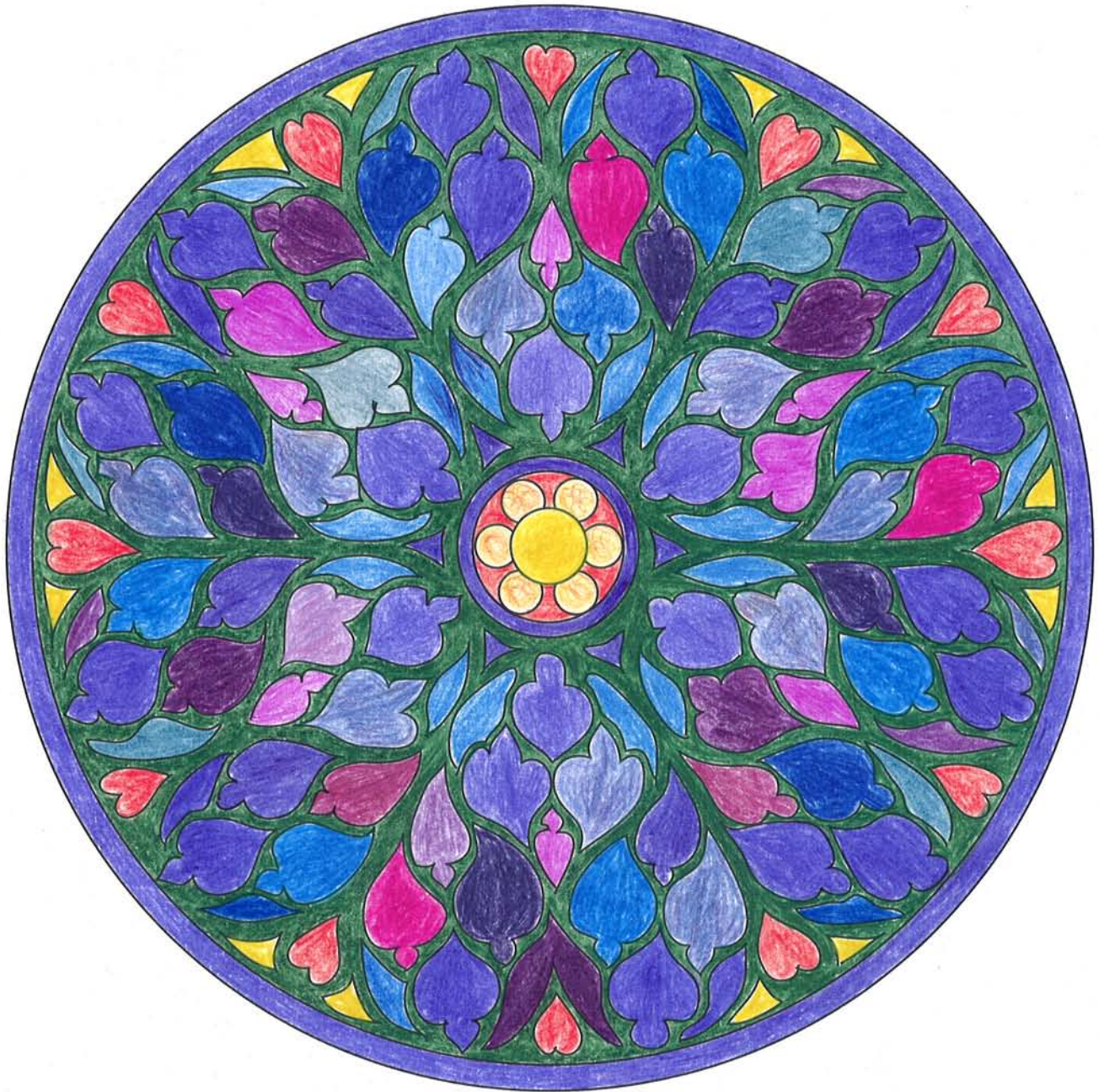


Lent 2011



Lenten Devotional for March 9 2011 Luke 18: 9-14

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

As I read this a first time, I thought Jesus was actually expressing himself very clearly in this passage. We don't like people who think they are better than everyone else, and obviously Jesus doesn't either. Then alarm bells went off in my head. Was this really the focus of this passage? Jesus never seems to be straightforward in His parables. What is Jesus really trying to teach us?

The focus of this parable is really about prayer. How we pray, and how we come to God to pray. In ancient Jewish custom, people went to the Temple and prayed aloud. They stood in a group for their prayers. Jesus gives us an example of two men praying, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Both men stand apart from the congregation, but for different reasons. The Pharisee because he thinks he is better than those around him, the Tax Collector because he feels unworthy to stand before the magnificence of God.

The Pharisee thinks he has to make himself worthy to God by pointing out that, in his opinion, he is better than others. He exalts himself to God, even knowing that those around him can hear him. He thinks he can impress God with his actions.

The other man separated is the Tax Collector. He keeps his eyes downcast and he prays humbly and with his heart. He obviously is in personal anguish over something and beats his chest and asks God to be merciful to him, a sinner. He realizes that God can help him and prays to him.

We all have God's love and grace. That is why God doesn't want us to put others down to hopefully make us look better. We all are God's children. But God does want us to need Him and to be in relationship with Him. He wants us to pray to Him in need. He hears us.

Lenten Devotional for March 10 2011 John 1:29-34

John 1:29-34

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

I have always admired those who are called in this world to do one thing in their lives and they do it regardless of vocation – discernment is clear. John was one such person; called on by God to testify to the light that all may believe through him. “I myself did not know Him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that He might be revealed to Israel.” The *Mikvah*, ‘a gathering of water’, is collected from a naturally flowing source such as a river or rainfall. The *Mikvah* was and still is today a spiritual cleansing. John baptized with water or the *Mikvah*, making the path straight for the one who “ranks ahead of me because He was before me.”

Listening to God’s call, John was able to recognize Jesus; lead others to the “Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world.” How? He listened. And by listening, Jesus came to him. “I myself did not know Him but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

Through pure faith, John was able to step aside, as he testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove. And I myself have seen and testified that this is Son of God.”

We are also called in this world to do one thing: testify to the light that all may believe through our words, actions, and above all, love.

What will you do when you hear God’s call?

Lenten Devotional for March 11 2011 John 1:35-42

John 1:35-42

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

There must have been much more that happened during the day the John's two disciples left him and stayed with Jesus at his invitation, because something made Andrew find his brother and bring him to Jesus saying, "We have found the Messiah!"

We are not told what happened - perhaps that isn't the important part, but I would love to know what Jesus did or said that convinced John's disciples that he was the Messiah. What would it have taken to convince me? It would have to be something extraordinary, maybe not a miracle, but an irrefutable argument?

Then there is Simon, Andrew's brother, who when brought to Jesus was re-named Peter. Why were none of the other disciples re-named? . . . or were they and we are simply unaware of it because we do not have it recorded.

The stories of Jesus are all incomplete, just as when we tell our own stories. We cannot capture who we are even in an autobiography. There is so much that happens beneath the surface in our lives, we can only speak or write of the highlights or formative times. Nothing can completely capture who we are.

So it is also with the Biblical narrative. None of the writers can tell the whole story of Jesus. We get glimpses of what he was like, acts he performed or things he said, but they are only glimpses, and we are left with questions. That may be God's plan - to keep us searching.

Lenten Devotional for March 12 2011 John 1:43-51

John 1:43-51

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

“Phillip said to him, “Come and See”.

What happens when I am asked to “come and see”?

I probably have to re-arrange my carefully constructed schedule.

My head is so full – my schedule is so busy – do I really want to ‘see’ anything more?

What if I see something that moves me?

I might have to reorient the way I’ve thought about things.

I might be moved to change something, when it seems right now everything is in order.

I might have to be in the company of people I have carefully avoided.

I might see a truth I’ve been avoiding.

What happens if I go and my eyes are open?

Maybe I get a glimpse of the sacred.

Maybe I become inspired to try something new?

Maybe there is insight just waiting to be revealed?

Maybe the love of God becomes incarnate in me some way, some how.

“Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under a fig tree?

You will see greater things than these.”

I wonder what greater things I will see.

The truth is, I am afraid.

Afraid of what I don’t even know.

Afraid of what I’ll learn.

Afraid what’s next.

Afraid.

Do not be afraid – I am with you – Always and everywhere

Nothing ---- Nothing

can separate you from the love of God.

Come and See

Lenten Devotional for March 13 2011 Mark 2:18-22

Mark 2:18-22

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 'No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'

This biblical passage illustrates Jesus as teacher. He uses the opportunity of abandoning fasting on this particular Sabbath to make clear that a Holy life is not guided by a rigid set of do's and don'ts, rather, our commitment to God remains a feast of joy with the blessings of God's grace.

