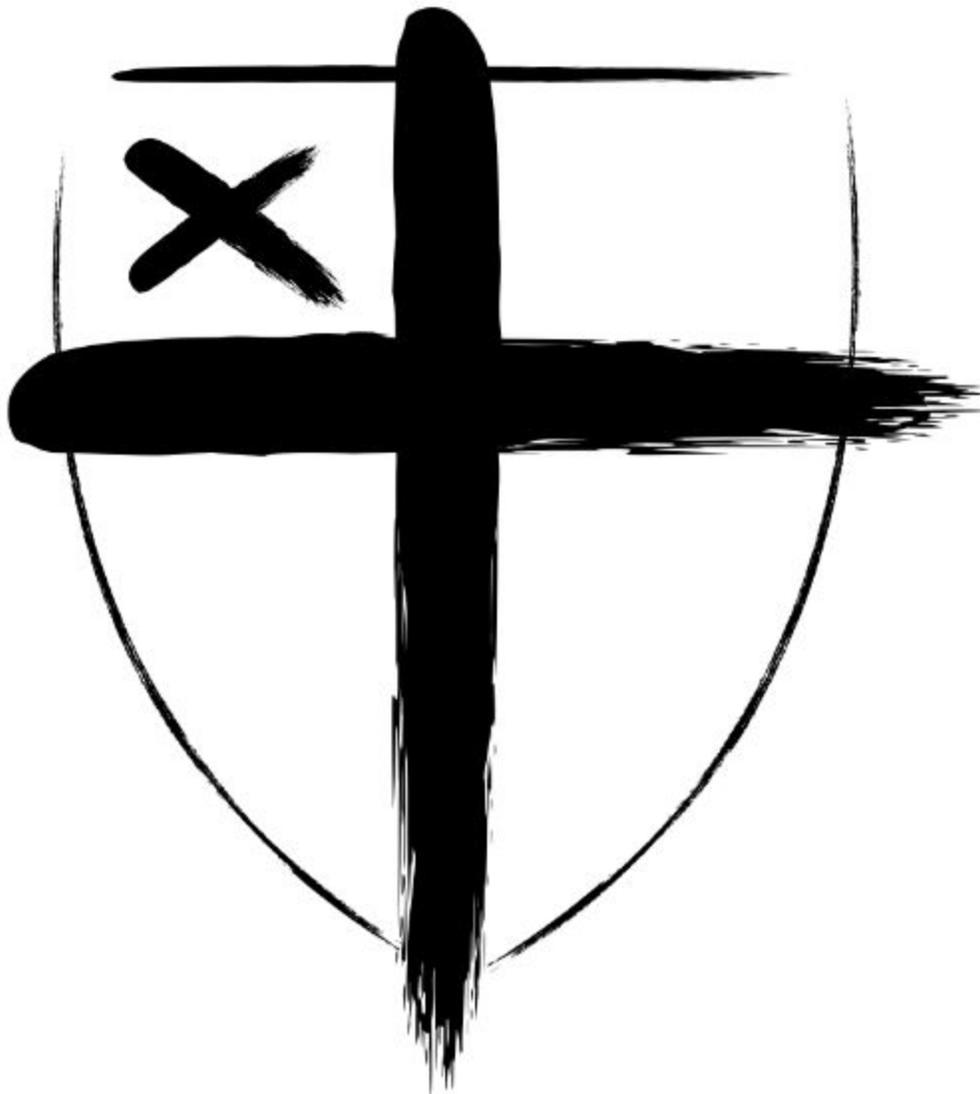


Piety in an Impious Age

Reading the Passion according to Mark in the
Merion Deanery



The Challenge and Opportunity of Lent

In the Ash Wednesday liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer, the priest invites the congregation “to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.” There was a time when the Church took this invitation very seriously. We saw in Lent an opportunity to reclaim our faith in practical ways. This inclination has become less common. In 2014, the Barna group discovered that while 72 percent of U.S. adults were “aware” of Lent, only 17 percent planned to observe it in any meaningful way. There are probably many reasons for this loss of interest in Lent. For one, we are so obsessed with the idea of self-improvement that the central conceit of the season, that we are wholly dependent on God’s grace, seems irrelevant to us. Thus, for many of us, Lenten disciplines have become “New Year’s Resolutions 2.0,” a chance to recommit to whatever self-improvement scheme we abandoned during the doldrums of January instead of an opportunity to recommit to our faith. Perhaps more significantly, we live in a culture that regards any spiritual practice skeptically. By our society’s standards, the idea of devoting ourselves to prayer or the study of Scripture feels like a waste of time. All of this begs the question: why should we heed the invitation to a “holy Lent”? What does it mean to read and meditate on God’s holy word and engage in prayer, fasting, and self-denial in our increasingly secular society?

The answer to these questions can be found in the gospel according to Mark. Once considered the “black sheep” among the evangelists, Mark has undergone something of a renaissance over the past few decades. Historically, scholars dismissed the shortest gospel because it appears to be a mere summary of its counterparts. Recently, however, Christians have begun to rediscover the distinctive and eloquent witness of Mark’s gospel. No longer considered a “black sheep,” Mark has taken his rightful place as one of the true geniuses of the Christian canon. The gospel according to Mark provides a unique and riveting account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. More importantly, it speaks powerfully to today’s Church. More than any other evangelist, Mark’s gospel is suffused with a profound awareness that the good news of Jesus Christ represents a significant disruption of the status quo. Moreover, the gospel according to Mark challenges us to live lives shaped by what God has accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Like Mark’s gospel, Lent disrupts and challenges us. It forces us out of our self-centered, impatient routines and invites us to look at the world in a new way. In this spirit, the Merion Deanery will be using the season of Lent to explore the ways the gospel according to Mark speaks to us today. Every day, one of the clergy of the Deanery will offer a reflection on an excerpt from the Passion Narrative in Mark’s gospel. These meditations on the events leading to Jesus’ crucifixion and death will help us appreciate the gospel’s true power. Indeed, these reflections will reveal that heeding the invitation to a “holy Lent” can transform our experience of the world. We hope you will make this journey through Mark’s Passion part of your Lenten discipline and consider how this holy season and Mark’s unique perspective can shape our lives of faith.

How to Use this Devotional

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

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

February 14, 2018
Ash Wednesday

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people." Mark 14:1-2

The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings a new Light into the world and into our lives. It is a light that reveals the face of the God who is gracious and forgiving; the God who is present with us at all times and in all places; the God who rejoices with us in the goodness of our lives; the God who suffers with us in our brokenness and struggles; the God who offers a way of living that brings real life and the power to become the persons God created us to be; and the God who offers us life now and a new life beyond the door of death. It is a light that shines in the darkness of our lives and gives us hope.

The Light that has come into the world and into our lives also reveals the shadows. Like a lamp in a room that brings light, the light casts shadows wherever that light cannot reach. It is not the intent of the Light to cast shadows, but there are shadows wherever we block the light. And we all block the light in areas of our lives where we are unwilling to turn to the life that Christ is calling us to live, especially when it means we will have to surrender our lives more completely to God.

Like the religious leaders of Jesus' day who are looking for a way to arrest and kill Jesus, we, too, look for ways to block the light and to hold onto our power and our less Godly ways of living, choosing to live in the shadows rather than in the fullness of Light.

May God grant us the desire and the ability to surrender our lives completely so that the light of Christ may shine in us and through us, removing every shadow, and setting us on the path of the life that is truly life. Amen.

The Rev. W. Frank Allen
Saint David's (Radnor) Church

February 15, 2018
Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Now while Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, reclining at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of costly aromatic oil from pure nard. After breaking open the jar, she poured it on his head. But some who were present indignantly said to one another, "Why this waste of expensive ointment? It could have been sold for more than three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor!" So they spoke angrily to her. *Mark 14:3-5*

William Law, in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, sums up the essence of the Christian life in the following words, "This, and this alone, is Christianity, a universal holiness in every part of life, a heavenly wisdom in all our actions, not conforming to the spirit and temper of the world but turning all worldly enjoyments into means of piety and devotion to God." In following this universal holiness, Jesus dismisses the anger of his followers with the woman when he offers her the freedom to live out her piety extravagantly. Lent reminds us as Christians that we are to freely give our alabaster jar of costly oil to God and others. All we do can integrate "a heavenly wisdom" which detaches from "the spirit and temper of the world." Our "worldly enjoyment" can become pious acts if we ask ourselves, "How does what I am about to do glorify God?" The woman who used her costly oil to glorify God knew the men might speak angrily to her. Nevertheless, her pious action was well placed simply because she glorified God. So how do we as Christians apply a "universal holiness in every part of life?" What a worthy reflection.

The Rev. Tim Gavin
The Episcopal Academy

February 16, 2018
Friday after Ash Wednesday

But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.' *Mark 14:6-9*

It's not that taking care of the poor is no longer important. This obligation will always be important. But time and context are everything. The context is that in Mark's gospel, every moment is precious and ever since his baptism in the river Jordan, Jesus has been on the path that leads straight to Jerusalem and the cross. And the time has finally come for Jesus to complete his work on the cross. The backdrop is in the shadow of the Temple during the annual Passover festival. As this unknown woman bathes Jesus' feet with an expensive ointment of nard, there were many looking on questioning the wisdom of wasting such resources in light of our obligation to the poor.

