

“The Power of Darkness”

Reading the Passion according to Luke in the
Merion Deanery



“An Orderly Account”

In the introductory verses to Luke’s gospel, the evangelist claims that he has written “an orderly account of the events” relating to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. This assessment is not misplaced: compared to its counterparts, Luke’s gospel is more rhetorically precise and interested in historical context. The evangelist’s attention to narrative structure is about more than style, however. In many ways, it is the “orderliness” of Luke’s account that illustrates just how radical the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ was.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Luke’s Passion. Compared to the other evangelists, Luke’s account of Jesus’ suffering and death is startlingly straightforward. There are few genuine moments of surprise: in fact, everything unfolds according to the way one would expect things to unfold. It’s as if the events have already been scripted and the key figures are simply playing their assigned roles. The effect is chilling. As the drama unfolds, the sense one gets is that nothing could have prevented this miscarriage of justice. The Passion in Luke’s gospel exposes the sinful reality of the world: the fact that we rejected and executed Jesus, not despite his innocence, but *because* he embodied faithfulness, truth, and love. Indeed, one could say that it is the “orderliness” of the world that crucified Jesus. It was the desire of those around Jesus to maintain the *status quo* and keep things on an even keel that led them to hand Jesus over to death. It is why, as he is arrested, Jesus proclaims, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness!” He is not speaking to anyone in particular; he is revealing that the path he chose put him in direct confrontation the ways of the world.

The season of Lent invites Christians to choose a path for themselves that is distinct from the ways of the world. Indeed, Lent can put us at odds with the people around us. This is because Lent is about acknowledging our mortality in a culture that is afraid of death. Lent is about seeking forgiveness in a society that rejects the possibility of redemption. Lent is about admitting we are powerless in a world obsessed with power. The clergy of the Merion Deanery hope that reflecting on Luke’s Passion will enable you to follow the Way that Jesus has set before us, even when the power of darkness seems poised to overwhelm you.

How to Use this Devotional

Each entry in this collection includes a passage from Luke's gospel and a reflection on that passage written by one of the clergy of the Merion Deanery. Some of the entries also include a prayer that is pertinent to the theme of the reflection. At its heart, this devotional is intended to help readers do the work of self-examination. While there is no "right" way to use this resource, but you may want to try the following approach:

- Begin by reading the gospel passage slowly and carefully, paying attention to those words that stand out to you. When you finish reading, pause for a few minutes and think about those words or phrases that touched your heart. Read the passage again, noting whether you experience the phrases you noticed before differently.
- Read the reflection. Consider the ways the reflection changes your understanding of the gospel text.
- Finally, take a moment to pray, either with the text or prompt provided, or with your own words. Think about what God is calling you to do in response to this passage from Luke's gospel. How does it change your perspective on the world?

Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

March 6, 2019
Ash Wednesday

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. *Luke 22:1-2*

Let no fear taint the glory of God's Love in your life

We start our Lenten journey with a tainted celebration. Luke makes a point to tell us that all we are about to hear—the betrayal, crucifixion, and death of Jesus—happens at the height of the Passover Festival season. It's important to remember that this is a festival that the Jewish people believe was instituted by God and commanded to be celebrated every year. It stood as a reminder of God's liberation and love for God's people. Passover was the holiest time, and everyone—especially the chief priests and scribes—were to be preparing their hearts and homes from the keeping of that festival. It was the only thing they should have been thinking about.

But that is not what the chief priests and scribes are doing. Luke tells us that instead of preparing the temple, their sermons, the sacrifices, or even their own minds for the Passover, they were preparing the murder of Jesus because they “feared the people.” They are not motivated by God's love. They are motivated by their fear. All this fear will taint their celebration and worship.

The same fear that they were motivated needs to be named in our own hearts as well. We fear so many things that can keep us from a holy Lent. We fear what others think of us. We fear our own sins. We may even fear that God will not forgive us. But we cannot let our fears taint the glory of what we already know to be true—that the resurrection is more powerful than anything we may fear. Thus, we must start our Lent praying for the celebration of Easter to be on our hearts to keep our fears at bay. Let no fear taint the glory of the love of God in your life.

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Reverend Dr. Hillary Raining
Saint Christopher's, Gladwyne

March 7, 2019

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present. *Luke 22:3-6*

Satan enters into Judas Iscariot and sets into motion the dramatic betrayal of his friend and teacher. We can identify the very human reasons Judas would betray Jesus: greed, jealousy. The Gospels hint that Judas was disillusioned with the politics of Jesus. Realizing that Jesus' vision of what it meant to be Messiah did not involve political revolution or violence, perhaps Judas felt that he himself was betrayed by Jesus' nonviolent political vision. Despite these reasons, Luke will not let us forget the influence of Satan on Judas.

Satan derives from a Hebrew word that is translated as "adversary" or "accuser." In the book of Job, Satan is a prosecutor in the court of heaven who accuses Job of serving God for selfish reasons. God—both judge and Job's advocate—allows Satan to test Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). In the New Testament, Jesus calls Satan the "father of lies" (John 8:44). The Christian tradition has room for those who believe in the existence of an actual Satan, and for those who wish to understand the character as symbolic personification of evil. Either way, this Scripture invites us to examine our own motivations and the ways we allow ourselves to be overcome by the spirit of Satan, of accusation and judgment.

There are times when those around us need to be held accountable for hurting others, especially those with power who will likely continue to use that power for harm. That's not what we're talking about here. Judas' accusations against Jesus and Satan's accusations against Job were false and falsely motivated. The spirit of Satan is about hasty judgments and false accusations made, not because of the actual misdeeds of others, but because of ugly things within us: greed, jealousy, ego, political divisiveness.

Lent is about identifying hard truths about ourselves. It is also about grace. We do not have to skulk in darkness, like Judas. We do not have to be ashamed of what we find within ourselves. For in Jesus Christ, God has redeemed all things, even the ugly, broken, and false. Through the cross of Christ, God has opened up a path toward transformation through love, mercy, and forgiveness. It is our nature to accuse and judge others rather than face up to our own faults, but peace awaits us as we learn to open ourselves up to the unstoppable grace of God.

O Lord and Master of my life, do not permit the spirit of laziness and meddling, the lust for power and idle talk to come into me. Instead, grant me, your servant, the spirit of prudence, humility, patience and love. Yes, Lord and King, give me the power to see my own faults and not to judge my brother and sister. For you are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The Reverend James Stambaugh
Holy Apostles', Penn Wynne

March 8, 2019

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Luke 22:7-13

It had to be done by then. It's no good throwing a Super Bowl party a few days after the event. The Thanksgiving turkey doesn't get popped in the oven on December 1st. On the Day of Unleavened Bread, Luke tells us, the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

But sometimes people run late. Sometimes the exigencies of everyday life complicate even the most well-thought-out plans and sabotage the best of intentions. The Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, according to the very command of the God of Israel, according to the everlasting covenant between the chosen people and the One who chose them. But how could it be done, with opposition mounting, with betrayal at hand? How could they do it?

They couldn't. But he could. Following his instructions, they found an upstairs room, "already furnished." Someone else had prepared the place for them. Someone else had accomplished that which was impossible for them, through no merits of their own. God's grace in action, again.

The Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. They couldn't do it, but he could. Quite without their knowledge, unjustified by their worthiness, the room was being furnished and the altar was being prepared. As the Passover approached, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

Jesus the Christ, furnish our lives for us, so that we may share in your Passover feast. Amen.

The Reverend Dr. Joel C. Daniels
Saint George's, Ardmore

March 9, 2019

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." *Luke 22:14-18*

There are more references to the kingdom of God in Luke than there are in any of the other Gospels. It's a constant theme and promise. The kingdom is near. And yet, this very kingdom is never given definitive form. A number of parables describe what it is like, but, notably, the specific nature of the kingdom is left ambiguous. It will only be made known when it arrives.

This is a profound silence — especially when we are much more prone to characterize the kingdom according to our own desires. We rather blithely claim that we are establishing something of the kingdom of God when we demand and work for what we perceive to be the social good. And our actions may indeed be good and thoroughly honorable. Yet, even when this is done with the best of intention, it's woefully presumptuous to say that what we are accomplishing is the instantiation of the kingdom. We must be continually mindful of the fact that many of those who shouted for the crucifixion of Jesus did so in order to preserve and protect their own understanding of what God's kingdom was supposed to be.