The Pharisees chide Jesus and his disciples because they are not fasting during the Sabbath. Was Jesus humbling himself before God by refusing to fast on the Sabbath? By not following convention, Jesus makes clear by example that Christianity is not necessarily a convention of rigid, inflexible rules. Rather, Christianity is an ongoing and deepening relationship with God and our spiritual self.

Was Jesus humbling himself before God by breaking man-imposed tradition of fasting on the Sabbath? Yes. The Pharisees used religion--and their notion of religion--to prove they were better than others. Most spiritual people would decry this self-serving manipulation. I certainly do!

We should not look down on anyone who, in our opinion, does less than us. Instead, this "source of pride" should transform itself to a source of humility. Shouldn't those who believe they do more than others humble themselves before the Lord and be thankful?

In my opinion, the best way we can prove to God our commitment to Him is to be an exemplar of kindness, grace, and thankfulness each day.

Lenten Devotional for March 14 2011 John 2:1-12

John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.

This has always been one of my favorite scripture passages about Jesus. To me it shows the human side of Jesus in a very good-natured way, but that is only part of why this is one of my favorite passages. The main reason is the simple little part in parenthesis which states “though the servants who had drawn the water knew”. The humble servants who did the Lords bidding were the only ones who knew that a miracle had happened except perhaps Jesus’ mother. The others were oblivious to this miracle. I can almost image the wonder of the servants as they witnessed the miracle and their amazement that they were the only ones who knew what took place. Here they were the lowest people there and they knew they were the only ones who knew what just happened. It seems like we can be so occupied with life that we miss the miracles that happen around us every day. If like the servants we humble ourselves and become servants to all and perform the Lords work those miracles that the rest of the world is oblivious to may through the grace of our Lord Jesus become self evident and what wonder and amazement will fill our lives daily.

Lenten Devotional for March 15 2011 John 2:13-22

John 2:13-22

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

There are some passages of scripture that speak to me immediately and some passages that call me up short. This passage is in the latter group. My Jesus is a passive Jesus. He is a rabbi that teaches his followers to turn the other cheek or to give your coat when asked for your shirt. Here Jesus is the exact opposite. He seems to be out of control. I don’t know if there are many other instances where Jesus reacts this way and that got me thinking about times in my life when I may react differently than people expect. I know that we all do it because our society has sayings such as that person is having a bad day or he/she got out of the wrong side of the bed. But is it really that easy. For me it seems as I get older the one thing I haven’t learned yet is how to react verses respond to a situation. In too many instances I react only to later be upset that I acted wrongly. If only I could take a second in the heat of the moment and think before reacting. How would my life be different? In the movie Groundhog’s Day, Bill Murray gets up every morning to relive the same day over and over again. In some ways that might nice, knowing that I can change my behavior the next day but this not Hollywood. This is the real world.

In the real world Jesus was truly human as well as fully divine, and I believe that Jesus may have been showing his humanity when he erupted in the temple. The temple was a location that Jesus was very passionate about. It is in his reaction to a passion that I can find hope. Hope that our human emotions are acceptable before God , and Hope that even if I react instead of respond to a situation that I encounter that I may react in a Christian manner.

Lenten Devotional for March 16 2011 John 2:23-3:15

John 2:23-3:15

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

In this section of John's gospel, Jesus is visited by a name named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. Pharisees were a very select group, each one having taken a solemn vow that he would devote every moment of his entire life to obeying the Ten Commandments, as a way of pleasing God. The Pharisees took this very seriously. So it is amazing that he would come to Jesus at all, because the Pharisees regarded themselves as superior to other men in spiritual status before God due to their total dedication to obeying the law of God. But Nicodemus regarded Jesus as a successful teacher, because God put his seal of approval on him by doing miracles through him. Nicodemus had no miracles to his record; nor could any of the other members of the Sanhedrin work miracles. Therefore Nicodemus came with a great deal of respect for Jesus, regarding him as a superior teacher, able to instruct in the meaning of the Law.

Jesus tells Nicodemus 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' This is confusing to Nicodemus because he doesn't understand how anyone can be born twice. Jesus then repeats himself: 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "you must be born from above". The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Jesus is telling Nicodemus that strict discipline to the Ten Commandments is not enough to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus is speaking of something radical, a new beginning. It is a second birth, but it comes from above. It is God that does it, not man; and it results in a new creation, a new beginning. The point being made here is that you can't see the wind; you can only see its effect. Similarly, you can't see any physical change in a person born of the Spirit, but you can see the effect of the Spirit at work in someone. We may not understand how the Spirit works, but the effect of the Spirit in the lives of believers is evidence of God at work.

Lenten Devotional for March 17 2011 John 3:16-21

John 3:16-21

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

These verses are a continuation of Jesus' conversation with "a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. . . ." Jesus speaks to him of the difference of things "heavenly" and things "earthly" and of the need to believe in those things which cannot be seen, but which are true. He does not speak in the first person, saying "I am here to teach you, so that those who believe in me will have eternal life." Instead, he states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." This passage is one of the most famous in Christianity --- it states the basis of our faith!

Jesus continues his teaching by attempting to explain to Nicodemus what is required to attain eternal life. He addresses the subject of judgment and states that those who do not believe have already been judged, but that those who do believe are not judged. As the scripture continues, it seems to me that the judgment of which Jesus speaks is not quite what we think of it today --- as a decision to be made based on merits and evidence in a situation. It appears that he is speaking of the state of one's life. One who rejects the good, the belief in the teachings and example Jesus is giving humanity, will live in darkness, hating the light, and no further judgment is necessary. The light would expose the evil ways. On the other hand, "... he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought of God." As in many passages in our Bible, the "light" seems to be synonymous with God. It appears to be a "given" that belief invites us into the light, and believing brings us in --- into an eternal life with God. No judgment is necessary.

Lenten Devotional for March 18 2011 John 3:22-36

John 3:22-36

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized— John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.' John answered, 'No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him." He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.' The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

While Christ is the central figure of this passage, there is so much we can learn from John the Baptist.

Here we have John out baptizing and at the same time Jesus was in the Judean countryside baptizing. Some of John the Baptist's followers were annoyed that Jesus was out baptizing too and people were turning to him. John was so right when he said "I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him." I never thought about John the Baptist being a happy or content person but here I see a new John. One that is humble and happy to be Jesus' friend. He likens himself to the best man at a wedding serving the bridegroom and is full of joy for his friend. "That joy is mine and it is now complete. He must become greater and I must become less."

We all want to be the servant of Christ but do we do it joyfully and humbly? We want to do his work and be joyous for He is greater than we are. Occasionally, we have all gotten carried away and forgot that we should be filled with the same type of joy as John in serving Christ. John's attitude in this passage reminds me that I need to stay grounded and remember that is Christ who is the important one (the Bridegroom) not me.

This passage goes onto tell us once again that "God gives the Spirit without limit." "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." WOW now that is Grace...undeserved and freely given. I did not look for grace while thinking about John the Baptist or even when I first read this passage.

As Lent moves forward toward the arrival of Easter, I know I will try to be more like John and be happy for those above me, ahead of me, and most of all for the Sovereignty of Christ.

My prayer during this Lenten season is help me be more like John the Baptist and be humble and happy in who I am. May I remember that it is "The one who comes from above is above all."

Finally, I am grateful for all the moments of grace I did not notice before but am seeing a bit more clearly thanks to John the Baptist.

Lenten Devotional for March 19 2011 John 4:1-26

John 4:1-26

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'— although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor

in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 4God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

Water. Worship. Jesus.

In this passage, physical and spiritual are contrasted in these images. The water in the well, Jerusalem, and Jesus the man asking for a drink of water are merely the means by which the saving grace of God is revealed.

The Samaritan woman at the well initially is thinking of water in a physical sense only. And she is acutely aware of the cultural and societal gulf between herself and this Jewish man who is asking her for water. But Jesus is speaking to her of living water that He will give – and tells her that if she knew who he was she would ask him for that water. He tells her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The Samaritan woman is probably beginning to sense that there is something out of the ordinary going on, because she does ask him to give her this living water.

And in response to her request for this living water, Jesus tells her to go call her husband and return. When she tells him she has no husband, Jesus acknowledges the truth of her statement, and then tells her that the five previous men she had had also were not her husbands. The Samaritan woman, now sure that Jesus is more than just an ordinary Jewish man, tells him she thinks he is a prophet, and then asks about the requirement that “the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus’ response takes the conversation out of the physical realm into the spiritual: “...the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... the hour is coming, and now is here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Jesus has now moved beyond culture, society, and physical structures to the heart of the matter, which is our relationship to God. God, who is spirit, cannot be confined by space or time. True worship is our grateful response to God’s gift of salvation, and that response is more important than location, ritual, or ceremony. The Samaritan woman tells Jesus that she knows the Messiah is coming. Jesus responds, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” We know God through what He reveals to us - and here the Jewish man asking for a drink reveals that he himself is living water for all.