During Lent, we Christians are challenged to make choices and take on disciplines that will help us come closer to God. Many embark on a fast; a fast of alcohol, or maybe screen time, or some other things that get in the way of a holy relationship with God. As we shed ourselves of these bad habits and unhealthy wants, we make space for God to enter. Similarly, others decide to take on a discipline. The aim is not the mortification of the flesh, but rather to take on the healthy habits that lead to a stronger relationship with God. Remember, time and context are everything. Our context is a busy life as a Christian in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. The time is Lent. The time is now. The question is, will we watch and judge as the world does? Or, this Lent, will we take the time to make room for God in our busy lives?

A Prayer for Self-Dedication

Make us channels of your grace, O Lord, that our wills may conform to your will and our choices reflect your love to your people; so that your law may be fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

taken from *A Time to Pray*, compiled by George Cobbett

The Rev. Joseph K. Smith
Saint Mary's, Wayne

February 17, 2018
Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. *Mark 14:10-11*

We cannot know light unless we have know darkness! I cannot help but think that this very brief, pithy pericope from Mark about Judas is all too relevant today. Many of us pray that we are never put to this test and yet so many of us are...every day: between money and faith, between betrayal and loyalty. And so I wonder whether after our initial feelings of anger at Judas and even our own shame, we too might have chosen material luxury over the abundance of God's love, we might even be grateful for this reminder. If we are willing to put ourselves honestly into the story and not "rise above it," we might rest in God and heal our own temptations. In Lent we fast and pray and adopt disciplines which will reorient us to our God of love. Today, early in this penitential season, we cringe that such good intentions might not produce deeper faith and trust. On the contrary, I would suggest that to live into Judas' desperation, false ego and our own moments of betrayal against God's will, however small, might render insight into forgiveness and mercy which will allow us to emerge ever more faithful. Judas' betrayal was essential to the Paschal Mystery. It demonstrates the depths of human brokenness as well as the depths of God's mercy. We know these depths because we have witnessed betrayal AND crucial tragedy which lead not to despair but to resurrection life! God uses everything that we might know eternal love! The forgiveness of sins is palpable and available to all.

The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
Saint David's (Radnor) Church

February 18, 2018
The First Sunday in Lent

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." *Mark 1:9-15*

Lent is a season spent in the wilderness. In the Bible, "the wilderness" is thought to be a very remote and desolate place where people can get lost. It's a place of danger. A place you shouldn't travel alone. It's a place where God's people have always had to be lead OUT of, like the Israelites following the Exodus. And yet here we are—being lead INTO the wilderness of Lent just as Jesus was lead into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit after being baptized.

We might ask the question: why? Why spend a whole 40 days in a wilderness of fasting, in self denial, in prayer? Why follow the Spirit into a place of discomfort? Part of the answer comes from comparing the life of Jesus with the culture of today. We live in a time where the "wildernesses" are more dangerous than ever. Millions of advertising dollars are spent trying to get us to believe that we are not as happy, healthy, or whole as we could be if we but purchased whatever new product they are pushing. It is a wilderness of instant gratification that leads to debt and regret. Social media lets people portray a false front of perfectionism that has lead to a loneliness and depression. Every news cycle seems to bring a parade of racism, sexism, and injustice. A wilderness of human pain and despair. These wildernesses really are something to fear.

Yet, the wilderness we enter in Lent is a different kind of wilderness. It's a time to simplify and be lead out of the wildernesses of society into a wilderness of self-discovery of our identity in God. It's a time when we strip away all the excess stuff in our life that makes us nearly numb with comfort. It's a time when we can admit that our lives are not perfect, but that we are not alone in Christ. It's a time when we can look at the world in love so that we might be renewed in the hope that we can help God change it. These were the lessons Jesus learned, and it's what we are invited to learn as well in Lent. We are lead by the Spirit into the wilderness. Let us journey with Jesus knowing that he will lead the way.

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

The Rev. Dr. Hillary D. Raining
Saint Christopher's, Gladwyne

February 19, 2018
Monday after the First Sunday in Lent

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Mark

14:12-16

This passage describes the events of the afternoon before Jesus was arrested and crucified. Jesus had somehow already initiated the preparations for the Passover meal, and here he instructs two of his disciples to complete the preparations for this last, crucial meal with his friends. In order to complete the task given them, the disciples had to keep their eyes open for the man carrying the jar of water, and carefully follow Jesus' instructions.

As twenty-first century followers of Jesus, our task follows the same pattern. In Scripture, we have the general outline of Jesus' instructions for us, summarized for us in our baptismal covenant. The general outline of the task Christ has given us includes continuing in the apostle's teaching, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers...persevering in resisting evil...proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ...seeking and serving Christ in all persons, and striving for justice and peace among all people (BCP, 304-5). Yet, in order to understand how each of us is to apply this general outline to the specifics of our daily life, we must keep our spiritual eyes open. We must look for those mysterious signs indicating that the Spirit of Christ has gone ahead of us, preparing the way for us to do God's will. Lent is a time to slow down and cultivate those spiritual senses that allow us to see where Christ is moving, what Christ has been preparing for us to do to further God's kingdom. Through Scripture reading, regular participation in the sacraments, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines we are learning see what God is already doing in God's world. When we can perceive that, all we have to do is get on board.

A prayer for mission, to be said after receiving the Eucharist

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Sacrament of your son, Jesus Christ, his body in this bread, his blood in this cup. We thank you that you sent your Holy Spirit to reveal the light of Christ's presence to us in Word, in Sacrament, and in the prayers. May your Spirit kindle in our hearts, warmed by the Sacraments, the fire of Pentecost. Send us out now to do your will. As you have fed our spirits, feed also our imaginations to see you acting the world, so that we may witness to your great and mighty deeds. Amen.

The Rev. James Stambaugh
Church of the Holy Apostles, Penn Wynne

February 20, 2018
Tuesday after the First Sunday in Lent

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?' He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For 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.' *Mark 14:17-21*

One thought I have each Lent is how often the focus is on the “one” who betrayed Jesus. But reading between the lines, every one of the twelve were, in all likelihood, dipping their bread in the bowl as well as Judas, and all of them abandoned Jesus at the end of his earthly life. I find Lent puts the reader into the story, and forces us confront the realities that make us most uncomfortable. When did we see someone arrested unjustly? When did we see someone in trouble and run scared? When did we sell someone out for money? Our actions matter. The practice of being at the Eucharist each week takes on a new immediacy as we realize that we eat and drink with Jesus at least each Sunday, and then betray him throughout the week. This realization is not a guilt trip, but an opportunity to love and serve the Lord and recommit to the radical table fellowship we share, in worship, with one another.

Lord God of our Fathers: God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name. Amen.

The Rev. Michael Giansiracusa
Saint Mary's, Ardmore

February 21, 2018

Wednesday after the First Sunday in Lent.

And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Mark 14: 22-25

Our unbelieving, "impious" age tends to have a problem believing in the miraculous. This ought not to surprise us: The human mind, in its fallen state, generally has a problem believing in perfectly believable things. The deceit of self-love, our delusional attempts to make ourselves "as gods, knowing both good and evil" blind the mind and soul to the realities of God's truth surrounding us in the order of his creation and those more perfectly revealed through the prophets and, in these last days, by His only begotten Son. Indeed the Son of God was incarnate to "destroy the works of the devil" whose aim, from our infancy, has been to convince us of this very lie: That divinity consists in rebelling against God; that in knowing something other than God, we can be "as gods". And yet we are left with this simplicity of this truth: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." If our end is to be the divine life, then it can only be by the measure of God's righteousness, it can only be accomplished by our conforming to the image of God and not on the basis of walking apart from God. That God condescended to take our nature upon Himself to teach us this truth, to become our righteousness, is made all the more profound to us when we consider that though our vain attempts to be as God separate us from Him, yet his humbly becoming a man and emptying Himself of His Glory accomplishes the end of making us like Him.

Lent is the Church's annual reminder to us of the truth of the fall in us; of the truth of our sin and the greater truth and reality of God's love, witnesses in the redeeming work Jesus Christ on the Cross. George Herbert, that great master of Anglican divinity, reminds us of these two fundamental principles, these "two vast, spacious things" in his poem "The Agony."

Philosophers have measured mountains,
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
Walk'd with a staff to heaven, and traced fountains
But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove:
Yet few there are that sound them; Sin and Love.

Who would know Sin, let him repair
Unto Mount Olivet; there shall he see
A man, so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
His skin, his garments, bloody be.
Sin is that Press and Vice, which forceth pain

To hunt his cruel food through every vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay,
And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.

Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.

The Rev. Edward Rix
All Saints, Wynnewood

February 22, 2018
Thursday after the First Sunday in Lent

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Mark 14:26-28

It struck me as rather odd that Jesus would be singing on this night, a night of betrayal, following a last supper, knowing the agony and abandonment that lay ahead. I don't recall any other place in the Gospels that mentions Jesus singing. So, it caused me to research what he might have been singing following this Passover meal. I learned that throughout the meal portions of Psalms 113 – 118 (the "hallel" psalms) would be sung and that it is likely that Psalm 118 would be sung at the conclusion. That psalm begins with the words "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!" In my Bible, this psalm is entitled: "A Song of Victory." Jesus' life is a song about the steadfast love of the Lord and he sings it to the very end. It is his life's composition and even in this very dark moment, his proclamation does not waver. He knew God's love would be victorious.

We all find many reasons to doubt God's love. We can become deserters, who flee when the crushing weight of life is too much, when our disappointments mount and our hearts are broken open by betrayal. Lent is a time to hear again Jesus' song to "the steadfast love of the Lord." For no matter what happens, his love is victorious and Jesus always goes before us to Galilee, to the places where we live and work and play and he will keep us close and be the shepherd of our souls.