In the remainder of the Gospel, Jesus does not again drink a cup of wine; nor is it stated that the kingdom of God has indeed come. Instead, Jesus is given sour wine when he is executed. This implies, at very least, that the actions of the crowds were a dreadful poisoning of the kingdom of God. It's wasn't theirs to determine. Nor is it ours. We, like Jesus, still wait upon it.

In a poem given the understated title of "Adjustments," R.S. Thomas set out the core witness of the church:

*Patiently with invisible structures [God] builds, and as patiently
we must pray, surrendering the order of the ingredients to a wisdom that
is beyond our own. We must change the mood to the passive.*

"We must change the mood to the passive." This is what prayer does. For then, what is possible, as Thomas concluded, is that we may realize "... more loving mutations, for the better ventilating of the atmosphere of the closed mind."

The Reverend Peter Vanderveen
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

The First Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

March 11, 2019

Monday after the First Sunday in Lent

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Luke 22:19-20

He took bread. After he gave thanks, he broke it and gave it to them. He said, "This is my body which is being given for you. Keep doing this as a remembrance of me." He did the same with the cup after the meal. He said, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is being poured out for you."

As long as I've known my husband, he and his family have told me stories of their beloved grandmother, Elvie, affectionately known as "Mor Mor." Mor Mor was the world's best cook, she was never without an apple to slice for her grandkids, she was the embodiment of a New Orleanian lady, and she loved her family fiercely. I never met her, but I knew that her life and story were a deep part of my husband's identity.

When we were engaged, my husband gave me Elvie's engagement ring. When we were married, he gave me her wedding band. When our youngest daughter was born, we proudly named her Elvie. I am deeply connected to a woman I never knew—to her life, her story, and her people. Every time I look at my rings or at my spunky daughter (who reminds our family of her namesake), I know that I need to love her family well, and honor the legacy of which I've become a part. I am grateful for her.

Whenever I take the bread and the cup, the same anamnesis (or remembering things before my time) comes to mind. I am connected to the person of Christ. I have never met Jesus with my eyes, but still, I know him so well. I am connected to every person who has taken the bread and the cup before me, as well as to those who will commune together after me.

May our lives, our love, and our words bring gratitude and honor to Jesus and the great cloud of witnesses that surround us.

The Reverend Michelle Bullock
The Episcopal Academy

March 12, 2019

Tuesday after the First Sunday in Lent

But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed! *Luke 22:21-22*

It seems that everyone had a different idea of who and what Jesus should be. Even if they did believe he was the messiah, what kind of messiah would he be? Would he be a military leader who would once and for all vanquish the Roman horde and restore Israel to its proper place? Or, would he just be the anointed one, the King of the Jews? It seems that everyone would lay their agenda on top of how they thought things ought to be, instead of following God's agenda on how God would reconcile the world to himself through the person of Jesus Christ. It's this clash of kingdoms, the priorities we have in this world over and against God's priorities and His kingdom, that leads to betrayal. Yes, we all know of Judas, but what of Peter's denial? Certainly, that's a betrayal too. Where were those brave disciples on the day of the Cross? Most had scattered as Jesus was being led to his death. And what of our betrayal? We followers of Christ claim to be with Him. We come to his table and yet, how often is our agenda overlaid on top of God's agenda? In what ways are we complicit in Jesus' betrayal through our actions and inactions?

Now there is rejoicing in heaven: for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins. Thanks be to God.

The Reverend Joseph Smith
Saint Mary's, Wayne

March 13, 2019

Wednesday after the First Sunday in Lent

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. *Luke 22:24-27*

As Jesus' ministry grew and His closest followers experienced the power of His healings and teachings, they began to understand and believe that Jesus was indeed the Messiah they had hoped and longed for. They were witnesses to a power that had not been known on earth since the creation of the world and expected that Jesus would establish the kingdom of God on earth. And, as some of Jesus' closest followers, they began to imagine their position in this new regime and fell to arguing among themselves about which one of them was the greatest.

Overhearing their dispute, Jesus reminds them that, like Him, the greatest among them is called to be a servant. In God's kingdom we are called to live with a deep regard and humility for God and one another. In Jesus' kingdom it would not be a kingdom like the world's kingdoms. In the world, persons in power lord that power over others, but not in God's kingdom. In God's kingdom, it is the one who serves who will be considered great.

Christ, who set aside His power and glory to live as we live; to face the struggles and triumphs faced by all; and show us the loving, merciful face of God, came as a servant. In obedience to God's purposes laid down His life to take away our sins and to break the power of death forever.

In your life and my life, we come to moments of power and authority in the lives of others and to accomplish tasks, great and small. In these positions, we have a choice to make. Will we wield our power or will we serve? Will we seek our glory and prestige or will we simply and humbly accomplish the tasks God has laid before us?

Precious Lord, teach us to be more like you, and less like the world around us. Help us to put aside our selfish desires and vain ambitions, that we may be true servants in both word and deed. Give us servants' hearts and bless the work of our hearts and hands for your purposes. This we ask in the name of one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Reverend W. Frank Allen
Saint David's, Radnor

March 14, 2019

Thursday after the First Sunday in Lent

“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Luke 22:28-30

When I was six years old, my best friend Robin Lee and I discovered an old empty tool shed. It appeared to both of us to be a perfect clubhouse. Therefore naturally we formed a club. The only requirement for membership was that a member had to be one of us. We planned our first meeting for the following day. As I recall it never happened ... but it was great to belong.

God offers each one of us of this world a far greater belonging. It is offered to all who are willing to be themselves. In this one, the membership is eternal. It begins with each person's decision - as Luke quotes Jesus - to stay with him in his trials. These are the trials we all encounter every day. They are before us in each decision to act - or not - in concern for life: your own and all others. The categories of individuals seem to make little difference to the Master. He cared for women as well as men, Gentiles as well as Jews, poor as well as rich. The important consideration in the trials confronting him seems clearly and only to be that an individual is alive in this world ... and thus is a treasured child of God's creation.

We meet two kinds of people in the biblically recorded events of “Holy Week”: those who take Jesus Christ seriously, and those who do not. Those who fail to do so are the individuals who surrender to fear for themselves and their own earthly status. Those who stay with Jesus are the holders of an energizing faith in God's Son - a faith triumphant over personal fears. They choose daily to be in partnership with God. The question before each of us is simple: do you want to be in and of the Kingdom of God?

If you too - like the young six year olds mentioned above - are inspired by a club house, consider a church ... and claim it for yourself and God.

O Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Then give me the grace to stay with you this day. Amen.

The Reverend Bill Wood
Saint David's, Radnor

March 15, 2019

Friday after the First Sunday in Lent

“Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” And he said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.” Luke 22: 31-34

Recently I watched an episode of Anthony Bourdain’s television show, “Parts Unknown.” In this episode he visited the Canadian province of Quebec. He joined a group of chefs on a hunting expedition which included looking for the results from beaver traps. I was disconcerted when one of the traps proved successful, resulting in a rather horrific death for the beaver by trap and drowning.

Why do I tell you this gruesome story? Jesus warns us to be on guard as to how we live our lives. “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with...the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly.” Now I am certain that had that young beaver understood the consequences of going near and eventually into that trap, he would have swum around it.

Unlike the beaver we have been warned and we have been given the choice or choices throughout the Gospels – forgive and you will be forgiven; don’t forgive and you will not be forgiven. Show mercy and receive mercy, don’t show mercy and you will receive none; avoid the concerns of this world and avoid the trap, don’t and be trapped.

Our lives have consequences for us and our discipleship has eternal consequences for each one of us. Lent is the time for repentance and return to God. Like the prodigal son our Father is waiting for us to return, but we can only do so when we recognize our lack of forgiveness, mercy, and embrace of the world. It is then that we free ourselves to rest in the embrace of our Father in heaven who will welcome us home.

The Reverend Frank Wallner
Saint John’s, Lower Merion

March 16, 2019

Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent

He said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing." He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled." They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." He replied, "It is enough." Luke 22:35-38

Jesus is preparing his disciples for life without him. Up to now, he has been taking the brunt of the abuse. But after he has died, the attention will turn to all those who love him, and they will be called into question, oppressed, and persecuted wherever status and power is challenged by Jesus' transformative love. (How was it that the director of the FBI in the 1960s thought that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was the most dangerous man in America at the time, do you think)? Therefore, although the disciples are not to rehearse pat answers, they are to decide continually about the foundation on which they will base their lives. Will they continue to deepen what they have learned from Jesus, or will they cave in to the ambient culture and try to fit in?

