



A LENTEN JOURNEY 2020

A Lenten Journey, 2020

One of my father's favorite poems was "Thanatopsis," by William Cullen Bryant. Its closing lines have this direction:

"So live that when thy summons comes to join
the innumerable caravan which moves
to that mysterious realm, where each shall take
his chamber in the silent halls of death..."

My father loved those dark, fatalistic images that appropriately characterized his fundamentalist and non-sectarian beliefs. He could quote large portions of the poem, and it seemed to undergird his somewhat dark and seemingly hopeless journey until he finally gave up a destructive alcohol dependency and found the bright promise of hope in Jesus Christ.

As elegant and beautiful as Thanatopsis is, its empty Deism leaves an incomplete picture of the Christian journey. With popular singers, we could join in singing, "Is that all there is?"

Lent offers a way to deal with the dark days. It acknowledges our sin, our guilt, and our inability to save ourselves. It gives us the support of a holy, loving God who guides us through the brambles with the realization that God will provide the strength and patience to live through the trials to the hope on the other side.

Lent is a process by which we work through our weakness, and receive hope that we can be better. We don't earn angel's wings by living through Lent. Instead, we gain hope for living and fixing what is wrong. We are not alone on this journey. Forty days of prayer and scripture are being shared by fellow brothers and sisters. Together we can emerge from the crooked, brambled road to a renewal of Christ's love and light in our lives.

Ash Wednesday begins our journey. Let us set forth!

Ash Wednesday, February 26

Psalm 32; Amos 5:6-15; Hebrews 12:1-14; Luke 18:9-14

I Samuel 7:12 describes the setting of the Ebenezer stone by Samuel to mark Israel's victory over the Philistines. The stone has become a symbol of God's guidance and help, and is quoted in sermon and song in phrases such as,

“We've come this far by faith;”

“Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I'm come.”

The Ebenezer Stone is but one of many symbols that mark our faith. A host of Christian crosses are evidence of our history. Colors, robes, olive branches, doves, and cups help us remember and tell our story.

Some objects have become symbols unique to Northminster almost by happenstance. The feathers that fill our halls, dropped from childhood angel wings on Christmas eve, tell us of young faith and the wonder of a baby's birth. The flowers that families place on the cross on Ridgewood Road remind us of victory over death. Wet footprints left on our brick floors trace the path of newly-baptized believers who hope to never quite dry off.

Ashes are a part of the discipline that accompanies the act of believing. Ashes are left from the symbolic burning of the old life in refinement of the new. Ashes are an acknowledgement of our weakness, our inability to save ourselves. We wear ashes as a reminder that we have been through the fire, that we are like dust, and both dust and ashes are evidence of our mortality. Ash Wednesday begins the road to the other side. The ashen cross that marks our foreheads tells the story of a journey toward grace-filled, changed lives.

Lord, give us courage to step out! A broken world awaits!

Thursday, February 27

Psalm 37; Habakkuk 3:1-18; Philippians 3:12-21; John 17:1-8

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4

When you take this verse out of context, the verse is one you want to memorize and take to heart. Love God, and you will get everything you want. But this interpretation of the scripture comes from the greedy human heart. We want, and we want to obtain in the easiest manner possible. Sounds like a wish come true.

However, reality proves that we do not simply get everything we want. Our relationship with God is not one of magic. Our relationship with God is the very foundation of our creation. If we are truly in relationship with God, our desires will be pure and honest and in line with God's perfect plan. This transformation occurs as our relationship with God deepens. Our greedy human heart becomes the loving heart that God created.

Lent is the period of time when we look for signs of metamorphosis - the period of the chrysalis. We have the chance to turn our focus from earthly things toward heavenly perfection. As our delight in God shapes our desires, we begin the slow process of becoming the creatures God intended.

Friday, February 28

Psalm 95; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Philippians 4:1-9; John 17:9-19

We are all of us judged every day.

The one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully. Romantic love is blind to everything except what is lovable and lovely, but Christ's love sees us with terrible clarity and sees us whole. Christ's love so wishes our joy that it is ruthless against everything in us that diminishes our joy. The worst sentence Love can pass is that we behold the suffering that Love has endured for our sake, and that is also our acquittal. The justice and mercy of the judge are ultimately one.

Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words*

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

Saturday, February 29

Psalm 30; Ezekiel 39:21-29; Philippians 4:10-20; John 17:20-26

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

I used to think that this verse meant I can do anything as long as I believe that God is with me. After all, David beat Goliath, and Daniel was not eaten by the lions, and Jesus rose from the dead. However, doctors cannot save every patient, and not all good people make it home safely, and bad things happen to good people. Perhaps strength comes from the willingness to try even when all seems impossible.

“Slowly I have realized that I do not have to be qualified to do what I am asked to do, that I just have to go ahead and do it, even if I can’t do it as well as I think it ought to be done. This is one of the most liberating lessons of my life.

The qualifications needed for God’s work are very different from those of the world. In fact, when we begin to think we are qualified, we have already fallen for the tempter’s wiles. Not one of us has to be qualified in order to employ lesson, meditation, and orison; to read, think, and pray over Scripture. We do not need to have gone to a theological seminary or to have taken courses in Bible in or out of college. We do have to be willing to open ourselves to the power of the living Word. And sometimes that can be frightening.”