I invite you to pray Psalm 118 (*Book of Common Prayer, 760*) sometime this day.

The Rev. John W. Sosnowski
Christ Church, Ithan

February 23, 2018
Friday after the First Sunday in Lent

Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.
Mark 14:29-31

The disciples were with Jesus at the Last Supper when he startled them with these words: "...one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me". We are told that "They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, Surely you don't mean me?" Can you imagine being told that one of your intimates was about to betray the person around whom your life had centered for three years?

Yet there was a bit of the disingenuous about the disciples' reaction. Their question was a denial; it wasn't, "Well, it's not me, Lord." Rather it was, "You don't mean me (do you)?" This subtle question reveals the reality that each of them understood that they were capable of the betrayal. While it was Judas who would betray Jesus to the authorities, the other disciples also betrayed him. Peter would betray him sitting around a blazing fire warming himself outside the High Priest's house. His betrayal took the form of the threefold denial of knowing Jesus. All of the other disciples would flee from the authorities and leave Jesus abandoned to face his death alone.

In Lent we are asked to look at our lives and their estrangement from our Lord. It is a period of reflection and repentance. It is also a time of hope and mercy. Just as each of the disciples betrayed our Lord, so do we when we break the bond of love which belongs to God alone – "you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength." Yet we also ask the question, "Is it I, Lord?" afraid to admit the answer, "Yes it is I." When I was in elementary school, the Dominican nuns taught that it was our sins that crucified Jesus, and that God's love was so great that even if there was no other sin than mine, Jesus would have gone through with the Passion. In the great Holy Week hymn, "Ah, holy Jesus" we sing the words, "Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee. 'Twas I, Lord Jesus," I it was denied thee; I crucified thee."

Lent is another chance our Lord gives us to make those changes which allow us to be reconciled to himself, but to do that requires us to look into the depths of our souls, to look into the mirror of our souls, because that will give us the honesty to answer the question the disciples posed, "Surely you don't mean me?" Reconciliation requires change and that is frightening; yet it the only way forward. During Lent the refrain from the song, "Man in the Mirror", sums up this inward introspection beautifully, "I'm starting with the man in the mirror/I'm asking him to change his ways/And no message could have been any clearer/If you wanna make the world a better place/Take a look at yourself and then make a change."

Let us join Jesus at the rock and pray for the courage to change by reconciling our lives with God. This God who brought Jesus from his great ordeal to the day of resurrection and will bring

us from the death of sin to a new life of grace. As the psalmist writes in Psalm 103, “He has not dealt with us according to our sins/nor rewarded us according to our wickedness./For as the heavens are high above the earth/so is his mercy great upon those who fear him./As far as the east is from the west,/so far has he removed our sins from us./As a father cares for his children so does the LORD care for those who fear him.”

The Rev. Frank Wallner
Saint John's, Lower Merion

February 24, 2018
Saint Matthias the Apostle

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." Mark 14:32-34

Jesus is moving closer to the hour. In these few words we can feel his emotions, his human emotions, as the full impact of submitting to God's will hits him. While he invites the companionship of his disciples, he also seems to be distancing himself from them at each step. First, he leaves most of the disciples to just sit – no other command or thought was given. He takes a few disciples further along the path and the command to them is to stay in that place and keep awake as he moves into a solitary place - literally and figuratively. But at the same time, he knows that the disciples need to prepare themselves. What was going through the minds of the disciples? I'm sure they had no comprehension of the brutality that was about to happen. Jesus did not ask them to pray, just to sit and keep awake. If I put myself in this space, I would like to think I'd be concerned about Jesus' words "I am deeply grieved," words uttered by the man I had come to believe was the Messiah. Would I have gone after him? Would I have stayed awake in prayer? Would I not have sensed anything wrong – to the point of being able to quickly fall asleep? I don't know what I would have done, but I can engage in this deep need for prayer for Jesus as he comes to realize the full impact of submitting to God's will; and for each of us as we experience (and accept) God's will in our lives. Lent allows us the opportunity to do both.

The Rev. Karen Kaminskas
Saint Mary's, Ardmore

February 25, 2018
The Second Sunday in Lent

Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." *Mark 8:31-38*

Jesus is a realist. He knows the ways of the world, and he knows the ways of God. He refuses to deny either reality.

Peter is also mindful of both - somewhat. As do many of us - and maybe all of us at times in our own lives - Peter wishes to ignore the inevitable collision between the two. In this exchange with the Master, he opts for the comfort of encouragement over agreement with Jesus' conclusion of the inevitable. In his immediate and definite response, Jesus compares Peter to Satan.

Who is Satan? We meet him in the first chapter of this Gospel. Satan is the tempter of Jesus. Satan's chief goal is temptation ... to forsake the truth of God's reign in order to achieve earthly status and comfort.

In this brief encounter, we witness the intensity of Jesus' harsh retort to Peter, a harshness perhaps born of the power of temptation upon Jesus to claim the comfort of his own immediate human worldly wishes.

We are thus enabled by the Son of God to come to ourselves as we really are at this moment. Through God's loving acceptance and parental-like strength, we are then invited to confront the challenges of our own lives with an outstretched hand to God's hand, leading each of us home, again and again.

The power of this faith increases in us as we come to our God continually with our faith, hope and love. This life is why we strive especially in this season to keep a holy Lent.

O God, whose glory is always to have mercy, bring us again and again to embrace and ever hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Bill Wood
Saint David's Church, Radnor

February 26, 2018
Monday after the First Sunday in Lent

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.' *Mark 14:35-36*

In Mark's gospel, prayer is a dangerous activity. From the start of his ministry, Jesus is confronted with the tempter whenever he goes off to the wilderness or to a deserted place to pray. In prayer, he does battle with the lure of power, the enticement of popularity, the temptation to abuse or misuse his God-given powers. In every instance, Jesus struggles with his identity as he hears God's call to surrender his entire self to God. Time and again, Jesus emerges from prayer in Mark's gospel and sets his sights on proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom and doing what is necessary to bring God's world about. He knows more and more that this is what God wants of him.

In the passage above, Jesus is pleading with "Abba," to take away what is coming. Struggling in fear, knowing the end was near, his prayer ends in surrender, "not what I want, but what you want." That is our prayer, every time we pray the Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done." These words that we often recite by rote with little thought, are really a prayer about surrender. In it we are asking that our will be aligned with God's will. We pray that God's World, his Kingdom may come. When we pray this prayer, we release what we want to what God wants; we submit ourselves to God's design, giving up our own will. To pray in such a way is to allow oneself to fall dependently into the loving embrace of God.

So, ultimately prayer is an activity of love. It is an activity of intimacy. It is a way for us to approach God, our Creator, the one we call Father, Abba, and immerse ourselves in God's world. It is time spent unveiling our hearts to God, speaking about our deepest needs, the deepest longings of our hearts. We place our fears, our self-doubt, our joys and our sorrows before God. We trust that God knows what is best for us and so we surrender ourselves to God. We begin to understand and accept God's activity among us. We become better at allowing God to be God in the fullest sense of what that means. Prayer is not so much about getting what we want but learning how to accept what God wants for us.

I invite you to pray this as a mantra (a repeated phrase) throughout this day:
"Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done."

The Rev. John W. Sosnowski
Christ Church, Ithan

February 27, 2018
Tuesday after the Second Sunday in Lent

He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. *Mark 14:37-38*

The evening begins with Jesus and his disciples celebrating the Passover. A mood of distress is set at the beginning of the meal with the announcement that one of the twelve will betray Jesus. The anguish is heightened for Jesus because this is their Last Supper, something he knows the disciples are incapable of grasping. After supper, they come to the Garden of Gethsemane for a time of prayer. At some point, Jesus brings Peter, James and John to a place separate from the rest, and says to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and keep awake." Jesus goes a little further, throws himself on the ground and he asks his Father to remove the cup of suffering he is about to drink. He then submits to the Father's will.

We can only imagine Jesus' torment as he returns to Peter, James and John. Then to find them sleeping adds disappointment and hurt to his suffering. The level of distress, agitation, aloneness, anguish and fear that must be raging in Jesus are beyond our imagination, but yet, he is gentle in his rebuke of the disciples for falling asleep. And his reminder to them, and to us, is that regardless of our best intentions, we are weak in carrying out our resolve. Only by mindfulness and prayer can we receive the strength to maneuver the trials and conflicts of life.

Lent is a time when we are reminded of our weaknesses. It is a time when we renew our resolve and practice the discipline of keeping awake and being constantly in prayer. It is an essential part of our journey to the cross which allows us to live a life of resurrection.

Loving God, help us to be watchful and to see the loving sacrifice of your Son in all that we encounter so that we make his sacrifice worthwhile through our actions. Amen.

The Rev. E. Edward Shiley
Saint David's Church, Radnor

February 28, 2018
Wednesday after the Second Sunday in Lent

And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.

Mark 14:39-40

The presence of a friend is a gift that not only makes our life sweeter but also helps make difficult pain easier to bear. Companionship – fellowship with another that helps us know we are not alone - that we are with someone who knows us and loves us – can be a balm and comfort in the journey of life.

As Jesus prayed in the garden, he wanted and needed his companions. He needed them at his side - to watch, to wait, and to pray, together. But every time Jesus turned to his friends, every time he reached out for their presence, they abandoned him for sleep.

This isn't the only time Jesus finds himself reaching out to his friends with no response. He is constantly reaching out to us, too, his beloved friends, to gift us with the grace and gift of companionship. He reaches out to be a presence for us, to hold us through whatever situation life has to offer. But we are not always ready or responsive. Sometimes we are distracted. Sometimes we are asleep.

