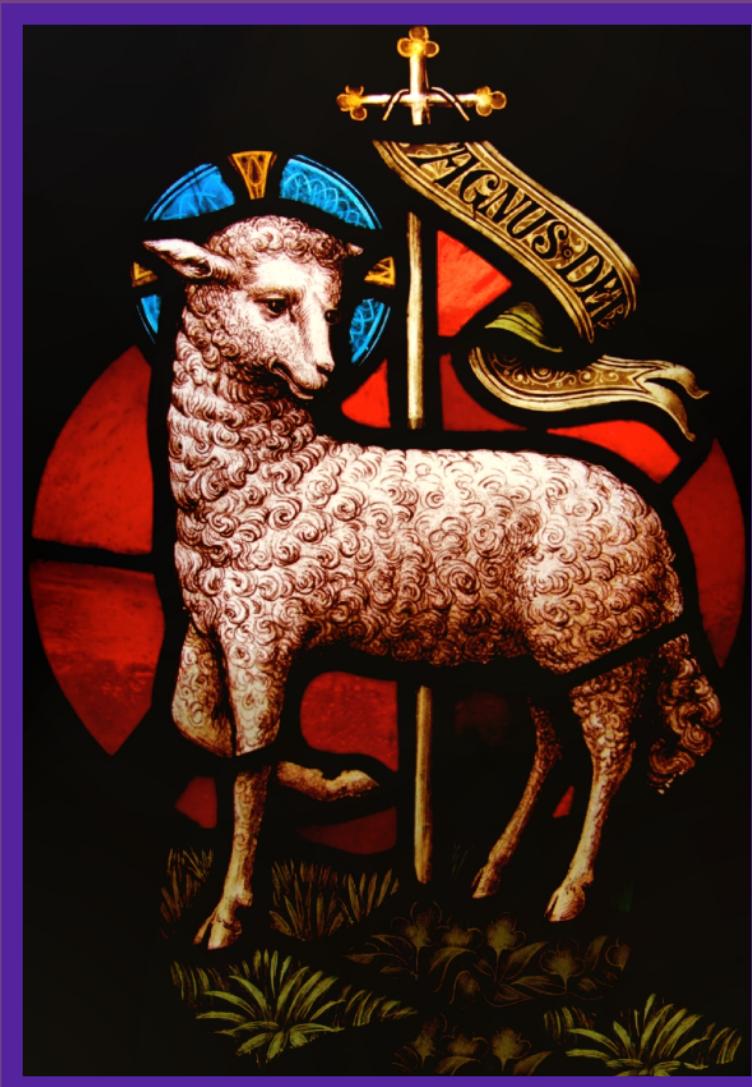


BEHOLD THE LAMB

Lenten reflections from Canadian Anglicans



Edited by Jonathan Turtle

This devotional resource is offered to the glory of God and in thanksgiving for the faithful that call The Anglican Church of Canada home. Deo gratias!

“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”
– Luke 24:45

“The purpose of a book of meditations is to teach you how to think and not to do your thinking for you. Consequently if you pick up such a book and simply read it through, you are wasting your time. As soon as any thought stimulates your mind or your heart you can put the book down because your meditation has begun.”

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

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Introduction

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect for Ash Wednesday, to be prayed daily throughout Lent.

Lent is a pilgrimage into the heart of the Paschal mystery, that is the mystery of Jesus Christ – crucified, dead, and risen. As such, the Cross permeates each and every day of Lent and, thus, each and every page of this devotional.

This resource is designed to be a tool; a guide, but not the goal. It is a beginning, rather than an end. My prayer as you read these meditations is that the Holy Spirit would enlighten your mind, warm your heart, and enliven your soul with the hope of Jesus Christ. A hope that we come to know only in, through, and by the Cross.

Perhaps that sounds counter-intuitive. After all, isn't the Cross a defeat? Isn't it a bit morbid to meditate upon it? "I prefer my cross without a body on it," someone once told me. This is understandable, of course, because the real scandal of a crucifixion is the degradation associated with it. As the inimitable Fleming Rutledge reminds us in *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, a cross proclaimed to the world that this individual hanging upon it is less than human, a beast, unworthy of the dignity we would usually ascribe to a human being.

We prefer an empty Cross because we would rather not see the God we worship in Jesus Christ subjected to such shame. And yet, as the Orthodox theologian John Behr has noted it is just here, on the

Cross, that Jesus shows us what it means to be God, and what it means to be a human being as well.

I wonder if the same sort of discomfort is at work in our tendency to shrink back from the truth that Lent brings to light? That, to quote the Collect for Ash Wednesday, we are sinful and wretched, that “we are not worthy So much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table,” (The Prayer of Humble Access).

And yet we need not shrink back because it is only in the light of our salvation – the light of the Cross – that we come to this knowledge in the first place. It is only as we behold the fullness of God in Christ that we are able even to begin to recognize our own lack at all. That is why the Collect begins and ends with God, “who hateth nothing that [He] hast made.”

In light of God’s loving mercy and kindness we are free to know ourselves as sinners, and to know the joy of God’s forgiveness.

So it is our Lenten pilgrimage begins with an invitation, the very first words of Jesus in this devotional: “Follow me.” And it will conclude on Easter morning with the very last words of Jesus in this devotional: “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.”

Let us heed his invitation and journey with Jesus to the Cross. For it is there, at the Cross, that our eyes are opened to discover who God is, and who we are as well. It is on the Cross that Jesus comes to us as “the living one.” It is on the Cross that he tramples down death and dances upon the gates of Hades. Let us journey with Jesus to the Cross, and we will find that it has become for us the way of life.

“Follow me. Do not be afraid. I am alive.”

Finally, an enormous thank-you to those who contributed to this devotional – all 46 of you! Together you represent the breadth of our church – young and old, lay and ordained, from the Maritimes to the Arctic and everywhere in-between. Thank you.

Ad gloriam Dei!

The Rev. Jonathan Turtle

Wednesday, March 2

Mark 2:13-22

The Rev. Dr. Daniel F. Graves
Trinity Anglican Church, Aurora
The Diocese of Toronto

Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’

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.’

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The sixteenth century Anglican divine Richard Hooker speaks about the gifts of Repentance (Laws VI.5.5), amongst these is the “recovery of the soul of man from deadly sickness,” which elaborates “as the restitution of glorious light to his darkened mind, a comfortable reconciliation with God, a spiritual nativity, a rising from the dead, a dayspring from out of the depth of obscurity, a redemption from more than Egyptian thralldom, a grinding of the old Adam even into dust and powder, a deliverance out the prisons of hell, a full restoration of the seat of grace and throne of glory, a triumph over sin, and a saving victory.”

How deeply we are in need of all these things, and how blessed we are to have a Lord who is passionately invested in our healing and restoration. Who are we? We are the tax collectors. We are the sinners. We are the sick in body, mind, and spirit. As we sit in our “tax booths” or lie in our “hospital beds,” he comes to us with healing in his wings and beckons, “follow thou me!” And what is required of us? Simply this, “I need you, Lord.” Each and every one of us is beautifully made and precious in the sight of our creator, but we must never forget that we are creatures, and creatures have flaws, experience sickness, walk in darkness, and fall into despair. Yet, God’s love is so great that he has pitched his tent amongst us and made his home amongst mortals – the sick and the broken, the fearful and despondent. Wherever we find ourselves, he comes to us and invites us to his glorious banquet with gifts of healing and restoration. In ourselves, we are unable to help ourselves, and yet, our helplessness is no obstacle to him. His earthly nativity becomes our spiritual nativity, his glorious resurrection becomes our resurrection – the resurrection of our bodies and also of our flagging hope. He grinds our brokenness into dust and powder and as we turn to him again, we are raised by grace to glory.

We have great need of a physician, but thankfully the great physician has come to us. Perhaps this Lent, our devotion will be to become willing and receptive patients, open to his healing love that we might find such healing grace and, in turn, become inspired to participate in the healing of the nations.

Thursday, March 3

Matthew 24:29-end

Michael Bonikowsky, Poet
The Diocese of Toronto

'Immediately after the suffering of those days
the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from heaven,

and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and

would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that wicked slave says to himself, “My master is delayed”, and he begins to beat his fellow-slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

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Be ready,

Though you have grown old with waiting.

Be ready,

Though the winter is so long.

Be ready,

Though you groan with the earth in expectation
Of his touch upon our face again.

Stay awake,

Though you are full of weariness

Stay awake,

Though night has stretched for years.

Stay awake

Though you have never yet been able
To watch until the dawn with him.

He is coming

Though the distance seems so far

He is coming

Though the fig tree's not yet tender

He is coming

So let us be found ready and awake,

The tools of our labour warm in our hands.

Friday, March 4

Matthew 25:1-30

The Rev. Jesse Parker
St. John the Evangelist, Port Hope
The Diocese of Toronto

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made

five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

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For many of us, the Parable of the Talents is one of the most perplexing of Jesus’ teachings. The master seems cruel and capricious with his declaration, “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” This sounds like something Gordon Gekko would say right after intoning, “Greed is *good*.” In a world where it often seems that the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer, what does this parable have to tell us about the kingdom of heaven?

A helpful commentary points out that “talent,” in the sense that that word is used here, has nothing at all to do with how we normally use the word to describe an individual’s giftedness or skill. Instead, the talents of the parable are measures of weight (of *substantial* weight), and they betoken the most substantial thing of all in the biblical imagination, which is the love and mercy of God.

Read the parable again with that in mind. This is not a story about best practices for maximizing your stock portfolio, not really about money at all. Instead, it is about the gift of God's mercy, the substantial, weighty, superabundant gift of God's merciful love and what we do with that gift.

God's mercy is always a free gift, always grace. And we who, in Christ, have received "grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16), we who have received the weighty gift of God's merciful love, are called to share it, to spend it, to give it away, to invest it in the world around us. In so doing we will find that the gift of God's merciful love grows in us, doubles and redoubles again and again.

We must never think of God's merciful love as something to be kept to ourselves, hidden away, buried out of sight. If we do that, we will lose it. The very nature of the grace we receive is that it is to be shared, spent, given away, invested in the world around.

For God's wonderful grace is the one thing, the only thing, that actually *increases* the more we give it away.

Saturday, March 5

Matthew 25:31-end

The Rt. Rev. William Cliff
Bishop of Brandon
The Diocese of Brandon

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these

will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

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I have sat through some terrible preaching on the sheep and the goats. For some there is an irresistible desire to hedge and assume that Jesus would never separate us out, one from the other. I was raised in a different denomination that saw correct belief as the only manner of being saved. However, this parable was about being received into the kingdom because of the good works of mercy that had been accomplished in life: "I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink, naked and you clothed me, sick and imprisoned and you visited me." It could be confusing.

All my life I had been warned that just being a 'good person' wasn't enough, but faith and accepting Jesus as my Saviour was the only way to salvation. Nothing I did in the list above would make me right with God. Preachers would agonize over this text on the one hand because it implied that our care for the poor, sick, hungry, naked and imprisoned mattered with regard to salvation. On the other hand, preachers later in my life were undone by the thought of any judgement at all. They could not fathom that God's inclusive love could end on the left hand of God.

Jesus is only days away from his betrayal trial and death. This is his last public teaching; given in the precincts of the temple. The contemporary desire to make Jesus more loveable or at the least more pliable to our sensibilities is a terrible temptation, but look again.

Both the sheep and goats are surprised by the judgement. The goats clothe themselves in injured ignorance when the Son of Man indicts them for the unrelieved hunger, thirst, want and loneliness they had observed and to which they did not respond. The sheep will also wonder at when it was they saw the Son of Man in any of these disguises. The goats are condemned because they saw suffering but did not see Jesus. The sheep saw suffering, and didn't see to whom they were responding.

We are meant to see Jesus in those suffering around us. We must not turn away. In the parable though neither group saw Jesus, the sheep saw the hunger, thirst, want, and loneliness as demanding compassion even if they did not perceive that they were doing it for Christ. We have an advantage over the both of these groups at the end of time,

because we have faith to see Jesus. Look for Christ in the suffering around you and reach out in compassion.

Sunday, March 6

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

The Ven. Dr. Pilar Gateman
Archdeacon of Calgary
The Diocese of Calgary

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

'You are my Son,
 today I have begotten you';
as he says also in another place,
'You are a priest for ever,
 according to the order of Melchizedek.'

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the

source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

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There is a kind of intermediary role spoken of here in Christ. The kind of role which many leaders have whether they be in a secular or church leadership role. The writer of Hebrews spends a lot of time explaining and urging us to understand Jesus and his fulfillment of a promise God has made. Israel is promised a “great high priest” to serve in this intermediary role in perpetuity. Here he is in Jesus, says the writer of Hebrews. The regular priesthood, of course could only do this to a certain extent. Previous priests could only do this as mere humans. Jesus does this perfectly.