Jesus tells his disciples, 'the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.' So, the disciples inform Jesus that they have two. He replies, 'It is enough.' Does that mean that two swords are sufficient for twelve people? What, are they going to fend off the hostile crowd with them? Or, is Jesus simply saying that it is enough of that kind of talk?

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus says: 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.' (In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul calls the word of God the sword of the spirit).

Jesus wants the disciples to approach the world with eyes wide open: 'They will arrest you and persecute you; ...because of my name... So make up your minds... (Luke 21:12-19).

O sword of love, cleave from me all that is not love. Pierce my self-satisfaction with your mercy. Amen.

The Reverend Barbara Briggs
Saint Asaph's, Bala Cynwyd

The Second Sunday in Lent

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

March 18, 2019

Monday after the Second Week in Lent

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Luke 22:39-40

"As was his custom" are the words that jumped off the page for me when I read this passage. Earlier in Chapter 21:37, we are told "everyday he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called." Jesus had an established pattern to his life. In many places in Scripture, we are told that he often retreated to places alone after a hard day of ministering to the people, in which crowds were pressing in on him and begging him to heal them. It was his custom. It was his spiritual habit. He needed to be alone, to re-ground himself, to refocus on his mission and purpose of his life.

What are your spiritual habits, the habits of your heart? Do you take the time in the busy-ness of life to step away from it all? Do you have any spiritual customs that you can't live without? Lent is a time to re-visit old customs of the heart. How great it is to rediscover old habits, those spiritual disciplines that worked so well in our past that we have cast aside or forgotten! They can be like old, well-worn shoes, that once we put our feet into them, we sigh with delight at their comfort and fit. Those habits of the heart can "save us from the time of trial" – that big moment when we are faced with a choice that will define who we really are. For the habits of our heart form us, they remind us every day that we live for and with and in our God. Those habits, to which we faithfully adhere, do give meaning and purpose to our lives.

I invite you this day to try on an old habit of the heart. Do it today, tomorrow, and the next. It might be a good fit!

The Reverend John W. Sosnowski
Christ Church, Ithan

March 19, 2019

Saint Joseph

Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. *Luke 22:41-44*

In my experience, most Episcopalians tend to have a visceral and automatic preference for the traditional version of the Lord's prayer, (i.e. "Our Father, who art in heaven," as opposed to "Our Father in heaven"). There are probably a variety of perfectly sensible reasons for this, but it's a little unfortunate, because the contemporary version is actually a more accurate translation of what is found in the gospels. In particular, "Save us from the time of trial" is much closer to the Greek than "Lead us not into temptation." Moreover, the contemporary version of the Lord's prayer provides an illuminating lens for understanding Jesus' final hours.

Just before the passage appointed for today, Jesus seems to have the Lord's prayer in mind when he instructs those closest to him to pray that they "may not come into the time of trial." After leaving the disciples, Jesus confesses his deep apprehension about what is coming, acknowledging that he is about to come into a time of trial. Yet, he also prays for God's will to be done, echoing yet another line from the Lord's prayer. In other words, even though Jesus knows he will not be safe from the time of trial, he still prays for his will to align with God's will. Jesus prays he will be able to trust that God's grace can redeem even his darkest hour.

I suspect that most of us pray the Lord's prayer at least once everyday, but I doubt we consider its profound implications. When we pray the Lord's prayer, we ought to imagine that we are kneeling next to Jesus in Gethsemane, trusting that even when we endure times of trial, God's will is to redeem us and make us whole.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

The Reverend David Romanik
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 20, 2019

Wednesday after the Second Sunday in Lent

“And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” *Luke 22: 45-46*

St. Paul tells us that Luke was a physician and his concern both to diagnose the fundamental disorder of the human soul and prescribe its antidote in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is replete throughout his account of the Gospel. Likewise Church tradition describes Luke as an artist who, if he didn't in fact 'draw' the Blessed Virgin Mary, is to be credited with limning a more vivid account of our Lord's life, teaching and passion through his employment of rich literary contrasts and word pictures. It is Luke alone who gives us the story of Christ's conception and birth from the perspective of His mother, who draws the strong contrast of hard-heartedness and compunction in the repentant and unrepentant thieves, who records the poignant parable of the Prodigal Son, his forgiving Father and his envious, unforgiving brother. Just so Luke gives us this strong contrast between Christ engaged in the intensity of prayer, his sweat 'as great drops of blood' and the disciples, in the depth of dejection and sorrow, deciding to simply retreat into sleep. There is a time for sleep, to be sure. "It is but lost labor that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, for so he giveth his beloved sleep." Charles Péguy writes "I don't like the man who doesn't sleep, says God. Sleep is the friend of man. Sleep is the friend of God. Sleep may be my most beautiful creation. And I too rested on the seventh day. He whose heart is pure, sleeps. And he who sleeps has a pure heart." And yet clearly there is a time when we sleep not as an act of virtue but of self-indulgence. The foolish sluggard of Proverbs avoids his necessary labor and is always looking for opportunities for "...a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep..." Our sin would have us fold the hands not in prayer but in sloth, to have us sleep not as a blessed reward for labor or in preparation for a day of effort in the Lord's vineyard, but to run from that which is needful. And so the disciples are up-braided for sleeping not because sleeping is wrong, but because prayer and attention to Christ and His Passion is what is wanted. It is certainly what is wanted for us, especially in our Lenten pilgrimage.

The Reverend Edward Rix
All Saints', Wynnewood

March 21, 2019

Thursday after the Second Sunday in Lent

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" *Luke 22: 47-48*

What a stunning observation and judgment from our Lord—the kiss, love’s symbol of affection and intimacy, twisted into betrayal. This kiss marks the moment of Judas’s spiral into his self-made ending, his descent into the horrors of his remorse and suicide. There must be no sweetening up of Judas’s legacy as the Gnostic Gospel of Judas wishes to do. No! Evil is evil. If there were ever an unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit, this infamous kiss might qualify.

And—not “but” or “nevertheless”— and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, yes for Judas’s kiss, for my kisses of betrayal.

God, in the gracious mystery of his magnanimity, not only forgives sins, he also died for our sins. The church has struggled to approach comprehension of the impossible possibility of the extent of His grace, where substitutionary sacrifice is at the heart of the matter. Thus, when I think of Judas’s kiss of betrayal I must think of Christ dying for the sins of all. Jesus returns good for evil precisely as He commanded us to do. Even in duly chastising us on the day of judgment, would He who commands us to return good for evil, do any less?

The words of Robert Buchanan’s *Ballad of Judas Iscariot* come to mind. I cite its last verses at the end of the poem’s descriptions of the remorseful agonies Judas suffered.

“’Twas the Bridegroom stood at the open door, and beckon’d, smiling sweet;
’Twas the soul of Judas Iscariot stole in, and fell at his feet.
’The Holy Supper is spread within, and the many candles shine,
And I have waited long for thee before I poured the wine!
The supper wine is poured at last, the lights burn bright and fair,
Iscariot washes the Bridegroom’s feet, and dries them with his hair.”

(From *Miscellaneous Poems and Ballads*, 1878-83.) Robert Buchanan

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of your grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Reverend Dr. Sandy McCurdy
Saint David’s, Radnor

March 22, 2019

Friday after the Second Sunday in Lent

When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. *Luke 22:49-51*

When we see someone we care about potentially come in harm's way, our human instinct is do what we have in our power to try and avert harm from coming to that person. People are, like their Creator, inherently good, even though sin, at times, prevents that good from being realized all the time. Jesus' disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane on that night were not an exception. Though they have heard Jesus say that he was going to suffer and die, when the events leading up to those events were getting underway, they revert back to their basic instincts—without even waiting for Jesus' response, one of them already had a sword in hand. And even as quickly as Jesus could respond, the ear was already severed. In the heat of passion, it's easier to just be our base selves; it's easier to be follow instincts than what we may have heard or been taught, even by Jesus. Yet Jesus, also aware of his basic instinct as our Savior, responds from what is true of his nature—he speaks against the violence and begins to heal, even in the midst of the danger to his own person.