Lenten Devotional for March 20 2011 Mark 3:31-4:9

Mark 3:31-4:9

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teachings he said to them: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it

did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched: and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

This passage begins with a powerful statement from Jesus informing all of us that, regardless of our earthly relationships (mother, brother, sister), we are all ONE in His sight as believers and doers of the will of God. Whenever we worship together we feel the power of the spirit as our being ONE. Likewise, when we work together to build God's kingdom by caring for our neighbors...the poor...the hungry...the destitute...we know that we are ONE in God and Christ. Our deeds represent the affirmation of our faith.

And as if this opening passage was not powerful enough, it is followed by Jesus' Parable of the Sower. It is a reminder that whenever we plant seeds representative of serving God and our neighbor, we must take care to be selective in where and how we engage in our works so that our good intentions produce the most fruitful results possible.

However, in today's world, we know that there are times that when selecting charities or agencies to support, either by deed or finance, it is better to provide that support regardless of really knowing whether the results will be as we intended. This reminds me of our support of USAID in destitute areas of the world...just because all of the food and supplies periodically does not reach the people for whom it is intended, this is not a rationale for ceasing support of this agency. On the local front, bringing God's word of love, salvation and redemption through Christ to the homeless on the streets and in the shelters represents sowing a fruitful seed regardless of how they appear to receive the word...since we do not really know what is in their hearts. Our Lord reminds us, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen"...somehow we know that a homeless person has heard, is being touched in his/her heart, and gives a quiet thanks to God...and probably helps some other homeless person. That is sowing a seed that multiplies. We will not actually witness these acts but in our hearts we know it happens. During this Lenten season, let us remember to support God's kingdom by sowing the best seeds possible.

Lenten Devotional for March 21 2011 John 4:27-42

John 4:27-42

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

Most days I feel like I have not done enough of God's work. My trips to the grocery store, the pharmacy, doctors' appointments and resting hardly seem like the stuff of holy work. I don't pray enough, I don't give enough: I feel like I've been stripped of my capacity to give as much as I want to. What I want to do and what I'm able to do are miles apart.

Yet, I see some hope in this reading. Jesus says, "For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'"

I am a gardener, and I know what goes into maintaining a garden. There is the soil preparation, the planting, the tending, the protecting, and the reaping of the enjoyment of the flowers or vegetables. At one time I was able to do all that. But now, my role is basically that of a tender: I watch over my plants, give some water and verbal encouragement. Others do the hard physical work. My role in the garden is just as important as ever. Though my contribution seems much smaller, it contributes to the larger vision.

I am reminded in this passage that my job is to do what I am able to do. That my small prayer offered for my doctor and his other patients matters; a kind word to the grocery clerk matters; a smile offered to a frazzled parent matters. I may not be able to give as much as I used to be able to, but what I can give still counts. Jesus is the one who oversees the harvest, and my part in the harvest may be small, but it is still important. What is God calling you to contribute to the harvest this Lenten season?

Lenten Devotional for March 22 2011 John 4:43-54

John 4: 43-54

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.' The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.' The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

In this reading, a man who is accustomed to wielding authority becomes helpless in the face of his son's critical illness. He hears of Jesus, a miracle worker, he has probably reached out in every direction, and there has been no help for his son.

He approaches Jesus, his last resort, and begs for help. Jesus, surprisingly, (and probably directed to the surrounding crowd) says "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." The official, a father, doesn't skip a beat: "Sir, come down before my little boy dies."

What a moment; such love. Jesus responds with love: "Go, your son will live". Jesus didn't just heal the dying, He left a small Christian Church in that place, for the man and his household became believers. Everything Jesus did in Galilee and Jerusalem had the effect of creating the Christian Church. I wonder what became of that family? Did the official lose his job due to attention paid to this miracle? Did he and his household become the center of the new Christian Church in Capernaum? We don't know. What we do know that Jesus chose to not

only save a life, but to create new life by leaving behind Him a body of believers.

We don't all have a tragic illness in the family, and those of us that do, most often suffer loss. It happens in our midst all the time. So where is our miracle? Perhaps it is to be found in the Christian Church that Jesus left behind. That miracle provides us solace in our sad time, and provides us as well with the grace to share our Christian gift with others.

It is not always clear. But perhaps we can do well to remember the faith of this one parent, who said: "Sir, come down" . We need to say this every day on good days and bad. "Sir, come down.....".

Jesus, You gave Yourself to us completely, and our Faith is such that we continue to say,

"Sir, come down....."

Jesus. Accept our invitation,

Every day of our lives.

AMEN

Lenten Devotional for March 23 2011 John 5:1-18

John 5:1-18

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

FAITH: What is the definition of Faith? According to Hebrews 11:1 Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

In this reading we meet a man who has been paralyzed 38 years. He along with many sick people has come to a pool called a Bethzatha, which many believers feel has healing powers. Jesus who was in Jerusalem for a special feast, and knew the man had been sick for a long time, asked him "Do you want to be made well?" He replies, "Sir there is no one to help me get into the pool when the water starts moving. While I am coming to the water, someone always gets in before me." Jesus said to him "Stand up. Pick up your mat and walk." Immediately the man was well and picked up his mat and began to walk. He does not question Jesus but had "Faith."

Faith is something we call upon and need in our daily lives. In difficult times such as illness, uncertainty, family strife etc., we can find ourselves questioning our faith. Yet we know that Jesus is always with us in both good

and bad times. If we just look to Him, trust in Him and pray for the faith to move ahead despite our problems, he is listening to our prayers. Even if we don't get the answers we hoped for or see the evidence of our prayers being answered. As the man in this reading we must have FAITH to "Stand Up." Pick up our problems and continue to move on in the knowledge that He will never abandon us.

Dear Lord Jesus:

Renew our spirit and give us the faith to trust in You always, not just in our times of need. Imbue in us a strong faith that your love and grace is always with us. In this season of Lent, let us call to mind Your words of FAITH in Your Father, while in the Garden of Gethsemane as you prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. AMEN

Lenten Devotional for March 24 2011 John 5:19-29

John 5: 19-29

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life. 'Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

God's actions reveal His mercy and His justice. Do you recognize His action in your life, His saving grace and love and the purifying fire of His Spirit who convicts us of sin and transforms us in his holiness? The religious authorities refused to accept Jesus' authority to heal and to speak in the name of His heavenly Father. They charged Jesus as a "Sabbath-breaker" and as a "blasphemer". They wanted to kill Jesus because He claimed the same authority and power as God. He claimed equality with God -- something no mortal could say without blaspheming. Jesus answered their charge of breaking the Sabbath law by demonstrating God's purpose for creation and redemption -- to save and restore life. God's love and mercy never ceases, even on the Sabbath. Jesus continues to show the Father's mercy, even on the Sabbath day of rest. When they charged that Jesus was making Himself equal with God, He replied that He was not acting independently of God because His relationship is that of a Father and Son relationship. If we wish to see how God reacts to sin and how He responds to our sinful condition, then we must look to Jesus. The mind of Jesus is the mind of God, and the words of Jesus are the words of God. Jesus also states that his identity to the Father is based on complete obedience. Jesus always did what his Father wanted him to do. His obedience was not based on submission or power, but on love. The unity between Jesus and the Father is a unity of love. We are called to submit our lives to God with the same love and obedience which Jesus demonstrated for his Father. Jesus states that to accept Him is life and to reject Him is death. Are you ready to follow the Lord and to leave behind whatever is false and contrary to His will?

This is a poem from, Thomas Merton's Thoughts in Solitude, that I carry with me always.

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

Lenten Devotional for March 25 2011 John 5:30-47

John 5:30-47

“If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. “I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Today's world has not changed in many ways from the world of Christ. As now, people then, did not believe that Christ was the son of God. Even though there were many examples that bear witness that Christ was sent by God to do good works here on earth.

People read the scriptures and think by doing this they will have eternal life but, just because they read the words -- those words are not abiding in the people. As Jesus said and witness bears out, you must believe in me to have eternal life. If we are true believers, we can testify about Jesus' works and who He is. Your witness can be done with self-assurance because the Spirit is within you.

Are you a good witness? As a reliable witness, you can help to point many souls to Christ.