Madeleine L’Engle, *Glimpses of Grace*

First Sunday in Lent, March 1

Psalm 63; Daniel 9:3-10; Hebrews 2:10-18; John 12:44-50

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 2

Psalm 41; Genesis 37:1-11; I Corinthians 1:1-19; Mark 1:1-13

Kathleen Norris, in her book, *Acedia and Me*, describes in wilderness terms the illness and death of her husband, David. Stuck in a cheap motel room because it was near the hospital where David was receiving treatment, television was the only diversion. Snacks from the vending machine were warmed in the room's microwave. It was a depressing wilderness. She knew how serious his respiratory situation was. Nevertheless, when he died, she was "numb with loss . . . I had lost my identity as a married woman. The community of two that had constituted my marriage was no more, and I had no idea how I would inhabit the devastating word, *widow*. As for prayer, I was not surprised . . . that when I needed the consolation that prayer can bring, I was unable to pray."

That is the wilderness of grief, the terrible loneliness of grief that feels like utter abandonment, isolation. Finally, Kathleen found a prayer she would pray in the wilderness:

This is another day, O Lord.
I know not what it will bring forth,
But make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be.
If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.
And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
And give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me*

God comes into our wilderness. That is the promise. We are not finally alone there. In the lonely wilderness of illness and

grief, angels come to wait on us. The church is there, friends are there, reaching out to touch and comfort and hold us, reminders that God is there, that we are held tightly by the One who loves us. Angels came to Jesus, reminders that he was God's beloved Son, reminders of the voice he heard on the day of his baptism. Angels came to Jesus in the wilderness, reminders of the voice he heard that day before the wilderness: "You are my beloved Son: with you I am well pleased."

And that is the news - you are a beloved daughter, a beloved son of God - in whatever wilderness you find yourself in. In Jesus Christ, the beloved Son, we are all God's beloved children.

John M. Buchannan

Tuesday, March 3

Psalm 45; Genesis 37:12-24; I Corinthians 1:20-31; Mark 1:14-28

For Courage

When the light around lessens
And your thoughts darken until
Your body feels fear turn
Cold as a stone inside,
When you find yourself bereft
Of any belief in yourself
And all you unknowingly
Leaned on has fallen,
When one voice commands
Your whole heart,
And it is raven dark,
Steady yourself and see
That it is your own thinking
That darkens your world.
Search and you will find
A diamond-thought of light,
Know that you are not alone,
And that this darkness has purpose;
Gradually it will school your eyes,
To find the one gift your life requires
Hidden within this night-corner.

Invoke the learning
Of every suffering
You have suffered.
Close your eyes.
Gather all the kindling
About your heart
To create one spark

That is all you need
To nourish the flame
That will cleanse the dark
Of its weight of festered fear.

A new confidence will come alive
To urge you towards higher ground
Where your imagination
Will learn to engage difficulty
As its most rewarding threshold!

John O'Donohue, *Benedictus: A Book of Blessings*

Wednesday, March 4

Psalm 119:49-72; Genesis 37:25-36; I Corinthians 2:1-13; Mark 1:29-45

If you are in the middle of your life, maybe some of your dreams of God have died hard under the weight of your experience. You have knocked on doors that have not opened. You have asked for bread and been given a stone. The job that once defined you has lost its meaning; the relationships that once sustained you have changed or come to their natural ends. It is time to reinvent everything from your work life to your love life to your life with God – only how are you supposed to do that exactly, and where will the wisdom come from? Not from a weekend workshop. It may be time for a walk in the dark.

Barbara Brown Taylor

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
And the fact that I think I am following your will
Does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
Does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
Though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
And you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton

Thursday, March 5

Psalm 50; Genesis 39:1-23; I Corinthians 2:14-3:15; Mark 2:1-12

Lent is a journey, it means accompanying Jesus as He travels to Jerusalem, the place where the mystery of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection is to be fulfilled. It reminds us that the Christian life is a *road* to be traveled, consisting not so much of a law to be observed but, as in the person of Christ Himself, who must be encountered, welcomed, and followed.

Dear family of faith, on this Lenten journey let us be careful to accept Christ's invitation to follow Him more decisively and consistently, renewing the grace and commitments of our Baptism, to cast off the former person within us, and put on Christ, in order to arrive at Easter renewed.

Baptism and penance are elements of Lent— both must be lived together. Through penance we recall the evil of sin and the need for God's grace of healing. Grace is received in baptism and renewed each time we confess our sins, and, symbolically, when we receive Communion.

Conscious of these elements, we should perform our works of penance as a way of dying to ourselves and dying with Christ, with the hope that we may emerge spiritually reborn in the new life that is beautifully symbolized by the baptismal waters of Easter.

Leaving tracks of the water from our baptism, may we arrive at Easter soaking wet and singing *Hallelujah!*

Friday, March 6

Psalm 40; Genesis 40:1-23; I Corinthians 3:16-23; Mark 2:13-22

Good Grief, God

How do you bear to look upon it,
the awful beauty of our loss

and how are we to bear it
while we await the ashes of sorrow
to ignite a living flame again?