Each day of Lent is an invitation to ask about where our fidelity lies; an invitation to shed a little bit more of the comfortable ways of responding to life's challenges so that our fidelity to basic human instincts could be renewed and even transformed by our fidelity to the person of Jesus—Jesus who in the midst of danger remained faithful to the Father's desire: salvation and healing both to believers, seekers and even those who for whatever reason are caught in hostility and even doubt and fear.

Lord Jesus, quiet our hearts in the midst of our daily cares, so that whatever may come our way, we might not succumb to the temptation of trusting in self alone. Renew us in our fidelity. Sustain us in our hope. Heal us so that we might live more closely by you and through you. Amen.

The Reverend Nazareno Javier
Good Shepherd, Rosemont

March 23, 2019

Saturday after the Second Sunday in Lent

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

Luke 22: 52-53

The narrative of the Passion of Jesus goes by very quickly, and the words are so familiar to us that it is often hard to hear the story and absorb all that is going on. In a matter of moments, Jesus receives the kiss of betrayal, speaks to Judas, hears his followers ask if they should strike out with a sword, and without awaiting an answer, they cut off the ear, not of Judas, but of a slave of the high priest, and just as quickly, Jesus rebukes them and reaches out, replaces the ear, and heals the slave. So fast! In the next breath, Jesus asks the temple officials if they have come to arrest him with weapons, as if he were a bandit, and just as quickly, they do just that. What were they doing when this ear was miraculously reattached and healed? Did they miss it, and if they did not, how could they have proceeded with their dreadful mission? How often do we find ourselves determined to finish a task, short of time, and therefore blind to what is happening around us, factors that might suggest a different outcome, were we more attentive?

Holy and Gracious God, open our eyes to your work in the world around us. Slow us down, that we might see your hand at work, in likely and unlikely places. And when we have critical decisions to make, help us to go even more slowly, that we might fully understand the impact of our actions on those around us. In the name of the Christ, Amen.

The Reverend Liz Colton
Saint David's, Radnor

The Third Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

March 25, 2019

The Annunciation of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Blessed Virgin Mary

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

Luke 22:54-55

Transition. Transition. (sung to tune of "Tradition" from *Fiddler on the Roof*.)

Verses 54-55 are a transition from the prior passage- the drama of the sword and the ear in the Garden to the passage which follows, Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. Remember that at various points in the Gospels, the passages begin or end with the threat of detractors setting out to "trap or seize Jesus," and each time Jesus deftly escapes their clutches. Not this time. This time, for the first time, "they" (and we don't know for sure who the "they" comprise) have seized Jesus and are forcibly moving him from freedom to prison, along the walk from life to death.

Have they bound Jesus in ropes or chains? Are his feet bound forcing him to shuffle? Do they prod at him with stick and swords?

Imagine bystanders mocking him on the street, throwing rotten fruit, spitting on him.

Imagine Peter walking "at a distance": anxious, fearful, ashamed, curious. Then a fire unites them bringing warmth, comfort, a sense of camaraderie. And Peter moves from the outskirts of this small crowd to an inner circle who gather, in silence or chatting, around the fire.

Gracious God, you give us life in the action and in the waiting. You bless us with freedom and times in which we are captive to forces beyond our control. Grant us your patience and peace in these rhythms. Amen.

The Reverend Hentzi Elek
Saunders House

March 26, 2019

Tuesday after the Third Sunday in Lent

Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. Luke 22:56-60

Our faith in God is unwavering, until it is tested. These verses from Luke are the ultimate test for Peter, and he would fail. But Jesus knew that his friend would fail and told him so during supper earlier this night.

It is hard to imagine being Peter that night, what he experienced and how he felt. But let's try. Imagine having watched as Jesus was first betrayed by Judas and taken away. Anxious for his teacher's life, Peter follows the guards as they take Jesus to Caiaphas. There he sat outside waiting to hear word of Jesus' fate.

But, Peter, who had declared such loyalty to Jesus, is feeling personally threatened and scared. Perhaps it is self-preservation that causes Peter to deny that he knew Jesus or that he was with him. Not just once but three times! How would we react to the accusations if we were there? Would we have stood up and said, "yes! I am one of his followers. Take me, not him?" Or would our own self-preservation become more important than remaining loyal?

And then the sound. The sound of a cock crowing. The sound that meant that Jesus knew Peter would deny him. What does that do to your gut? To your heart? That deadly sinking feeling when you realize how dreadful your behavior has been. Peter must have been full of shame, deeply disappointed in himself, at a loss of what to do. Our faith in God is unwavering, until it is tested. It is the love and mercy of God that has the power to forgive us even if we fail the test.

O Lord Jesus Christ, look upon us with those eyes of yours with which you looked upon Peter in the hall; that with Peter we may repent and, by the same love be forgiven; for your mercy's sake. Amen.

The Reverend Karen Kaminskas
Saint Mary's, Ardmore

March 27, 2019

Wednesday after the Third Sunday in Lent

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. *Luke 22:60-62*

When we confess our sins, we confess our faith.

Peter is known for his denials and his confessions of faith. There are times when he believes in Jesus with such fervor and zeal that he declares him the Messiah. At times, it is a faith that seems so rock-solid that Jesus himself says he will build his church upon it. His confession of faith is so strong that we even celebrate it as a feast day in the Church calendar.

Yet, Peter is also known for his denials. The three that we have in quick succession in the Passion narrative are devastating. Not only did Jesus tell Peter it would happen, but he looks him square in the face as he claims not to know him the final time. I imagine this look haunts Peter. I know it haunts me as I think of all the times Christ has had to witness me deny him with my thoughts, words, and deeds. Lent is a time for confessions. It is a time when we confess all the ways we have denied the love of God in our life. It is a time when we can confess our sins. It is a time to confess that we are finite. But it is also a time when we can confess our faith. We can confess that we believe in a God who loves us enough to forgive our denials. We can confess that we know him to be the Messiah. We can confess the faith of Christ crucified who loves us even when we have denied the truth of that love again and again. When we confess our sins, we are also confessing our faith that we will be forgiven.

Let this Lent be the time when you set your denials aside for good and be know for your confession of our all forgiving God.

Almighty Father, who inspired Saint Peter, first among the apostles, to confess Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God: Keep your Church steadfast upon the rock of this faith, so that in unity and peace we may proclaim the one truth and follow the one Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Reverend Dr. Hillary Raining
Saint Christopher's, Gladwyne

March 28, 2019

Thursday after the Third Sunday in Lent

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" They kept heaping many other insults on him.

Luke 22:63-65

We want to turn away from the cruelty of the men who are abusing Jesus. Perhaps now that we are about half-way through Lent, we are growing weary self-examination and penitence; weary of self-discipline and self-denial. We are tempted to look away.

It is worth remembering that Lent is about grace, not legalism. If we fail to live up to our Lenten disciplines, we should not be severe with ourselves. As the Benedictines say, "Always, we begin again." Begin again. Every day of Lent is a new opportunity for transformation regardless of the day before. This is not the time to give up or turn away.

Lent is about grace. Part of grace is learning to stay with the trouble. To understand grace we must not carpet over or ignore human cruelty and suffering. In the story of Christ's passion, we are confronted with the way things are. Individuals and systems are cruel and unjust. Individuals and systems hold the potential for real evil. Evil is real. That is reality. But, in the story of Christ's passion, we are confronted with the way things are, a different reality—God's reality. The fundamental truth of God's reality is that, despite unspeakable cruelty, hatred, and pain; despite human frailty and weakness, grace, and love, and mercy always have the final word. Grace, love, and mercy—won for us through the passion and resurrection of Jesus—constitute a reality that is more real than anything else. Don't turn away from the suffering of Jesus found in Scripture and in the outcast, the oppressed, and the hurting. Stay with the trouble. The paradox of Lent is that by staying with it, we learn to see reality how God's see it. We cannot help but be transformed.

Lord Jesus, help me not to turn away from you. Help me to stay with the trouble and find you there. Help me to trust in your grace, mercy, and forgiveness, now and in every hour of my life. Abide with me as I abide with you, for it is only by your great mercy that I receive mercy, and it is through your faithfulness alone that I may attain faith. To you be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

The Reverend James Stambaugh
Holy Apostles', Penn Wynne

March 29, 2019

Friday after the Third Sunday in Lent

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." *Luke 22:66-69*

From then on, he would continue to face persecution. Already betrayed, already arrested, already abused, from then on, he would undergo a sham trial, be condemned by religious and civic authorities, taken outside the city, crucified as a criminal.