Faith in Christ --- A prayer:

Almighty Father, You have called me to walk by the light of Christ, Your Son, and to trust in His wisdom. During Lent, I submit myself to Him completely and strive to believe in Him with all my heart. With my renewed commitment to Jesus, I endeavor to continue His work here on earth in helping to build Your Kingdom so that all may benefit from the message of salvation. Amen

Lenten Devotional for March 26 2011 John 7:1-13

John 7:1-13

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' (For not even his brothers believed in him.) Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.' After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, 'Where is he?' And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, 'He is a good man', others were saying, 'No, he is deceiving the crowd.' Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

Once again we have a story full of many layers. One layer is The Feast of the Tabernacles. I don't know much about this holiday but what I do know is that it is a pretty big one in the Jewish tradition. And Jesus says he isn't going. Another layer is verse 4 - his brothers telling him that he must make himself know "for no one who seeks to make a reputation for himself does anything in secret". Yet Jesus does go to the feast - in secret.

When I first read this passage I wondered about that - about Jesus going in secret. Why did he do that? Why secrecy? But after thinking more about it I realized that Jesus wasn't about making a name for himself. Jesus was about peace and love and forgiveness. Jesus was about bringing people back to God. His brothers didn't understand this. "My time has not yet arrived, but you are ready at any opportunity!" (verse 6). This isn't the first time we hear him say that his time has not yet come. And timing is everything. His brothers do not understand, his apostles and disciples do not understand. And if I were there then, I wouldn't have understood either. Nothing of what Jesus said or did made much sense until it was time. The time when the sting and horror of death was conquered. The time when we realized who and what he really was. The time when we can make our Alleluias - Jesus Christ is risen today!

Lenten Devotional for March 27 2011 Mark 5:1-20

Mark 5:1-20

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake. The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. As he

was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

At the first reading of these verses, it becomes apparent that one needs to know more about the time and place where this occurs. First, all of it is in Gentile territory, not Jewish. It is a land that has been totally dominated by Roman Legions, law and rule. You could easily say the people have been demonized by the Romans. Further, these people raise pigs, obviously not the preferred herd of the Jews. The point here is that the people were crushed by the Romans and hated with a passion.

And who comes to this land, but Jesus. He comes across a “possessed” man named, interestingly enough, Legion. The man recognizes Jesus and begs for release from his tortured existence. Jesus responds to this man’s supplications and puts the evil spirits into a large herd of pigs and drives them into the sea to their deaths, which is exactly the fate that the enslaved people wished for the Romans.

To me, elements in this story can be seen in our world and lives today. In many ways we are tempted by the world around us, striving so desperately for fame, money, prestige, recognition, success and all the apparent rewards such things offer. For the great majority of us these ends cannot be realized. As a result we may be unhappy, angry, unfulfilled, demoralized, or if you will “possessed” by our inability to reach our wished-for ends. Are we then doomed to wallow in this morass? Not really. We have a choice. We can turn to Jesus. We know his teachings, his life and his simple but powerful commandment, “Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself”. Obviously not easy to do, but turning to God can give you an alternative to the crushing pressure of the secular world. True, you need to be comfortable, have the basics and enjoy life’s pleasures, but you do not have to be over powered by the desire for more and more. Are we literally able to drive the all-consuming desires, “demons”, from us into the sea? I believe it’s possible. Very difficult, but with God’s help we can surely try.

In the bible passage, after Jesus performed his miracle, the man asked to go with Jesus. Jesus said, “NO, go and tell your people what the Lord has done for you”. I believe this is what we are asked to do and it is demonstrated to others by our actions and words. Opening ourselves to God frees us from many demons.

Lenten Devotional for March 28 2011 John 7:14-36

John 7:14-36

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, 'How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?' Then Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him. 'Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?' The crowd answered, 'You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?' Jesus answered them, 'I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.' Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.' Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the

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

Part of our eternal learning process is always enhanced by asking questions. In these passages there is constant questioning on all sides – the Jews, the authorities, Jesus himself. The Jews marvel at his teaching, but question his credentials. Jesus answers with questions of his own about breaking the Sabbath – the people question if the rulers really know who Jesus is. Jesus reminds the people of who sent him and where he is going. But the people keep asking what does he mean by "you will look for me and not find me", and "where I am going you cannot come"?

Little has changed historically from Jesus' time to the present day in the process of asking questions. We still ask, but often do not perceive any answer, or, if we hear the answers, often they are not the ones we were wishing for, sometimes when ones we hoped we would never hear. We also receive answers of great joy and thanksgiving.

One thing is certain, however – Jesus always points to the God who sent him to be among us, and the God to which he will return. Therein is the true answer. God so loved the world. Amen.

Lenten Devotional for March 29 2011 John 7:37-52

John 7:37-52

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." ' Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?' So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' Then the Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.' Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?' They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'

Ponder again, if you will, those in the scene John presents here and think of their predicaments:

- Jesus - among crowds of people who have gathered around him - He desires to speak to their very hearts, their very souls -- those who believe Jesus to be the Prophet or the Messiah - These are perhaps some who had seen Jesus heal sick, feed many, or had already been changed by his words.
- those who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah - Judeans were not readily believing that a man from Galilee could be great.
- the guards - They were probably simple bystanders sent to arrest a man - unknown to them. Surprised are they to find a person speaking so eloquently.
- the chief priests and Pharisees - confused, angered, threatened by the very words Jesus spoke - How could it be that so many people could "be fooled" by someone not of their status?
- Nicodemus - one of the Jewish authorities - His heart had been open to some of Jesus' teaching, so much so that he had sought Jesus out to ask him more questions.

These people were deciding what to make of this man - a man who was increasingly causing much talk among many. Could he be the Messiah? He has performed miracles... He has touched hearts... He is the man from Nazareth, how could he be anyone great?! He is a man without any Jewish authority; in fact he has insulted us!

And there is Jesus - in the midst of this storm of humanity - beseeching all to believe, to come unto him and receive Life-giving Water. He speaks not with authority of this world, yet he speaks to the very hearts and souls of those whose hearts and souls are open to his truth.

It is sad to think that this very day there are those whose hearts and souls are not open to the offer of Life-giving Water. In truth, there are moments, days, periods during our lives when we find ourselves dehydrated slightly. Circumstances arise that temporarily harden our hearts and souls. But we know and believe that God's presence will be there with plenty of Water whenever needed.

Pray for those who do not know Jesus' love and desire to soften their hearts and souls with his grace and peace. May we be Water-bearers for others, whenever Jesus asks us to be. ~ Amen.

Lenten Devotional for March 30 2011 John 8:12-20

John:4-12-20

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

Previously, Jesus relieves a woman from her sins. Now, Jesus turns to address the crowd. Imagine you are in the crowd and Jesus says he is the light of the world. This is music to your ears, it is a message you have been waiting to hear. In life, the path is not always properly lit; however, when we consult God the light shines on the path so we can see. As we see God working in and through our lives, we feel the light and abundant life that God desires us to have. When good news appears, there is sometimes opposition. The opposition, here, are the Pharisees. The Pharisees claim that Jesus' proclamation or testimony is not valid. In Jesus' time, a testimony

was, only, valid if there was another witness to verify what you said. The Pharisees were basing their assumptions on the status quo of their time.

Jesus seeks to correct the Pharisees' misunderstanding. Knowledge seems to be an important factor for testimony. Jesus says if he was testifying about himself, his testimony is valid because he knows where he is from and where he is going. Having a good understanding of one's self and, at the same time, it is important to know the people around you. In essence, Jesus is saying the Pharisees counterargument is not valid because they do not know Jesus. Another fallacy, for the Pharisees, is their use of human standards. Think back, to the years, when you were in school or sometime at a job where an assignment or project did not satisfy the teacher or boss. Or there may even be the possibility of being too tough on ourselves or others. However, Jesus states he does not pass judgment on anyone. Jesus' statement reflects his last claim with his encounter with the woman, in the previous story, about not condemning. In addition, this statement provides sense of peace and freedom by not being judged.

Then, an important "but" comes into play. Jesus does have the ability to judge and his decisions are true. The reason Jesus' decisions are true is because he is not alone. Jesus displays assurance and confidence that God is always with him. The great news is that we are not alone as well. God is always with us. As mentioned earlier, the way of validation came through having another witness. Jesus, here, seeks to prove his testimony is valid. Jesus' other witness is God the Father. As Jesus mentions God the Father, a fact is added about God the Father being the one who sends. Just as God the Father sends Jesus, God the Father sends us. Since the Pharisees do not know Jesus, they have to ask Jesus where is his father. It is interesting that the Pharisees ask where instead of who. A person's identity was bound to who their father was.

Jesus' comment states the obvious and, then, provides hope. As of now, the Pharisees do not know Jesus or God the Father; however, the "if," in the statement, suggests the possibility of knowing Jesus which leads to knowing God the Father as well. John is nice enough to provide some background information for the context of this encounter. This whole narrative takes place where offerings were put in the temple. Offerings were a means of alleviating sins. And no doubt Jesus knew what he was doing by teaching about judgment in the place where people felt most judged. As with the previous passage, Jesus is offering freedom. Freedom is available to all, my hope is that we may be able to accept and receive this precious gift from God.