We see Jesus pictured as truly and totally for us. He can represent us because he is truly and fully a human being who remembers what it is to be tired, frustrated, limited in his humanity. As Jesus meets us after his resurrection, in his divinity, it is not in some patronizing way. He can truly sympathize. As he sits at the right hand of God, he speaks on our behalf because he knows us - intimately.

When we pray. When we reach out to God. We are not praying to some out of touch God who does not understand us. A God who somehow does not appreciate or understand us. We can confidently approach the throne of grace because we have not had to do it ourselves. God himself, in Jesus, builds a bridge that we might cross with confidence.

We are freed from our own brokenness and whatever barriers that creates for an intimate relationship with Love. Much like the Old Testament view of the priest who was meant to be a bridge between the people and God. Unlike the human versions of priests then, or now, Jesus culminates this idea and yet is so far beyond any before him.

It is a pretty astonishing claim. A God who crosses the divide for us and becomes the way across to relationship with him. No other faith claims this kind of outrageous love. No other faith can claim a God who is with us, who is for us, and seeks our fullness.

Do we dare to lean in with all the weight of our faith and hope in this Jesus?

Do we trust him that much? With our hope, our grief, our fear, our very lives?

What does it look like for us to spend time this season of Lent giving up our self-aggrandizing or self-effacing images? What does it look like for us to spend time instead looking at the face of the one who stands in our place? What does it look like to look this God-man in the eyes? The One who knew us in our mother's womb. The One who is beyond any of our own thoughts or plans. This Jesus, who shows us who we can fully be and invites us into a fuller life than we can ask or imagine. Do you dare?

Monday, March 7

Matthew 26:1-30

The Rev. Molly Finlay
St. John the Baptist, Norway
The Diocese of Toronto

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.’

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, ‘Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.’

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, ‘Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.’ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover

at your house with my disciples.”’ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’ Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

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What a waste! If you’re like me, that’s how this latest January lockdown felt. Like a complete waste – a waste of time, a waste of energy, and wasted opportunities as many of our parishes were forced to close their doors at Christmas. After two years of pandemic, it’s easy to feel like the grumpy disciples who are partying with Jesus at Simon’s place (which sure sounds like fun to our party-starved pandemic selves!). When they see an unnamed woman (in John’s Gospel she is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus) pour expensive perfume on Jesus’ head, they get as rattled as a bunch of churchwardens facing a deficit budget. “Why this waste?” they complain. And if we are honest, we can complain like this too. But has all of this been a waste? Was it a waste when this beloved soul sacrificed her life savings to show Jesus how much she loved him? Of course not – because as Jesus himself points out: “Truly, I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” And that is true of the sacrifices we have all made in the last two years as we have faithfully proclaimed the Gospel – the Good News of the transformational

love of Jesus to our wounded world. It wasn't a waste when we brainstormed how to move a 2000-year-old institution onto Zoom and figured out how to livestream our services. It wasn't a waste when we opened up more community meal programs and food pantries to feed those who were down and out in the pandemic. It wasn't a waste when we invited folks who hadn't been to church in ages to try an online Alpha course. None of it is wasted. Sure, we got tired of preaching to a camera and a bunch of empty pews in the lockdown months. But many of our people found their faith again in this pandemic – we took it to heart that *we* are the church – not the building. Matthew's account of the anointing at Bethany is smack in between two grim developments as the Gospel's wheels grind towards Calvary. On one hand, the chief priests conspire to kill Jesus and on the other side of the anointing pericope, Judas agrees to betray Jesus. Just so: between all our various sins and proclivities to evil, there is the dazzling image of an unnamed woman who gives it all in humility for the one she knows is the Messiah. We too are capable of such holy sacrifice, a kind of dim human-sized reflection of the beautiful exchange that is made for us on Easter morning. After all, just look at our beloved communities – the Body of Christ, still standing after all we've been through. There's no way you can call that a waste.

Tuesday, March 8

Matthew 26:31-56

The Rev. Pamela Rayment
St. Clement's Anglican Church
The Diocese of Toronto

Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,
“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”’

But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.’ Peter said to him, ‘Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And so said all the disciples.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again he went away for the second time and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.’ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into

the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

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When my grandmother entered hospice care we rallied. My mom, aunt, sister, cousins. Day or night, Gran was never alone. Sometimes we would sit quietly. Other times we would tell stories of years gone by – like the time the kids wrapped her up in toilet paper at the family reunion or the way she would save string from the sack of potatoes. We'd listen to Gran's favourite music and when she felt up to it, the kitchen staff would make her whatever she wanted to eat.

There were also the times we cried. As we gently moistened her dried out lips with a damp sponge. As we listened to her breathing change while she drifted in and out of sleep. Those days she often spoke in French, her first language, rather than English. As I sat on the edge of her bed, she would pull me close and whisper, "Tu prie." You pray. As I prayed the Lord's Prayer, she would close her eyes and move her lips, praying with me as best she could. I don't think it quite occurred to any of us at the time that what we were doing those few weeks was keeping vigil.

Then Jesus said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here; and stay awake with me.” Did it occur to Peter, James and John that they were being invited to keep vigil?

Jesus was palliative. His death imminent. Only he wasn’t bed ridden. He was eating and drinking with his friends. Teaching them and washing their feet. Here at Gethsemane, while visibly troubled, he is walking, talking, praying. Jesus had told his friends in different ways that his death was coming, but this didn’t look like death.

Still, Jesus is praying for his life. And his friends fall asleep.

At Gethsemane, Jesus is asking his closest friends to keep vigil. To journey with him to his death. As Jesus prays in agony to the Father, he is also asking his friends to stay awake and pray, yet in their sleepy haze they struggle to comprehend the gravity of what is to come.

As we journey through Lent, we are being invited to keep vigil as those who know what is to come. Might we recognize this vigil in worship? Where we take time to sit quietly, recount the stories of Jesus in the retelling of Scripture, listen to music and sing, share in the breaking of bread and pray. Might this be precisely where we rally and together stay awake; awake in the agony, awake in the ache of death and awake in the unexpected beauty of sacrifice? May it be so.

Wednesday, March 9

Matthew 26:57-end

The Rev. Mark Regis
St. Mary and St. Martha's
The Diocese of Toronto

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you,

From now on you will see the Son of Man

seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?' They answered, 'He deserves death.' Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, 'Prophesy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?'

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.' When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of

Nazareth.' Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.' Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man?' At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

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The trial of Jesus is heartbreaking, and Matthew takes us through step after painful step. Jesus is deserted by his closest friends, misrepresented by his enemies, unjustifiably put on oath by the high priest, accused of blasphemy and sentenced without due process, and finally ridiculed and humiliated by onlookers. At every turn, Jesus Christ, the Lord of All endured what we would rather not imagine, let alone face, all on the cusp of a tortuous death. Jesus had done no wrong,

There was a second trial that night, unofficial and also highly irregular in nature, where an accusation was made at night, with two witnesses giving testimony, an oath given, and a response by the accused. In this case however, Peter, the Rock on which Jesus would build his Church, used his oath to deny that which his Lord had just upheld. In the grip of fear, Peter forgot himself and turned away from the one he so recently proclaimed he could not possibly deny: "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will..."

With the memory of that true conviction far beyond recall, Peter sank even deeper by drawing down curses upon himself, doubling down on his denial with a distorted emotional and psychological force, recklessly committed to his own deception.

Oh what we will do to save our own skin, our sense of personal dignity, to save our right to ourselves. We will pay any cost – even giving over that which is priceless, conceiving myths and committing ourselves to them. Lord, help us.

The Lord did help Peter. Jesus told Peter earlier that he would deny him and a rooster would confirm it. Jesus did not foretell this moment to wag an omniscient finger at Peter, or make him retroactively guilty. Jesus did it because he loved Peter, in order to bring Peter back to himself.

“Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

We go to great lengths in life to avoid the bitter tears of Peter, employing our myths of self-justification and denial to escape the hard edge of our sin. But Jesus’s love is vast beyond measure, he sees every corner of our being, every wisp of thought, every intention of the heart, and has transformative mercy on our miserable estate – calling us back to him and ourselves over and again.

The gospel writers all included the denial of Peter. It is easy to imagine that Peter worked diligently to ensure that the tearful gateway of his own conversion to the grace and joy of Christ would be spread far and wide to encourage us to trust Jesus with all that we are; to return to Jesus, the saviour of our souls.

[Peter said,] “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.”

Thursday, March 10

Matthew 27:1-26

The Rev. Lo Cook
Senior Student, Wycliffe College
The Diocese of Toronto

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’ Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.’ After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.’

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus said, ‘You say so.’ But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?’ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they

had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.’ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ And they said, ‘Barabbas.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ All of them said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ Then he asked, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let him be crucified!’

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

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Every year in Lent we read through this passage, as Jesus has been betrayed and is now handed over to the Cross that we know awaits him. We read about how the crowd wants Jesus dead so badly that they are willing to send him to his death and accept the freedom of Barabbas.

It’s a sobering thought! To read the words, “crucify him!” being shouted by the crowd and to know that we too are guilty of shouting right along with them. But what stands out in this passage is Pilate. Pilate asked the people what they wanted, and they insisted that he crucify Jesus. He knew Jesus was innocent and there was nothing he could do to change the minds of the crowd and he was much more concerned about a riot breaking out. Pilate, knowing Jesus was innocent, washed his hands of the drama unfolding before him. Then he released the criminal Barabbas, “and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.”

I can picture Pilate washing his hands, announcing this, and leaving, proving that he was done with it. In his mind he’d washed his hands clean. I can’t help but wonder at the significance of this. Pilate knew

Jesus was innocent and yet still sent Jesus to his execution. Why? We know Jesus was sent to the cross for our sins, but Pilate didn't know that. Pilate knew that politically, in his position, he had to appease the crowd. Knowing Jesus was innocent Pilate gave a verdict on Jesus that best benefitted him.

I wonder, what verdict we make of Jesus? Do we find him the way he was portrayed in the crowd? Do we think he is a liar, a fraud, a lunatic, a criminal? Have we judged him for not answering that prayer like we wanted, or not giving us that promotion that we earned, or for not stopping yet another lockdown? Or have we looked at who Jesus truly is? That He is the Son of God who died on a cross for our sins, to bring us to right relationship with the Father.

Even in the midst of our trials, our frustrations, and our humanity let us remember that Jesus was innocent and still accepted His death on the cross for our sins. This lent let's remember the actions of Jesus and what He's done before we make a verdict. Never forgetting how much Jesus loves us, enough to die on a cross for our sins.

Friday, March 11

Matthew 27:27-56

The Very Rev. Chris Dow
Rector of St. Jude's Cathedral and Dean of the Arctic
The Diocese of the Arctic

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

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Of the last seven words of Jesus from the cross, his anguished cry of dereliction is the most haunting.

These are the first words of Psalm 22, but it's not the first time the Psalm is quoted in this scene. Earlier, the chief priests, along with the scribes and elders, mock Jesus with the scorn of Psalm 22:8, unwittingly becoming the ravening and roaring lions, dogs, and wild oxen of the psalm. (In much the same way do we act like these beasts when we deride each other).

The words of Psalm 22 jump off the page, as it were, and become flesh at the foot of the cross. Upon his throne, the Son of David bleeds the words of Scripture penned by his ancestor. The soldiers strip Jesus naked, divide his garments and cast lots for his clothing (Ps. 22:18), as David himself apparently experienced in his own persecutions. What David merely felt, Jesus experiences in full: he is laid *in the dust of death* (Ps. 22:15).

But the second half of the Psalm builds to the hope and celebration of resurrection (Ps. 22:19-31); and already in Matthew's gloomy account of Good Friday do we see the dawn of Easter.

Jesus does not merely breath his last (as in the NRSV), but literally, *yields up his spirit* (Matt. 27:50). Here, just as the prophets foretold, God's Spirit is poured out upon all flesh from on high to make the wilderness a fertile field (Joel 2:28; Isa. 32:15). The tombs of the saints are opened, and the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel's vision come to life (Ezek. 37; Matt. 27:51-53). Seeing all of this, the Roman centurion and his soldiers confess Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 27:54), the firstfruits of the Psalm's hope that *all the families of the nations shall worship before the LORD* (Ps. 22:27).

During this season of Lent, may we recommit to the Anglican discipline of praying the Psalter. As we pray the prayer book of the crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus, we are united as his body. *In the midst of our dispersed assembly* his voice will speak through us to praise the living God (Ps. 22:22; Heb. 2:12).

O Lord and Saviour, stripped naked upon the Cross, yet robed eternally in holiness and light: Take from us the torn rags of our divisions, sins and self-righteousness; and clothe us with the garment of praise in Zion; where you live and reign in the glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Saturday, March 12

Matthew 27:27-56

The Rev. Chris Roth
St. Leonard-on-the-Hill, Red Deer
The Diocese of Calgary

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

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It seems a bit strange to be reflecting on the resurrection during Lent. That is, however, our place in God's divine drama. We are in Lent, reflecting as post-resurrection people. So, I would like to consider what Jesus says to those post-resurrection disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel.

To those worshipping and doubting disciples Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20).