Let the walling winds have their way with us.
Let their gales gust all around us

over and under us, in, through and
out of us forever in spite of us,

till our grieving grip is loosened from the past
and love's brave battle bows to beauty's call at last.

And since we are not strong enough to mend
our faithless fall, send a cool, calm breeze to

sweep us to our knees, breathe gently on us, please—
till we break like bread to thank you.

Sherry Paige, *To Find a Stone*

GRACE

Grace does not need to be seen
You can feel it stir your soul
Melting pain, healing wounds
As it whispers forgiveness

Wrapping around your heart
Releasing burdens to the heavens
Power gentle as a summer rain
And constant as a mountain

Grace, every man's mercy
Grace, the invisible cure.

Margeaux Nicholas

Saturday, March 7

Psalm 55; Genesis 41:1-13; I Corinthians 4:1-7; Mark 2:23-3:6

Lent is a call to renew commitment grown dull, perhaps, by a life more marked by routine than by reflection.

Joan Chittister

Listen in silence because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God.

Mother Teresa

DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
Fast from worries and have trust in God.
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

Pope Francis

Second Sunday in Lent, March 8

Psalm 24; Genesis 41:14-45; Romans 6:3-14; John 5:19-24

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 9

Psalm 56; Genesis 41:46-57; I Corinthians 4:8-21; Mark 3:7-19

A Lenten Poem

Lent is a time to take time to let the power
of our faith story take hold of us,
a time to let the events get up
and walk around in us,
a time to intensify our living into Christ,
a time to place our feet in the streets of
Jerusalem or to walk along the sea and
listen to his Word,
a time to touch his robe
and feel the healing surge through us,
a time to ponder and a time to wonder...

Lent is a time to allow
a fresh new taste of God!
Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,
for thoughts come unbidden.
Perhaps we're afraid to face our future
knowing our past.
Give us courage, O, God,
to hear your word
and to read our living into it.
Give us the trust to know we're forgiven
and give us the faith
to take up our lives and walk.

Ann Weems

Tuesday, March 10

Psalm 61; Genesis 42:1-17; I Corinthians 5:1-8; Mark 3:19-35

A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

I find inspiration in all types of music. As a child of the 60's, pop music is still one of my favorites. The poetry in many songs is as beautiful as the music itself. I often find a deeper meaning in the lyrics than the songwriter may have intended (or maybe not!)

“Bridge Over Troubled Water,” a 1970 song by Simon and Garfunkel, is just one example.

When you're weary, feeling small
When tears are in your eyes, I'll dry them all
I'm on your side, when times get rough
And friends just can't be found
Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay me down.

The song is most likely written for a close friend of Paul Simon, but in my mind it could just as easily refer to Jesus. He is not only our friend, but also a bridge. A bridge over the troubled waters of our lives as well as a bridge to God. He will certainly lay down over the troubled waters. After all, He did lay down his life for us.

Jesus is walking the Lenten Journey with us, as He walks with us every day.

We are blessed!

Wednesday, March 11

Psalm 72; Genesis 42:18-28; I Corinthians 5:6-6:8; Mark 4:1-20

Prayer of Saint Francis

Although this prayer in its many forms is often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi (c.1182-1226), it is actually not found in his writings. The first known publication of the prayer was in the small spiritual French magazine, “La Clochette” in 1912. Below is the English translation of this publication.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

O Master, let me not seek so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

A beautiful prayer for everyday living, but especially meaningful for the Lenten season.

Thursday, March 12

Psalm 70; Genesis 42:29-38; I Corinthians 6:12-30; Mark 4:21-34

He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

Mark 4:31

Jesus often used light to symbolize the truth, God’s truth. The dichotomy of light and dark is a common theme in early religions, especially Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion well known to Jesus. Here he is using a parable about hiding truth or light by placing it under a bed or under a bowl. This reminds me of the children’s hymn “This Little Light of Mine, I’m Going to let it Shine.”

We are not called to be Christians so that we will be happy and contented and at peace personally. Christianity is not a self-improvement course or a self awareness meditation like Yoga. Our personal faith is meant to prepare us to share, to give, and to reach out to help others who are in need of help. It is only through service to others that we can discover what our faith is really all about.

A personal faith in Jesus Christ is not much use to us if we do not share it, as Jesus would have it done, by feeding his sheep. We must have both, a personal faith and outreach to others if our faith is to light the dark corners of the room (or city or nation or world).

Prayer: O Lord, may we always reach our arms out to others as you reach out for us. May we strengthen our faith in you by doing for others what we know you would have us do. Amen.

Friday, March 13

Psalm 69; Genesis 43:1-15; I Corinthians 7:1-9; Mark 4:35-41

The authorship of Psalm 69 has been attributed to David, but also to Jeremiah 400 years later. Perhaps both authored parts of it. You might call this Psalm “The Whipping Boy.” The sons of kings had teachers. When the prince made a mistake, the teacher didn’t hit (or whip) the prince, but he would hit a boy that had lessons with the prince. He was the “whipping boy.” Today we call a whipping boy anyone who is hurt when someone else did the wrong.

