or do we, deep inside, still support just a little bit of stoning for those who are "really bad". Hard questions--and a quick look at the news makes it clear that we, despite being made in the image of God, have fallen far short of that lineage.

Ron Kuhlman

**April 12, 2019**

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13

Romans 11:13-24

John 11:1-27

In Jeremiah the LORD God tells His people who have been carried away captive into Babylon to build houses, dwell in them, plant gardens and eat the fruit they produce. They are to take wives and bear sons and daughters and plan their marriages so that they will produce another generation. In this manner their people will increase and not diminish. They are to seek peace in the area where they live and pray for it, as well. They are not to listen to false prophets, diviners or dreams which deceive them. The LORD further tells them that after seventy years He will visit them and restore them to their own land. He then adds: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you are thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." (Verse 11).

In Romans, Paul is speaking to the Gentile believers and uses the example of the olive tree as representative of Christ. The branches are symbolic of the believers, Jew and Gentile alike. The only difference between the latter is that the Gentiles are as branches that have been grafted into the tree. The tree is considered holy and so are the branches because of belief. If, however, either sect loses faith, they will be cut off. If any return in faith, they will be grafted in again. Unbelief is a sin and sin separates us from God. In Him we are secure and have peace.

The reading from John is the first part of the wonderful account of the resurrection of Lazarus by our Lord, where Martha confesses her belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus tells her: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" She replies: "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (Verses 25-27).

All these readings speak of enduring belief in God and His blessings which come from Him as a result of our faith. The people in Jeremiah's time are told to go on living in the same manner as before and that the LORD God will bring them out of captivity into their own land again. Paul symbolizes those of faith as branches of an olive tree--the tree being Christ's body. Those members who renounce their belief will be cut off. Those who remain faithful will not. There is the opportunity, however, for being grafted in again where there is repentance. Finally, there is the beautiful account of Martha's confession of her belief in Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, bestowing on her the Lord's promise of eternal life. In all three readings, Jeremiah 29:11 seems to speak for all of them in relating God's message and precious blessings for His people: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Blessed be the Lord our God!

Nancy Kindley

**April 13, 2019**

Jeremiah 31: 27-34  
Romans 11:25-36  
**John 11:28-44**

There is a lot to unpack in John's gospel reading about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Let me start with a little background on what this story means to me.

In 2003 I did not attend church and did not consider myself a follower of Jesus. Then I read Christopher Moore's national bestselling book "Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal". If you haven't read it and don't mind foul language and heresy, I have a copy you can borrow. It's also available in the Contra Costa Library system and for purchase online. His account of the Lazarus story made me laugh out loud and the book brought me to Jesus and to church. When I saw this lectionary reading, I knew I had to sign up. (Thank you, Helen Coleman.)

I tweeted to Mr. Moore (@TheAuthorGuy) for any advice he could offer. He replied: "I think the only revelation to me, in really studying it, was to pay attention to Lazarus's family ties. I don't even remember what I did in the book and what's in the Gospels, but there's more of a relationship there than just 'a dead guy'". I got another reply from @MikePollastri: "...perhaps the angle to take is that despite the fact he was raised from the dead, he still smelled bad. Maybe there's a lesson there about what you should expect from miracles: they aren't always exactly what you imagined!"

Here are some of the things that need more unpacking for me:

Verse 32: "... Lord, if you had been there, my brother would not have died." *Even with the greatest faith, we all die?*

Verse 35: "Jesus began to weep." *Illustrating that Jesus is incarnate, both God and human?*

Verses 41-42: "... Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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 have sent me." *What makes you, me, us, confident that God sent Jesus?*

Sharyn Mitzo,  
with help from Christopher Moore, Mike Pollastri, and Patricia Pearson

**April 15, 2019**

**Jeremiah 12:1-16**

Philippians 3:1-14

John 12:9-19

I have a lot of empathy for Jeremiah. He was called by God to be a prophet at an early age. He did not feel worthy and felt he was too young for the task. In addition, the words that God “put into his mouth” to speak to his countrymen were far from happy. Jeremiah was called to tell his countrymen that Jerusalem would fall because of their iniquities. Jeremiah lived through the exile of the Jews to Babylon, and his message to surrender to the Babylonians was not welcome. He knew that the exile was imminent, that his countrymen would not listen, and in fact that they considered him to be a traitor.