"From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." "Hardly," the chief priests and scribes must have thought. "Not likely," the soldiers must have said. "How?" the disciples must have asked. The forces of the world—usually at odds—were unifying around their desire to destroy Jesus of Nazareth. Their combined power was focusing its energies on the destruction of this innocent man. The children of Adam had him in their sights and the drama was tumbling downhill to its inevitable catastrophic conclusion.

"From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." What is the power of God? Where is it found? What does it do?

In the book of Revelation, the triumphant Lamb reigning in heaven is depicted as bearing the marks of his slaughter. Raising high the flag of victory, the marks of his sacrifice are still obvious to John the Divine. Covered with all-seeing eyes, unsealing the scroll of history, the conqueror is also the victim.

God's loving-kindness is prior to his power. Better: God's loving-kindness is his power. But it comes at a cost.

You, Christ, are the king of glory, the eternal Son of the Father. When you became man to set us free you did not shun the Virgin's womb. You overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. You are seated at God's right hand in glory. We believe that you will come and be our judge. Come then, Lord, and help your people, bought with the price of your own blood, and bring us with your saints to glory everlasting. Amen.

The Reverend Dr. Joel C. Daniels
Saint George's, Ardmore

March 30, 2019

Saturday after the Third Sunday in Lent

And they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." And they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Luke 22:70-71

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus never refers to himself as the Son of God. This attribution always comes from elsewhere. The angel Gabriel informs Mary that others will call her child holy and blessed, the Son of the most High. At Jesus' baptism a voice from heaven announces that he is the Beloved, the son in whom God's pleasure would be shown. The devil tempts Jesus by using this title for him; but Jesus all the more cleverly demurs, acknowledging no part in the devil's flattery. The demons that Jesus cast out of Legion cry out this name in fear of him. Jesus silences them by sending them away into a herd of swine. And finally, at the last, the rabid crowds, hungry for a reason to send Jesus to his death, use this claim against him. Famously, he neither affirms nor denies this. He leaves this judgment completely up to the people, which sets the perfect trap.

Had Jesus stated that he was in fact the Son of God, the crowds could have reasonably reacted with the charge that Jesus had overstepped his bounds. His hubris would have been idolatry and his own undoing. But Jesus put the responsibility of these words into the mouths of the people. This was their assessment. It's what they said of him. And precisely in light of this, they explicitly demanded the right to put the Son of God to death, even as they erroneously put the blame on him. To say that he had implicated himself "from his own lips" — no greater lie could be told. Their actions displayed their own sin upon sin. Nietzsche's notorious statement is merely an echo of Luke's: "God is dead... And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us?"

It is precisely in this moment, however, that the true gravity of God's "justification of the ungodly" can emerge. Only God can save us, and we can "no longer believe in [ourselves] or in any sort of promises that require [us] to believe in [ourselves]." (Eberhard Jüngel). Jesus didn't. This was his freedom. Which is ours too.

The Reverend Peter Vanderveen
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

April 1, 2019

Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." *Luke 23:1-3*

When Jesus is brought before Pilate by the religious leaders, we see just how crafty they can be. Earlier in Luke, they had tried to trick Jesus by asking him whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes. He answered them by asking whose picture and title were on the coin (the emperor's) and replied "Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:20-26). Their recollection of this event is deceptive and serves to paint the picture of Jesus that promotes their agenda.

When they accuse Jesus of saying he is Messiah and king, Pilate could not let this accusation go. To claim to be the Messiah or a king was a threat to the emperor and to the authority of Rome itself. Jesus did not respond with a yes or a no, but he simply said, "You are saying it."

This calls to mind earlier in the Gospel, when Jesus asks the disciples, "who do you say I am?" (Luke 9:20) Friends, who do we say Jesus is? Does the picture we paint of Jesus benefit our own agenda—whether religious, political or personal—or does it really proclaim the words and actions of Christ? May what we proclaim with our words and our actions point to the real gospel of Jesus.

The Reverend Michelle Bullock
The Episcopal Academy

April 2, 2019

Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

Luke 23:4-5

So often we are struck by the contrast between strength and weakness. We are often tempted to characterize another person as being one or the other. The Swiss physician and author Paul Tournier addressed this phenomenon in his important book entitled *The Strong And The Weak*. He invites us to reconsider our assumptions as he argues that we humans are much more alike than we are different. As Harry Stack Sullivan asserted, "We are all simply much more human than anything else." We all are afraid of others, afraid of ourselves and sometimes afraid of God. What makes us appear to be fundamentally different is the behavior we decide to use in the face of our common fears. Pilate fears the disapproval of his Roman authorities should there be Jewish unrest while he is prefect. Thus while he finds no fault with Jesus worthy of death, he sidesteps a decision for justice. Pilate's weakness is apparent.

Jesus, claiming kinship with his "Heavenly Father," has consistently stood for love and justice for all of God's children. Ironically Jesus is accused of subversion and blasphemy by the Jews who are afraid of losing power. "He stirs up people ... by his teaching." That often still seems to be the ministry of God. In this life, we all encounter the same temptation to surrender ourselves to the apparent powers of this world. The alternative of true strength comes through our faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot serve two masters. We must decide.

The journey in this world to true strength is given to each of us by Christ on the Cross: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

O Lord guide us in the way of justice and truth. Then open our lips that our mouths may show forth your praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Reverend Bill Wood
Saint David's, Radnor

April 3, 2019

Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.

Luke 23:6-9

Jesus takes people as they are. To those who are willing, to those who have listening ears, to those who have some measure of faith that Jesus can change their circumstances, Jesus is fully present. He welcomes. He teaches. He heals all comers. And to those who are not willing, to those who do not have ears to hear or the faith for Jesus to change their lives, Jesus is silent. Jesus gives them impossible tasks: "Go, sell all you have and come, follow me"; "Let the dead bury the dead"; "Find out what it means that I desire mercy not sacrifice".

I've often likened it to red apples and green apples – ripe and unripe apples. The red or ripe apples receive Jesus' full attention as though there is no one else in the world. And the green or unripe apples get very little of Jesus' attention and either some impossible task or silence.

In our passage for this day, Jesus is being shuffled from one worldly power to another, neither of which has any interest in who Jesus really is and what He has come to do. He is simply another Jewish prophet for Pilate and an object of interest and entertainment for Herod. The Truth, the Son of God, the Savior of the world stands before Herod who is interested only in Jesus as entertainment. When no sign is given, Herod questions Jesus and Jesus, who knows that Herod is unripe, is silent. Jesus gives Him no answer because He knows it will fall on deaf ears and because Jesus knows that His path to glory goes not through Herod, but only through the cross.

When you and I are caught up in the busyness, power, and material distractions of our lives, it often seems that God's signs and wonders are absent from our lives and that we do not hear God's gentle voice offering us love, strength and guidance. But if we are willing; if we have hearts turned to God; then Jesus will act and speak and we will be able to receive and hear and follow in His way.

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Reverend W. Frank Allen
Saint David's, Radnor

April 4, 2019

Thursday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Luke 23:10-12

Many would agree that being accused, and worse, convicted, of wrongdoing when one is innocent is a position in which one never wishes to find themselves. Jesus never sinned, never acted in any way that was against God's will. He prayed, he followed God, he abided in God's love. He lived a life of grace and promoted the dignity of every human being. But because of his radical love, he was accused of challenging authority and the culture's currency of retaliation and punishment. This was threatening to many around him. The threat was big enough that the chief priests and scribes wanted to put an end to his ways, his message, and to him. But little did they know that while they tried, the biggest surprise lay ahead of them. It was not the end of this message or of him. Although he had to suffer the accusations, the abuse, the loneliness and despair that day, new life and resurrection were ahead. So when we find ourselves disbelieved or misunderstood, even though it may feel like it, we are not alone. Jesus has been in that same place, and even though we may feel betrayed and rejected, Jesus is with us and promises that injustice and misunderstanding, of any proportion, are not the end of the story. In due time, truth and light eventually conquer all injustice.

Merciful and loving God, send your grace on all those who find themselves misunderstood, wrongly accused, and rejected. May your grace help dispel the powers which threaten honesty and truth, and help us with your love and grace, to bring your light and justice to unjust situations, in Christ's name. Amen.