David laments that they hurt him and slander him although he has done nothing wrong. He portrays himself as a whipping boy. Christians later saw allusions to Jesus in this Psalm, as he was the greatest whipping boy of all. They put him to death although he had done nothing wrong. This Psalm reminds us of Jesus although it was not written about him. New Testament writers from Matthew to John to Acts and Romans all saw verses in this Psalm as pointing to Jesus. An example is Matthew 27:34 where the soldiers gave Jesus vinegar to drink on the cross.

Although most of this Psalm is a lamentation, it ends with hope. David declares that he will pray to God for deliverance and he knows that God will deliver him from his enemies. We can relate to this lament but, like David, we should have that faith that God will be with us through any hardship and deliver us in the end.

Prayer: Dear God, like David we sometimes feel helpless and alone and overwhelmed. But like him, we know that whatever is happening to us, you are present with us as we go through it. May we feel that presence in our lives in times of trouble and in times of happiness. Amen.

Saturday, March 14

Psalm 75; Genesis 43:16-34; I Corinthians 7:10-24; Mark 5:1-20

In Mark 5:1-20, Jesus encounters a man who has been banished to the caves near the lake because he is possessed by spirits, (i.e. insane). Jesus expels the demons who call themselves Legion (many). When the demons beg Jesus not to send them away but to allow them to enter nearby pigs, he agrees and as they enter the pigs, the swine rush headlong into the lake and drown. The pig farmers rush to see what happened and marveled at the healing of the man. He then tells the man to go home and let people know what has happened.

As a literal story, there is much that one could say about it. Pigs can swim for one thing. And pig farmers would not be happy to lose all their pigs, demons or no. And we know what all those dead pigs in the lake would do for the drinking water. And where were the disciples who clearly were on the boat as it crossed the lake that night?

The point for Mark, obviously, is not to tell a factual story about the community and its pigs! Instead, in this story about the Kingdom of God, it becomes increasingly clear that humanity ~ its society and institutions ~ impedes the in-breaking of God's kingdom more than it expedites it. In Mark's story, the Kingdom of God breaks into the world, wresting control from humanity. Humanity's way of "dealing" with the demonic ~ ostracism and segregation ~ is not tenable in God's Kingdom.

It transforms and forces humans to perceive the truth that God's kingdom best takes root in the marginalized, the outcasts, and those seemingly most insignificant. This runs counter to human institutions ~ even most ecclesiastical ones ~ in which power, wealth, fame, and influence are given pride of place.

Prayer: O God, may we reach out to those who are in need physically and spiritually in our midst, in our communities, and in our world. And may we do so in humility. For we know that we are nothing without your love and grace and presence in our lives. Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent, March 15

Psalm 93; Genesis 44:1-17; Romans 8:1-10; John 5:25-29

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 16

Psalm 80; Genesis 44:18-34; I Corinthians 7:25-31; Mark 5:21-43

Lord God,

Who cleansed the earth through forty days of floods,
and gave your guiding law through forty days of
worship,

Who revived Elijah through forty days of pilgrimage,
and sent Your Son to fight our foe
through forty days of fasting;

Grant us grace to enter
the flood, the fire, the desert,
the penitence and the journey,
the emptiness and the fasting.

That leads us to Gethsamane,
and the dark scene of Golgotha,
and leave us at the empty tomb,
to see Your risen Son.

Tuesday, March 17

Psalm 78; Genesis 45:1-15; I Corinthians 7:32-40; Mark 6:1-13

Lord of Lent, renew our lives.

For ourselves, Lord,
we pray that your spring-cleaning
would be thorough and true this Lent.

Show us clearly those effortless sins
we no longer even notice,
and help us to address the sins
which sit on our shoulders every day,
our constant companions.

Give us both discipline in dealing with some faults
and gentleness in dealing with others,
and help us to know the difference.

Create in us a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within us.

Lord, lead us into the wilderness
that we may meet you
in the flame that burns but does not destroy.

In silence and in prayer,
help us to find you
and to be found by you,
that we might be remade
in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, March 18

Psalm 119:97-120; Genesis 45:16-28; I Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 6:13-29

In times like these, we need a Saviour;
In times like these, we need an anchor;
Be very sure, be very sure,
Your anchor holds, and grips the solid rock.

Ruth Cave Jones, 1943

The Pearl River runs through the Ross Barnett Reservoir. The Rez offers some splendid sailing adventures, and I loved to sail. Many times I found myself dropping anchor in the deep river bed which was sometimes 100 feet. I either needed more rope or needed to anchor further out. Either way, an excellent rule to follow was to have a good, solid anchor.

If we remember only ten rules by which to live, and we earnestly try to follow those rules, our life could be safer and simpler. By stepping out of the boundaries set down for us in God's Commandments (rules), our actions, or in some cases, lack of action, could cause us to be a stumbling block for our neighbors, co-workers, friends, or family.

By making God's Commandments, and our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our personal anchor, we can know for certain we are gripping a solid rock. Facing life's challenges on a daily basis then becomes less daunting, knowing our anchor will always hold.

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

I Corinthians 8:6.

Thursday, March 19

Psalm 42; Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34; I Corinthians 9:1-15; Mark 6:30-46

What's in My Basket?

There is a food bank on the Mississippi Gulf Coast called Twelve Baskets. This name was chosen because Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, filling twelve baskets.