As the philosopher Dallas Willard reflected on this Great Commission he wondered if we have not sufficiently emphasized the words "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." We have great works of systematic theology that seek to make rational sense of our faith. It is needed and important work. But, have we given the same kind of effort to helping people deal with their anger (Matt 5:21-26)? Do our catechism classes include dealing

with adultery of the heart (Matt 5:27-30) with a similar amount of teaching as we give to helping them understand the atonement?

In theology, we don't presume to think that telling people to believe in the Trinity is enough. We explain it and prove it from Scripture, tradition, and reason (as much as that is possible). Yet, we often expect that we can tell people to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:44) without a similar kind of explanation regarding *how* we can do this. As a consequence, we try to force ourselves to follow the command by sheer willpower, and we usually fail, and then put aside the command as too idealistic, or condemn ourselves for being unable to live up to it.

What would it be like to spend six weeks considering how to deal with our anger? Not as a mere law to be obeyed, but as wisdom for living in the kingdom of God. What if we considered dealing with our anger as something we can learn more about, and practice, and get better at? Not as "works righteousness" that earns us anything, rather as a part of what it means to fix our gaze on Christ in faith.

Sunday, March 13

Hebrews 10:19-end

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Boldt
Adjunct Professor of Theology
Tyndale University

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

For if we wilfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy ‘on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of

your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet

‘in a very little while,

the one who is coming will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one will live by faith.

My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.’
But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.

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Jesus did not enter the earthly temple to make his sacrifice, but he entered the heavenly temple. That is the temple that served as a "pattern" for Moses' construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Inside were a number of holy objects like the showbread, menorah, and so forth. These all lay within the "holy place" where the priests did their daily duties. Yet behind a heavy curtain embroidered with cherubim lay the ark of the covenant – the very "footstool" of God, above which were two golden cherubim whose wings ("he rides upon the wings of the winds") were the very throne. Yet here in the "holy of holies" the priest could only come once a year on the day of atonement after a long and elaborate ritual.

To understand the curtain properly one should remember that the earthly tabernacle with its three courts (the outer, the holy place, the most holy place) mapped out the cosmos. Descending from the most holy place, which represented heaven, the holy place represented earth, and the outer court the realm of the grave under the earth. On this cosmic map the curtain separating off the most holy place corresponded, on the one hand, to the "firmament" God made on day two of creation, and which separated heaven from earth. It is this solid blue firmament Moses climbs through on Sinai to see God. Likewise, it is here – the true most holy place – where Jesus goes when the curtain of his flesh is torn.

Mapped out in the architecture of the tabernacle, the realm of heaven is obviously not on earth. And yet, through the torn flesh of Jesus we have peered into heaven. For, heaven is nothing other than the very being of God, from which the Son of God descended at the Annunciation, and to which he ascends again when he is lifted high

on the cross. On this wooden axis he joins earth to heaven, and he draws all people to himself so that, by faith, we can be worthy to enter the most holy place with him. This is that for which the writer to the Hebrews encourages his readers to persevere. Here is the only gate to heaven. It is as narrow as a nail hole but as widely known as the sun in the sky.

Monday, March 14

John 1:1-28

The Rev. Dr. Walter Hannam
St. Bartholomew's, Regent Park
The Diocese of Toronto

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said,

‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
“Make straight the way of the Lord”’,
as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, ‘Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.’ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

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The opening sentences of this morning’s lesson conjure a host of scriptural resonances. The first phrase, “In the beginning,” echoes the opening words of Genesis: “In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). In both places, these words – in the beginning – lift the human mind to that which both grounds and transcends it. We can neither experience nor conceive the universe’s beginning, for such an absolute beginning has neither ‘where’ nor ‘when’, no broader context within which our consciousness might locate it so as to render it concretely intelligible. The ‘Beginning’ of creation can be no beginning in the sense that we have ever experienced a beginning, for there is no temporal or spatial ‘before’ out of which it can be said to come forth. This Beginning is nothing other than that moment in which creation and its Cause as it were ‘touch’. That is to say, it is nothing other than the eternal creative Act undergirding the successive moments of time, space, history, and, most importantly, human thought and striving.

But how can the mind conceive itself as coming to be? This would either be to attempt to conceive of itself without its cause, in which case it would not (yet) be to be able to think at all; or to conceive of its cause without the existence of any human mind to think it.

Thankfully the Scriptures do not leave us here. Unable to locate us before either their own beginning or that of the cosmos, they move forward, and, in moving forward, they speak in words and images that our thought can grasp: “God said, ‘Let there be light! And the light came to be” (Genesis 1:3).

God creates by speaking. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Psalm 33:6), says the Psalmist, echoing this verse of Genesis. “Thou hast made all things in thy word” (Wisdom 9:1), a sage will later cry. It is this Word, our lesson tells us, that was “in the beginning with God” (1:3) – in that Beginning into which our thought cannot penetrate. And it is this same Word that in Jesus of Nazareth “was made flesh and dwelt amongst” (1:14) the members of our human race. The One who from eternity lay hidden “in the bosom (*en kolpōi*) of the Father” (1:18) has himself come to “declare” the common Life of Father and Son that is our eternal Beginning. By drawing close to Jesus at his Supper, and there leaning “upon his breast” (cf. Jn 13:23) to hear him speak the words of his love, we discover, as if for the first time, the Beginning that is also our End and the fulfilment of all that we can ask or think (cf. Eph 3:20).

Tuesday, March 15

John 1:29-end

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Stephen Andrews
Principal, Wycliffe College
The Diocese of Toronto

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.’

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).

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.’

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Lamb of God? Lambs are docile creatures. Figures in children’s rhymes. What could possibly have entered John’s mind when he chose this image as a description of the young rabbi coming towards him at the River Jordan?

The figure of the lamb is, in fact, a biblically rich one.

To begin with, the Spirit’s descent on Jesus at his baptism (John 1:32) would have resonated with Isaiah’s announcement of the arrival of God’s Messiah: ‘I have put my spirit upon my servant’ (Isaiah 42:1). A few chapters later we are told that this servant would be ‘brought as a lamb to the slaughter’ (Isaiah 53:7, 11). To call Jesus the Lamb of God is thus to identify him as God’s obedient servant foretold by Isaiah.

Secondly, in calling Jesus the Lamb of God, John is identifying him as a sacrificial victim. He says so explicitly: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). Here Jesus is being related to the ritual sacrifice of Israel. From the story of the Passover in Exodus, where lamb’s blood on the lintels and doorposts meant deliverance for the Hebrew people, to the elaborate regulations laid down in Leviticus, the lamb plays a central role in the rituals of redemption. To call Jesus the Lamb of God is thus to identify him as sacrificial saviour.

Finally, in John's day there was an expectation that, at the end of time, God's Messiah would appear to rescue God's people from the forces of wickedness. These forces were often described as frightening beasts, and it is not hard to identify them as political powers bent on destroying Israel. But liberation, says the Seer in the Revelation, would come by a lamb, whose power is demonstrated not only in strength (seven horns and seven eyes, 5.6), but in the purchase of all people by his blood (5.9).

To call Jesus the Lamb of God, then, is to affirm that he is God's obedient servant, sacrificial saviour, and sovereign ruler over time and history. The image of the lamb retains its docility, but in Christ we must not underestimate its potency. In a statement describing 'Christ alone without sin', the Articles of Religion say that Jesus 'came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of himself once made, should take away the sins of the world' (XV). It is this Lamb to whom we pray in the *Gloria*, 'O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us'. It is this Lamb who can lead us to a great and holy Lent.

Wednesday, March 16

John 2

The Rev. Aidan Armstrong
St. George's, London
The Diocese of Huron

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Now standing there were six stone water-jars 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 chief steward.’ So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.’ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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

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?' Jesus 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.

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.

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John chapter two contains two of the most famous stories of scripture, stories and images that are used by the most faithful followers of Jesus and by those of good humour who make jokes about water turning into wine and Jesus flipping over tables. The thing that binds these two groups of people together is that Christ will go to the cross for them both.

The first, and perhaps most well known of the two stories is Jesus turning water into wine. We are told in the story that this is the first sign that Jesus does in his ministry and that these signs point to who he is. In this sign we are shown that Jesus is the one who can take the ordinary and turn it into something extraordinary. The water turns to wine, the sinner is redeemed, life defeats death. This is the mission of Christ, this is what the cross is about!

The second story is that of Jesus cleansing the temple. Jesus drives out those who would make his Father's house a marketplace. In this section of John chapter two our Lord is explicit about who he is and what he has come to do. He is the true temple, God incarnate on earth that will be torn down and raised up three days later. The language of sign is used once again. In the Wedding at Cana we see Jesus' first sign and in the temple he is talking about the ultimate sign where he will be lifted high upon the cross out of love for the world.

During this season of Lent we are clearing out our hearts, minds and souls and laying the sin, darkness, grief and pain at the foot of the cross. We are clearing out our hearts, minds and souls to make room for something new; new life in Christ. Death itself will be defeated on the cross and in its place the new life of Christ will be offered to us all, and it is life in abundance.

The stories of John two, mirror for us Christian life and the great act of salvation that our Lord will accomplish for us on Easter. We are to spend this season of Lent letting the Lord clear out our bodily temples – heart, mind and soul – so that on Easter through his work on the cross we can be filled with his abundant new life.

Thursday, March 17

John 3:1-21

The Rev. Jonathan Turtle
The Parish of Craighurst & Midhurst
The Diocese of Toronto

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, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘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.’

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Yesterday, today, and tomorrow Jesus comes to offer us life. And not just any old life but *eternal* life: “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.” But what is eternal life, exactly?

If you’re like me you’ve probably begun to imagine life after death. Eternal life, we suppose, is a bit like this life but it goes on and on indefinitely after we die. In heaven, we hope! In other words, we tend to think of eternal life *quantitatively*.

That’s not necessarily wrong but there’s more. In fact, later on in John’s Gospel Jesus tells us what eternal life is. “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” (17:3). Eternal life, says Jesus, is a relationship. It is coming to know the One who is the source and satisfaction of our deepest desire. It is coming to know the God who is our Father.

To know this God personally, and to come to know who we are in relation to him, that’s what eternal life is all about. In other words, we might say that the life Jesus offers us is *qualitative*, not just quantitative. It means that something can happen in *this* life to make us truly new creatures.

This “something” Jesus calls “being born from above” or “born again,”¹ apart from which “no one can enter the kingdom of God.” This happens – and can only happen, for it is a work of grace – when one is “born of water and Spirit,” says Jesus. Simply put to be “born of water and Spirit” is to be baptized.

John the Baptizer was sent to prepare the way for the One who would “baptize you with *the Holy Spirit* and fire,” (Matthew 3:11). In Acts Saint Peter urges the crowd to repent and be baptized “so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of *the Holy Spirit*,” (2:38). Within the Anglican tradition we affirm that our new birth as children of God is accomplished by *the Holy Spirit* who also signs and seals us,² and we pray for the catechumen that God “will grant to this Child that which by nature he cannot have; that he may be baptized with Water and *the Holy Spirit*, and received into Christ’s holy Church, and be made a living member of the same.”³

Let me cut to the chase. Eternal life is not something that you must simply wait around for but is rather a gift that you have been given already when you were baptized and received the Holy Spirit.

And now here is the challenge that I leave you with. Do not forget the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic theologian Mary Healy says that to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to come alive to the grace received in sacramental baptism. To come alive to grace.

In other words, the Holy Spirit was not a one time gift but is rather like an unlimited and infinite resource on which you can draw each and every day. He is the very life and love of God, now poured into your heart. Learn to rely on him, every single day, and watch what happens. This is eternal life.

¹ The Greek phrase that the New Revised Standard Version translates “born from above” can also be translated “born again.” This is, for example, the way the King James Version, the English Standard Version, and the New International Version all translate it. Being “born again” isn’t just for *those* Christians. Rather, “born again” names an essential component of what it means to be a Christian at all.

² The Articles of Religion, Article XXVII. *Of Baptism*: In baptism “the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed.”

³ From the opening prayer of The Ministration of Holy Baptism to Children (The Book of Common Prayer, 523)

Friday, March 18

John 3:22-end

The Rev. Dr. Stephen McClatchie SMMS
Professor of Theology, Huron College
The Diocese of Huron

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.

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In a homily read on the Third Sunday of Advent in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, St. Augustine states that “John is the voice, but the Lord is the Word.” Today’s reading places an emphasis on hearing. In the midst of a dispute, John appeals to the witness of his own disciples; that is, to what they have *heard* John say: that he is not the Christ, only a voice in the wilderness sent to sound His coming. John’s response echoes Jesus’ own words elsewhere when a similar rivalry is being stirred up between disciple factions: “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they?” (Mark 2:19).