The Reverend Amanda Eiman
Saint David's, Radnor

April 5, 2019

Friday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

Luke 23:13-17

The Sunday before Ash Wednesday we celebrated the feast of the Transfiguration. I wonder if Peter, John, and James had any idea of the event they were about to experience. This Jesus whom they had followed for the past three years, whom they knew as friend and teacher and healer, who shared his life of itinerancy, is transformed before them, is seen speaking with Moses and Elijah, and is finally revealed by the voice of God as the Beloved.

Could they have even begun to imagine the scene we see in Luke 23:13-17? Jesus is no longer the glorious figure whom they had seen on the mount, but rather a prisoner of a brutal Roman governor about to be sent to a punishing Roman guard and finally to a disgraceful and painful death. They must have wondered what had happened to the Jesus of that mount as they saw Jesus about to mount another, very different, hill.

I was brought up with the belief that Jesus needed to die in such a brutal way to satisfy God and reconcile us to the Father - the result of the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. God seemed to have a blood lust, a need for sacrificial dying. This always seemed at odds with our concept of a loving, merciful God.

Maybe Henri Nouwen in his book *The Wounded Healer* had a better way to look at this. His basic premise is that we serve best when we serve from our woundedness. When I look at my neighbor's brokenness and need for love from the perspective of my own brokenness, then I can relate more fully to our common humanity. The Jesus on the mount is a beautiful sight, but the Jesus in the Garden, kneeling in fear and trembling, the Jesus on the cross, spilling the last drops of his sacred blood: this is the Jesus that I can relate to more fully and who more fully can relate to me.

The Reverend Frank Wallner
Saint John's, Lower Merion

April 6, 2019

Saturday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted out, "Crucify, crucify him!" *Luke 23: 18-21*

The opposition and rejection that Jesus engendered in the synagogue in Nazareth that led to the people driving him out of town and taking him to the edge of the hill to hurl him from it has now come to its inevitable and final expression in this crowd in Jerusalem. Willing to exchange the Son of God, for Barabbas, a man imprisoned for murder and insurrection, the crowd now shouts out for Jesus to be crucified. We join in shouting for Christ's crucifixion also, explicitly as we play that part in the Passion reading and, again, explicitly and implicitly, in our rejection of Christ as the Son of God. We feel intensely the weight of the responsibility for all men's sins to the point of shame and self-disgust. During the Palm Sunday reading, it is difficult to lift one's head and look another in the eye after shouting these words of anger, fear, hatred and denunciation.

"Take hold of yourself and make yourself responsible for all men's sins. My friend, believe me, that really is so, for the moment you make yourself responsible in all sincerity for everyone and everything, you will see that it really is so and that you are in fact responsible for everyone and everything." Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Reverend Jo Ann Jones
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

April 8, 2019

Monday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished. Luke 23:22-25

I guess you have to give Pilate credit for trying. He knew he had an innocent person in his custody and repeatedly went back to the crowds trying to convince them to let Jesus go. In the end, Pilate chose the coward's way out. He let the voices of the demanding crowd prevail and handed Jesus over to be crucified. He believed in Jesus' innocence, but did not let that belief change him. There was too much at stake and he feared an uprising. The pressure was too much. He bowed to the crowd, as mistaken as their claims were, and chose not to release Jesus who stood before him, an innocent victim of a misguided mob.

Every day we are faced with choices between Jesus' Way of Love and the voices in our world that rebel against it. Our hearts are convinced that Jesus' way for us is the way to healing and hope for our world. And yet, dissenting voices always challenge us. "Prove it!" they shout. "That's just not realistic," they protest. "You hypocrites!" is their shout of condemnation. In our time, as hate groups are on the rise along with hate-related crimes, as tribalism reinforces the divisions among us, and mutual respect is absent in the public square, it's difficult to be persistent in proclaiming Jesus' saving love for us all. It certainly takes much more courage than Pilate exhibited as he caved to the unrelenting shouts from the crowd. It requires that we commit over and over to Jesus' Way and not let the dissenting crowds keep us from loving, caring, respecting the dignity of every human being, forgiving, reconciling, feeding, transforming hearts and bringing others, through our word and example, to know the love of Jesus. Let us choose to bow before the living Christ and be bold and daring before the dissenting voices of our world and let us always choose love as our way.

If you are not acquainted with the Lenten resources from the Episcopal Church on "The Way of Love," I invite you to take a look: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/life-transformed>

God of hope, from you come every blessing and all peace: Show us that, in the midst of our struggles, you are with us. Give us the abundance of your grace that we may do the work you give us to do and that we may be for the world a sign of your presence; through Christ, the Way and the Truth. Amen.

The Reverend John W. Sosnowski
Christ Church, Ithan

April 9, 2019

Tuesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. *Luke 23:26*

Just about anybody who is familiar with the story of Jesus' suffering and death knows who Simon of Cyrene is. He is the man who was coerced into carrying Jesus' cross to Golgotha. While we don't have a whole lot of information about Simon, it is surprising is that we know anything about him in the first place. It seems that he wasn't selected for any particular reason: Mark's account tells us that the soldiers "compelled" Simon to carry the cross, while Luke notes that they "seized" him and laid the cross on him. Clearly, Simon did not volunteer for this assignment. What's more, the circumstances were such that he should have been anonymous. The soldiers just pulled someone off the side of the road. To them, the identity of the person carrying the cross did not matter; all they were looking for was a body. Why, then, do we know that this man's name was Simon?

Mark's gospel tells us that Simon was "the father of Alexander and Rufus." Alexander and Rufus were probably members of the community to which Mark wrote his gospel. In other words, part of the reason that we know who carried Jesus' cross is because he happened to be related to some members of the early Church. On a deeper level, however, the fact that we know who Simon of Cyrene is demonstrates something profound about the nature of God. Part of what Jesus reveals in his confrontation with the evil powers of this world is that the way they understood people was fundamentally flawed. The Roman establishment may not have cared about a visitor from the frontiers of the Empire, but God did. In his Passion, Jesus reveals that, despite the assumptions of those who condemned him to death, human dignity is not reserved for members of certain classes or ethnic groups. On his way to the cross, Jesus reminds us that we are all created in the image of God, and that God calls us each by name.

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Reverend David Romanik
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

April 10, 2019

Wednesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

“And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

Luke 23: 27-31

The witness of these men and women, presumably not disciples of Jesus, devoutly following and calling out in pity for him, stands in stark contrast to the disciples, whose vocation it was “to follow” Jesus and who nevertheless forsake Him in His hour of trial. Again the literary convention of virtue juxtaposed to vice works to great effect. Here are the people that “heard Him gladly.” But it is to the women in this crowd that Jesus addresses a rather foreboding warning of the wrath to come. Strange as it may seem, it is in fact a reference to the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, wherein the city of Jerusalem is condemned for faithlessness in the face of God’s revelation through His prophets. Christ’s words here of a “green tree” and “a dry” evoke the image of Jerusalem as a dried vine, fit only for firewood in the flame of divine judgement and wrath. In Christ’s day Jerusalem “which killeth the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee” has not regarded the fullness of God’s revelation in Him and yet the day of God’s wrath is not yet upon the city: the wood now is still green, unfit for the flames. There is time to repent. The daughters of Jerusalem are those faithful who, as in the day of Ezekiel, turn to the Lord and His Word. They are the remnant spoken of by Ezekiel, “...sons and daughters...they shall come forth to you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem...and they shall comfort you...and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it...” The faithful of the Lord, those who stay close to Him and His Cross when temptation is greatest to flee, are the very ones who show us the comfort, the strength of God’s grace in the midst of our own temptations and trials. They point us forward that we might anticipate Christ’s judgement of the quick and the dead not with fear, seeking to hide at the roots of the mountains, but with the hope of God’s children by the grace of adoption. There is, after all, “...only one misery...not to be saints” (Leon Bloy, “The Woman who was Poor”).

The Reverend Edward Rix
All Saints’, Wynnewood

April 11, 2019

Thursday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. *Luke 23:32-34*

This one of the last seven "words" from the cross is not found in half of the NT extant manuscript texts. The specifics of this issue aside, its exclusion is symbolic of the church's historic tendency to repeat Israel's sin of understanding its election as a guarantee of its exclusive selection for God's love and grace. A major theme of the Church's preaching is, and has been, salvation for itself; hell and damnation, limbo at best, for the rest of humanity. The manuscript examples that do not include vs 34a resonate with this theological tradition.