Mark 6 recalls how Jesus nourished the thousands with food for their bodies. The scripture also reminds us that they were hungry for his teaching.

These verses made me ask the question, "What is in my basket?" Is it filled with despair, doubt, pity, jealousy, and envy? Or, is my basket filled with hope, prayers, good thoughts, good will, and gratitude? Only I can fill my own basket. God has nourished and enriched me, but it is my choice how I fill my basket. Can I take its contents and bless the lives of those with whom I come in contact? Or, will it be the source of discouragement and pain?

I choose a basket filled with kindness, gratitude and love for Christ and others.

Be a Blessing!

Friday, March 20

Psalm 88; Genesis 47:1-26; I Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 6:47-56

The Addresses: Sonnet 31

Do you think I don't know that when I say Lord
I might be singing into the silo where nothing is
stored,
where it is written low lights were confused

by skyward light and flew its bodies
as birds against walls?
Well, everyone thrashes
against a wall
in this life.

I don't know what I mean,
but I mean it. I don't know what to want,
but I want it. And when I say God
it's because no one can know it—not ever,

not at all-. It's a wall.
And it drops to the floor as I fall.

Katie Ford, *If You Have to Go*

Saturday, March 21

Psalm 87; Genesis 47:27-48:7; I Corinthians 10:1-13; Mark 7:1-23

Faith, Perhaps

Afternoons, sometimes, nearing dusk,
there was a certain glow around the edges of the room.

The sun by then low on the other side of the house;
the glow could not be from the sun.

It was not from the unrisen moon.

Hue a little gold, but sometimes bluish,
sometimes refracting, like being inside a diamond.

Always silence like that locked inside a diamond.

She'd sit very still in the glow
as if expecting a certain bird to alight on her hand,

her pulse tapping softly in her upturned wrist.

She was patient and she loved the glow:
its whimsy, its inability to explain itself.

She didn't need explanations.
She was tired of talk.

Sitting within it was nearly enough.

Gillian Wegener
from her collection
The Opposite of Clairvoyance

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22

Psalm 66; Genesis 48:8-22; Romans 8:11-25; John 6:27-40

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 23

Psalm 89:1-18; Genesis 49:1-28; I Corinthians 10:14-11:1; Mark 7:24-37

In today's reading from Genesis, Jacob gathers his sons to him to supposedly bless them before he dies. A blessing was not the case with all of the sons. However, he did bless his son Judah, who was the forefather of King David, and all of the legitimate rulers of Israel up to and including the Messiah, and from whom the Jews got their name.

Dennis Prager, adapted

We Gentiles would like to ignore the fact that we aren't also descended from this prominent line of Judah. But the Syrian woman was well aware that she was considered an outsider when she approached Jesus and asked him to heal her daughter. He initially tells her that he must tend to his own people, the Jews, first. Then, in an about face, He grants her request and heals her daughter.

We often pray, hoping and expecting for such an instant response as Jesus gave to this woman. However, we have to remember that He does listen, even if we don't receive our requests how and when we'd like. He will answer our prayers in His Time and His Way.

God is Never Beyond Our Reach

God asks for no credentials,
He accepts us with our flaws,
He is kind and understanding
And he welcomes us because
We are His erring children
And He loves us everyone.
And He freely and completely
Forgives all that we have done,
Asking only if we're ready
To follow where He leads
Content that in His wisdom
He will answer all our needs.

Helen Steiner Rice

Tuesday, March 24

Psalm 97; Genesis 49:29-50:14; I Corinthians 11:17-34; Mark 8:1-10

Every time we invite Jesus into our homes, that is to say, into our life with all its light and dark sides, and offer Him the place of honor at our table, He takes the bread and the cup and hands them to us saying: "Take and eat, this is my body, Take and drink, this is my blood. Do this to remember me." Are we surprised? Not really!

The Eucharist is the most ordinary and the most divine gesture imaginable. This is the truth of Jesus. So human, yet so divine; so familiar, yet so mysterious; so close, yet so revealing.

Henri J. M. Nouwen

Whether it's a few small loaves of bread and a few small fish to feed thousands, or the Lord's table to feed his few special friends, Jesus used this simple but incredible act to give and to leave this everlasting example of his love and care for us.

Common Things

The things I prize of greatest worth
Are just the common things of earth.

The rain, the sun, the grass, the trees;
The flowers, the birds, the glorious breeze;
Clouds that pass, the stars that shine,
Mountains, valleys____. all are mine!

Rivers broad and open sea,
Are riches none can take from me.

Oh, God is here on every hand_ _ _
Upon the sea, upon the land.
And day by day my thanks I give
That with these common things I live.

Author Unknown

Wednesday, March 25

Psalm 101; Genesis 50:15-26; I Corinthians 12:1-11; Mark 8:11-26

How aware are we of our spiritual gifts from God? In today's reading, Paul speaks of spiritual gifts that we recognize such as service to God, the ability to give wise advice, to have great faith, and the ability to interpret what is from God. Other spiritual gifts that Paul names may make us a little uncomfortable, such as the gift of healing, the power to perform miracles, and the ability to speak in unknown tongues. We may shy away from the latter group because we may not have seen these for real and because they may be beyond our understanding.