The good news is that even though we don't always turn toward his outstretched hand and take his offer of companionship, his presence and offer are never rescinded. They are always there for us. God never gives up. Not in this life, nor the next. Jesus is always our companion, is always waiting for us to turn and respond, to take his hand. And even if we don't, even in our darkest hour, in our death and beyond the door of our death, Jesus outstretched hand touches us and holds us, softly, until we turn, and meet his grace.

The Rev. Amanda Eiman
Saint David's, Radnor

March 1, 2018
Thursday after the Second Sunday in Lent

And he came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."
Mark 14: 41-42

Was it so much to ask that the disciples sit and watch? No wonder on finding them asleep the third time, Jesus is disgusted with them. Given the heaviness of fear, trepidation and terror that weigh so heavily upon him, at best all the disciples could offer Jesus in these hours is their presence. None of them is equipped with an experience of life that could offer guidance, wisdom, even consolation to Jesus. Their very presence is all they have. And that is something each of them – each of us – can offer in times of deepest distress. Be aware of the pain that others bear that you can never know. We know from sitting by the bed of a sick child; waiting with a friend for the results of a critical lab test; holding a deathbed vigil. Oddly, families visiting prisoners on the day of execution are permitted relatively short visits. But the disciples have failed to offer Jesus what they could – the comfort of their presence. And now it is too late. The moment has urgently come upon them all. There is no need to counsel the disciples any further. Jesus must be sick with anxiety and fear, yet he resolutely faces squarely what comes next. "Let us be going." What might the disciples have experienced in waiting with Jesus? How powerful an experience to be in Jesus' and God's presence on this terrible night! What revelation of God did they miss that enabled Jesus to face his betrayer, one of his very own, into the hands of his enemies, and what would follow? Mark's spare and direct account captures the depth and breadth of the terror, betrayal and regret of this moment. Have mercy on us, God, have mercy.

The Rev. Jo Ann B. Jones
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 2, 2018
Friday after the Second Sunday in Lent

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard. So when he came, he went up to him at once and said "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. *Mark 14:43-46*

At the center of Bologna in Italy, there is a complex of 4 (once 7) churches, known as "Little Jerusalem" because copies have been built there of what is believed to be Christ's tomb, a miniature Gethsemane and even Pilate's Courtyard at Santo Stefano. Daily, this "little Jerusalem" teaches, through the narrative of its architecture, the story of betrayal and suffering unto death to worshippers, pilgrims and the most casual tourist. This struck me as powerful, having our tradition of only annual, Holy Week connection to the stories of Judas' and Simon Peter's betrayal of Jesus. For this to be a constant in people's lives took me a little aback.



Standing in Pilate's Courtyard, admiring the plump cockerel in its perfect niche, the sunny courtyard with its pretty stone well, I wondered that these symbols of life could be perverted to mean betrayal. Then, one kiss, given to betray instead of to express love and devotion, resulting in the worst perfidy. Isn't this how betrayal happens: casual, barely noticed, bit by bit? Then the unspeakable consequences: the grey lifeless, tortured figure of Jesus sculpted above the nearby crypt.

Today's passage from the Gospel of Mark invokes the crowd of temple military with their swords and clubs eager to pick up whomever Judas identifies – but evidently unable to identify him themselves. Unleashed by the religious authorities, they act without questioning the veracity of the claims made against the man they have been sent to arrest and bring before Pilate. They carry out decisions that have been made in all their names by fearful chief priests, scribes and elders, colluding with the Roman state.

The experience of standing in Pilate's Courtyard in Bologna's "little Jerusalem" left me conscious of the quotidian nature of betrayal. It is part of the difficult truth of our humanity. We can each be degraded, whether we betray ourselves or one another, or when betrayal occurs in our names. We betray the God we love.

I believe we are living in a time of betrayal of many of our deepest commitments as people of God. Whether it's the environment, international assistance, respect for treaties, our treatment of the alien among us, protection of long-respected immigration goals, health-care as a human right...much of who we are as people of faith is compromised daily.

Jesus, in Mark's gospel, prepares the sleepy disciples for Judas' approach : "Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." Would that we could live more consciously, recognizing our complicity in his betrayal, and that God grant us the will to object, and the strength to resist evil; that is my prayer.

The Rev. Barbara Abbott
Saint George's, Ardmore

March 3, 2018
Saturday after the Second Sunday in Lent

But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." All of them deserted him and fled. Mark 14:47-50

It is always heartbreaking to ever hear of Jesus' life, teachings or ministry being used to justify war or any kind of violence. All one has to do is even glance at the beatitudes or Sermon on the Mount to know that Jesus taught, and lived, nonviolence as a core principle. But if anyone ever has a lingering question about it, his response to violence committed by his own protectors on the night of his arrest ought to clear it up.

At this point Jesus knows what's coming. He is looking down the barrel of a gun with the finger of ridicule, torture, and execution on the trigger. Yet, when one of his friends tries to stop one of those about to arrest him, he stays his hand with a simple, "Let it be." Jesus is able to do this because he knows the victory never lies with the violent. God wins, love wins, justice wins, even when in the midst of human chaos and fear that seems far away.

Father, not my will, but yours be done. (Repeat).

The Rev. Christopher Bishop
Saint Martin's, Radnor

March 4, 2018
The Third Sunday in Lent

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

John 2:13-22

The most remarkable aspect of this story is the verse that is probably least noticed. It appears to be merely an afterthought appended at a much later date: "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this."

What actually captures our attention is the unexpected violence of Jesus' actions. His outburst seems out of character — a rare moment of exception, when anger gets the best of him. And we wonder then what to make of this and how to justify this very physical manifestation of his fury. Our focus often remains fixed on the particulars of his reaction and what it was about these mundane transactions that caused his eruption. It's easy to imagine grounds for complaint or postulate some kind of injustice whenever business is negotiated. But Jesus' violence should not be taken as a form of social protest; it was, quite differently, a moment of revelation.

Violence is a mode of communication. It happens when "I want to say something to you that really cannot be said to you, that you are not in a position to hear, and when, yet, I insist that you are going to hear it." More pithily, violence declares the "alienation of what is to be from what is." Jesus' actions disrupted not just the trade that was happening that day; they were his declaration that the very logic on which any transactions depend have no place in the economy of God. In the temple there could be no room for any manner of quid pro quo. Jesus was not just overturning tables. He was "overthrowing everything" — even the very "way in which God will create the future... in utter contradiction of every standing order." And this violence is as good a description of resurrection as we can get.

All quotations from Robert Jenson: Essays in the Theology of Culture

The Rev. Peter T. Vanderveen
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 5, 2018
Monday after the Third Sunday in Lent

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.
Mark 14:51-52

My New Testament professor in seminary loved to muse about this passage, which was funny in light of the fact that he did not like for us seminarians to interpret what was not written in scripture. Whenever one of us seminarians would break this rule he would say, "That's all well and good, but the text does not say that. Your explanation is simply midrash." And yet for him, this passage was fair game for this kind of extra scriptural interpretation. He fancied the idea that the little boy who ran off naked was none other than the gospel writer Mark himself. And he would throw a few facts our way to support his claim.

Going with the premise of his midrash makes me wonder about those seminal moments in each of our own day-to-day activities that change the trajectory of our lives forever. Again, making an assumption that we all have those events in our lives, it may be helpful to reflect and identify our own seminal moments. Is your moment the death of a loved one? Could it be a mountaintop experience? Might it be a time where you gave so much of yourself that you understood the power of servant ministry? Maybe it's a time where you messed up your own life so badly that receiving and accepting grace was the only way to move forward in your life. Lent is full of opportunities for the discipline required in self-discovery. Today I invite you to reflect on those times in your life, good or bad, acknowledging that they somehow changed your life forever. After careful reflection, I invite you to pray. Because you never know how one day can change your life forever...if you let it.

Lord God we know that you are with us in all aspects of our lives. Please help us recognize your presence in all the things that we do and experience. Help us to have the discipline to be quiet and reflect on your activity in our lives. And then give us the wisdom to open our hearts so that you may work in and through our everyday lives. All this we ask in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Rev. Joseph K. Smith
Saint Mary's, Wayne

March 6, 2018
Tuesday after the Third Sunday in Lent

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. *Mark 14:53-54*

Growing up in Northern Michigan, the action of warming oneself by the fire was an essential part of most of the year. In the summer months there were campfires under starlit skies and crisp night air. In winter there was always a fire in the fireplace or woodstove that was essential to stave off the cold. In the midst of a chill, the warmth of a fire provides a level of comfort that is hard to describe.

Today we meet Peter, in a rather chilling place. Yes, the air might have been crisp, but the situation was definitely more chilling. There in the darkness of unknowing and uncertainty, the warmth of that fire must have provided some comfort, if only fleeting. I can imagine when Peter looked around at the other faces, with firelight dancing across them, that the fear and vulnerability must have come crashing back in.

I wonder what is the chill in your life this day. What is the difficult circumstance, or challenging relationship that might draw you to a moment of escape in the light and warmth of a fire? In face of these moments, Lent reminds us that prayer is a sure place to find solace and comfort. Prayer, like the flames of a fire, provides for us warmth and light, that creates the space for us to discover the way forward.

Take a bit of time today and reflect on your life of prayer. Perhaps it is time to fan the flames a bit more, and bring your whole self into the conversation with God.