But those including 34a resonate more with the notion of God's grace for all humanity and creation. Here, judgment is expected; severe and unequivocal in its quality. At the general resurrection, with "every knee bent" before Jesus, everyone will know what evil they did. Stripped of all rationalizations and excuses, our remorse will be devastating. Standing with history's most notorious sinners, St Paul also "as the foremost" (I Tim 1: 15b), we will cringe at the sight of our "manifold sins and wickednesses." The righteous wrath of God's judgment will not be denied.

But then, the all-inclusive Grace will embrace us, forgiveness for every human that ever lived from the Christ who "died for the sins of the whole world." God's Grace will manifest as radical and total, not superficial and selective. Forgiveness will be for all, as they didn't know what they were doing. Even for those who did know what they were doing, as in St. Paul's case "doing the evil that he wouldn't do," grace is the last word.

A God whose essence is love and grace: He is "the perfect offering for our sins, and not only for ours, but for this sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2). That the God of love would be a kind of eternal concentration camp keeper, torturing his fallen creatures in all eternity, is the ultimate absurdity.

34a belongs with all it implies—about forgiveness for all.

Assist us mercifully with thy help, O Lord God of our salvation; that we may enter with joy upon the meditation of those mighty acts whereby thou hast given us life and immortality; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Reverend Dr. Sandy McCurdy
Saint David's, Radnor

April 12, 2019

Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." *Luke 23:35-38*

Dashed expectations. Overwhelming defeat. Failed Savior. From the surface, these seem to be the lingering thoughts of the people witnessing the events that Friday afternoon. By this time, of course, those closest to Jesus have likely dispersed. Hiding. Probably afraid. Probably disillusioned. "Could the accusations of crowd really be true? We thought he was the one. Or was it too good to be true?" Then, as it is now, people—believers, seekers, and the crowd alike—seem to equate salvation and epiphanies, with something happening on a grand scale as if taking place on the set of a big-budget Hollywood production. Seen from this lens, Jesus on the cross—abandoned by those closest to him, and left to mercy the jeering crowd—could really be that: a failed Savior, now too paralyzed even to make a difference for himself, let alone for others. But perhaps, what made that Friday so good for us now is the fact that death needed to happen—death not so much in terms of Jesus' crucifixion but the death of our Hollywood-esque ideas of what a Savior looks like; of what salvation, healing and even a life of discipleship ought to look like. If we're honest, the people were upset not so much because they despised Jesus; they were upset because, in their eyes, he didn't deliver what they expected him to be! In the midst of the seeming tragedy, it's ironic that the pagan Romans got it right all along: This is the King of the Jews—not so much the charge of a crime; but likely a confession of truth. If you've forgotten what your image of a Savior ought to look like... perhaps the Lord has already given you the blessing of a cleaner slate from which to plant the seeds of resurrection!

O Crucified Savior, grant us the openness to judge or dismiss not those things that we cannot or dare not understand; the tenderness to embrace the subtle promptings of your divine love; and the wisdom and the humility to discern them, standing at the foot of your cross, and waiting for the dawn of your resurrection. Amen.

The Reverend Nazareno Javier
Good Shepherd, Rosemont

April 13, 2019

Saturday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Luke 23: 39-41

Two men, having received a death sentence for unspecified crimes, hang alongside Jesus. Tradition has it that they are thieves, one penitent and one angry, sarcastic and accusatory. The great irony is that the one who speaks first, after having derided Jesus, speaks words of truth. He identifies Jesus as the Messiah and acknowledges his salvific power through God. Had he only, in his unimaginable pain, hanging and dying slowly, spoken these same words in a confessional tone, with an admission of guilt, as did the other man, he would also have had God's mercy extended to him.

Faced with an outcome we do not like, or an outcome beyond our control, something much less than a death sentence, we are too quick to react defensively. We are all experts at mustering some righteous indignation on our own behalf. It is hard for us to give up anger, and it is too easy to accuse this angry thief. Most of us are probably somewhere in between these two dying men, wanting to believe we would be like the penitent thief, but frightened that we might behave like the angry one.

Holy and Gracious God, give us the faith and courage of the dying thief, who in his final moments, acknowledged his wrongdoing and recognized the innocence of the dying savior. Help us to feel this holy fear of your judgement. And may this awareness of ourselves in relationship with you humble us as it did this penitent thief, whose example shines through the darkness of the crucifixion of your son. In Christ we pray, Amen.

The Reverend Liz Colton
Saint David's, Radnor

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

April 15, 2019
Monday in Holy Week

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." *Luke 23: 42-43*

The hauntingly beautiful and reassuring Taize chant captures this passage so perfectly when you sing it quietly by yourself or in a crowd with thousands. The simple refrain, sung in a round, sung in parts, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Our faith continues to conflate past, present, and future, reminding us that being in God's presence is history, is the immediate now, and is simultaneously a hope for the future. The hope for the future underscores the gnawing doubt that we have not yet been accepted by Jesus into the kingdom, the fear that God could somehow forget us: ridiculous, and yet such a powerful anxiety.

With all of the people in the universe, why would God remember me? Who am I that I would even be a blip on God's radar screen, let alone a cherished memory, a loved friend who will be welcomed back home to the family table?

Somewhere, perhaps seemingly inaccessible, in one our brain files, memories and hopes dance together, reaffirming each other. Singing such passages, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," may help activate those brain activities that normally seem inaccessible.

God has implanted in us the hope and the reality. We are and will always been remembered, welcomed, and cherished in God's Kingdom. Remember, others need this hope. Pass on this confidence. Share this faith. God remembers you and welcomes you and loves you. Nothing you have done, are doing, or might do will ever diminish God's vibrant memory and welcoming love of you.

Gracious God, remind us that we matter to you and that you remember and welcome us with love into your kingdom. In your name we pray, Amen.

The Reverend Hentzi Elek
Saunders House

April 16, 2019
Tuesday in Holy Week

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. *Luke 23.44-45*

It was noon or close to it. It was the time of day when the sun was supposed to be at the highest point in the sky, the time that was supposed to be the brightest. It was the time when one would have sought the cover of shade or a sip of water from a vessel that had been filled earlier that morning. At noon, if at all possible, the day slows, even if only for a moment. There is no hiding at high noon.

It was at noon, when Jesus hung on the cross, that cruel instrument of death used by the Romans to maintain order by the power of fear. There was no hiding from the sun. But the sun's light failed, Luke reports. Perhaps even the sun could not bear what was transpiring beneath it. The women, however stood by. They had followed him from Galilee. They were the ones keeping watch. They were there whether there was sun or not. Waiting and watching for whatever words they might be able to hear. Waiting and watching for that last breath and the deliverance of Jesus from the agony of the cross. Three hours they waited and watched. Three hours while the sun's light had failed. Three hours from the words offered to the thief that was hanging next to Jesus. Time hadn't just slowed; time seemed to stand still.

Perhaps you have been the one who has waited and watched at the bedside of a loved one who had no words left to say but the breathing continued. Waiting and watching, the pain and anticipation are great. Wondering when the last breath will come. Wondering if God is present or absent.

It was after three hours that the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Just as the heavens were ripped open at the river Jordan and the dove descended through the clouds to fall upon Jesus at his Baptism. This same rending occurs to the curtain of the Temple, that place where God was present on earth, where God comes down. That place was now torn in two.

It was noon for what seemed an eternity, and yet in the blink of an eye, it was three o'clock. The waiting was over. Death would come as death always comes. This life had to end in order that story might continue, that God's will might be done.

Blessed Jesus, be present with us in the time that is in-between. Sustain us when time stands still. Comfort us in our grieving. Deliver those we love from this life into paradise with you. Give to us all the hope of life eternal. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Reverend Barry Harte
Saint Asaph's, Bala Cynwyd

April 17, 2019

Wednesday in Holy Week

Then Jesus, saying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" *Luke 23: 46-47*

One has to wonder how many crucifixions this centurion has witnessed. As a commander of a hundred men, this centurion must have seen many men die. To rise to this office, centurions fought alongside the men whom they commanded. They usually led from the front, occupying a position at the front right of the formation. Thus, in the field they were quite vulnerable to suffering heavy casualties in battle. Death, particularly death that was violent and gruesome, was not a stranger to them. Their training, experience and discipline all contributed their being impervious to suffering and death.