Whatever we think, and however we recognize spiritual gifts, we must be careful not to lock our understanding of them in our own little "spiritual box." From an early age, many of us sang the short hymn, "Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me; break me, melt me, mold me, fill me," as a matter of routine in a church service. We also sang:

Holy Spirit, breathe on me, until my heart is clean;
Let sunshine fill its inmost part, with not a cloud between.
Breathe on me Holy Spirit, take thou my heart;
Cleanse every part, Holy Spirit, breathe on me.

It occurs to me that we should let our vision of the Holy Spirit out of our "spiritual box" and look for all the ways that the Spirit is here every minute of every day, guiding our thoughts and actions. If we do, we may recognize that the Holy Spirit is not as celestial and as ethereal as we thought.

The Spirit may be easily recognized by that calming thought that comes in times of anxiety, that nudge to help someone in need, by biting our tongue when we want to lash out, by encouraging a shy or reluctant child, that urge to laugh at ourselves when we goof up, and many other small ways that frequently occur in our

daily lives. The Holy Spirit is right here with us and in us because Jesus left us this gift of grace and leadership. We just need to open our “spirit box” and willingly let it in and out.

By Moses came the law, By Christ came truth and grace;
The law reveals man’s sin, Grace shows a Saviour’s face.

The law says: do and live, But grace says: live and do.
Law says: thou shalt love God. Grace: God first loved you.

Law says: forgive, forgiven. Grace says: forgiven? forgive!
By law we die, by grace Through faith in Christ we live.

Anonymous

Thanks be to God!

Thursday, March 26

Psalm 69; Exodus 1:6-22; I Corinthians 12:12-26; Mark 8:27-9:1

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.

Psalm 69

What is promised is that those with the courage to mourn will find, in the wake of mourning, a strange blessing: that after the sadness is expressed, the pain released into the accepting air, it is as though some love at the heart of life wraps its arms around the mourner and says,

“There, there, I am with you, I hear you, I understand. Everything’s going to be all right.”

Healing After Loss

Nor did I know about grace, that it meets you exactly where you are, at your most pathetic and hopeless, and it loads you into its wheelbarrow and then tips you out somewhere else in ever so slightly better shape.

Anne Lamott, *Almost Everything: Notes on Hope*

Weeping is perhaps the most human and universal of all relief measures.

Karl Menninger

Healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness. Conviviality is healing. To be healed we must come with all the other creatures to the feast of Creation.

Wendell Berry

Life only demands from you the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible—not to have run away.

Dag Hammarskjöld

Friday, March 27

Psalm 107:1-32; Exodus 2:1-22; I Corinthians 12:27-13:3; Mark 9:2-13

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from many lands.

Psalm 107

Religions are treasure chests of stories, songs, rituals, and ways of life that have been handed down for millennia—not covered in dust but evolving all the way—so that each new generation has something to choose from when it is time to ask the big questions about life. Where did we come from? Why do bad things happen to good people? Who is my neighbor? Where do we go from here? No one should have to start from scratch with questions like those. Overhearing the answers of the world's great religions can help anyone improve his or her own answers. Without a religion, these questions often do not get asked.

Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy*

The best way to know God is to love many things.

Vincent Van Gogh

Nature as it may be to try to translate everything into my own religious language, I miss a lot when I persist in reducing everything to my own frame of reference.

“The supreme religious challenge,” says Jonathan Sacks, “is to see God’s image in one who is not in our image.” If he is right, then the stranger—the one who does not look, think, or act like the rest of us—may offer us our best chance at seeing past our own reflections in the mirror to the God we did not make up.

Sometimes all I can hope for is that I’ll feel more hopeful tomorrow.

Healing After Loss: A Daily Devotional

Saturday, March 28

Psalm 102; Exodus 2:23-3:15; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Mark 9:14-29

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.

Emily Dickinson

If I can let my resistance down, be calm in my soul, my grief will tell me what it needs from me at each step along the way.

Healing After Loss

It is the nature of grace always to fill spaces that have been empty.

Goethe

The earth will help us. There is such strength in the ground, the trees, the water. The air we breathe washes over us with new life. Water is drawn into the atmosphere and returns to fill rivers and streams. The mountains rise up, are worn away, and rise again. On the high tundra tiny flowers bloom unseen. The cycle of the seasons is alive with the promise of rebirth. Creation is a mystery, and so is death. But there are clues, and promises. We are children of God.

Healing After Loss

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29

Psalm 118; Exodus 3:16-4:12; Romans 12:1-12; John 8:46-59

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 30

Psalm 31; Exodus 4:10-31; I Corinthians 14:1-19; Mark 9:30-41

What rich passages we are called to reflect upon in today's liturgy. I urge you to make time during this day to read and absorb each word given to us. We are reminded that God delivers us and loves us. We witness Moses' hesitation and God's solution. We are encouraged to build up the church through prophesy. And we hear where Jesus tells his disciples of his imminent betrayal. As you reflect on these words, remember that we are part of a greater family of faith. As the psalmist had God, Moses relied on Aaron, Paul was in the company of the Corinthians, and Jesus was with the disciples, we are not alone on our Christian journey. Our congregation of believers walks this Lenten path with us, protecting, joining, prophesying, and learning. Thanks be to God.