The Rev. Andrew Kellner
Saint Christopher's, Gladwyne

March 7, 2018

Wednesday after the Third Sunday in Lent

Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands."' But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Mark 14.55-59

They found none. They found nothing, not a word of testimony with which they could condemn Jesus. In this Gospel of Mark, be assured, Jesus is innocent of any heresy against the faith of his forebears. It is, however, rather remarkable, isn't it? Countless times Jesus has transgressed laws of cleanliness and the observing of the Sabbath. Still these infractions are not among the ones with which Jesus is charged. And of those Jesus has healed or reconciled with their families or communities, with those oppressed and poor whom he has stood by, where are they? Not invited to testify, to be witnesses for the accused? Truth be told, they are out proclaiming the good news of the in-breaking of the reign of God. Such is the Gospel as told by Mark. These have been healed, these have been forgiven, these have known reconciliation. Once one has experienced the power and presence of God's healing grace, they can do nothing else!

What testimony do we seek? Words meant to divide and bring death or do we seek the words that lead to life? Is not the testimony of Jesus, nothing less than the saving acts of a God who loves us?

Gracious God, help us to agree that Jesus is the way to our life and our salvation and let us work to bear witness to that truth in all we do. Amen.

The Rev. Barry J. Harte
the Church of Saint Asaph, Bala Cynwyd

March 8, 2018

Thursday after the Third Sunday in Lent

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Mark 14:60-65

As the parent of a three year old, I have seen *Moana*, Disney's latest animated feature, more than a few times during the last few months. In the film, the title character, a restless teenager torn between her wanderlust and her responsibility to her people, is called to journey from her home to save the world. Though she encounters challenges along the way, her mission is most threatened by her own self-doubt. Just before the climactic scene, Moana is asked, "Do you know who you are?" Moana's response allows her to overcome the shadows of self-doubt and fulfill her destiny, revealing how powerful it can be when we know who we are.

We see a similar revelation in this passage from Mark. Throughout Mark's gospel, Jesus' true identity is kept hidden from most of the people around him. In this passage, where Jesus is questioned by the high priest, Jesus finally reveals who he truly is. When the high priest asks if he is the Messiah, the one anointed to usher in the reign of God, Jesus, recalling the language God uses at the burning bush, responds, "I am." In a gesture of deep lament, the high priest tears his clothes. The high priest's reaction is less about his anger and more about the threat that Jesus' claim represents. Jesus' true identity is a fundamental challenge to the status quo. It reveals that God's purpose will be accomplished irrespective of the religious or political authorities.

We are often reminded that our purpose as Christians is to proclaim the good news. While this true, it is helpful to remember that the truth of the gospel is not contingent on our participation. In fact, this passage from Mark's gospel reveals that we can find our true identity by framing our lives within the the mission and destiny of Jesus the Messiah.

Almighty and most gracious God, in your son Jesus Christ you revealed your true purpose for creation. Help us to find our identity in his life, death, and resurrection, so that we may know who we are. Amen.

The Rev. David F. Romanik
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 9, 2018
Friday after the Third Sunday in Lent

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself by the fire, she stared at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' But he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about.' And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. Mark 14:66-68

One day many years ago, I was with a group of people at a dinner who began to gossip and say several misleading and hateful things about a friend of mine who was not in attendance. They attacked him, spreading ugly, vicious rumors about him. They were crucifying my friend right before my eyes.

I started to say something to defend my friend, to stop the verbal abuse and defamations, but I didn't know these people all that well and, as a person who doesn't enjoy conflict all that much, I kept silent. On my way home, I was kicking myself over my disloyalty and outright weakness, sad and ashamed that I hadn't seized the opportunity to speak the truth and to speak out for my friend. Still today, I am ashamed and regretful that I didn't speak out, afraid to lose my standing with these dinner partners, but not enough to love my friend in their presence.

You may have had some similar experience in your life when you didn't stand up for a friend or something that matters to you in the face of opposition. You may have had a similar experience in not standing up for your faith and your relationship with God. It's not easy some days to admit our Christian leanings, much less the experiences and life we have with God as an individual or as part of a Christian community. And it hurts our souls and our hearts when we realize that we have denied God before others. A rooster may not crow, but we know it when hidden from others the life that we know and are trying to live in Christ.

May God give us the courage and the strength to stand up for our friends, what matters to us and especially our life in God. Amen.

The Rev. W. Frank Allen
Saint David's (Radnor) Church

March 10, 2018

Saturday after the Third Sunday in Lent

And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept. *Mark 14: 69-72*

I have grown to admire and love Peter more and more. As a child, Peter was presented to me as the most Holy and Perfect of the Saints, holding the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and head of the Church on Earth. He was so perfect and saintly that he seemed aloof and out of reach. However, when I read the Gospels and Acts on my own, I came to see Peter as a person full of flaws. He was impulsive, rough, outspoken, crass and surly. He failed Jesus many times. Even in Jesus' darkest hour, Peter denied knowing Jesus. I came to see Peter through a looking glass that reflected the person I was – flawed, insensitive, impulsive, and sinful. As a result, I found hope in Peter. If Jesus was willing to empower Peter and give Peter authority, then perhaps, Jesus would empower me to live out my vocation in order to build the kingdom of God here on earth in spite of my flaws, sins, and shortcomings. I grew to love Peter not because he was superhuman but because he was truly human, saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, often putting his foot in his mouth, and even prone to violence as when he cut off Malchus' ear. Peter did protest that he didn't know Jesus and through his remorse and tears came to face the reality of his own ugliness. As a result, he realized that Jesus loved him for who he was. By coming to know his true and authentic self, Peter realizes that he was finally seeing what Jesus Christ saw and the reality that Christ loved him anyway. In the end, Peter came to love himself and love God and was willing to sacrifice everything for Christ, even his own life. May we have such hope.

The Rev. Tim Gavin
The Episcopal Academy

March 11, 2018
The Fourth Sunday in Lent

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 judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. *John 3:17-19*

God became a human being, the man Jesus, so that the world might be saved—through him. Those who do not believe, those who cling to the ways of this world, have chosen; they have chosen to condemn themselves. But that's not the end of the story. The Good News is that God continues to reconcile the world to God's self. God is not finished. Yes, at the resurrection and ascension God broke the power of death once and for all, and yet we humans still cling to the darkness. For whatever reason, our sins too often get the best of us. The story would end here were it not for Jesus' work on the cross. But as God crushed the power of death represented in the cross, the light broke out into the world and all of humanity was given the opportunity to bask in the Glory of God's light.

Sure, it's a struggle. But is there a more appropriate time than Lent to trudge through our own desert searching for freedom from the darkness to which we so tightly cling? Is there a better time than Lent to take inventory of the things that pull us away from the light; the way of Christ? Is there a more fitting time than right now to make a decision to repent, change the direction of our lives while groping, the best we can, for the light so freely offered? Even if we do nothing else this Lent, why not begin on this day, two weeks before Holy Week, the work of repentance and amendment of life? Why not let go of the darkness that this world offers and grab ahold of Christ's light? Why not?

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

The Rev. Joseph K. Smith
Saint Mary's, Wayne

March 12, 2018

Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You say so' Mark 15:1-2

There was a pious and faithful Rabbi who lived on the edge of a town. He spent his days in prayer and communion with God. One day a harsh knock on the door jolted him and he greeted several angry men, one of whom said: "Rabbi you will pay for impregnating my daughter!" To which the Rabbi calmly replied: "Is that so?". They left still angry and bewildered. Many months later after the birth of the daughter's child, the Rabbi was awakened by another loud knock and greeted the same gang of men who seemed somehow less agitated. "Rabbi I apologize you are not the father of my grandchild" And the reply was stunningly the same: "Is that so?" We humans ask so many questions, especially before we commit to an action. And we often ask those questions hoping for an answer which will clarify or get us off the hook or prove our own misguided point. And so it is with Pilate. Whatever construction Pilate, and the chief priests and elders, has determined is the truth is simply not the Truth. Jesus is! Say what you will; the answer is Always the Same. May we be a people who ask questions which point us to the Truth, which point us to God.

The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
Saint David's (Radnor) Church

March 13, 2018

Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. *Mark 15:3-5*

Lent is a time for silence, and not always in the quiet contemplative way we might be tempted to associate with it. In this short but mighty scene from Mark's Gospel we witness Jesus refusing to respond to Pilate's demand for answers following a false accusation. His silence is a far cry from any image of a hermit sitting on a distant hilltop. His silence is a powerful form of protest—a sign of his true power in the face of a lesser adversary.

Pilate believes himself to have the upper hand, and at first blush the world might tend to agree. He has the might of the Emperor behind him. He has the crowd turning to him to wield their brand of justice. He has money, prestige, and military might. Because of all of these trappings of power, he has come to believe that people will listen and respond to him when he speaks—even if he is demanding answers to lies. Pilate was so sure of his own power that there were really only two responses he expected from Jesus in this moment: fight or flight. Jesus could have openly fought back with yells or screams or been terrified and tried to plead for mercy.

But Jesus chose a third way. Jesus chose the dignity and defiance of silence. Jesus chose the way of nonviolent resistance. Instead of pretending that Pilate was all-powerful, Jesus acted on what he knew to be the bigger truth—that God was in charge. As such, he did not respond to Pilate as though he were an equal of God. Assured in his knowledge that he was acting on God's will, Jesus had no need to defend himself from lies or defer to a lesser power. Imagine what a shock it must have been for Pilate to see someone as low on the proverbial power scale as Jesus having the audacity NOT to respond to him! Jesus' silence amazes him and he must take notice of Jesus in that moment.