This passage has an interesting ending. Jesus would have created uneasiness when teaching about judgment. In addition, the Pharisees may have interpreted Jesus' words as harsh towards them which could create an environment of hostility. The Pharisees would have had plenty of motivation to seize Jesus; however, they could not. John is gracious enough to supply us with the reason the Pharisees could not seize Jesus and it is because the hour had not come. The right timing detail reminds us that God's timing is not always our timing. Only when the timing is right will God allow events to happen. This is not always easy waiting on God when we feel the timing is right. But when the time is right, everything just seems to fall into place and it is, usually, better than we could have asked or imagined. In this Lenten season, may we embrace the freedom that comes from Jesus and shines light on our path. And may we always know and feel God's presence in every circumstance. Finally, may we be able to have the patience to wait for God's timing from this day and forever more. Amen!

Lenten Devotional for March 31 2011 John 8:21-32

John 8:21-32

Again he said to them, 'I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' Then the Jews said, 'Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.' They said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Why do I speak to you at all? I

have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.’ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.’ As he was saying these things, many believed in him. Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’

This little section is tricky, so I looked back to the beginning of Chapter 8 and forward to the end of the Chapter. The Chapter as a whole looks at sin, truth and relationship: Jesus’ relationship to God and our relationship to Jesus. And He gives the Jews, and us, a choice - believe in the One sent by God and receive truth, freedom and salvation...or...die in your sin. Jesus doesn’t beat around the bush, does He?!! His directness relays a sense of urgency.

Sin is real and present and works against everything that is good. We need to see sin clearly for what it is and how it can rule us, eating away at us until it destroys us...there is another way; from the beginning, Jesus has told us that He is the way and is truth itself. Here comes the relationship part - Jesus wants to instruct us and free us, but we have to open our hearts and souls to Him.

Lenten Devotional for April 1 2011 John 8:33-47

John 8:33-47

They answered him, ‘We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, “You will be made free”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.’

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

In this passage, Jesus invites challenge. He declares who He is, and his relationship with the Father, and further identifies who we are and where our relationship should be.

He continues to ask us today: Do you believe in the Father – in me? If you pronounce that you do, then why are you not free of sin?

He invites you to ask questions, and He promises to provide answers to all questions ,if you are willing to follow the answers that He gives us.

From the very beginning God gave us choices – freeing us from any bounds that we might feel in His presence. We are able to choose the life that He prepared for us, or we can reject His plan and form a life-line path of your own delight. Either way, He still loves us. He desires for us to recognize Him for what He is and what He has already given us, and the continual out-pouring of love and guidance provided without a demand for payment.

Children know Him! Children love Him without question! Why does their vision fail so quickly? Why is there a continual craving to return to Him? And yes, why do we hear His words, but fail to listen to the message – Get to know me better, and I've got a place for you in my presence forever.

God sent His Son to lighten the way when we have fallen into darkness and our light has diminished in a smoky haze of our own choices.

The Good News tells us that we can sharpen our focus on the implications of our choices, and how, with a little effort on our part, we may rediscover Him and accept the relationship that He offers. It is important that we look for the Spirit and soul within us to monitor our choices. Then we need to open our mind and heart to the grace of the Father, and of the Son, and welcome the new lasting relationship that is all that He has ever wanted for us.

Lenten Devotional for April 2 2011 John 8:47-59

John 8:47-59

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

Sometimes, even when we are presented with the truth, we don't want to see it – or at least I know there are times I know I don't. This is certainly the case when it is something I don't understand, or when the truth presented to me is something that I wasn't expecting, or doesn't come in the package I thought it would – neatly wrapped and tied with a pretty bow.

In this reading Jesus is questioned by the Jews (by Jews, John is referring to the Pharisees and those who are educated in the scriptures) because He isn't what they were expecting. After all, isn't it simpler to say that there is something wrong with the truth Jesus is presenting. It is easier to say that He has a demon, than to believe that Jesus, who speaks in ways they don't understand, is the Son of God and is the Messiah.

The inability of the people to understand leads to frustration. As with many of us today, when they became

frustrated, they stopped listening. They attempted to catch him in a lie, so they ask about Abraham. Jesus goes back to the Old Testament replying that He was around before Abraham existed. Again, this frustrates and angers the people this time to the breaking point of wanting to stone Jesus for His supposed blasphemy.

What I take from this, and I hope you do too, is that often when we are presented with the truth, it isn't going to be neatly wrapped, and it probably won't even have a bow. Nonetheless, if we are willing to be open to the truth, no matter how much we don't want to hear it, or don't understand it, if we don't fight it – that is where we will find God.

Lenten Devotional for April 3 2011 Mark 8:11-21

Mark 8:11-21

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.' And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.' They said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' Then he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'

St. Mark, Evangelist, himself having been just a young man, when the described incidents took place. He is mentioned at the time of Jesus' betrayal. It was in his mother's home in Jerusalem that Jesus celebrated the first Holy Communion service.

No sooner had Jesus arrived in Galilee than his enemies were resorting to ways of discrediting him before the people. This portion recounts the Pharisees questioning Jesus to produce a miraculous sign, a larger sign than his miracles. He refused because of their lack of faith.

“Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees” using yeast at this point as a symbol of evil.

On a boat trip across the lake the Disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf, for the trip.

Jesus was troubled by the disciples inability to understand the reality of his miracles and admonished them for their concern about food while he was with them. It is almost comical for them to say, “It is because we have no bread.”

“Do you not understand?” And the much quoted passage: “having eyes do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear. How is it that you do not understand.

How often do we hear but do nothing about a situation, and when we see abuse or unkindness to others, do nothing. When there is suffering and hunger do we do more than just see it? Jesus is asking us too, “How is it that you do not understand.?”

Lenten Devotional for April 4 2011 John 6:1-15

John 6: 1 - 15

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

This is probably the only miracle that appears in all four of the Gospels. For John, it is used as a sign of Jesus' divinity.

At the start of this passage, Jesus and His disciples see the approaching crowds and Jesus is aware of their need. He knows how the problem of feeding them will be solved, but He asks His disciples what they would do. For me, this shows what a wise teacher He was. He wanted His disciples to use their own minds in solving problems, He respected their autonomy. He also could see from their answer the depth of their understanding of what He wanted them to learn. I wonder what He thought of the response that they could not feed the approaching crowd because they did not have enough money?

The solution came from an unexpected source. Over and over Jesus taught His disciples that the least was the greatest, the mustard seed was enough faith. A child's willingness to turn everything over to Jesus is what God's Kingdom looks like. The small lunch that a boy's caring mother had packed for him, given to Jesus, became the answer to their problem. God's grace and power can take the smallest gift and make it more than adequate! This miracle revealed a God of infinite love and abundant grace, a God who will more than meet our need, our cup will run over! It also revealed Jesus as God. God fed the Israelites manna in the desert. Jesus is the Bread that sustains us on our journey.

I think His gathering up the leftovers shows His human side, something that He must have learned in Mary's household where nothing went to waste!

Gracious Lord, thank you for the many ways You reveal Your grace and love. We ask for grace to help us give all that we are and have to You. Help us today to be sustained by Your Spirit and share Your love with all we meet. In Jesus Name, Amen

Lenten Devotional for April 5 2011 John 6:16-27

John 6:16-27

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going. The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the lake saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.'

God is to water what Forrest Gump is to shrimp.

God separated water. The Holy Spirit moved over it. Noah was in a rainstorm. Haggai and Ishmael found a well. Rebecca tended animals at a spring. Jacob wrestled an Angel next to a stream. Moses floated in a river, later he parted a Sea, and struck a rock with his staff to bring forth water. Gideon wanted proof in dew. Jonah swam. John baptized. Christ converts it to wine. And now...

JESUS WALKS ON WATER.

In this passage the disciples have set off at night to row across the Sea of Galilee. It is dark, and Jesus is not with them. The wind and waves pick up. Picture-it is dark, the disciples, tired before they left the shore, rowing in rough waters. After going about 3 to 3 ½ miles across the sea, a shape approaches the boat. At first, they might have considered themselves hallucinating. But the shape keeps coming; it is not a shadow of a wave or an aberration of a nearing vessel. Can you smell their fear? The sheer heart-pounding terror that man is coming toward them. A voice is heard...

"It is I: don't be afraid."

The scripture continues- Then they were willing to take him into the boat... Think about it, after they heard the voice they turned the fear into willingness. I pray that when I am afraid, I will hear the voice of God and turn my fear into willingness.

Lenten Devotional for April 6 2011 John 6:27-40

John 6:27-40

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them

bread from heaven to eat.” ’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.’