Jesus the Bridegroom and the mystical marriage of Christ and His Body, the Church, are themes that resound in scripture. And the bride is none other than His people, Israel, joined to Him in faith: “I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD” (Hosea 2:2). John takes up this imagery and calls himself the *friend* of the bridegroom. He shifts from being a servant, unworthy to untie the Lord’s sandal, to a friend, acting out of love and jealous for the groom’s interests and not his own. “Those who are friends of the truth,” St. Thomas Aquinas writes, “should act in the same way, not turning the bride entrusted to their care to their own advantage and glory, but treating her honourably for the honour and glory of the groom; otherwise they would not be friends of the groom but adulterers” (*Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* C.3, L.5, §519). As we debate the hot-button issues in the Church (ineluctably shaped as we are by our own theological, sacramental, and ecclesiological convictions), we may well be rightly jealous but for whom? Are our interventions made only with the interest of the bridal couple, Christ and his Church, in mind? Or sometimes are they more about other interests, other voices, and other words?

“The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice.” From a voice, John now becomes an ear. He hears and obeys and, in hearing, understands that the groom is united to the bride by Faith, because “faith comes from what is heard” (Romans 10:17a). And believing the one who speaks is the very definition of Faith. It is not an act of reason but a Revelation by and of the Word; something *given from heaven*.

John rejoices at the bridegroom’s voice and this voice is also the Word. Without the Word, a voice is just meaningless, phatic dithering that “strikes the ear, but does not build up the heart” (Augustine). When we speak in and as the Church, does our own voice always bear the Word with it? Even in the simplest things our own words are

often inadequate, incapable of conveying the fullness of what we have in our minds and in our hearts. Only in Christ is this linguistic wound healed; only in Him is the gap between thought and language, sound and sense, perfectly united “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” In Jesus the Christ “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Like John, I hear and rejoice at the voice that is the very Word of the Truth that “now we only see in a mirror, dimly.” And acting in faith, hope, and love, if I believe and trust in this Word, I know that in the end “I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The sound of a voice brings the meaning of the word to your heart and then fades away. But it remains in your heart, just as it remains in the heart of the one whence it came. The word grows, the sound diminishes, like John. “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Let it root in your heart and let his glory increase in you – for the more you know Him and understand, through prayer and study, the more He seems to grow in you. Like John, may we always rejoice in the bridegroom’s voice. St. John Baptist, pray for us.

Saturday, March 19

John 4:1-26

The Rt. Rev. Jenny Andison
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The Diocese of Toronto

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. God 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.'

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Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once famously said "There is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." While that may be true, our reading today puts Jesus, and us vicariously, right in the heart of someone's bedroom. It is an intensely personal encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, but is not a story about morality, or the lack of it. Like the Samaritan woman, we are all "born thirsty" and only living water will ever satisfy.

A new baby is given immediately to its mother to drink, and we can only survive three days without water. Not only do we have a built-in thirst for food, drink, clothing, and shelter, we also thirst for security, purpose, meaning, and love. Unless we are thirsting after destructive things there is no shame in these desires and longings. Learning how to follow Jesus is not about eliminating our desires, but rather, we should pay careful attention to them, to the thirst under the thirst. C.S Lewis wrote "If I discover within myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." The Samaritan woman was learning the hard way that no earthly relationship, no sparkling career, no beautifully mannered children, no marathons completed, or pillows fluffed just so, were going to do it. The desires remained, her thirst was unquenched, and she kept on looking.

Jesus knew that the thirst under the thirst, for the Samaritan woman and for us, is to live a life of worship. Worship is acknowledging that there is someone or something else which is greater – worth more – than us, to be obeyed and adored. True worship, according to Jesus, is

not about externals (which mountain do I worship on?) but is an orientation of the heart, which itself is a gift to be received. The living water that Jesus offers us is the gift of the Spirit poured into our hearts, quenching our deepest desires and longings with God's love and mercy. This frees us up to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this life, knowing that greater beauty in the world to come awaits us. This frees us up to be in relationships that don't have to meet our every need, knowing that our identity rests in Jesus Christ.

Lent is spring cleaning for the soul. As part of that spring cleaning, take an inventory of your desires, your "thirsts." What is the thirst under that thirst? Ask, in prayer, the Spirit of the Living God to quench it.

"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty."

Sunday, March 20

Hebrews 12:18-end

The Rev. Canon Giuseppe Gagliano
St. Francis Regional Ministry
The Diocese of Quebec

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’ This phrase ‘Yet once more’ indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

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Today's climactic passage from the letter to the Hebrews contrasts God's revelation to Israel on Sinai with God's revelation to all creation in Jesus Christ. In all the dramatic differences between Sinai and Zion, there is one thing that remains constant and unshakable as the universe is sifted: "our God is a consuming fire."

This phrase is borrowed from elsewhere in the Scriptures. Moses asserted to the people of Israel, "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God" (Deut 4:24). (The New Jewish Publication Society translation wonderfully uses the word "impassioned" in place of the usual "jealous.") It astounds me that ancient people, so careful not to associate the LORD with physical imagery, could make such a blunt statement about who God is. It sounds overtly blasphemous to say, "The LORD your God is a rock" or "a fish" or "a golden calf." Somehow, fire comes so close to who God is that even the most idol-wary critic can embrace this natural metaphor.

Fire is rife with seeming contradictory symbolism. It is light, heat, and comfort, but also pain, destruction, and purification. Fire is a sign of promethean ingenuity and a final apocalypse. With all these symbols wrapped in a single package, it is no wonder that the author of Hebrews maintains this ancient designation for an ineffable God. Fire calls to mind a burning passion, which is itself paradoxical: passion is both an overwhelming love and, from its Latin root (*passio*), sacrificial suffering. This whirlwind of imagery shows us that the fiery, impassioned God is one who loves us beyond our imagination and suffers for us in Christ, who sustains us by his warmth and purifies us in our souls.

The Lenten journey is, in some ways, a fiery one. Lent begins with ashes, but ashes begin with fire. As we progress through this period of fasting and self-reflection, we participate more deeply in the life of the impassioned God. By seeking God with intentionality, we hope that the superfluous parts of us burn off, while the core and unshakable nature remains. And our Lenten journey even ends with a paschal fire, an ultimate sign that God's passion burns bright—that the victory of love is revealed through sacrificial suffering. This flame will not cease until the tinder of the universe is consumed by the love of resurrection.

While it is also fitting for Pentecost—another fiery occasion—the hymn, "Come down, O love divine" could be a prayer for our Lenten

journey. The second verse speaks of the fire of the Holy Spirit consuming the Christian, transforming misguided passion, and enlightening the mind:

O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illumining.

We traverse this Lenten path from fire to fire, ever seeking the impassioned God. The Consuming Fire will light our path until the end, when all of creation is consumed by love. Only this Fire, who engulfs all things, is worthy of our reverence and awe.

Monday, March 21

John 4:27-end

Cormac Culkeen

Youth and Family Pastor, All Saints', Peterborough
The Diocese of Toronto

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.” I 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.’

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.

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"How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!"

Do you remember the hour when you first believed the Good News? Some of you surely will not – and rightly so! Lots of Christians raised in the familiar teachings and traditions of the church cannot recall a time that they did not believe in the loving reality of our Saviour, Jesus. Belief in God is something that comes to some of us easily, in a context of love and familiarity. God is always with us, and many Christians have always held that truth in their hearts.

Still more of us have the experience of believing as children, then having an experience of doubt or disillusionment. Maybe you have experienced a period of wandering in your spiritual journey – even a period of profound unbelief. For those of us in the church who have experienced deserts of disbelief in our walk with God, belief doesn't come to us once – but many times during our unfolding relationship with the Divine.

Me? I'm a convert to Christianity. It took me a while to self-identify as a convert because I grew up in a culturally Christian home. We had

a Christmas tree in December and brightly painted eggs at Easter.
How could I be a convert?

When I was fifteen, I heard a passionate sermon at a Youth Ministry event. I had gone to the event for the free pizza – and I left with the sensation of “a heart strangely warmed.” Days later, I called the preacher from the service. We met at a local drop-in centre, and I described my curiosity about Jesus. After a long talk, the preacher asked if I would like to surrender my life to Christ. That’s how he phrased it: “surrender my life”! I surprised myself with how quickly I said yes. I believed.

I *remember* the hour I first believed: I felt shaky, small, and beloved. I felt hopeful in a way that I didn’t have words for. I felt awkward and unsure and elated. I wanted to tell everyone what had happened. I wasn’t sure what exactly *had* happened. But I knew it was *good*.

Today as we reflect on this scripture passage about the newfound faith of the Samaritan people – I wonder, who told you about Jesus? Who, like the Samaritan woman at the well, had to tell you about their encounter with the Christ?

What experiences in your life have sparked or renewed your faith? When Jesus heals the official’s son, it is a sign that causes the official’s family to believe that Jesus really is the Messiah. What causes you to believe in God’s love and goodness today?

God is present in every hour of our little lives. God perseveres through our experiences of doubt, despair, and disbelief. That grace appears just as precious to us now as it did during our first hour of belief, even in this hour that we have spent reading and meditating during today’s Lenten devotion.

God is real. God is with us. God is good. Thanks be to God.

Tuesday, March 22

John 5:1-23

Major The Rev. Canon Don Aitchison
Trinity College School, Chaplain
The Diocese of Toronto

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.

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.

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If St John the Evangelist had been born in our century I like to think that he would have been a screenplay writer. The episodes that appear in the Gospel of John remind me of a script, complete with set design, stage directions and dialogue. When we read John, we become directors; mentally building the set, casting the characters and indicating how we want the lines to be delivered.

Too often though, the mini-film that runs in my imagination is not based on a close reading of the script itself, but is a loose adaptation that cobbles together images and assumptions collected over the years from other sources and sermons I have taken in.

The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda is one of those stories that bear closer reading. John describes the people who gather at the pool as including “the weak/ill, the blind, the limping, and the withered.” The person Jesus approaches is described simply as weak or sick, and yet, likely as a result of the Christian comic books I was given in Sunday School, I have this bias that he is paralyzed. This could also be partly because when Jesus heals him, he tells him to rise and walk about, which suggests that his illness prevented him from walking. The script doesn’t say that, however, and the man himself tells Jesus that he is able to move, just not quickly enough to get into the pool first and obtain the healing on offer.

At any rate, I think it is a distraction to focus too much on the nature of this person’s physical limitations. Clearly he has bigger problems. John suggests that Jesus has seen this man in this place before on previous trips to Jerusalem and the narrator’s voice confirms that he

has been hanging out by the pool for 38 years, alone. As he tells Jesus, “I have no one to help me into the pool.” This strikes me as truly tragic and makes me wonder if his illness was in fact more spiritual than physical. If he was so isolated that he had no friends or family to help him out, perhaps he was suffering more from a broken heart than a broken body?

Maybe that is why Jesus asks him if he is actually interested in being made well, or restored – first to health and secondly to everyday life. Physically healing seems to have been only half of his problem. By taking interest in the man and encouraging him to ‘rise up’ and walk, Jesus becomes the one he had been waiting for, someone who cared enough to help.

Later, while defending himself, Jesus says that he only does what he sees the Father doing and that the Father makes the dead to ‘rise up and walk’, restoring them to the land of the living.

Through these last two years of COVID, many have observed that we are also living through an epidemic of loneliness. Just as Jesus emulated his Father, may we emulate him in reaching out to the lost and the lonely and offer Christ’s restoring love to those who have no one to help them into the pool.

Wednesday, March 23

John 5:24-end

The Rev. Dr. David Curry
Christ Church, Windsor, NS
The Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

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.

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his

form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

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John does not give an account of the Transfiguration of Christ nor of the questions which precede that account in the other gospels where Jesus asks “who do men say that I am?” and “what do you say?” “Thou art the Christ the son of the living God,” Peter replies. As Jesus says, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” In John’s Gospel, this passage from chapter five is about what Christ says about himself. It is entirely about who he is as Son of God and as the Son of Man. What he says about himself, as the philosopher Michel Henry notes, is that he is the foundation of all life and thought.

The Prologue of John’s Gospel read at Christmas is itself a summary of John’s Gospel. This passage illustrates what is meant by saying that “In him was life and the life was the light of men.” Aquinas wisely notes that “in all living things whose generation occurs in time, it is always possible to find something that at some time or other was not living. But in the Son, whatever is, is life itself.” We have no foundation of life in ourselves; that is the prerogative of God whose life is all sufficient and all-complete. Here Christ bears witness to himself as the Son of God *and* the Son of Man.

The commentary tradition reveals the logic of what will become the Chalcedonian definition about the relation of the divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ. Here Christ bears witness to himself and to what that means for our humanity; the transformation of our souls through the Word and the resurrection of our bodies through

the Word made flesh. Both belong to the unity of God and man in the person of Christ. It is what Christ teaches about himself. This goes beyond what we say about Christ or even what Christ says about us. It grounds both of those considerations in what Christ reveals about himself in and through the witness of the Scriptures. We have the hope of our transformation through the Word and Son of the Father in whom is all life and light, all grace and glory.

Thursday, March 24

John 6:1-21

The Rev. Heather Liddell
St. Peter's Anglican Church, Westmount
The Diocese of Edmonton

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.

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.