In an era when people literally shout at each other for entertainment (think ESPN) or for political discourse (think Fox or CNN), making a choice to not respond to lies or inflammatory noise is an act of rebellion. It is choosing a third way of peace in a time that desperately needs the strength of those who do not need to be the loudest person in the room to feel like the most powerful. Lent give us the chance to develop the strength to be silent so that the love of God might be the loudest sound of all and that people might be amazed at his power.

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Hillary D. Raining
St. Christopher's, Gladwyne

March 14, 2018

Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Mark 15:6-11

Barabbas, probably a political dissident, apparently violent, and imprisoned by his political enemies, the Romans, suddenly finds himself a pawn in the political machinations of the chief priests and Pilate, the Roman governor. The name Barabbas means, "son of Abba" or "son of the father." It is therefore a bitter irony that he is chosen for pardon, rather than Jesus, the true son of the Father. But, Barabbas is chosen for release by the crowds who are stirred up by the chief priests, who were themselves motivated by jealousy. Pilate's simply wanted to defuse the situation, and appease the crowd. Where did all this leave Barabbas?

On his 2017 self-titled album, the country singer-songwriter, Jason Ealy, recorded a song written from Barabbas' perspective. Ealy's Barabbas is confused and disoriented by his sudden release. He had no sooner come to terms with "doing his time," when he finds himself free at the expense of an enigmatic man he does not know. "On this side of forgiveness," the cross that Barabbas must bear is to learn to live life well after getting a second chance; to learn to forgive himself; to learn to be free. This is our task, also. By virtue of his life, teachings, death, and resurrection Christ offers total forgiveness, infinite love, and limitless grace. As the Apostle Paul tells us, through the Spirit of Christ we are made children of the God—we are un-ironically made sons and daughters of the Father (Romans 8:12-17). Christ has set us free, not because of an insistent mob, nor because of the jealousies of religious leaders, but because of the unending mercy of the ever-living God. On this side of forgiveness, we must learn to bear the cross of accepting this grace, and this freedom.

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. James Stambaugh
Church of the Holy Apostles, Penn Wynne

March 15, 2018

Thursday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!'
Mark 15:12-13

Shouts of 'Crucify him!' coming from the crowd that was, only shortly before, hailing Jesus as a king, demonstrate how quickly we can be swayed. The values we hold as individuals can often be suppressed and supplanted by the loud cries of the crowd. We may fool ourselves into thinking we are above such peer pressure, but how often do we pause when writing a sermon because we start to think about who it might offend? How often have we heard or supplanted Jesus' message of justice to one of mere charity because it fits more neatly and comfortably with our lifestyle? Lent allows us time to reflect on those "sins of omission" when we find ourselves looking more like the crowd than disciples of Jesus and we fail to act although we know better.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Rev. Michael Giansiracusa
Saint Mary's, Ardmore

March 16, 2018

Friday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. Mark 15:14-15

In a previous meditation on our Lord's institution of the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, I recalled George Herbert's poem "The Agony," a mediation at once upon our Savior's crucifixion and of the rite that recalls the same:

Philosophers have measured mountains,
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
Walk'd with a staff to heaven, and traced fountains
 But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove:
Yet few there are that sound them; Sin and Love.

 Who would know Sin, let him repair
Unto Mount Olivet; there shall he see
A man, so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
 His skin, his garments, bloody be.
Sin is that Press and Vice, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruel food through every vein.
 Who knows not Love, let him assay,
And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
 If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine

Throughout these forty days, the Holy Spirit mends our confused minds in manifold means of grace: Meditation on Scripture, prayer, self-denial and deeds of mercy are chief among them. Through them we see afresh the truth of our own sinful predilections, the Father's infinite mercy, and the Son's perfect obedience. And we learn, as it were, 'our place.' We learn that we are creatures, the product of God's love. And we learn anew that His commandments, like his creation are good, that they constitute our good and form the basis of the miraculous life in us, chiefly witnessed in our reception of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the New Covenant. It is a profound truth of Lent traditionally observed that the farther we travel its pilgrim way, the clearer the truth of our sin and God's love become. The increasing intensity of Passiontide, Holy Week, the three days of the Triduum Sacrum, and finally Good Friday itself, are like curtains being drawn in a pageant of revelation, one discomfiting truth preparing us for the next. The institution of the Sacrament of Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday, the night

of love's betrayal, is the constant, sacred reminder that Christ, who is at once all God and all human, has made the instrument of shameful death to be the throne of His glory. On the Cross we see His blood shed and His Body broken, we see our sin in all its terrible consequence: We would not simply be as gods, we would kill the very God who made us. And yet, as the sacrament reminds us, what seems bread and wine to us is at once His Blood outpoured and His Body broken: it is His love for us accomplished not simply despite our sin, but through our sin. The distance between our sin and God's love would seem infinite ('spacious' as Herbert would put it), and yet the two are one in a mystery at once beyond our telling and perfectly believable. It is believable because it is God alone that make everything out of nothing, who gave us this something made out of nothing. And despite our vain attempts to bring the 'less than something' of sin and lies into God's good order, He has taken that "less than something" on the Cross and given to us more than even we had at that beginning. For we have more than the goodness of Eden wherein we were first placed, we have the greater goodness, the "more than something" of an eternal relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in eternity. That is the miracle we recall in these words of institution: That we sinners have been invited to drink this wine with our Savior in the Kingdom of God.

The Rev. Edward Rix
All Saints, Wynnewood

March 17, 2018
Saturday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him." Mark 15:16-17

Jesus is clothed in symbols of royalty, a purple cloak and a crown, not because the people seek to make him king, but in order to humiliate and shame him. The authorities make a mockery of him and Jesus is the innocent victim of the hatred of human beings. This suffering servant's kingship is really a kinship. He is one with us, one with all those who suffer humiliation and shame. He understands our pain and stands with us fully and completely. He knows the pain of those who are maligned and victimized. Our redeemer, king, stands with those who are tormented by and ravaged by opioid addiction. He bears the scars of those who have been physically and sexually abused, victims of predators who seek to exert their power and exploit. He knows the humiliation of those who live in poverty, who lack the security of a warm home, and who beg for their next meal. He walks with the immigrant living in fear of deportation and knows the painful wandering of refugees seeking a homeland. This suffering servant king stands before all of these tormented people and each of us who bears the scars of our own emotional, physical or psychological struggles and says: "You are not alone. I am with you."

This king of compassion wants us to know that not only are we not alone, but also that there is no suffering, not even death itself, that can put an end to God's love for us. It is a forever love, one that saves and liberates, restores dignity and gives us all hope for new and lasting life. Let us use this Lenten time to re-discover the depth of God's saving, compassionate love for us all.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

The Rev. John W. Sosnowski
Christ Church, Ithaca

March 18, 2018
The Fifth Sunday in Lent

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 honor. 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 judgment 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.

John 12:20-33

In this Johannine passage we meet a Jesus who is seemingly full of bravado as he faces his Passion and death. "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" It is interesting that it is only in John that we find this "troubled" but seemingly unfrightened Jesus moving steadfastly forward. It is also interesting that John gamely jumps from the Last Supper with only a mention of Gethsemane in the context of his arrest. "On the other side [of the Kidron Valley] there was a garden and he and his disciples went into it."

In contrast, the Synoptic Gospels present a different picture. Jesus and the disciples go to the garden to pray, and it is a much more human, frightened Jesus that we meet. In Matthew 26:37-38, Jesus takes some of the disciples and "...he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.'" In Mark 14:33 we are told that Jesus is "deeply distressed and troubled," and in Luke 22:42,44 Jesus knelt and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done... And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

It is this Jesus to whom I can truly relate, especially during the Lenten season. I have what most would call a "tacky" picture of Jesus in Gethsemane, one which most of you have probably seen. It shows Jesus kneeling at a rock in a flowing purple robe, his anguished face looking up, and a ray of golden light shining on him. This picture is my touchstone, the Jesus who understands my sin, my fear, my alienation as I too move inexorably to the grave.

On Ash Wednesday we read Psalm 51: "I know my transgressions, /and my sin is ever before

me.” As this psalm washes over us, there is a duality of fear and comfort emanating from it: “Hide not your face from my sins” and “Cast me not away from your presence” contrasted with “Wash me through and through from my wickedness/and cleanse me from my sin” and “Create in me a clean heart, O God”.

This is Lent – a time of recognizing our estrangement from God mixed with our realization that God wants us to be reconciled to himself. Lent calls us to a self-examination which can be brutal, but with the knowledge that God will look on us with his “loving-kindness” and “in (his) great compassion (will) blot out my offenses.”

The Rev. Frank Wallner
Saint John’s, Lower Merion

March 19, 2018
Saint Joseph

And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. Mark 15:18-20

This takes me back to Jesus' teaching of the principle of non-retaliation to affronts against our own dignity. Jesus' response to the hatred and brutality of the guards is not met so much with the love he espoused, but with a pure acceptance of God's will and Jesus' mission in this world. His seemingly passive non-response to them may feel unnatural to us, but it displays the incredible power of the Holy Spirit helping us to fulfill God's call to us – even at the most excruciatingly testing times. Jesus is the perfect example of following God's will AND not taking offense at those persecuting him. He was silent before them and neither in these verses or in later verses did he call for revenge from the Father on those who brutalized him. Some may look at this scene and see cowardice. Others, including me, see incredible strength and resolve – in doing something we'd almost give anything not to do. And this is only the beginning. The brutality, humiliation, inhuman treatment, disgrace and scorn will continue for hours to come. For what Christ endured for all that time, the "sacrifice(s)" we make during Lent can never measure up. But our Lenten practices can reflect our efforts/desires to understand and accept God's will in our lives –without retaliation, second guessing, or placing our own personal desires above His. There couldn't be a more humbling model and teacher than Jesus.