Every verse in this passage spoke deeply to me however; verse 35 is what really touched me.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”.

This verse has defined two massive realities in my life. One is the object of my hunger and thirst. And the other is the nature of saving faith.

Jesus Is the One We Hunger For

Jesus — Jesus himself and all that God is for me in him — is what I hunger for and thirst for. He has been merciful to me — and to most of you — to reveal himself as the supreme Treasure of our lives. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” That doesn’t mean hunger and thirst in our souls does not rise up every day. It means now we know what it’s for. Now we know where to turn. Now we know what to drink and what to eat. We drink down Jesus. We swallow the glory of Jesus. And there is a never-ending supply. This is what we were made for. All other treasures, all other pleasures point to this. Jesus is the all-satisfying end of every longing.

Saving Faith: Satisfaction in Jesus

And the other thing this verse has shown me is the nature of saving faith. Notice the parallel between coming to Jesus to be satisfied and believing on Jesus. “I am the bread of life. whoever comes to me will never go hungry.” That’s the first statement. We come to Jesus to have our hunger stilled.

Now parallel to that, and repeating the meaning, is the next statement: “And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Coming to Jesus to be satisfied in him and believing on him so as not to thirst are the same. So I define saving faith as being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus.

The Fight of Faith Is the Fight for Joy

This was a huge discovery when I made it. I will never read my Bible the same again. I never think about the obedience that flows from faith the same again. When I saw that saving faith is being satisfied with all that God is for you in Jesus, the “good fight of faith” (as Paul calls it in 1 Timothy 6:12) becomes a fight for joy. And from then on, everything was different for me.

The fight of faith is the fight for joy. And the fight for joy is doing whatever you must to see Jesus for who he is, and savor Jesus above all things.

Lenten Devotional for April 7 2011 John 6:41-51

John 6:41-51

The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven". They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'? Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever: and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Jesus often used parables and metaphors in his teaching to try and convey God's will to his followers. Both are compelling ways to give instruction to others on how they should live. Jesus was a master at drawing the listener in, and making them really ponder God's teaching. Parables are instructive stories like the Good Samaritan that really stick with you and provide a ready example, and metaphors are like puzzles, that you turn over and over in your mind, contemplating what Jesus is trying to convey. It can take a lifetime to truly understand what these central metaphors of the New Testament mean. "I am the Bread of Life", is one of the most important metaphors of the bible. It is central to Christ's teachings. Yet it isn't necessarily easy to comprehend, or accept. This is why the listeners in the passage murmur amongst themselves, and later in John 6, declare that "this is a hard saying, who can listen to it?" Some followers are receptive to Christ's teachings and are drawn to "hear and learn", from the Father. For others, Christ's words are a stumbling block, that ultimately cause some followers to draw back, and reject Christ. Often the 12 disciples remain loyal to Christ but don't completely comprehend what Jesus is trying to teach them. Sometimes he has to spend extra time trying to explain everything to them and they still don't completely comprehend what he is trying to say often until after the resurrection. This has always been comforting to me, that even the disciples don't always completely "get" what Jesus is trying to say. The important thing in this passage seems to be that they try and "hear and learn" what God is trying to say. They stick around and keep listening and trying to be receptive.

So what does I am the Bread of Life mean? I am still turning this metaphor over and over in my mind. A good literary device works on multiple levels simultaneously and is rich with meaning. Certainly Jesus is talking about his own future crucifixion. The passage says that Jesus's flesh is the bread of life. Through his death and sacrifice he removes our sin and reunites us with God the Father. I don't fully understand what eternal life means. Hopefully I will fully get it at some future juncture. But I do understand that Jesus is spiritual food that gives life to the world. I always try and read bible passages in their context reading what comes just before and after the selected verse and just a bit before John 6:41-51 it says "the words I have spoken to you are "bread and life". If we take in Jesus's word, if we feed on the spiritual food which he provides. Our lives will be transformed, and we will live in a powerful, spiritual' meaningful way, not just focusing on sustenance and selfish concerns but living in a full way. I always feel that God redeems us in both this world and the next. We are saved by eating spiritual food, studying the word of God, and Jesus's teaching in particular.

Lenten Devotional for April 8 2011 John 6:52-59

John 6:52-59

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When I was a freshman in college many long years ago, my World History Professor asked us which religion practiced cannibalism. When the answer was given as Christianity, the entire room became very quiet. No lively discussion followed as this was a conservative church sponsored college and most of the students shared a detached view of communion. I was a practicing Methodist then and communion was a quarterly event with grape juice and little pellets for the bread. Not something shared by a community and not something that would send you out into the world to do the most good. The word and the preaching and the singing were the moving moments. So this professor's view to me was about those "catholic" religions and meant nothing to me.

Years later when I married and became an Episcopalian, Communion became an entirely different thing to me. The beauty of the Liturgy and the walking together to the Communion rail made me feel such a part of this Community. It made me hunger to serve my Lord in whatever humble way I could. It made me transformed into a better human being. Sometimes this didn't last long but then you had the opportunity to repeat it again and again. Each week you were given the opportunity to walk forward with your fellow parishioners and the Lord. Each week was a chance for you not just to be renewed but to be strengthened to love and serve the Lord.

John's gospel preceded all the theological arguments of the eating of the flesh and transfiguration. For John, all of Jesus' life, rather than one particular event at the end of his life, "institutes" the sacrament of the Eucharist. Participation in the Eucharist creates a relationship between Jesus and the believer that contains within it the promise of new life. We share in all of Jesus' life and ultimately his death. So our communion is so much more than an isolated event once or twice a week. It gives us a moment each week to be washed by Jesus' grace and love. And if we are really thinking about this "communion" the way John sees it as the entire sharing of Christ's life, than we should be going into the world and sharing that love with others.

Dear Lord, As we read the words of John and prepare ourselves at this time of Lent, may we become aware in our heart of the love of Christ poured out for us at Communion and may we strive in whatever way we can to share that love all week. Amen

Lenten Devotional for April 9 2011 John 6:60-71

John 6:60-71

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him.

And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.' Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.' He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” – John 1:1,14

Jesus, the Word made flesh, had up to this point in his public ministry, amassed quite a following. After all, according to John's gospel, he had healed the sick, changes water into wine, and fed five thousand people with just five loaves and two fishes. Needless to say, he had developed quite a following.

Or had he? In the passage prior to today's, Jesus had taught the assembled crowd, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35). But the crowd doesn't seem to (or perhaps, want to) understand. They challenge Jesus, saying, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’” (John 6:42). Indeed, the more they listen to what Jesus is teaching, the harder they find his words to swallow. Finally, Jesus tells them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.” (John 6:53-54).

This apparently proves to be way too much for many. “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” they say. And with that “many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

Isn't this always the way in most things? Go with the flow, unless perhaps, too much is asked of you, in which case it's easier to simply walk away. Certainly at some point in every faith journey, there are places where we all look up to the heavens and, in our own way say, “this is too hard”. We struggle with the day to day of living the Christian life, let alone those “higher theological ideals” which present themselves in Jesus' teachings.

And yet, it truly is all about faith, isn't it? There is plenty in Jesus' teachings, and certainly in all of scripture, which we could simply dismiss as “too hard”. (Love your enemies? Really?) But fortunately, we also have a road map for faith. The twelve that stayed with Jesus still really had no idea of road they were traveling, or where it would lead. And yet, they all knew – “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

And so it is, the flesh that was the Word, bringing the words of eternal life through his actions in the flesh upon the cross, marking the way for us to eternal life through him.

“Alleluia, Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. Alleluia.” – The Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978

Lenten Devotional for April 10 2011 Mark 8:31-9:1

Mark 8:31- 9:1

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' He

called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Are you kidding me? Jesus, the Messiah of God, the chosen one, will undergo suffering??? will be rejected by those in authority??? be killed? dead?? Peter can't even imagine such a fate falling upon Jesus, let alone the impact a fate like that on Jesus would have upon him (Peter). That's not the way its supposed to be. That's not the way Peter has always envisioned the role of the Messiah. And he simply did not want to believe it. Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus rebukes Peter. It all gets rather messy.

And then there's that famous line 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.' Are you kidding me? Maybe I want to be a follower, but do I really have to take up my cross in order to do that? I have to lose my life to save it?? That doesn't sound like the way its supposed to be - not in my mind, if I'm honest. That's not the way I've envisioned the joy that comes with following Christ. It all gets rather complicated.

I like to think of myself as open to God's mystery, desiring to know ineffable and eternal truths. But to be honest, in the face of texts like this, I am rather uneasy, uncomfortable, and unprepared to live into the truth of God's love amidst suffering, denial, death. As a child of God, a follower of Jesus, is this what I need to do? Are you kidding me?