Jeremiah was not a traitor. He actually really loved his country but knew that he must speak God’s words to his people. His unwelcome message caused him to be rejected, and his own family actually plotted against him.

In this passage, Jeremiah is asking the age-old question of why do wicked people, who try to appear faithful, prosper? God doesn’t really give him an answer and tells him that the worst is yet to come. God then laments over the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of the people.

This would seem to be a difficult and sad message, but when I got to verse 15, I was heartened by God’s love for us..” *And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again to their heritage and to their land, every one of them.*”

God always has compassion and steadfast love for us even when we cannot or choose not to see it. God is always there nudging us along, and gently pulling us back when we choose the wrong direction. Even when bad things have to happen, God will always love and guide us.

Sian Suter

**April 16, 2019**

Isaiah 49:1-7

**1 Corinthians 1: 18-31**

John 12:20-26

*"The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.*

This reading causes me to reflect about what is the Wisdom of God versus the Wisdom of the World. I think I am being invited to realize that God turns the worldly wisdom we think we have upside down. The wisdom of the world Paul may have been talking about, and the Jews and Greeks in the church at Corinth could have been arguing about, was possibly the cultural norms and power structures of the time. I can think of many cultural norms and structures in our 21st century world, that seem like wisdom or truth and guide many of my actions, but are not, as I understand it, the wisdom of God. I am sure that God's wisdom is seldom the guiding principle in many parts of today's consumer society!

Paul finds the ultimate expression of the wisdom of God in the message of the cross. For me, in life Jesus threatened the wisdom of the world, the normalcy of the world systems at that time, and they put him to death. The wisdom of this world now still has little use at all for the wisdom embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. His death on the cross was the culmination of a life lived sacrificially for the cause of God and the good of others.

Is that what Paul means by "proclaiming Christ crucified"? I am not sure. I do know that with the complexity of modern life and the expectations of our society, this message of following the love and simplicity of Jesus is no easier for me than those in the early church in Corinth. There are days when I forget to acknowledge my powerlessness and rely on God's power. So caught up with the 'doing' I even forget to ask for God's grace many days. The message of Jesus's life is so simple it should be easy to follow, but I slip into the Wisdom of the World many times and, in my rush, forget the Wisdom of God.

Alison Hill

**April 17, 2019**

Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Hebrews 12:1-3  
John 13:21-32

### **The Inside Story**

“Nobody knows the troubles I’ve seen. Nobody knows but Jesus.” These words of a Negro spiritual are words of someone who knows the feeling of being troubled. The scriptures for today all reflect times and situations where things are not going well.

The Old Testament lesson confirms that in the midst of our own troubles, we have a helper. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians reminds us not to lose heart when we feel the weight of sin in the world – Jesus has gone before us and endured hostility and the cross. The famous scene from the Gospel of John portrays what must have been one of the lowest points in Jesus’ ministry. He is among his closest contemporaries, and one of them will leave the group that very night and hand Jesus over to those who will kill him.

We all have troubles that we hold inside. As a result, our emotions are worn and frayed regardless of what our costume appears like on the outside. Each of the three scriptures have examples of times when the going gets rough, and each example shows that turning to God will provide strength to face what we find before us. Perhaps the act of turning towards God is **the strength itself**. Perhaps even the ability to see and admit to our troubles is **where the strength begins**.

Rather than denying what we may consider to be weaknesses within us, maybe there is hope in accepting them and thus allowing the strength of the Lord to live inside of us. Let us “not grow weary and lose heart” and allow the Glory of God to be our inside story.

Jan Mahoney

**April 18, 2019**

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

**John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

Have you ever walked down the street, been in the store, or been in Church and looked at someone and had the thought, "please don't talk to me, please don't get in my line, please don't sit by me?" You may be saying to yourself, "Oh goodness no, I have never done that"; if so, then you are truly an exceptional Christian. I will readily admit that I have caught myself doing this at times. As I read the scriptures for this reflection, I was reminded of those moments in time when we react in other than a loving way to those that appear to be "less than."