The Rev. Karen Kaminskas
Saint Mary's, Ardmore

March 20, 2018

Tuesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

Mark 15:21-24

Here is Mark's stark description of the utter disregard for the Son of God. The rejection is so clear, in both its physical and emotional depiction, no one can miss the cruelty, callousness, and inhumanity. The scene is haunting.

The Crucifixion of Christ is always a shaking experience for any willing to think about this account. Whether the reader believes that Christ is "The Best Man who ever lived" or not, any serious observer of Mark's account cannot dodge the realization that Jesus Christ willingly gave his life to an agonizing death to make a point for your life and mine. The message is forever clear: the love of God for all does not "cut and run," even and especially in the face of worldly opposition and personal torture. That is simply the powerful truth of our faith in God. God's love is real.

A lovely friend of mine took his own life. He left a note apologizing to his young wife and children. The note explained he feared he was "losing his mind" and did not want to use the family's meager savings for his possible recovery. His death was devastating to his family and friends. The lingering family fear was that he would not enter God's Heavenly Kingdom because he had committed the sin of suicide. When eventually they shared that fear with their rector, he responded, "How can that be?" Then he proceeded to suggest that Christ also suffered emotionally as well as physically on the Cross to make sure we know that God is in the midst of all such suffering with redemptive and eternal loving care especially for those who experience the worst of this world's consequences.

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ is indeed so stark we cannot avoid the sense of devastation. The suffering of others is usually less dramatic and apparent, unless it is our own. All suffering is known to God. As we pay attention to it - and love the sufferer - perhaps beginning with our own and extending outward to others, we draw ourselves into God's company.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, give mercy and grace to the living, pardon and rest to the dead, and to us sinners, everlasting grace and glory, for with the Father and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Rev. Bill Wood
St. David's Church, Radnor

March 21, 2018

Wednesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.

Mark 15:25-27

We often assume that Jesus was executed for blasphemy: that the religious authorities simply couldn't tolerate his claims of divine authority. Two facts belie this assumption. For one, there was a punishment prescribed for blasphemy, and it wasn't crucifixion. Crucifixion was reserved for enemies of the Roman state: those who had challenged the emperor's supremacy. It was a public spectacle, an explicit threat to any would-be rabble rousers. Furthermore, as Mark notes in this passage, the accusation against Jesus read, "The King of the Jews." Only the gospels according to Mark and John include a reference to the inscription of the charge against Jesus. While John tells us that the religious authorities objected, saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, 'I am King of the Jews,'" Mark allows the charge to stand on its own. In Mark's gospel, in other words, Jesus was crucified, not for blasphemy, but because he was the "King of the Jews." This is a subtle, but crucial distinction. Rome decided that Jesus needed to be destroyed not because he violated the Jewish tradition, but because he embodied it completely. Jesus did this by putting his whole trust in God's saving power. This represented an existential challenge to the emperor's supremacy, because it fundamentally disrupted the Rome's ability to secure its position of authority. Most tyrannical regimes coerce obedience by threatening death. By putting his trust in God and going willingly to the cross, Jesus nullified the tyrant's ultimate threat.

When Jesus is crucified, he demonstrates how the gospel frustrates the powers of the world. The gospel we proclaim is deeply and quietly subversive. It insists that those who claim worldly authority have no real power over us, because Jesus Christ has neutralized their ultimate threat. The season of Lent is an opportunity to acknowledge this truth and recognize that there is nothing we have to fear.

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For if we live, we live unto the Lord, and if we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. Amen.

The Rev. David F. Romanik
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 22, 2018

Thursday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"
Mark 15:29-30

Are these the same people who sang, "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" only four days ago? Are these same people who threw palm branches in the path of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem? I would hope not, but suspect that many who ridiculed Jesus as he hung on that cross in shame and suffering, many who had yelled "Crucify him, crucify him" just hours earlier were the same people.

It's doubtful that there were two separate crowds in Jerusalem, one that shouted "Hosanna" and another that yelled "Crucify him!" Even given the possibility that the religious leaders may have hired some persons to manipulate the crowd, this speaks more to our fickle human nature.

A significant number of these people could have been at the Sermon on the Mount, and if they did not physically follow Jesus around, they aurally followed his teachings and healings. But as he hangs there in disgrace it is so easy to scorn him, to turn his teaching into mockery.

The bullies of this world do that. They mock those they perceive as less than themselves. They blow this way and that, always seeking the advantage. They laugh at compassion and call it weakness. They do all this to keep from realizing how empty they are, how lonely and how much they hurt. But, this trait is not far below the surface of all humanity. Just look at how Hitler manipulated the crowds.

It is for this reason that we need to look at the baseness of our nature in Lent, that we need to see how weak we can be. It is important for us to realize that Jesus must constantly pray for us, "Father, forgive them...."

Loving God, who holds us responsible for our neighbors, put a fire in our hearts and ignite our passion so that through our words and actions we may work with you in bringing about justice for all humankind; in the name of your Son whom you anointed to set us free. Amen.

The Rev. E. Edward Shiley
Saint David's Church, Radnor

March 23, 2018

Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe. Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Mark 15:31-32

Asking Jesus for proof of omnipotence is not a new request. Sometimes we find ourselves uttering the words, "If you are God, please save me from this situation... give me a sign." Or, "If you intervene, if you help me, I will do anything for you in return."

We all may have had these kinds of conversations with Jesus, at one time or another. But thankfully his relationship with us is not contractual. Mercy, justice, and love don't operate with this kind of currency. Instead, they are gifts. They are given abundantly, sometimes shockingly, and in disproportionate amounts to our sin.

And the ways that God gives them to us might not always be the way that we ask, or even want. Often mercy comes to us when we least expect, or when we think we are least deserving. Justice may be present in ways that we don't understand. And love may pierce our hearts in a situation or through a person with whom we don't want to connect.

We may never be able to get our heads around the magnitude of God's care and love for us. But what we do know is that it is so powerful that God slipped into the vulnerability of skin and entered our violent and disturbing world so that he could redeem us - redeem the pain, brokenness, struggle and strife. Bind the lame, and transform death into life.

The Rev. Amanda Eiman
Saint David's, Radnor

March 24, 2018

Saturday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'E 'lo-i, E'lo-i , la 'ma sabach-th 'na?' which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" *Mark 15:33-34*

At the conclusion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, her affecting novel about the dark legacy of slavery and how it speaks to our national experience, she writes about two kinds of loneliness. "There is a loneliness that can be rocked. . . . It's an inside kind – wrapped tight like skin. Then there is loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It I alive, on its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place." What kind of loneliness do we suspect has now overtaken Jesus? From the first moment of opposition to his ministry through the abandonment of his disciples, his solitary struggle to come to terms with the crucifixion that lies ahead, it would seem Jesus feels the roaming loneliness. It only appears so if we believe that he speaks these first words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," unmindful of the rest. In and out of consciousness, it is astounding that he has breath enough to utter these words. We are not privy to his innermost thoughts, distraught as they may be. It may be by rote that he remembers the rest of the psalm, particularly "Praise the Lord, you that fear him; stand in awe of him. . . give glory." In the tradition of the prophets, darkness suggested the time of YHWH's visitation. Therefore, in this seeming darkest hour, and in our darkest hours, if we through discipline live as upright people, who turn to God in the press of hostile opposition, we will find that failure does not await Jesus and us. God has not abandoned Jesus and will not abandon us. God alone is our source of consolation and triumph.

The Rev. Jo Ann B. Jones
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 25, 2018
Palm Sunday

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 11: 1-11

This is a reading with huge liturgical significance for Christians because we reenact it on Palm Sunday as our entrance into worship and into Holy Week. We shout the verse beginning "Hosanna!" and wave our palms. Taken literally, hosanna expresses a cry for help from the divine like "Save us, now". Yet, when we proclaim it on Palm Sunday, we intend a joyful greeting like "Savior!"

One preacher, whose sermon I read while preparing to preach a Palm Sunday service years ago, Scott B. Johnston, insisted on the former reading. He asked the listeners to identify their own deepest fear: "When we wave our palms and boldly cry out 'Hosanna,' do we dare imagine what we really want God to save us from? Save me from anger. Save me from cancer. Save me from depression. Save me from crushing debt and unemployment. Save me from the strife in my family. Save me from boredom. Save me from the endless cycle of violence. Save me from humiliation. Save me from staring at the ceiling at three AM wondering why I exist. Save me from bitterness. Save me from arrogance. Save me from loneliness. Save me, God, save me from my fears."

By encouraging me to make myself vulnerable with the crowd crying out to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, my engagement with the liturgy of Palm Sunday became visceral. I could greet Jesus with a heart full of expectant joy at receiving deliverance from suffering. I joined many other hopeful, expectant people, each reaching out for deliverance, all hurrying to see and greet Jesus. I was ready to process with them into the service and could proclaim God's love even in the midst of the haunting Gospel narrative to follow.

The Rev. Barbara Abbott
Saint George's, Ardmore

NOTE: The word hosanna (Latin osanna, Greek ὡσαννά, hōsanná) is from Hebrew ,הושיעה־נא הושיעה־נא hôshia-nā' which is short for hōšî'â-nā' and related to Aramaic אושענא ('ōsha'nā) meaning "save, rescue, savior". In the Hebrew Bible it is used only in verses such as "help" or "save, I pray" (Psalms 118:25). However, the old interpretation "Save, now!", based on Psalm 118:25, does not fully explain the occurrence of the word in the Gospels as a shout of jubilation, and this has given rise to complex discussions.