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Jesus tells us not to be afraid; in the midst of uncertainty and overwhelm, in the face of scarcity and poverty and civil unrest and oppression. Surrounded by excitement, advancement, and change, Jesus tells us not to be afraid.

When we enter into the Gospel reading for today, we find ourselves in the thick of the action of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He has made a name for himself, healing on the Sabbath and breaking all kinds of rules. Paralyzed people are walking, blind people can see, and folks are eating their fill where there was no food to be had.

Every word in this passage shows us that Jesus is God. Jesus is the God who created everything. The God who is wholly other than everything and anything that we can think of or imagine. He is that God. The God. The God of Moses. The One who led His people out of Egypt. The One who provided manna from heaven. Jesus is that same God, and every word of this passage not only tells us that, but it reminds us that we can trust that God.

Yet, *we* are still afraid.

Alongside his earliest followers, we struggle to trust Jesus when He tells us that we are safe with Him.

Yet we are, ultimately, safe.

Jesus walks on water in a storm. At His direction five barley loaves and two fish feed a vast crowd with twelve baskets left over. People try to seize Him and make Him king, but He disappears. These are the big guns. This is Christ’s divinity right out and in the open. To us reading in 2022 that might seem pretty obvious. But this passage of John echoes with the last line of John 5, the passage immediately preceding it, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

And I wonder if we are honest with ourselves if our hearts echo with those words as well.

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

Why is it so hard to trust in God's abundance?

Why are we still so afraid?

Why, when we are shown that the God who flung the stars into orbit is also the sort of God that takes the time to feed a rag-tag crowd, are we not comforted? Why are we not dancing and laughing and breaking bread with our neighbours? (Other than it being a Thursday in Lent.) God fed a whole crowd of people who just didn't get it, of people who wanted God to be something God wasn't and isn't and cannot be. If God fed them, then surely God will provide for us too, and that is good news.

"It is I; [said Jesus] do not be afraid."

Do not be afraid in the storm, in the crowd, in sickness, isolation, or confusion. Do not be afraid in times of prosperity and change. Do not be afraid simply because God is with you. Not because you are strong. Not because you are prepared or clever or privileged. Not because you are materially or socially or ethically or intellectually above the challenges of others. Do not be afraid because you are with God.

Friday, March 25

John 6:22-40

The Rev. Don Beyers
St. Anne's Anglican Church
The Diocese of Toronto

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.' 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.'

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Once, while serving as a high school religion teacher, I had a profound encounter with one of my students. For reasons I do not recall, I became rather animated during class and related my own encounter with Jesus Christ. It was an unusual occasion as I rarely spoke so candidly about my faith with my students.

Shortly after, the bell rang and the students proceeded to leave, except for one. To my surprise, I looked over and saw this young man sitting in his desk with tears streaming down his face. Now the student was not one I expected to be caught up in so much emotion. He was what some teachers considered a troublemaker and he relished in breaking all the rules. Yet there he was, sitting in the middle of my classroom, full of emotion. I walked over, sat down, and asked him what had happened. With a seriousness I had rarely ever seen before, the young man looked up at me and said: "I want what you have; I want to see Jesus." I was dumbfounded. I further asked him what he meant and he lamented that he had never heard or seen God. My heart ached as I listened.

I couldn't help but think of that student as I read this gospel passage. Like the young man, the people are desperate for Jesus. They barrage Jesus with questions: When did you come here? What must we do? What sign are you going to give? Their longing for Jesus is heartfelt. But why? Jesus challenges the crowds and asks them "What really brings you here?"

The same question can be asked of us. Why do we seek Jesus? Is it for a sign, for a moment's comfort, or do we long to let go of ourselves and truly trust in him? Although my student's desire was genuine, I sensed his seeking was much like that of the crowd surrounding Jesus. He wanted something tangible to hold onto, a definite answer here and now. But it's not seeing Jesus that relieves us

of that tension, but believing in him. You can see Jesus but still not believe. Rather, Jesus invites the crowd – and us – to not simply come to him for signs and wonders, but to relinquish all our desires and entrust ourselves to him. We will only experience life if we entirely depend upon Jesus for our sustenance.

Of course, that is easier said than done. It's difficult for us to let go of those things that assure and comfort us. Yet that is why penitential times such as Lent are so helpful for us as we make our journey to the cross and resurrection. Seasons such as these force us to ask ourselves what prevents us from totally and completely depending upon Jesus for life and to ask him for the grace that will enable us to come to him.

Saturday, March 26

John 6:41-end

The Rt. Rev. Bruce Myers OGS
Bishop of Quebec
The Diocese of Quebec

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, “I have come down from heaven”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 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 the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’

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 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.

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Ever since Jesus first instructed his followers to "do this in remembrance of me," Christians have sought to understand what exactly "this" is. Immediately after Jesus tells his hearers that he is "the living bread" which he invites them to eat, we're told "a fierce dispute" broke out about what he meant. It's a dispute that's ongoing.

Is this ritual meal a sacrament or an ordinance? How is Christ present, or is it strictly a memorial? One loaf and one cup or tiny pieces of bread and small individual cups? Wine or grape juice? Presided over by only the ordained or by the laity also? How often? Only for the baptized or for anyone who desires to receive? And the latest, pandemic-inspired eucharistic controversy: can communion be celebrated in its fullness over Zoom?

We even diverge in what we call it. Anglicans have become accustomed to speak of the Eucharist, reclaiming an ancient church word for thanksgiving, for that is a significant part of what this meal is about: thanking God. The *Book of Common Prayer* favours the language of Holy Communion, words that point to relationship,

which is the kind of language Jesus uses in today's gospel: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

In the Eucharist we are invited to enter into holy communion, not only with Christ, but with the fullness of the Holy Trinity, a kind of mystical participation in the life of our triune God. The dynamic relationship among the persons of the Trinity is sometimes described as a kind of never-ending divine dance, in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit perpetually make room not only for one another, but also for us.

The Eucharist also invites us to enter into holy communion with one another. Jesus stresses that the bread he offers is "for the life of the world," not to feed theological disputation. We eat at the Lord's table not primarily for our own edification or comfort or to sate our own appetites. It's no coincidence that in the Eucharistic liturgy, there's not very much in between the act of receiving communion and being dismissed. We are fed, and then almost immediately sent – sent into the world to feed others, to be bread for others, to become the body we have consumed.

Sunday, March 27

Hebrews 13:1-21

The Rev. Captain Melissa Frankland
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Steinbach
Armed Forces Chaplain
Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?"

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise

to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you.

Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things. I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon.

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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“Laetare, Jerusalem!”

Rejoice! O Jerusalem for your salvation is at hand!

Now I don't know about you, but I needed to hear these encouraging words today. In fact every day, because being a follower of our Lord can be joyfully challenging!

But why is it so challenging? Because Christianity is counter cultural. The way of the Lord, and the way of the cross, is counter cultural not culturally cutting edge. By reflecting on Hebrews 13, we truly see that we are called to this counter cultural ministry to be salt and light to a hurting, lost, confused world.

The counter cultural way of the cross is a journey that, first and foremost involves the whole Christian family, of which we become members at baptism. The way of the cross, as Jesus shows us, is to love all our Christian family with brotherly love – even those who disagree with us, and those who prove to be most difficult.

“Cancelling” them is not an option! Loving them is the way of the cross! We show this love by serving, and showing hospitality.

The way of the cross calls us to honour biblical marriages. All of us, regardless of our marital status, are called to support and pray for husbands and wives as they stay faithful to their marriage vows – those working hard to love one another, for richer or poorer, in

sickness and in health. And especially now, more than ever, are we to pray for them, because our secular society is continually redefining the biblical institution of marriage. Today, Christian couples have a real opportunity to show our culture the blessings of a faithful lifelong marriage between one man and one woman. It's a real opportunity to be salt and light in our mixed up world.

The way of the cross also calls on us to put our whole trust not in money, but in our Heavenly Father. Live a life of blessedness. Know, and believe, that you are loved and forgiven by God, and that only he gives you purpose. We are worth more than our material possessions.

Finally, in all things, let us write Hebrews 13 on our hearts. May we glorify God by loving our Christian brothers and sisters, honouring biblical marriage, and placing all our trust in our Heavenly Father. By all these things, we are displaying his goodness to the world.

Monday, March 28

John 7:1-24

The Rev. Dr. Dane Neufeld
St. James Anglican Church
The Diocese of Calgary

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.

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.'

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Jesus' brothers offer him some advice on how to promote his image and gain the fame that he was apparently seeking. Jesus, they suggest, should head to the festival of booths in Judea because "no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret" (John 7:3). I would have found this interchange to be deeply embarrassing, because well, yes, I would like to be widely known, no, I am not prepared to organize my life in accordingly, or at least to be seen to be acting in that way. Many of us are like the hapless folks the brothers refer to: secretly desiring acknowledgment but too proud or afraid to seek in openly.

Jesus refuses his brother's provocation and hesitates, though he does eventually go to the festival in secret. This secrecy conveys the distance between Jesus and his brothers: it is not that his time for fame has not yet come, it is that his ministry will inevitably collide with the society he was not yet called to confront. "The world cannot hate you but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). While there is still a kind of glory to be attained in speaking truth to power, as it were, Jesus' words would lead to an intense form of isolation and suffering. He did nothing to impress his friends, or to gain influence among desired circles. He did everything in obedience to his Father: "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" (John 7:18).

There is a great deal that is false in us, and Lent is a time to pay special attention to the layers of deception and pretense that cloud our minds and muddle our actions. But it is also a time to desire what is true, or at least to pray for that desire, that our lives might reflect in

some way the simplicity and integrity with which Jesus lived. Jesus calls us to not “judge by appearances” but with “right judgment” that comes from a heart that is no longer concerned for its own glory. In a world that is often consumed with vanity and self-promotion, the more we learn to live this way individually and communally, the more difficult it will be to remain in secret.

Tuesday, March 29

John 7:25-end

The Rev. Canon Dr. Timothy G. Connor
Adjunct Lecturer in Theology, Huron College
The Diocese of Huron

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”?’

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.’

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At the climax of Lent stands an invitation into the immersive embrace of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ in the waters of baptism. To plunge beneath those saving waters is to be identified by the power of the Holy Spirit with the incarnate Word in his death-resurrection and return to the bosom of the Father. The seventh chapter of John’s Gospel builds to a climax in the invitation and offer of Jesus to all who are thirsty to come to him and drink. Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Logos, is himself the wellspring of the water of life.

After an initial delay, John tells us, Jesus comes up to Jerusalem to the Feast of Booths and teaches in the temple. In the face of honest questioning about his identity, dubious speculation about his mission, and violent rejection by the powers that be, Jesus reveals himself plainly: “the one who sent me is true...I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” To account for Jesus’ identity, the ultimate origin and the truth of his words and actions, is to look to the Father who sent him. “I am from him.”

On the last and great day of the Festival, Jesus cries 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.” Jesus identifies himself as the source, the wellspring, of the water of life. His cry is thrilling, daring, outrageous especially to pious ears; it should stop us in our tracks. The witness of the Scriptures of Israel is consistently clear: it is the living God alone who is the wellspring of the water of life. Yet Jesus identifies himself as the source of that water of life. And John, anticipating the end of his narrative, deepens the mystery by identifying the water Jesus gives as the Holy Spirit gushing up in exuberant abundance in the very heart of the believer. Not simply a drink which quenches thirst permanently (4:14) but rivers of water, the abundant life of God overflowing to excess in the heart of anyone who receives, trusts, and follows him.

Jesus’ invitation stands today. He makes his gracious offer to us all this Lent. Come to him and freely drink. Let him fill you to overflowing with his Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life! Let him draw you into the bosom of the Father. Come, plunge into the unfathomable, triune Mystery of Love.

Wednesday, March 30

John 8:1-30

The Rev. Canon Anne Privett
St. Andrew's Kelowna
The Diocese of Kootenay

Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’]]

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.

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.

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The story of the woman caught in adultery (or the men caught in hypocrisy, as some have named it) was not found in the earliest manuscripts of John's Gospel. The passage doesn't fit: in style it sounds more like Luke and it doesn't quite carry narrative congruency with the text around it. Scholars have no doubt this is a story of an encounter with Jesus, it just doesn't really belong in John.

But here it is. Here she is. And here is Jesus.

Many have speculated about what Jesus wrote in the dust that day. Rowan Williams offers this:

"[Jesus] hesitates. He does not draw a line, fix an interpretation, tell the woman who she is and what her fate should be. He allows a moment, a longish moment, in which people are given time to see

themselves differently precisely because he refuses to make the sense they want. When he lifts his head, there is both judgement and release.”⁴

Judgement and release. Here we are.

Lent invites us to pause in the dust, the dust of Ash Wednesday, the dust of our mortality and sin, the dust in which Jesus writes, so that we might receive the truth and time to see our selves differently, to see all of humanity in the light of God’s tremendous love. A love so fierce and so holy that there is no separation between judgement and mercy. We are judged by Love for love. We are released by Love for love. God’s love and mercy refuse to make the sense we want: the Light has come into the world and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:5).