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Maya Angelou

God of creation, Lord of Lent,
bless us on this journey,
reminding us that we are not alone. Amen.

Tuesday, March 31

Psalm 121; Exodus 5:1-6:1; I Corinthians 14:20-40; Mark 9:42-50

Psalm 121

Assurance of God's Protection

A Song of Ascents

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

A Prayer for Protection

The light of God surrounds us;
The love of God enfolds us;
The power of God protects us;
The presence of God watches over us;
Wherever we are, God is!

James Dillet Freeman

God of protection, we praise you and thank you for being
always with us. Amen.

Wednesday, April 1

Psalm 128; Exodus 7:8-24; II Corinthians 2:14-3:6; Mark 10:1-16

Jesus Blesses Little Children

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

O God, help us recover our hope for our children's sake.

Help us recover our courage for our children's sake.

Help us to recover our discipline for our children's sake.

Help us to recover our ability to work together for our children's sake.

Help us to recover our values for our children's sake.

Help us to recover a spirit of sacrifice for our children's sake.

Help us to recover our faith in Thee for our children's sake.

Marian Wright Edelman

God of children and youth, adults and the aged, help us to see the world through the eyes of a child, trusting, loving, and living as you taught us. Amen.

Thursday, April 2

Psalm 131; Exodus 7:25-8:19; II Corinthians 3:7-18; Mark 10:17-31

When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.”

Mark 10:22-23

“Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven,” Jesus says tenderly to the rich young ruler, “then come, follow me.” It is a rich prescription for a rich man, designed to dissolve the burden on his back, the hump that keeps banging into the lintel on the doorway to God. It is an invitation to become smaller and more agile by closing his accounts on earth and opening one in heaven so that his treasure is drawing interest inside that tiny gate instead of keeping him out. It is a dare to become a new creature.

It seems to me that Christians mangle this story in at least two ways. First, by acting as if it were not about money, and second, by acting as if it were only about money. It is about money. As far as Jesus is concerned, money is like nuclear power. It may be able to do a lot of good in the world, but only within strongly built and carefully regulated corridors. Most of us do not know how to handle it. We get contaminated by its power, and contaminate others by wielding it carelessly ourselves—by wanting it too desperately or using it too manipulatively or believing in it too fiercely or defending it too cruelly. Every now and then someone manages to use it well, but the odds of that are about as good as they are of pressing a camel through a microchip. The story of the rich young ruler is a story about money.

But it is not a story that is only about money, because if it were then we could all buy our ways into heaven and you know that is

not so. We can keep the commandments until we are blue in the face. The kingdom of God is not for sale. The poor cannot buy it with their poverty any more than the rich can buy it with their riches. The kingdom of God is God's consummate gift, to be given to whomever God pleases, for whatever reasons please God.

The catch is, you have got to be free to receive the gift. You cannot be otherwise engaged. You cannot be tied up right now, or too tied down to respond. You cannot follow if you are not free to go.

Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*

Friday, April 3

Psalm 22; Exodus 9:13-35; 2 Corinthians 4:1-12; Mark 10:32-45

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:43-45

It is not in the nature of man to bear the cross, to love the cross, . . . to fly from honors, to bear reproaches meekly, to despise self and desire to be despised, to bear all adversities and losses, and to desire no prosperity in the world. If you look to yourself, you will of yourself be able to do none of this, but if you trust in the Lord, endurance shall be given you from heaven.

Without love and charity no work profits, but whatsoever is done in love and charity, however small and of no reputation it be, brings forth good fruit; for God verily considers what we are able to do, more than the greatness of what we do. We do well who minister to the public good rather than to our own.

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Saturday, April 4

Psalm 137; Exodus 10:21-11:8; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18; Mark 10:46-52

Have no fear of men's sin. Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.

At some thoughts one stands perplexed, especially at the sight of men's sin, and wonders whether one should use force or humble love. Always decide to use humble love. If you resolve on that once for all, you may subdue the whole world. Loving humility is marvelously strong, the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part II, Bk VI, Ch. III

Palm Sunday, April 5

Psalm 24; Zechariah 9:9-12; 1 Timothy 6:12-16; Luke 19:41-48

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday of Holy Week, April 6

Psalm 51; Lamentations 1:1-12; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Mark 11:12-25

Ask me how I keep one shred of faith,
With all the suffering in the world today,
Ask me how I can believe,
You are who you've always claimed to be.

Even when we've done our worst to you,
You have always done what love would do.
We even tried to take your life,
But you made yourself a sacrifice,
And turned our desecration
Into our salvation,
To lead us to
What love would do

So many idols calling, "follow me!"
So many self-inflated Pharisees!
But when their darkness has its way,
There is still a light to guide each choice we make.

But even when we've done our worst to you,
You have always done what love would do.
We even tried to take your life,
But you made yourself a sacrifice
And turned our desecration
Into our salvation,
To lead us to
What love would do.

Even when the world has done its worst to you,
God, you have always done what love would do.
Teach us in our hearts to be enough like you
To do what love would do.