March 26, 2018
Monday in Holy Week

When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Mark 15:35-36

This detail from Jesus's last chaotic, awful moments reflects more than anything else the confusion of the "bystanders" witnessing the event. We are told that Jesus calls out "Eloi, Eloi..." (Aramaic, "My God, my God"), but those listening either hear or interpret this as beseeching Elijah, a prophet. Then they "run" and offer him a sponge with rancid wine to drink.

Are these his friends, or enemies? Do they seek to relieve his suffering, or further mock him? Are they acting in hope, or cynicism? Whatever the intent they do this, apparently, to see if this act, or his plea, will bring Elijah to his aid. All we know is that the next thing that happens is Jesus takes his last breath.

Today, thousands of years later, we are still struggling with the same confusion as those standing by as Jesus dies. As we stand at the foot of the cross what proofs do we seek? How do we hear his words? What struggles do we have about what is happening, our part in it, our doubts, our yearning, our hopes? We are still confused bystanders, staring aghast up at the cross, listening to the gasping of a dying Christ, offering insufficient comfort as we try to grasp what he is saying to us. As the body of Christ, we are still calling out to God.

In this step by step, day by day pilgrimage of Lent, we needn't rush to the tomb because we are afraid. If scripture is clear about anything it is that we are asked to live these struggles as Christ's body, just as he lived, and died in them so something new can be born.

God, what is it going to take for us to know that you are with us? How much will we cause you to suffer because loving each other as you love us is so hard? How long before we hear you? Amen.

The Rev. Christopher Bishop
Saint Martin's, Radnor

March 27, 2018
Tuesday in Holy Week

Then Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

Mark 15:37

There is a particular power to the verb “to utter.” It conveys something more primal and raw than many of the other words we use to describe an act of speech. “To speak” already suggests the intervention of thought. When we speak what we say is considered. What we think is discerned. Our words fit within a certain grammar that is shared and understood. To talk, to discuss, to exclaim, or to declare all assume some degree of self-reflection. We choose to do these things and are aware of that choice even as we are doing them. But utterance is more immediate, as if it couldn’t be helped.

Mark doesn’t tell us simply that Jesus cried out; nor do we ever say that someone “uttered a shout.” By stating that Jesus “uttered a loud cry” Mark makes the instant of Jesus’ death the complete antithesis of the act of God’s creation, when, in Genesis, God spoke the world into being, bringing form out of chaos. God’s words in the beginning were more than statements or commands; they were primal utterances too, through which God gave his very life to the life of the world in all its beauty and variation. (Only after each utterance did God step back to declare an assessment.) And God’s culminating act was then breathing soul into the life of humankind.

In this one verse, Mark informs us that Jesus died on the cross. But he did so in such a way that we might realize what Jesus’ death signified. It was the undoing of everything, the triumph of chaos in the unravelling of all creation. And, as Jesus’ breath vanished, it was even the death of his soul.

One verb reveals the magnitude of this moment.

The Rev. Peter Vanderveen
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 28, 2018
Wednesday in Holy Week

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."
Mark 15:38-39

What a sight to witness! Finally, the opposition has achieved what it wanted. This rabble rouser, who so upset the religious authorities, is dead! But who expected such a dramatic and immediate end – the holiest of holy portion of the temple utterly exposed. And with it the very being, the very essence of just who this Jesus the Christ is. His death has opened the way for us to God in a new way. God is no longer inaccessible, as the veil is torn in two from top to bottom, God is fully exposed, fully accessible. The full revelation of who Jesus the Christ is is made manifest. And of all the people who have attended or witnessed this crucifixion, only one, a centurion, a professional officer of the Roman army, was converted that day. He was immediately caught up in the revelation of Jesus Christ and can proclaim him the Son of God. Thanks be to God.

*Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ;
For those who have lost their faith
For those hardened by sin or indifference
For the contemptuous and the scornful
For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples
For those who in the name of Christ have persecuted others
That God will open their hearts to the truth, and lead them to faith and obedience.*

The Rev. Jo Ann B. Jones
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

March 29, 2018
Maundy Thursday

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Mark 15:40-41

Being on the outside looking in can be a very disheartening place to be. Today we meet a group of women, who had been close with Jesus. They had cared for him and provided for him, while he was alive. But now in the moment of Jesus' death, they are labeled mere onlookers. They find themselves at a distance.

In our own lives of faith, this can be a recurring theme. We can go from being active and feeling as though our faith is burning within us, to feeling as though nothing makes sense. It is as though we have become like those at a distance. Lent has been a time of special devotion, with heightened attention given to our own spiritual lives. In this we have practiced our faith, building and strengthening the knowledge of doing and being that is at the core of faith.

On this Maundy Thursday, we remember Jesus giving to the Church a memorial of his life, death and resurrection. In Holy Eucharist we are invited into the story, into the life of faith. It is a gift that invites us, with each celebration, to remember and to grow. It is a gift that challenges us to not remain on the outside looking in, but rather to roll up our sleeves and put our hearts, hands and minds to work, in living out the knowledge of doing and being.

Today take a bit of time to acknowledge the times and situations that have made you feel at a distance, and to remember also when you have felt close to God and strong in faith.

The Rev. Andrew Kellner
Saint Christopher's, Gladwyne

March 30, 2018
Good Friday

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

Mark 15.42-45

Jesus is dead. "Are you sure?" Pilate wants to know. "Yes," the centurion of the guard assures him. "Dead as a doornail," or perhaps the nail used for the crucifixion. A dead nail is a nail that has been bent at its end to create additional securing - and as such, a nail that will no longer have any other use. Pilate wants to know that this Jesus of Nazareth will never again cross his path, let alone challenge his beliefs.

Pilate wants no other information. I am sure that the centurion only offers what he has been asked. He is a centurion after all, disciplined in his duty and well aware of the consequences he faces for disobedience. But the death is not what the centurion will remember at all - for "...Truly this man was God's Son...."

Most loving God, hanging on a cross to die our death, give us the hope of resurrection at that darkest hour and bring us into life again. In Jesus' most precious name. Amen.

The Rev. Barry J. Harte
the Church of Saint Asaph, Bala Cynwyd

March 31, 2018
Holy Saturday

Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.
Mark 15:46-47

In his book *The Good Funeral*, the theologian and pastor Tom Long reflects on presiding at burials: “It’s not that ministry is fundamentally different at a funeral; it’s just that the urgency of it is more apparent. At a baptism there is almost always an uncle with a video cam, beaming and circling the font; at a wedding, some bridal coordinator is often in the wings, barking orders and directing the choreography. But at a grave, the grinning uncles and know-it-all wedding consultants have vanished. This is death, and no one knows exactly what to say or do.”

The death of Jesus took place in a context in which people had a sense of how to respond when someone died. Joseph of Arimathea’s actions are fairly typical of first century Jewish burial customs: the body of the deceased would be wrapped in a linen cloth, laid in a tomb, and eventually anointed with spices. Yet, while the disciples of Jesus knew essentially *what* to do when he died, they were almost certainly plagued by a sense of dislocation and fear. These ritual actions, prescribed by Law and tradition, were meant to shepherd them through a time of confusion and help them trust that God continues to be faithful in even the most desperate circumstances.

In the popular imagination, Christians go through life oblivious to the pain and suffering of the world. In fact, it is the wider society, in its desire to make sure that we are always comfortable, that tends to ignore, or at least contextualize suffering. When understood properly, our faith allows us to confront the harsh realities of the world honestly, because ultimately we are a people of hope. On Holy Saturday, we are called to remember the heart of Christianity: a radical trust that God remains faithful in even our darkest moments.

Help us, we pray, in the midst of things we cannot understand, to believe and trust in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to life everlasting. Amen.

The Rev. David F. Romanik
Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

April 1, 2018
Easter Day

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. *Mark 16:1-8*

Christianity is about the resurrection. The tomb is empty, and Jesus was seen alive. We are Christians because Jesus rose from the dead. Run and proclaim that Jesus Christ is risen!

Throughout history, we have attempted to become enlightened. However, the resurrection of Jesus Christ should terrify, humble, astound, and inspire. It turns our feeble pursuits at explanation upside down. Visualize Mary and Mary Magdalene standing at the empty tomb as they touch, hear and see. Witness their unfolding realization that Jesus IS risen. Behold the young man telling them to go and they will "see Him." The women realize that this was not something that might have happened or an erroneous comforting story. This event eclipsed the premise of a warm spiritual feeling, a good story, or the hope that the cause would continue.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary run in panic because Jesus Christ overcame death and the grave. They are filled with amazement, since we have a new life that is beyond comprehension. Easter is terrifying, in that we are no longer apart from God. We are in a relationship with God through the Son. We have life in Him and then, there is eternal life after life after death. It is a life that we have never seen or encountered before the resurrection of Jesus. It should render our lives transformed. The resurrection is shocking. In the words of Paul, we will appear with Him in all His glory (Col 3:1-4).

This truth should cause us to risk everything. I share this quote by Oswald Chambers: "When Our Lord rose from the dead, He rose to an absolutely new life, to a life He did not live before He was incarnate. He rose to a life that had never been before; and His resurrection means for us that we are raised to His risen life, not to our old life. One day we shall have a body like unto His glorious body, but we can know now the efficacy of His resurrection and walk in newness of life. I would know Him in 'the power of His resurrection.'"

Have no fear, for Jesus Christ is not laying in the darkness; Jesus Christ is risen. It is real, is it visible, and we must go and follow Him.

The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutierrez
XVI Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania

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