The remainder of our passage unwinds the inability to comprehend who Jesus is and it is “only when you have lifted up the Son of Man,” Jesus says, “that you will realize that I am he” (8:28). It will take seeing Christ crucified, seeing God’s self-giving love on tortured display, for the truth that set both the woman and men free to start making sense. It takes our Lenten journeys to the cross, year in and year out, to begin to understand how true almighty is known in vulnerability, true power in solidarity and mercy. Christ came into the world not to condemn the world but to save it.

May you hear the word your heart most needs: ‘put down the stone’, ‘neither do I condemn you’, ‘I am the Light of the Word’, the silence in between. Jesus is writing in dust and there we shall find the “light of life” (John 8:12).

⁴ *Writing in the Dust*. USA: Eerdman’s Publishing Co., 2002. Page 78.

Thursday, March 31

John 8:31-end

The Rev. Ian Wissler
Parish of Chester
The Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

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.’ 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.'

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.

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In this moment of history, antisemitism is giving rise to violence and hatred. We have seen with alarming frequency incidents in which antisemitism continues to be a wide-spread malignancy, even in the 2020s. As a direct descendant of Eastern European Jewish refugees to North America, I see all of this, and then I read the words of our lesson today, and my initial thoughts are complicated ones. And that is as it should be. We struggle, which motivates us to dig deeper.

This is in keeping with our prayer, offered at the start of our Church Year, in which we asked that we might "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's holy word. And, even a most basic, but mindful, reading of these words gives us not room for hate, but the good news of life and truth.

After all, in terms of this particular passage, Jesus is not addressing "the Jews" as a whole people. There are two different groups of Jewish people who whom Jesus is speaking. There are those referred to in verse 30, who believe in Jesus because of his words, and those spoken of in our first verse, who, hearing Jesus' words no longer will

follow him – “the Jews who *had* believed in him.” These have heard Jesus’s words, and while they had been following him, they now find offence. Their rejection of Jesus is so complete, that they are eventually driven to attempt to murder him.

They have turned their backs on the Word made flesh. By this they reject the one through whom all things came into being, in favour of death. They reject truth in favour of lies. They reject God with us, and so become subsumed in sin.

But those who have heard Jesus and believe him, who follow as disciples, who keep his word, “will never see death.” These disciples now follow the truth, literally. Following the Word made flesh, they follow life.

We know Jesus is the truth and this truth, embodied, leads us to life. We sin during this life but in the course of this Lent we are consciously asking the Lord for the grace to amend our lives, according to the truth revealed in Jesus. By this we reveal that we are not slaves to sin, but ones who will share the place of the Son in the household of his heavenly Father.

Friday, April 1

John 9

The Rev. Dr. Judy Paulsen
Professor of Evangelism, Wycliffe College
The Diocese of Toronto

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His 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.'

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.'

If preachers and teachers of the Bible are searching for a passage to teach their churches about mission they strike gold in this chapter, for is it one of the richest in all of Scripture.

First and foremost, it reveals the unrelenting missional heart of God, as Jesus brings healing and wholeness into a life full of pain.

Secondly, it reveals that conversion is often a process, as one man gradually comes to know Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. And finally, it reveals a clear indictment of religious people who prioritize other things over the transforming power of God breaking into peoples' lives. They claim to be the People of God, yet their indifference to an amazing act of transformation is stunning.

The key character in the narrative is someone with a dire need. We meet him first as a blind beggar, completely dependent on others, trapped since birth in a handicap that limits every aspect of his life. But then he has an astonishing encounter with Jesus. At this point the man sees Jesus as someone with power to heal, but he knows little else. However, his understanding grows as he begins to tell others, including the religious insiders, what has happened to him. By this point he sees Jesus as a prophet and himself as a disciple. Finally, at the story's climax, we see him come into a much fuller understanding of who Christ is, when Jesus again seeks him out and teaches him more about Himself. The former blind man now worships Jesus as the Christ; the One who seeks, heals, and sends. It's a beautiful chapter, which we could easily simply enjoy as a story of the power and mercy of God.

But this is the season of Lent; a season calling the Church to reflection and repentance. So, how might *this* story speak specifically into *this* season? In short, there are some hard lessons for us to be found in the words and actions of both the disciples and the pharisees. Just like the disciples, we Christians often prefer to talk about the brokenness of our world rather than actively introducing broken people to Jesus. And just like the Pharisees, we're often suspicious of people who claim to encounter God and are often so concerned with maintaining our own religious rules practices than we fail to see what God is doing in peoples' lives and help them know Jesus.

In short, our lack of interest in people that God is drawing to Himself is startling. Let's change that. Let's begin to pray in every

Sunday service, and in every church meeting, for the people of our neighbourhood who don't yet know Jesus. Let's get our people talking with each other about why they are a Christian, so that they can also begin to learn how to share with their friends, neighbours, work colleagues, and family, what Jesus means to them. Let's build friendships with those outside the Church, so that we can begin to see the way God is already at work in their lives and help them know Jesus for who He is. Let's cultivate churches full of people with a hunger to help someone in their lives know Jesus more fully this year. And above all, let's expect, and welcome, and give thanks for those new followers of Christ who say for the very first time, "Lord I believe."

Saturday, April 2

John 10:1-21

The Rev. Sarah Armstrong
The Diocese of Algoma

'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.'

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?'

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Ash Wednesday was a month ago. Many of us made a commitment on that day to deepen our practice of prayer during the Lenten season. You are not alone if you find that your good intentions do not match your actual commitment as we move towards Easter. Several studies demonstrate that around 80% of New Year's resolutions are abandoned by February; likewise, many of us would say that our Lenten devotion to prayer is losing steam around now.

Perhaps our efforts are frustrated by feeling anxious about doing prayer right. Are we saying the right things? Has prayer started to feel like trying to make small talk at coffee hour? Are we correctly discerning God's will? If any of these concerns are familiar, this passage offers much comfort.

Jesus says that the sheep hear the voice of their shepherd. They know his voice and run from the voice of strangers. These words serve as a reminder that the foundation of a healthy practice of prayer is not what we say, but rather our hearing. As is true of all effective communication, listening is key. We do not need to initiate a conversation, but only respond to the one who calls us by name. In doing so we grow in our knowledge of the one who knows us and calls us his own. We are confident of when we hear his voice and can discern it from the voice of strangers.

This should be freeing for us. Prayer is not a task to be completed correctly; it is responding to the Lord's invitation to be willing participants in the work of the Living Word. We cannot free ourselves from the sheepfold because this is the work of the shepherd. The shepherd calls, brings out all of his own, and goes ahead of them. The call of the shepherd is the voice of the one who's word does not return empty but succeeds in the thing for which it is sent; this is what frees us.

As we look toward Easter, let's not allow any feelings of discouragement around prayer prevent us from renewing our commitment to our spiritual practice. Remember that there is no victory for the thief. There is good news to be heard. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God calls us by name, so that we may have abundant life in his.

Sunday, April 3

Mark 10:32-45

The Rev. Steve Greene

St. Luke's Anglican Church and St. Thomas the Apostle, Cambridge
The Diocese of Huron

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.’

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ And he said to them, ‘What is it you want me to do for you?’ And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They replied, ‘We are able.’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be

slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.⁷

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Yep! Been there and done that! I can't tell you the number of (arrogant and ignorant) times that I've had my *requests*. Requests that were always rooted in some selfish endeavour, not realizing the horrific consequences to come (a critical side effect of sin). I came before God asking for position, privilege and power. I came before the Eternal One, the One who sacrificed all for me for some ludicrous and outlandish demand, at times like a petulant child! Thanks be to God, He had and has the wisdom to deny our requests and to save us from ourselves and from our toxic agendas.

Today's reading is another beautiful testament that we are constantly called into Jesus' redemptive story and patiently corrected from our ways. James and John, the sons of Thunder, were making loud and unproductive noise. They intentionally and discreetly tried to send a shock wave through the Apostles that they were the Master's favourites! How many times have we jockeyed for position to be seen and heard by the masses? Oh how we raise ourselves, so that Jesus can distinguish *us* from *them*. *We* are better. *We* are more faithful. *We* deserve the adulation and adoration!

Yep! Been there and done that!!

Our Lord and Saviour continues to call us into a depth of service and sacrifice that disturbs and disrupts our baptismal vows. As we disrobe and disregard the filthy rags of self and embrace the robes of righteousness, we will venture into the many holy spaces and places and drink from a cup not made from gold, nor silver but from the precious and incredible awe of obedience and deliverance. It is here we no longer posture for position or power. It is here we no longer hunger for the allure of fame and glory. It is here we bow humbly, serve and love each other and yield to the One who came not to be served but to serve. The One who knows our requests and thirsts for us, calls for us to be redeemed, reconciled and ransomed.

Yep! Thanks be to the Triune God, we're humbly there and we're faithfully walking in Him!

Monday, April 4

John 10:22-end

The Rev. Matthew Brown
Parish of the Valley
The Diocese of Ottawa

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.

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What is it in the human condition that leads us to threaten violence and intimidation, or indeed, employ violence and intimidation, to address our most profound disagreements?

As I write this reflection in the middle of February an estimated 150,000 Russian troops are positioned on the border of Ukraine. We can only pray that a fragile peace will hold. Closer to home, the see city of my home diocese, our nation’s capital, has been illegally occupied by a small but entrenched group of protestors for the better part of three weeks. Earlier this week the Emergencies Act was invoked by our federal government for the first time since its adoption in 1988. I have heard clergy colleagues share their experiences of being harassed by protestors on their way to lead Sunday worship, and our cathedral church has had to delay its reopening for in-person worship for multiple weeks now. By the time you read this you will likely know how this sad chapter in our shared story as Canadians came to its conclusion. Right now, all that we can do as followers of Jesus is pray that it will not end in bloodshed.

I am mindful too, as I read today’s passage, of how it and other passages in St. John’s gospel have historically been used to justify violence by Christians against our Jewish neighbours. Throughout history we followers of Jesus have been wholly complicit in the perpetration of acts of violence and intimidation. Violence against fellow Christians; violence against people of other faiths; violence against women, indigenous persons, persons of colour, members of the LGBTQ2S+ community – the proverbial list just keeps growing.

The dust of this earth can indeed be hardened into stones, but Lent reminds us that the very same dust, by God’s grace and breath, can also be fashioned into beating hearts of flesh. Hearts that are capable of love; hearts that are capable of repentance. At the end of today’s passage Jesus somehow manages to step away from a likely scene of violence and return to a place of living water: a sacred place of cleansing and wholeness. Our annual Lenten pilgrimage leads us to the violence of the cross, but then beyond it, to a resurrection life that is far greater. May God grant you whatever you need this day to

resist picking up a stone, and to walk instead in the gentle way of peace.

Tuesday, April 5

John 11:1-44

The Rev. Gillian Hoyer
Parish of the Valley
The Diocese of Ottawa

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.'

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.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

In this season of Lent, the third in the shadow of a global pandemic, we can be forgiven for saying, like Martha, “Lord, if you had been here, we would not have had this suffering.”

I don’t blame her for those words. The first few verses of this chapter seem to show a procrastinating Jesus who deliberately stays away, taking his time getting to the bedside of his friend. “Lord, if you had been here...” Instead of the presence of Jesus, this family in Bethany is experiencing the overwhelming presence of death. Which sounds an awful lot like our Lenten journey, here, in yet another global-pandemic Lent.

We began this Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday being reminded of the frailty and uncertainty of human life. Many of us did not need that reminder: a shadow of fear and death has loomed over us every day since March 2020. We’ve lost friends and loved ones. We’ve lost our regular patterns of life and of worship. We’ve lost our ability to gather. Maybe we’ve lost our ability pray or have faith or hope. “Lord, if you had been here...”

And then, in the midst of her grief, Martha somehow finds the faith to utter prophetic words: “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him...I know that [my brother] will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

And Jesus replies to Martha with these familiar words: “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.”

I am the resurrection and the life. This is the Christian faith and hope that we cling to; the faith and hope that draws us through this penitential season where we are confronted all-too-closely with the frailty and uncertainty of life. “Lord, if you had been here...”

I AM here, says Jesus to Martha, and to each one of us this Lent.

I am here. I am the resurrection and the life. I am with you today as you struggle through grief, though uncertainty, through changes to our patterns of life and of worship, through finding the words for prayer.

I am here, I am with you always, I am life.

Peace and faith and hope be with you this Lent.

Wednesday, April 6

John 11:45-end

The Rev. Cameron Gutjahr
St. John the Divine Anglican Church, Squamish
The Diocese of New Westminster

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, ‘What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.’ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, ‘What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?’ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

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“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.”

I find this surprisingly...understandable. The pharisees and the chief priests are afraid of the quite real threat of violence and destruction the Romans pose.

It is so refreshing to catch a glimpse of a different, more human, perspective of these ones. The chief priests and pharisees are so frequently cast in the role of Jesus' opponent in the gospels, that they have too often been reduced to two-dimensional villains. This in turn has been fuel for the fire of the great sin of anti-Semitism in the Church and the world – something to guard against whenever we wonder our way through the stories of Jesus.