In the washing of feet, Jesus provides us with a perfect example of how we should show up to all people. He shows us that no one person is less deserving than another; in fact, Jesus challenges us. He challenges us to act as he does. I remember years ago the bracelets that were so popular that said W.W.J.D. Almost everyone wore them, they were a "fashion statement." They were an outward sign that a person was a "Christian" but did they truly practice what our Lord showed us time and time again? Did they show up for the man or woman who had not taken a shower for weeks, mumbled to themselves and undoubtedly smelled less than desirable? Did they pray for the young girl entering a clinic with a scared look on her face, making a decision that would live in her heart forever? Did they invite the person who was sitting by themselves to join them? I am sure many did, but I am asking you to reflect on the times that you/we missed that mark.

In the act of sharing His final dinner, washing His Disciples feet, Jesus showed that he would always be with us while he instructed us on humility and love. Finally, in verses 34-35 in John Chapter 13, Jesus provides the most important lesson, HOW to preach the Good News; "...love one another as I have loved you." We have been charged with one thing, love unconditionally just as Jesus loved us. We show our faith when we offer a meal, assistance, a prayer, a hand, a smile, an open heart. I have built my faith on that challenge in verses 34-35; "...everyone will know you are my disciples if, you love one another." It is not always easy to do this, but I find it easier and easier as I turn my gaze upward and inward and remember that Jesus has NEVER let me walk alone and he loves me in spite of my shortcomings and faults.

Nancy Arroyovila

**April 19, 2019**  
**Faith and Truth on Good Friday**

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

Today, on Good Friday, the Lenten season reaches its awful, inexorable climax on the hill of Calvary, just beyond Jerusalem's city gates. As fellow travelers on the Lenten journey, this is the time we may feel ourselves most broken, abandoned, exhausted, fearful, on the verge of some miraculous transfiguration or perhaps, just frustratingly untransformed.

In today's scriptures we are forced to undergo the purgative experience of Jesus' sacrifice three times – in prophecy from Isaiah, in Gospel real time from John, and in contemplation from Hebrews.

I always find reading the Gospel account distressing in its brutality and infuriating in its narrative arc. Why doesn't Jesus stand up for himself and get out of there? After all, the path to freedom is offered at least twice by Pilate, but the escape route is never taken, and we are left to walk with Jesus on that dreadful journey to Golgotha.

The story of the Crucifixion is all about truth and faith. Jesus' admission when the soldiers come for him in the garden: "I am he", contrasted with Peter's lies by the fire in the courtyard, denying that he is an associate of Christ: "I am not". Yet strangely, I am most comforted by Pilate's response to Jesus' statement that "...Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice". Pilate asks simply, "What is the Truth?".

Two thousand years later we are still struggling with that question. Truth is not just the facts. One of the things that was ingrained most deeply during the four years of EFM study I miraculously completed, is that in the Bible there are stories that may or may not be historically true, and yet there are still profound truths inside those stories. Faith seeps in and we hold on to these truths long after the plotlines have faded from the memory.

This Good Friday and beyond, I am going to try to spend more time seeking the truth of the story of the crucifixion— finding the faith in its truth and the truth in its faith.

James Vila

**April 20, 2019**

**Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24**

1 Peter 4:1-8

Matthew 27:57-66

In early February my family and dearest friends got together to celebrate Thomas's birthday with a pizza party. My sister brought some delicious wine. There were 11 of us and there, with three birthdays in all. The gathering was intentional as, over the course of the last couple of weeks prior, each of us could relate to some aspect of the suffering depicted in the passage from Lamentations. We missed a couple of people as they are quite ill. A couple of others had other commitments. Others of us are having issues with our houses, work issues, or making sure we understand what is expected of us. And some of us continue to mourn the loss of our dad and grandpa, as it is still quite recent. What I do know however, is that a good dose of fellowship with those closest to us, celebrating those birthdays and being together for a couple of hours can help us deal with those things that seem big, daunting, and downright sad.

I rarely always know why hard things happen to good people. Where I do take comfort is knowing that God is on my side. In Lamentations this passage left out at me:

But this I call to mind,  
and therefore, I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

Life will continue to present its challenges and its joys. It doesn't look at a calendar, nor does it care whether or not my plate is full. But knowing that God is there and his mercies are there too is comforting, and can get me through those times where it would be easier to curse at whatever is in my way, instead of dealing with it in a healthy way. And if I do chose the first way, please stop me or, as I do with Thomas, help me pick apart what is going on!

As for the pizza party, well, I think it was sanctioned by Paul. After all, he writes at the end of the Epistle passage that, "The end of all things is near, therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins". And that is what the party was about – love.

Blessings, Cathy Hager