If the centurion has stood at the foot of this cross for the entire three hours of Jesus' crucifixion, he has had an intimate experience of this man and his death. He looked on as Jesus bore physical pain and suffering, insults to his person and character, taunting and reviling him. All this Jesus bore in silence. He never responded to the taunts, but he did speak to one of the thieves crucified with him and promised paradise to him. He gave over his life to his Father. Most astounding is that he spoke first of forgiveness to those who did not know what they did. That could mean a great number of people. The poise, the sense of peace and love that flowed from him for those three hours seemed beyond the capability of most persons. So moved by what he has seen and heard that he had never witnessed before, the centurion exclaims, "Certainly, this man was innocent." And the centurion becomes the only person converted by Christ's crucifixion.

Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ:

For those who have never heard the word of salvation

For those who have lost their faith

For those hardened by sin or indifference

For the contemptuous and the scornful

For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples

For those who in the name of Christ have persecuted others

That God will open their hearts to the truth, and lead them to faith and obedience.

The Reverend Jo Ann Jones

Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

April 18, 2019
Maundy Thursday

And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. *Luke 23:48-49*

Where was everyone? Hiding? Behind locked doors in the upper room? It seems like it was just yesterday that we celebrated with Hosannas in the Highest Heaven as Jesus, our Lord, made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And yet, how short our memory is as we were the same ones yelling Crucify Him! Crucify Him! What happened? Maybe we should blame the temple leaders who were actively whipping the crowd into a frenzied mob. My first rector would always say, "Sheep." We can always count on them to be sheep. Like a reed blowing in the wind, we sheep can be worked up into a frenzy pretty easily while yelling "Hosanna in the highest" one minute and "Crucify him" the next. When we are gathered looking for a spectacle rather than standing on principle, we are easily manipulated by the foxes and wolves of this world. Sheep! What are we going to do when our passions are based on the latest headlines rather than long held convictions? Sheep.

O God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice, we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Reverend Joseph Smith
Saint Mary's, Wayne

April 19, 2019
Good Friday

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. *Luke 23:50-54*

Luke describes Joseph of Arimathea as a righteous man, who had not agreed to the council's plan and action concerning Jesus' arrest, accusation, and crucifixion. We can almost imagine Joseph's quiet dissent, and then his compassionate heart breaking at the news of Jesus's death. He may have been so moved that he came to Jesus even after his death to offer him some type of justice, since his voice was not heard loudly enough beforehand. So he came and like a servant, he tended to Jesus' body. It may have been the least he could do. He didn't come with fanfare or a desire to make himself known. But he quietly and deliberately asked for Jesus' body after it had been crucified and he cared for it according to the customs of the time. He wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid it in a tomb. He didn't seek recognition. He didn't ask for anything in return. He simply wanted to honor Jesus in the wake of his death. He was a true servant. How might we, like Joseph of Arimathea, be servants of those around us, especially to those who suffer wrongly, are treated unjustly, and are unloved and lost?

Almighty God, we give thanks for your servant Joseph of Arimathea, who revealed true servanthood to the world in the wake of Jesus' death. May we have grace to follow in his footsteps and be servant leaders in our own lives, through the power, grace, and loving compassion of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Reverend Amanda Eiman
Saint David's, Radnor

April 20, 2019
Holy Saturday

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.
Luke 23:55-56

In the Jewish practice of Sabbath – the day of rest God has commanded us to take – there’s quite a bit of work required before one can truly rest. Before the Sabbath begins, individuals must cook their meals and conduct their business so that no money is exchanged and no machinery is operated on the Sabbath day. In Luke’s gospel account of Jesus’ death, it seems important that we know that the women adhered to the law of preparation ending before sundown so that Sabbath could begin. Although Jesus’ death did indeed fall on the Day of Preparation, we might imagine this as a metaphor for something bigger. These faithful followers of Jesus were doing the difficult and emotional work of preparation: adorning Jesus’ body with scented oils, that he might have a holy and blessed rest. I have blessed many a head – including that of my own parent – with sacred oil as I prayed them on their journey from this life to the next, and it never ceases to be a humbling and beautiful experience.

How might we, too, prepare ourselves in this life for not only the weekly rest and for the eternal rest that is to come? Perhaps we can strive to be more intentional about our work and play, our prayer and connection with others, that we might be able to fully embrace a time free of burden and labor.

May we live our lives as disciples of Jesus, knowing that at our final breath, others will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Go in peace.”

Dear Friends: It was our Lord Jesus himself who said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Let us pray, then, that we may live our lives in such a way that upon our death, we may rest from our labors, and enter into the light of God's eternal sabbath rest.

The Reverend Callie Swanlund
Saint Christopher’s, Gladwyne

April 21, 2019

Easter Day

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Luke 24:1-12

We have arrived at the day for which we have been preparing for the last 40 days. It is Easter Day, the day of Resurrection, the day when we remember and celebrate the fact that the women went to the tomb and found it empty. And yet, despite the season of preparation, despite our disciplined efforts to make room for God in our lives, despite the fact that we have been looking forward to this celebration for weeks, we may still feel unready. We may still feel unprepared for this celebration, because the Resurrection challenges our assumptions and transforms the way we look at the world. Even as we celebrate the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead, we may have lingering doubts. After all, people do not rise from the dead in our experience. In spite of all our preparation, we may feel unready to proclaim that Christ is risen.

We are not the first people to have these doubts. Luke's gospel tells us that the women went to tomb early in the morning, only to find the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. After two men in dazzling clothes asked why they were looking for the living among the dead, the women rushed to tell the apostles, who dismissed it as "an idle tale." This word that Luke uses can also be translated as "foolishness" or "nonsense." For the apostles (and probably for the women who went to the tomb), the idea that someone could rise from the dead was ludicrous. First-century Jews knew just as well as twenty-first century skeptics that people do not rise from the dead, that death is the end of the story, that talk of resurrection is nonsense. The apostles had the same doubts that many of us have. The tomb may have been empty, but that doesn't mean that Jesus' followers were ready to proclaim that Christ is risen.

Nevertheless, even as the apostles dismissed the women's story as nonsense, one of the apostles ran to the tomb to see if it was true. I can only imagine what Peter's inner monologue was like as he rushed to the place where Jesus had been buried: "This is so stupid. Those women must have been seeing things.

Maybe the gardener was messing with their heads. Anyway, there's no way that Jesus' body is gone. There's no way that he rose from the dead. Things like that just don't happen." Peter was among those who confidently dismissed the very idea of resurrection, and yet as he approached the tomb, doubts may have crept into his mind. What if the tomb was empty? What if he really had risen from the dead? Luke's gospel provides a wonderful detail: as Peter arrives at the tomb, he has to stoop to look inside. As he approached the tomb, he had to slow down and pause at its entrance. He had to take a deep breath and stoop to peer into the gloom, terrified of what he would (or wouldn't) find.

Even in the midst of our doubts, even in the midst of our confident belief that the very idea of resurrection is nonsense, Easter challenges us to take a deep breath and stoop to peer inside the empty tomb. We may look to satisfy our morbid curiosity, we may look to prove our skeptical neighbors wrong, we may look because we are desperately in need of God's promise of new and abundant life. Whatever our motivation, Easter challenges us to look for new life even in those places that have known only death and despair. We may have our doubts, but Easter challenges us to look past our doubts and embrace the possibility of resurrection, the possibility of transformation, the possibility that this life can be renewed by the power of God who loves us.

When we stoop to peer inside the empty tomb and embrace the possibility of resurrection, we can proclaim to this world that God's love and faithfulness have the power to transform a world that has enslaved to death and despair. When we embrace the possibility of resurrection, we are given the opportunity to live resurrection lives of love and service to others. Resurrection is more than an empty tomb; it is a promise that the world can be transformed, that the evil powers of this world are no match for the love of God, and that we have the ability to make this world a better place. Even if we are afraid of what we will find when we peer inside the empty tomb, we are called to proclaim the resurrection by working for the transformation of the world.

O God our King, by the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you conquered sin, put death to flight, and gave us the hope of everlasting life: Redeem all our days by this victory; forgive our sins, banish our fears, make us bold to praise you and to do your will; and steel us to wait for the consummation of your kingdom on the last great Day; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Very Reverend David Romanik
Dean of Merion