Kyle Matthews, "What Love Would Do"
From the album *Sing Down*

Tuesday of Holy Week, April 7

Psalm 6; Lamentations 1:17-22; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22; Mark 11:27-33

Yes, reach out to your neighbor though her sadness overflows,
And it might pull you under if you dare to get too close.
Reach out, though there will be a price to pay,
If you start to care too much.
But before you try to reach someone so dangerous to love,
Reach Up,
Reach Up.

And reach down to your brother and your sister in despair,
Though poverty and ignorance conspire to keep them
there.
Reach down, though giving everything you have will never
be enough.
But before you try to reach someone who doesn't want
your love,
Reach Up,
Reach Up.

And reach in to the traitor who makes you feel like a clown,
Who's always making promises, but only lets you down.
Reach in, though you're not able to forgive yourself
For all the things you've done.
But before you try to reach someone so difficult to love,
Reach Up,
Reach Up,
Reach Up.

Kyle Matthews, from the album, *See For Yourself*

Wednesday of Holy Week, April 8

Psalm 55; Lamentations 2:1-9; 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11; Mark 12:1-11

For your consideration...

A deeply religious man, steeped in the Messianic theology of Judaism, who firmly believed the time was right for a Heaven on Earth that would overthrow Roman oppressors and usher in the Kingdom of YHWH. A zealous man—one of twelve—who followed an itinerant preacher from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of that Kingdom. Yet now the coming of the Kingdom is in peril because the very same preacher who threw the moneychangers out of the temple will not claim that which is rightfully his—will not take the decisive action that would restore to the Jews the power of their birthright as God’s chosen people.

So Judas makes a decision. If the Kingdom is going to come, he must call Jesus’ hand, forcing the Son of the Most High to bring about the effective rule of God over all peoples. But how to do it?

Judas makes a back-room deal. “Surely,” he thinks, “even though it will look like a betrayal at first, it will quickly turn into THE Kiss of the Kingdom.”

How often have we, with the best of intentions, grown impatient with the seeming lack of progress in a virtuous endeavor, and pushed toward a goal, only to find that it was our timing that was off? It was our will, not Thine?

In his burning desire for the prophecies to be fulfilled, might Judas have been seduced by fear, and erroneously thought, “If it is to be, it is up to me”?

Pray for the patience, trust, and wisdom to let things ripen in due season as designed.

Maundy Thursday, April 9

*Psalm 102; Lamentations 2:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32;
Mark 14:12-25*

"Tonight's the night," thought Judas. He was nervous as a cat, but committed to his mission. Revealing Jesus to his enemies would complete the plan laid out from the foundations of the earth.

"We dipped our bread in the wine together. He looked at me and read me like a book. He knew, and I knew he knew. Still, his eyes spoke love and not condemnation. Yet he told me to make swift work of it, which I did."

"I planned to kiss Jesus' cheek quickly, but when I did and tried to pull away—and this has never been told—Jesus took hold of my left arm and drew me to himself. In my right ear he whispered a prayer: 'Father, save him. He knows not what he does.' Then the master kissed me on my right cheek, released my arm, and was taken, all the while looking into my eyes with love—unmistakable love. I hid in the brush and watched, assured that at any second he would break loose and call the Kingdom into being. But, as you know, that's not what happened."

"Suddenly my eyes were opened and I realized the gravity of what I had done. I grabbed the first thing available to me, and with that rope, hanged myself. It was the shame and regret that killed me, though, not a noose."

"It was a dark, dark night. Yet in my final seconds, a vision. A bright light. And in that light, there He was, with arms outstretched, beckoning me."

"They say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. But if forgiveness is offered to one, forgiveness must be offered to all."

Good Friday, April 10

Psalm 95; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; 1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38

My God, my God,
 Why have you forgiven me?
In this deep hour
 I mourn your hurt at my expense.
This gift is almost too painful to accept,
 for in receiving, my flesh tears and burns.
Your bloodied countenance turns and
 induces me to hold on.

Breathing your last, you are gone
 leaving me stung and bruised
fighting the urge to flee from grace to some safer hill
 secure in myself.
Left with gory treasure to my own devices,
 what am I to do?

Holly Benzenhafer

Holy Saturday, April 11

Psalm 27; Lamentations 3:37-58; Hebrews 4:1-16

I sit in the calm
 ‘midst the storm’s rage.
Behind me whirl griefs and sorrows long ago exposed—
 pains grown woozy with time.
Before me spin future unknowns—
In shadow dances they tempt me
 to draw into their fury
 and be shredded with anxiety
 fear
 questioning
 despair.
 To left, to right
 turn today’s woes.
Ever-present, they stand
 ready to suffocate,
 but I sit in the calm—
for this moment, all is still.

Holly Benzenhafer

The Northminster Worship and Music Committee offers *A Lenten Journey, 2020*, as a gift for the home and individual worship of our members and friends. We are grateful for the writing and creative work of these committee members:

Introduction to Lent:	Richard Joiner
February 26:	Richard Joiner
February 27-29:	Holly Wiggs
March 2-4:	Shirley Foster
March 5-7:	Joe Rankin
March 9-11:	Gwen Anderson
March 12-14:	Rush Miller
March 16-17:	Richard Joiner
March 18-19:	Jo Ann Welch
March 20-21:	Mark Wiggs
March 23-25:	Rose Mary Porter
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