While fear is a powerful motivator, something that we might understand and even relate to, what they did was still wrong. It is wrong to conspire to arrest and murder someone. And so, perhaps the opportunity we have this Lent, with this text, as we assess the brokenness in the world and those who contribute to it, is to soften our eyes and our hearts a little. Perhaps this can be an invitation to resist reducing those who do wrong to two-dimensional villains, to hold on to their humanity, to be curious, to remember their belovedness and their hope of redemption, while still holding them to account.

I think that the invitation for soft eyes and hearts might just be for when we look at ourselves too. Because sometimes it is us who are like the religious leaders in this story, both as individuals and certainly as the institutional Church. We too have done what is wrong, silencing those who are different and challenging, sacrificing the innocent out of fear. While we are called to this important and uncomfortable self-reflection, to repentance, to atonement and newness of life; while we need to be held to account, we too are still beloved in our brokenness.

Thursday, April 7

John 12:1-19

The Rt. Rev. Susan Bell
Bishop of Niagara
The Diocese of Niagara

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

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, since 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!'

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It helps to remember that this narrative happens against the backdrop of the raising of Lazarus in an atmosphere of high tension and danger. Jesus' followers must have feared that Jesus was a dead man walking. This also makes sense of Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet and of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

It makes sense of Mary's acts because they don't make a lot of sense on their own: Mary performs the action of a slave, herself. Normally a woman would never touch a man except her husband and children, and then only in private. Nor would she allow anyone other than her immediate family to see her hair. The cleaning of feet was not done with perfume, especially with the amount mentioned here which would cost a year's wages for a peasant labourer. She anoints his feet – hands and feet were seen in the ancient near east to represent action with purpose. So, the first thing to say is that Mary knowingly anoints Jesus' mission of love in this world.

But Mary's boldest action was to name the elephant in the room – the fact that everyone must have known the logical conclusion of his actions – that he must die. Mary refuses to be dishonest about this. Mary's loyalty and trust, contrasts with the hypocrisy and dishonesty of Judas's words and actions. Mary's actions tell us of the ministry of that present moment.

It was an extravagantly honest gesture. Perhaps that's what shocked Judas so. It's also why Jesus didn't stop her. He affirmed her honesty, her hope and belief that God was doing something new and different in Jesus. She recognized with a stunning clarity that she was in the midst of living God's action in this world.

Cut to Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, a conscious reference to a symbol of humility and peace (as opposed to the horse which was a symbol of war) as well as an evocation of the prophet Zechariah's prophecy of the Messiah, a peaceable king, who would come to set his people free and care for his people Israel. Jesus' actions were symbolic and provocative. It's important to notice that his is not simply Jesus claiming alternative power in this world, this is the Son of God claiming *sovereignty* over this world.

These were *profoundly* challenging claims then, and today. And such claims cannot go unanswered in this world.

In the end, God's message was far more powerful than the principalities and powers of this world: that God so loved the world that he sent his only beloved Son that whoever believes in him will have eternal *life*.

With a message like that, they never had a chance.

Friday, April 8

John 12:20-end

The Rev. Christopher Samsom
Parish of the North Peace
The Diocese of Caledonia

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

‘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. Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

'Lord, who has believed our message,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'
And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said,
'He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.'

Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Then Jesus cried aloud: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.'

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A desire to see Jesus is expressed to Philip, who gets Andrew onside and goes to Jesus to request an audience.

Jesus begins his answer pointing us to why he has come to Jerusalem in the first place. He talks about a seed that has come to die to give life. If we follow Jesus he is inviting us to be buried as well, in baptism, in the surrender of our time and attention and hope and

fear, in our own burials when we die that we may be lifted up with him.

Then some hear thunder. Others hear a voice from heaven proclaim that God will glorify his name again. Some God chooses to make his ways known to, we ask that we may be among them.

Jesus continues his answer saying he has come to be lifted up on a stick and be seen, in being seen to gather – he points to the crucifixion. These Greeks being there at Passover are so close to witnessing this transformative revelation, this revelation of the wrath of God real and satisfied that in being beheld casts out the venom of this world, the flesh and the devil.

Someone in the crowd asks who Jesus is talking about, because in talking about himself he says “the Son of Man.” Someone asks him if he means the Messiah the King who is coming to restore the monarchy of David.

Jesus answers by saying they will have the light only a little longer, so they should walk by the light and become children of light. This was especially true when Jesus walked among us in the flesh, that those gathered had an opportunity to have their questions answered not just with words but with myth made fact before their eyes. This is true still for us as we hear the stories of Jesus, as we carry his promises and mysteries with us into our daily lives, as we feast on him in the Eucharist, by staying near the light we are made into something new, made into children of light.

Jesus then addresses those who did not hear the words from heaven, who were there but did not receive him. Jesus has come now to them, to us, to save and not to judge. But Jesus warns that on the last day his very words will come to condemn those who hear them, but do not receive them, on the last day.

So may we listen, may we stay close to Jesus in our pilgrimage, may we pray that our ears and our eyes may be opened to see him for who he is, that we may be in all ways the children of God.

Saturday, April 9

John 13

The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls
Archbishop & Primate of The Anglican Church of Canada

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are

messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.'

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

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.'

Jesus stands at the centre of a circle of chaos and conflicting emotions. Judas is ready to betray Jesus, the disciples are still high on the affirmation of Palm Sunday and the increasing popularity of Jesus including the miracles they had witnessed and the still nascent idea that Jesus may be the Messiah long promised; and all takes place in the excitement of the traditional Passover celebration – of God's liberation of their people with power! Jesus is at the centre of all those swirling hopes and dreams; of expectations yet to be fulfilled; of disappointment in what has not happened – and human egos and desire for glory.

Jesus quietly picks up a basin and towel to do the work of a servant – washing feet – an ordinary task simply to prepare them for the meal. A practical duty and a powerful symbol of all that his ministry is about. He serves, not with power but with humility, meeting an ordinary need, not claiming prestige or status or privilege and offering service to all. To those closest to him. To those who like him and to the one who would betray him. To Peter and James and John and to those history mentioned only once or not at all.

Even when Judas is revealed as the one who will betray him there is no condemnation, just a statement of truth. Even when Peter boldly proclaims his loyalty and Jesus predicts his coming abandonment there is no word of blame or anger.

In these last moments of the community gathered, Jesus offers them a new commandment, “Love one another as I have loved you.” As a servant. With humility, compassion, and forgiveness. With the heart of a teacher, willing to give fully of himself, including his very life. Love with that same love.

As baptized followers of Jesus this is the life we are to follow and emulate. It is such a contrast to the celebrity culture of our time that is constantly seeking approval or notoriety on social media, determined to raise oneself by destroying others. The life of Jesus builds up and heals as it promotes justice, nurtures kindness and compassion, and sustains a life-giving relationship with God through prayer.

Jesus is the still point in the centre of our chaos, inviting us to listen and learn from him. Even when it takes us into conflict the principalities and powers of this world. Even when the cost is as high as death itself. Will we follow?

Palm Sunday, April 10

Matthew 26

The Very Rev. Stephen Vail
Rector of St. James' Cathedral and Dean of Toronto
The Diocese of Toronto

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.’

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, ‘Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.’

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, ‘Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.’ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to

eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.”’ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’ Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,
“I will strike the shepherd,

and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”

But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.’ Peter said to him, ‘Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And so said all the disciples.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you

want.' Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days." ' The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that

they testify against you?’ But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you,

From now on you will see the Son of Man

seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death.’ Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, ‘Prophesy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?’

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ But he denied it before all of them, saying, ‘I do not know what you are talking about.’ When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ Again he denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, ‘I do not know the man!’ At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: ‘Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.

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One of my favourite television programs is Antiques Roadshow. I find the stories associated with items fascinating: how they were made, when they were made, their historical significance and what they have meant to their owners. Regardless of all that, every segment boils down to the same question: “What is it worth?”

That question looms over today’s reading. To the chief priests and elders, letting Jesus live is not worth the political cost, so they need him gone. The disciples are indignant at the cost of the ointment “wasted” by the woman who lavishly pours it over Jesus’ head. Judas asks, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” They settle on thirty pieces of silver. In today’s money, that is in the range \$90 - \$400. Not much for the life of a friend.

As the story unfolds in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus weighs the relative value of two lives – his and ours. The view from Gethsemane

is dominated by the Temple Mount. I wonder if that added to Jesus' anguish and his veiled question, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." There was precedent after all. The Temple, and now the Dome of the Rock, were built on the very spot where Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. In the dramatic moment when Abraham faithfully raised his knife, God provided a ram to sacrifice instead.

I wonder if this was on Jesus' mind as he hoped for another way to bring about God's plan of salvation. In the end, the Lamb of God says "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." In that moment, our salvation is assured. Jesus weighed the value of his own life versus ours, and found ours to be worth the cost of his own.

The value of things. How much value do we place on God's will and Word in our daily lives? What is Jesus and the life He offers worth to us? The decisions we make and how we "spend" our lives are all part of the answer. May God give us the strength to offer our selves, souls and bodies as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to Jesus for the gift of His life in exchange for ours.

Monday, April 11

John 14:1-14

Amy de Sousa
Youth and Family Pastor, St. Philip's on-the-Hill
York Simcoe Area Youth Coordinator
The Diocese of Toronto

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

I like Philip. He is one of the disciples I resonate the most with, and he happens to be the patron saint of my parish. Earlier in the Gospel, John writes about the feeding of the 5000 including Jesus' question to Philip, "Where are we going to buy food to feed all these people?" (John 6:5). Philip, who I imagine was wide-eyed and bewildered answers, "it would take a miracle to feed all these people," or at least that is my interpretation of what he said. What Philip actually says is, "it would take half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have one bite" (John 6:7). This passage gives us context for the reading today. Philip, who was in the inner circle as one of the twelve, had knowledge and zeal, but his faith had yet to move from knowing *about* God to knowing God.

Philip, knowing Jesus performed a miracle with the 5000, still needs Jesus to show him the Father. Philip's expectations of God are preventing him from seeing the reality of God in the flesh, through Jesus. With love, Jesus asks Philip, "Don't you know me, Philip?" This question reflects the essence of the Gospel: The Good News is personal knowledge of God. Getting personal means being vulnerable, honest, and talking about things that matter. Getting personal with God means allowing the Gospel to affect you intellectually, emotionally, and dutifully. One can have intellectual knowledge but have little character change, passionate in worship yet little theological knowledge, dutiful and disciplined but with little warmth. When Jesus says, "I am the way," he explains how to get personal. We get personal with God through the person of Jesus.

As we enter Holy week, may the Cross become personal, connecting our intellectual knowledge, emotional response, and dutiful action so that we can enter more deeply into communion with God.

Tuesday, April 12

John 15:1-16

The Rev. Orvin Lao
Little Trinity, Toronto
The Diocese of Toronto

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you

to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

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The image of the vine conjures up for the ancient Jewish mind the kingdom of Israel and the primordial history of creation. The psalms and the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea imagined Israel as the vine or vineyard God had planted on earth to bear the fruits of His will for seed to be sown in all the rest of creation. This was so too in the beginning when God first planted the garden of Eden and commissioned the first human pair as His royal gardeners to tend and extend it all over the world.

Where Adam and Eve at once and Israel many times have failed, the Son of God in Jesus Christ stepped in to fulfill and succeed. He is the vine of heaven that has stretched forth His roots into the earth, proliferating through and in the branches, His disciples, the Church (15:5), for them to bear fruits of His divine love in bodily sacrifice (15:12-13), for seed to be sown in all the rest of the cosmos. Jesus now calls His followers to abide in Him (15:4). What does this mean?

As a branch does not heave or strain to remain in the vine, so is the Christian who is irrevocably grafted into Jesus's Body by the Holy Spirit, through faith, and in baptism. And though this is not the Christian's doing, there is the responsibility and activity of abiding just as we are inclined to work out and live out our relationships with our families and relatives even as we are irrevocably related to them by blood. How much more so to Him and to them with whom we are irrevocably grafted by perfect Blood and Spirit?

The responsibility and activity of abiding is first, by love (15:12): not as sentiment but as bodily service and the laying aside of one's body, happiness, and rights for the other (15:13). Second, by Word (15:7): to believe and affirm the witness of ancient Scripture as bequeathed to us by the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, together testifying that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Third, by obedience (15:10): not begrudgingly, or in terror of punishment, or out of compulsion, but for the joy (15:11) of embodying the wholesome divine life of God to be seen and shared by others. And fourth, by friendship (15:14-16): as God's partners and companions, sober and mindful to apprehend His divine counsel and purposes for all time, disclosed in its fullness to us in the Bible, so that we are never surprised or left in the dark.

Let us then as royal gardeners tend and extend the Garden of Christ's kingdom on earth as we abide in Him who is the vine – by love, by Word, by obedience, and by friendship – to the glory of God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (15:8).