Lenten Devotional for April 11 2011 John 9:1-17

John 9:1-17

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.' They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

It's easier to be blind at times. When things become difficult, there can be an urge to turn away, to deny the truth of the matter, whatever it may be.

I've had my share of challenges, that's for sure, and they seemed insurmountable. It was hard to acknowledge them, to look at them. Curiously, they also seemed to get worse before they got better. "Mud" was "placed on my eyes"; not only was I "blind", but metaphorically, I was further encumbered by mud. At the time, I didn't understand that the mud was actually part of my healing process.

With time and forbearance, I've been gradually able to "wash away the mud". In doing this, my eyes continue to open, and see the truth of goodness. I found I was developing a stronger sense of character. I feel that I'm finally being able to start giving of myself to others, to give love, and be loved in return. It is good to be healthy and loving, not blind, and angry at the things I'd been dealt. And I know that I've sinned in different ways. My anger made me lash out at others to ease my pain. But I try not to punish myself for this, and I don't believe that this is what God wants us to do. Flagellating myself only makes things worse. Accepting that I have sinned, and forgiving myself, is the way to go.

I've needed courage and faith, and love and support from others, to cleanse my heart and soul. It's a continual process, but it will always be worth it. It might surprise you to hear that I'm grateful for the mud. But without it, I wouldn't be who I am today. And I am very grateful for that.

Lenten Devotional for April 12 2011 John 9:18-41

John 9:18-41

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.*

The reading today is a continuation of the account of Jesus restoring sight to the man who was blind from birth. When questioned by those in authority seeking to discredit Jesus, the man answers, "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

These words, although they are familiar to us from the hymn Amazing Grace, really caught my attention. I began to explore the many forms our “blindness” can take.

How often do I choose to be blind? Is there something I turn away from or refuse to acknowledge, hoping in my blindness that it will cease to exist? Perhaps I should open my eyes and be honest with myself.

Then there are those times when I do not recognize my blindness until there is a clarity of vision. It may come in that “Ah, ah” moment or after much struggle. Either way the results are of opening the eyes to the Spirit.

Also, how do I choose to perceive? Do I see with the eyes of compassion? Is my perception of God? We pray that we may see in a different way, as God or Love sees.

I argue that “blindness” has its place in our spiritual journey. The painter, Paul Gauguin wrote, “I shut my eyes in order to see.” My prayer would be that there are no boundaries between what we see and what we perceive.

Lenten Devotional for April 13 2011 John 10:1-18

John 10:1-18

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

So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.’*

In this passage, Jesus defines who he is by using seven “I am” statements. As I read this passage, I kept going back to verse 9: “I am the gate” and verse 10: “I came so that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” I think about a gate as being a door. Doors open, close, and connect us to another room. An image of the divine Jesus as the gate has a lot of possibilities! It could be a gate that opens us and gives us access to the Good Shepherd. Divine doors open us to the heart of a God of Love who invites us into this large variety store. God closes and turns out the light in one section and, at the same time, shines a light off in the distance. As we go toward the light, God provides Jesus the Good Shepherd of love to protect and guide our journey. As I reflect on these passages which define Jesus, I am so moved: When I look up, I know he’s watching over me in love, when I come to a crossroad and I need a friend, he is there beside me, when I stumble and falter and can’t seem to find the gate, he picks me up and dusts off my knees, he pats me on the shoulder and reminds me that it’s o.k., try again; when the road is a little dim and I see the light off in the distance, he walks before me as a guide to clear and order my footsteps; but I don’t always notice this Christ who died for me. I don’t always notice this Christ who died so that I might have life and a life abundant in him. Did I notice the light of Christ shining

through me and other people today? I close with:

Jesus, remember me,
when you come into your kingdom.
Most gracious and most merciful God,
THANK-YOU. A-men

Lenten Devotional for April 14 2011 John 10:19-42

John 10:19-42

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

The Jews, which most often means, the religious leaders in John's Gospel, were confronting Jesus, demanding to know if he was the Messiah. Jesus' response is basically, I already told you who I am and you don't believe. Jesus makes his declaration more emphatic by saying that the works he does is evidence that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. (i.e. actions speak louder than words.)

The religious leaders pick up rocks to stone Jesus; not for his works but because he said that he was the son of God. Jesus doesn't back down, as his opponents stand with rocks in their hands. Jesus goes on to say, we not only do the same things; we are the same: Father and Son: "He is me and I am in him."

In the middle of this brew-ha-ha about his identity, Jesus makes an astounding claim about our identity. He says that he gives us real and eternal life and that the Evil One cannot ever take that away from us. We are the sheep and he is the shepherd.

I am wondering if I could say to an opponent, look at what I do, look at what I say, can you not tell that I am a follower of Jesus. I am wondering what my words and actions would tell them about me. I am wondering what needs to change so that people can see Jesus in me.

Day by day, dear Lord of thee,

three things I pray
To see thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly,
day by day

Lenten Devotional for April 15 2011 John 11:1-27

John 11:1-27

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'*

Trust and God's Will.

In reading through this passage, I am struck by the themes of trust and God's will. Jesus gets word that Lazarus is ill and he takes time to figure out what God's will is for him. This cannot have been easy for him, for if he left immediately, he could save Lazarus, which would probably have been Jesus' first choice, considering how much he loved him. However, he becomes aware that God is trying to teach a bigger lesson - one of trust in the power of the Lord. Not an easy thing to do when you are facing a loss. I think that God lets Jesus know he has to do something big, something really big. In Jesus' calling, we are told that it is better that he was not there when Lazarus was dying but his work will be more meaningful after Lazarus' death. In other words - God understands that like many children, we are visual learners - and if many of us are to trust in God's greatness - we're going to actually have to see it in action - A picture being worth a thousand words. Some trust unconditionally, but many need to be shown the way. Lazarus is good and dead after 4 days and his 'waking' of Lazarus should be a significant enough event to show what God can do. Martha, our example of one who trusts easily, jumps in and believes in Jesus no matter what - Mary follows the protocol by sitting Shiva (the period of mourning) and waiting for mourners to call on the family - meeting Jesus later - evidently, she needs to be shown too.

When Jesus tells his crew he's got to go back to Judea and visit Mary & Martha and wake Lazarus, they freak out that he could be facing death by stoning if he returns. Jesus talks to them about light and Dark and, ultimately, we can choose to live in fear in the dark, or choose to live in the light and trust in God's plan. To quote a line from *The Shawshank Redemption*, I think Jesus tells them that they can "get busy living or get busy dying." Don't live in fear. Thomas doesn't really seem to trust, though he wants to support Jesus; he is convinced they will all die and, out of loyalty, they should die as a group in solidarity.

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Through all of this story, I think that the underlying message is, though we're all going to die, if we trust in God and live in the light and follow Jesus' example we will truly live for the time that God has given us to do so. We will allow ourselves to feel joy and sadness, embrace and celebrate all that comes at us both good and bad and LIVE for the experience. If we let go of hatred and fear - if we practice forgiveness and compassion - not only will our spirits be uplifted, we will uplift the spirits of others - That is building yourself up and building up others - you are giving life to the spirit. If we do not follow the light and live in darkness, if we don't let go of negativity, and self destructive behaviors if we are paralyzed by fear and sadness - if we destroy souls by acts of hatred, omission, shame, oppression, exploitation and abuse - we will surely die - our spirits are already dead - long before we stop breathing and we will surely obliterate the spirits and lives of others long before their body's stop working as well.

Try and trust in God's will - walk in the light - Do what you can to uplift the spirits of others -attempt to raise those spirits from the dead. This I believe is what we are called to do within this passage.

Lenten Devotional for April 16 2011 John 11:28-44

John 11:28-44

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'

Doubt and despair versus hope and faith. Death and darkness versus life and light. The verses prior to this passage talk about Jesus being the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Him will live. We have a choice, we can choose to believe, or we can choose not to. "If you believe you will see the Glory of God." Here we have Martha who knows Jesus and she still struggles with doubt! In our own lives too, we have the same doubts. How do we put our lives into the hands of God? Martha was fortunate because she had Jesus to talk to in person. We do not have that advantage. We have to rely on faith. A song entitled "In the Palm of Your Hand" ends with the words: "If I trust the one who died for me, who shed his blood to set me free, if I live my life to trust in you, your grace will see me through." God's grace will see us through that doubt and despair, and the death and darkness. But they do not control our lives unless we let them. With our belief and faith in God, we are given the hope of the resurrection and the life so that we can see the light and the life.

The scripture clearly tells us of Jesus' compassion – he wept. He was deeply moved and troubled over the weeping of Martha and her companions. Jesus is human, and the gospel here reminds us of his humanity. He wept. He was moved by their sorrow. And then Jesus, the human with whom we can identify performs the miracle of raising Lazarus four days after his death. Jesus is divine. Jesus is God incarnate. "If you believe you

will see the Glory of God.” Who else could we put our trust in?