Wednesday, April 13

John 16:1-15

The Rev. Dr. Leigh Evan Silcox
Church of the Incarnation
The Diocese of Toronto

I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

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Our passage from John is accompanied, in the BCP Daily Lectionary, by a reading from Isaiah 42:1-9, “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations...see the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Is 42:1, 9).

This reading indicates the commandment and commission that Israel and so the Church is to fulfill: to be the catalysts through which all nations are drawn back to God. It simultaneously casts a retrospective and future facing judgment on both branches of the olive tree (Gen 15:5-6; Ruth 1-4; Mat 1:5, c.f. Jn 3:1-3; Ro 11:19-32) and establishes the basis upon which God’s holy righteousness will be accomplished: a servant whom God himself will send.

Of course the one sent, as a babe, is Jesus Christ. The Son of God. Not becoming God; but always God (John 1:1). Not coming into a human body already born. Rather taking on human nature so that you and I might be reconciled in him to God, which of course we mark liturgically with our adoption, having been born from above, in baptism. The impotency of human procreation and law following to obtain relationship with God is overcome when God adopts us through his flesh sacrificed for us.

Our passage from John declares that Jesus must go away to the Father in order for the Holy Spirit to come and guide us into the truth. It is not clear from Scripture why Jesus must go away, although many have attempted to explain this in various theological ways. I would suggest, following the narrative of Scripture, that Christ’s ascension and the Spirit’s descent, marks the end of all things, the fulfillment of all things.

What the Spirit then declares to us is not some radically new truth of a world still unfolding its core being (as one might interpret Isaiah’s, “see the former things have come to pass”); an unfolding that abolishes what the Scriptures reveal. Instead the Spirit reveals to us now how we fit into a world which God in Jesus has brought to completion. A world where sin and righteousness are revealed for what they are, as our actions are held up to the figures of Scripture, all of whom are seen through Christ’s own actions. A world where

the distorted ends we pursue to the tower top where Satan awaits, that enmesh all of us in a net of sin, are not the final destination that would imprison us in hell. For the Spirit does not declare what our latest cultural trends suggest, or what our political parties demand, or whatever ideology floats our boat. The Spirit declares to us, thus presses and pulls us back to the revelation of God's truth we find revealed to us fully and completely in Scripture read through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Maundy Thursday, April 14

John 17

Martha Riddell
Postulant, St. Mary Magdalene, Picton
The Diocese of Ontario

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. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and

the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

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Throughout Saint John's Gospel, Our Lord refers to "the hour." His entire ministry is oriented towards the coming of this hour. What is *the hour*? It is the moment wherein the Father is glorified through his Son Jesus Christ. His entire life, his ministry, and his teachings point towards this moment of glory. But it is not the luminous transfiguration, nor the triumphant resurrection, or even the glorious ascension. The hour is the crucifixion. "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" (John 12:27). Christ came into the world – he came to his hour of glory – not for His sake but for ours. He came into the world to be crucified for our salvation. There, in the upper room, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come." And then he prayed, not for himself, but for us: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

These words mark the beginning of the end of Christ's life. These are his final moments of safety and security before he departs to the Garden of Gethsemane where he will be given over into the hands of sinners. And he spends these last moments making intercession not for himself, but for us.

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." In other words, Our Lord is saying, "sanctify them through *me*." In ages past the people of God were sanctified by the sacrifice of an unblemished animal but here Christ announces that they will no longer be sanctified in type, but by Truth itself – or rather by Truth *himself*. Christ the unblemished Victim will offer himself as a sacrifice to the Father so that we may have eternal life.

Let us approach the Paschal Triduum sanctified by the Truth, knowing "nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1) and making his name known throughout the world so that all might believe: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Good Friday, April 15

John 18:1-32

The Rev. Chris D'Angelo
St. Thomas, Huron Street
The Diocese of Toronto

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, ‘For whom are you looking?’ They answered, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus replied, ‘I am he.’ Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he’, they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, ‘For whom are you looking?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.’ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?’

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, ‘You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.’ When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, ‘Is that how you answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?’ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, ‘You are not also one of his disciples, are you?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with him?’ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’ They answered, ‘If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.’ The Jews replied, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death.’ (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

The prologue to St John's Gospel triumphantly proclaims Christ to be the "true light" of the world (Jn 1:9), the light that "shines in the darkness," which the darkness "did not overcome" (Jn 1:5).

Today, on Good Friday, we are confronted with the "power of darkness" (Lk 22:53) in an especially intense way: exemplified not only by the perverse error in judgment and cruelty of those who conspire to crucify the "Lord of Glory" (1 Cor 2:8) but also by Jesus' closest circle of followers, the disciples, as they abandon Christ at the time of his arrest, typified by Peter's threefold denial of him.

As reported in all four Gospels, however, the crowing rooster, the herald of the dawn, boldly announces at the moment of Peter's third denial that even the height of human wickedness and betrayal cannot stop the brilliant, transforming love of Christ the light from shining into the opaque depths of our hearts and our world, overcoming the darkness.

As Prudentius (348AD-413AD) describes in his hymn "The winged herald of the day": "This wherefore we all believe / that in the restful hour of night / at which the cock in triumph sings / Christ made his way back from the dead./ Then the power of death brought low, / then was the rule of hell suppressed, / then did the mightier force of day / compel the night to yield its place" (vss. 17 &18, trans. Walsh and Husch, *One Hundred Latin Hymns: Ambrose to Aquinas*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, p.59).

Knowing ourselves to be caught up in the same warped condition of those who crucified and abandoned Christ, beyond merely commemorating a past event, Good Friday, therefore, also invites us to acknowledge the twistedness and brokenness that we find within ourselves and within our world, inviting us to turn to Christ once again, to cry out for mercy and healing by way of the victory of his Cross.

Embodying this symbolism of light and darkness in built form at St Thomas's Huron Street, where I presently serve, it is especially striking that as the days approach the winter solstice, at Morning Prayer, the rising sun shines through the crucifixion window in the chancel then, at the darkest time of the year, more intensely than at any other time, with the effect of warming (and almost temporarily blinding) those gathered for prayer by its brilliant light.

May each one of us find ourselves so touched and illumined by the brilliant light of God's love for us shining through the Cross this Easter.

Holy Saturday, April 16

1 Peter 2:11-end

Ria Neish
Nurse

The Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. For it is to your credit if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, where is the credit in that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

'He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth.'

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free

from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

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In today's epistle, a quick reading presents an immediate interpretation to our contemporary mind that may interfere with our ability to enter into the text spiritually; St. Peter is not saying that we are to accept abusive and oppressive treatment that crushes our soul (Luke 12:4-5). In fact, he himself demonstrates that we are ultimately to obey God rather than authorities, when such authorities are in direct conflict with Christ and the Gospel (Acts 4:19-20). Clearly a kind of discernment is assumed. Let us proceed with open hearts and minds to allow the healing words of this epistle to work on and through us.

Tomorrow we will celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, but it was not revealed in any of the earth shattering possibilities suggested by our Apocalyptic writers. Rather, the "event" happened unnoticed, was hinted at by an empty tomb, and slowly made manifest in ordinary events on the road, by the lakeside, in a room where they gathered. The revelation was complete, the atonement made, and our Risen Lord breaks bread with his disciples, advising that the work is to continue: "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep" (John 21:16 -17). Evelyn Underhill reminds us that although we are united to His resurrection through baptism, "the spirit is reborn into the real life: not in some other transcendental world, but in this world..." (*School of Charity: Meditations on the Christian Creed*). We are to set our gaze upon Paradise, and yet we remain sojourners in the Wilderness.

It is within this tension of "realized" vs "futuristic" salvation (Fr. Robert Crouse, *Images of Pilgrimage*) that the Christian must make sense of this life and discern vocation – the comparison of the spiritual life to a "pilgrimage" is made yet again: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims" (1Peter 2:11a). The overarching goal of this epistle is an interpretation of this tension and pilgrimage as a call to a life of holiness. And our reading for this morning pays particular focus on that great foundational (and challenging) virtue of the spiritual life: Obedience.

From the Latin, *Obedio* literally means "to give ear to, to listen to, to obey." Therefore to "obey" insinuates nothing to be done blindly, but rather a conscious action done with intention. The Christian is living

for a kingdom not of this world, hence the image of pilgrimage for spirituality remains as vibrant as it is in the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, we are still living in this world: our Lord became a human in this world, died in this world, and was raised in this world. The question became, and remains to this day, how does the Christian live during this pilgrimage?

Throughout our entire tradition, we find the language of “love” to be ever-present when an answer is sought; “Beloved.” Peter exhorts us to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (2:11b) and goes on to explain it is through obeying our earthly authorities as well as our earthly employers that this can be done. We are told that this conduct is so favourable, that through the witness of it, non-believers may come to know God (2:12). Peter tells us that this is the will of God(2:15a), as such obedience offers us help to “discern” God’s will for us. And, it probably is not going to be pleasant a lot of the time: “by whose stripes [we are] healed” (2:24b).

Let us end this short reflection with a lovely plea from our Book of Common Prayer, that we might find aid to persevere during our pilgrimage in this life, guided by the light of Love,

O Lord God, when thou givest thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning but the continuing of the same until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through him that for the finishing of thy work laid down his life, Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (p.635)

Easter Sunday, April 17

Revelation 1:4-18

The Rev. John Caswell Boyd
St. George's Anglican Church, Kamloops
Territory of the People

John to the seven assemblies that are in Asia:

'Grace to you and peace from *Him Who Is, also Who Was, and Who is to Come*, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom—priests serving his God and Father—to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever; Amen.'

'Behold! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will mourn. Yes, Amen!'

"I Am, The Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord, "The God, Who Is, also Who Was, and Who Is to Come, The Pantokrator."

I, John, your brother and partaker in the tribulation, also the Kingdom, as well as the patient endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the Word of God and the witness of Jesus. I was in Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a voice great as a trumpet saying, "What you see, write into a book and send this to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, also to Pergamum, and to Thuateira, to Sardis, also to Philadelphia, and to Laodikea."

I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the *Son of Man*, clothed with a high priest's robe and

girded about his breast with a golden sash. His head and his hair were white as wool, sparkling as snow; his eyes were like a flashing fire; his feet were like glowing brass, as if burned up in a furnace; and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not; *I Am, The First and the Last*, and *The Living*. I was dead, and behold I live, forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.”⁵

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Though I have tried in the translation above, at present, our English renditions of Revelation cannot convey the sheer richness of Christ’s apocalypse to St John. It is a vision of the risen Jesus, Who has completed all of the work proposed by the Father according to the promise, ‘We shall fashion human being in our image, through our likeness.’ Now, by that same creative grace, St John, having become ‘like one dead,’ is raised up to stand in the presence of the Living God and behold the One Who, before all things, is ‘in first place towards God.’

St John, an eyewitness of the crucifixion, now is given the revelation that ‘opens [his] mind to understand the Scriptures, and everything in them written about [Jesus].’ The One who has been speaking to Israel for their entire history, The One who brought them out of Egypt, now is revealed in the flesh. Describing Christ ‘according to the Scriptures,’ St John uses the language of all previous types and signs: Priesthood, Song of Songs, Prophet, Temple, Genesis. Yet all have passed away in the fulfillment of Who God has promised us from the beginning. With the royal keys of His genesis from the Father and His birth of the Virgin Mother, Christ has opened the Book of Life through his pierced side – what no one else can open. His passage through the pit of Hades as the Lamb of God’s Wedding Feast has shut fast Death’s ravenous jaws – what no one else can shut.

Now, with St John, we look upon the one whom we have pierced and at His empty tomb, we make our song. We were dead to Life in our sin and preoccupation with what we thought was truth in this world.

⁵ Author’s translation.

Through the Christian life, epitomized in Great Lent, Christ lifts us up from the earth to face the Father in the same place the Son dwells before all things: crucified, cradled in the ‘breast of the Father.’ Now we come to know in full; no longer in part.

The ancient Christians of our Holy Mother Church, in the assemblies St John and St Paul ministered to, were the first to celebrate what we now call “Easter.” These Christians heard the Apocalypse and the Gospel together as one truth about the reality of the world and of Life itself. Our being taken up into the divine liturgy of Easter draws us into the same sheer richness of true Life. We are buried and bathed in the roar of its many waters. We are purified and cleansed in the flashing of its divine fire. We are knit together in the womb of Holy Mother Church by its creative word. We are wedded to it by the Lamb’s feast when He beholds us, the work of the Father’s right hand, and declares, ‘This at last is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.’ We will find ourselves returning to this marriage feast every hour of every day, in every week, and every year through all the colours of the Church’s liturgy, until at last these foretastes give way to eternal fulfillment.

Alleluia! Lord Jesus Christ, You are indeed risen. You alone are the Holy One, Who has opened the door to the Father’s household and the wedding feast of the Lamb. Merciful Savior, grant us never to lose this faith and sustain us with your revelation amid tribulation as the world passes away. To you alone is the glory, both now and unto ages of ages. Amen.



Christus resurrexit!