Who else would be able to accept our human failings, the stench of our lives, referenced by the rotting of Lazarus for four days? Although Jesus was warned by Martha, he wasn't worried about or perturbed by the potential smell. Instead He thanked God for His help and Lazarus walked out. He welcomed Lazarus back into the world. But Jesus loves us and will be with us no matter what, despite the “smell” of our lives, including our doubt.

Lenten Devotional for April 17 2011 Matt. 21:12-17

Matthew 21:12-17

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, ‘It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you are making it a den of robbers.’ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’, they became angry and said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself”?’ He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Upon first reading this passage, images of church billboards announcing “BINGO EVERY TUESDAY” flashed through my mind. Is it right to play bingo to raise money for the church? Does this text forbid the annual Valentine’s Day Dinner or youth car wash? But this story is not about bingo.

At the beginning of this passage Jesus forcibly stops the desecration of the temple. The temple is not a physical temple sitting in Jerusalem, the temple is us! Jesus’ cleansing of the temple is a prophetic sign of what he wants to do with each of us. He ever seeks to cleanse us of sin and make us living temples of his Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

Then Jesus proceeds to show God’s compassion and mercy in the temple courts by healing the blind and the lame. Here we are learning something of the importance of mercy ministry in the church. That is the church looking out for those who are hurting and needy, who are marginalized, who are lonely, who are in need of help and assistance. Part of this ministry of mercy is really seeing one another, every single one of us, as family!

And finally, in this passage we see Jesus worshiped by outcasts and children, while those who are supposedly pious are outraged and condemn Him. They oppose Him. See, Christ's glory is hidden from the prideful. But it is revealed to the humble. Have I humbled myself before God, trusting in Him alone, and bringing nothing to him in my hands, simply clinging to His cross?

"Lord Jesus, be the King and Ruler of my heart, mind, life, and home. May my life reflect your meekness and humility that you may be honored as the King of glory!"

Lenten Devotional for April 18 2011 John 12:9-19

John 12:9-19

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

branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!' His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'

I can envision the circling groups of Bethany reacting to the news that Jesus was coming to visit. Some groups were elated with the news while others plotted to thwart his support. However, what strikes me most is that Jesus has taken the time for a follow-up visit with his friend, Lazarus.

Jesus, the Divine Healer, could have just raised Lazarus from the dead and dazzled the crowd with his miracle and continued on his journey. Jesus cares enough to continue that relationship with Lazarus and Mary and Martha and you and I.

Perhaps we could look for opportunities this Lent to "follow up" with friends or family members who need some extra attention. Instead of giving up chocolate, let's fulfill the Pharisees comment that we are indeed following Him by taking up his example.

Call someone today who needs to know you care.

Lenten Devotional for April 19 2011 John 12:20-26

John 12:2--26

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

'Sir, we wish to see him - for ourselves'. Philip was given a title of respect, as one worthy of honor because he was in a relationship to Christ. The people wanted this too, they wanted to see Jesus; not only see his face, so that they might be able to say, when they came home, that they'd seen the one that was making all the news (they'd probably done that already – seen him at a distance); NO they wanted to meet him – to talk with him personally and be taught by him.

In all our church practice, in Anglican circles our attention to liturgy and the holy ordinances, saints' days and the church calendar - the great desire of our hearts should be to meet with Jesus and to be in relationship with him;

- to have our knowledge of him increased,
- our dependence on him encouraged,
- our likeness to him developed; to see him as our friend and Lord;
- to enjoy as well as keep up communion with him, and thereby derive grace from him as his Spirit dwells in us.

- Jesus' response to those who seek him is certain, surprising and transformational.

Jesus accepts the honor paid him, and tells them about the honor which he himself will have in being followed and the honor which those will have who follow him. His response was intended for the direction and encouragement of these Greeks, and all others that desired to be acquainted with Jesus.

But he also says things that indicate the cost of all this – he uses a picture of his own death – and our need to let go of our lives for him – to be “reckless” in our love (as the Message says) – not carefully measuring our investment – because its only then that we'll discover the reality of his transforming presence.

Jesus' way is the way of the cross – because it is the cross that expresses most fully the very heart of the Father's love. It's in the dying of the kernel of wheat that the Father and the Son are glorified, that the church is replenished, that the mystical body of Christ is kept together, sustained, and finally completed – and in a place where there'll be no more crying or pain. But to enable all this to happen Jesus suffered. And until we come to believe in the power and the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for ourselves, until we experience the filling of the Spirit as a present and continuous reality, we haven't yet come to 'know' Jesus at all – it's like we've just seen him from afar.

Lenten Devotional for April 20 2011 John 12:27-26

John 12:27-36

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

This passage begins with Jesus saying, “My soul is troubled.” This is not what we expect Jesus to say. He knows what lies ahead. He knows the kind of death he is facing. Is that why He is troubled? I don't think it is that simple.

Because Jesus goes on to ask, “Should I say Father save me from this hour?” What would have happened if Jesus had not died to save the world? How would the world have been different? How would any of us have survived? How would we live? He knows that He has come to die to save the world. He knows what the world might become without his sacrifice.

Jesus says, “Father, glorify your name.” He knows that His sacrifice will bring glory to God. He knows that submitting to God's will is what will bring glory to God. He knows that His sufferings and His sacrifice will bring glory to God.

What does this tell us to do? Maybe we should think about submitting ourselves to God's will. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray “Thy will be done.” Do we really mean that? Do we really want God's will to be done if it causes us some heartbreak? If it doesn't seem like what we would do? If we think we have a better plan?

How often have I prayed “Thy will be done” and then have gone on to try to make something work out the way I want it to. Do I trust God that things will work out in the way they should? Do I submit myself to do what God wants? Or do I keep doing what I want. Can I face doing something that I know will be difficult if I know it is God’s will? Am I like Jesus?

If we pray “Thy will be done” we really ought to mean it and do it.

Lenten Devotional for April 21 2011 John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. ‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

It is the day before Christ will die on the Cross and, fully aware of his fate, Jesus prays to God to glorify him in heaven. Jesus has brought God's glory to earth by representing God to the elected disciples. The disciples have accepted Jesus's words as those of God and they have been given the knowledge of God's glory by Jesus' presence in the world. They pledge to do great works to unify with the church and with one another. Such unification will grant eternal life to those who believe. Jesus also prays that God protect those who believe through the power of God's holy name so that they may be one with God as Christ and God are one.

During this Lenten season, I am drawn to Jesus through the Cross. The need to love God with all our hearts & to love our neighbors as ourselves is so much more pronounced for me. We exist to glorify God and one another. Belief in God gives us life and disbelief gives us death.

Lenten Devotional for April 22 2011 John 13:36-38

John 13:36-38

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

Peter is so eager and ready to follow Jesus, impetuous and rash, full of action. But Jesus knows him fully: if Peter has some time to think, he will second guess himself, and perhaps not do anything. Peter will allow doubt and fear to overcome him.

How often are we like Peter? Sincerely ready to follow Jesus anywhere, but when the opportunity comes, we over think it, and thus lose our momentum. We worry about how our actions will impact on our family, finances, security, well being. We anxiously project all kinds of problems, instead of trusting and forging ahead.

Committing ourselves to following Jesus is not easily done, we simply do not have his strength, but we must try as well as we can. We need to trust, to believe that love can do anything. We need to open ourselves to the complete amazing joy of agape love to understand Jesus' actions on this day. It is only in following his example of giving ourselves fully that we can bring Heaven to Earth.

Lenten Devotional for April 23 2011 Rom. 8:1-11

Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Does the Spirit of the Holy One enter inside each one of us and set us free? Or does the Holy Spirit dwell within, and it is our livelihood to consciously cooperate with that Spirit toward freedom in Christ? How we think about this makes a difference.

The idea that the Spirit of Christ is outside orients the mind toward an assumption that there is something we need to do, or be or live up to in order to be blessed with God's love. The idea that the Spirit of Christ dwells within and is unleashed as our awareness and attentiveness to things spiritual grows, allows for freedom to live in this Spirit for the good of ourselves and others. One's mind-set affects one's spiritual orientation.

"Flesh" or the things of this world are not inherently evil. Rather it is the subversion of those things in order to self-indulge toward accumulation of goods, power, wealth where we get into trouble. Living in the Spirit comes about when we set our minds on opening ourselves to grow in the desire to invite God to enter more and more into our lives.

The Holy Spirit that dwells within you has invited you to read this passage and this reflection. That Spirit already knows your desire to love and serve the Holy One – or you wouldn't have been led here. The Spirit that dwells within is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to you.

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