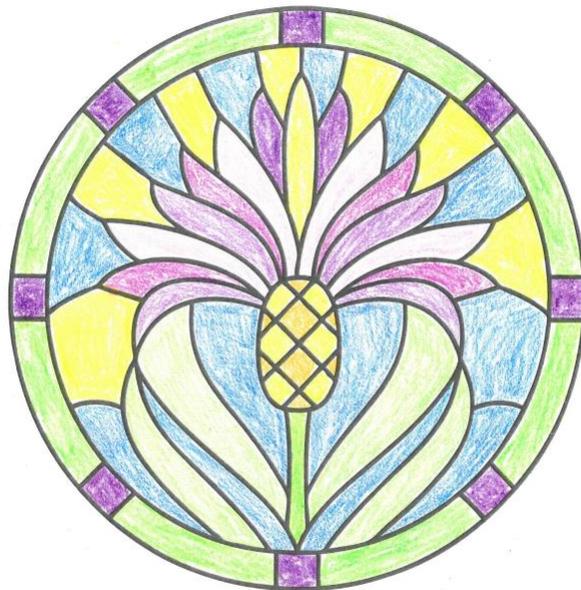


St. John's Episcopal Church

Daily readings for

LENT



*Daily scriptures and reflections
from the people of St. John's
2018*



SAINT JOHN'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

About the St. John's Lenten Devotional

This is the second annual Lent devotional compiled by parishioners, and a labor of love from those who contributed to it. In these pages, you'll find a diversity of insights into scripture that reflect the diversity of people in this parish.

Each day from Ash Wednesday through Easter has a designated scripture reading. This year, the readings are all taken from the books of Luke and Acts in the New Testament, because we are participating in the *Good Book Club*—a worldwide effort among Episcopalians to read those books during Lent and Eastertide. We asked members of St. John's to contribute a reflection on each day's reading through writing, drawing or another art form. Their contributions are offered here to support your prayer and contemplation this Lent.

To make the most of each reflection, start by reading the designated scripture reading for the day first — refer to the Bible citations at the beginning of each reflection. If you don't have a printed Bible handy, you can find the scriptures online at GoodBookClub.org or BibleGateway.com (type the day's passage citation into the search box, and choose your preferred translation—the New Revised Standard Version is the one we use in church). On days for which we did not get an original contribution, we have simply presented the citation for that day's scripture on its own.

May this book nourish and sustain your observation of a Holy Lent.

Ash Wednesday
February 14
Luke 2:22-52

As the mother of two boys, this short verse really resonated with me. *When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.* I can imagine Mary and Joseph's worry and concern when they realize Jesus is missing. Where has he gone, what is he doing, who is he with? How many times have I as a parent had these same worries? That panic of realizing your child or young adult isn't where they are supposed to be. I can remember so many times calling and texting my boys while praying that there hadn't been a horrible accident.

All parents have those moments when they realize that their children are growing up and have more freedom. They become more independent and develop their own interests and start to follow their own path. Try as we might we don't always know where they are and what they are doing. As much as we want to protect them they need to do things on their own and even make mistakes and get hurt. The world can be a big scary place, how can we keep them safe? Have I done enough to prepare them? Are they really ready to grow up and move along in the world?

As I reread the verse above I tried to put myself into Mary's shoes. She had been told by the angel Gabriel that this son of hers was also the son of God. So she always knew that Jesus had a path that he needed to follow. I found myself wondering if this moment when Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem was when it became crystal clear to Mary that Jesus was becoming independent and starting to fulfill his destiny. So much was ahead for him and so much of that she would want to protect him from. So for her, the panic of not knowing where Jesus was also was compounded by an understanding that Jesus was becoming independent and moving off into a direction that would ultimately end with his death on the cross.

The following prayer is in the Book of Common Prayer (a prayer for Young Persons). I have found the prayers listed in the BCP to be a comfort to me and often are so applicable to issues in my life. The prayer below is one that resonates with me as a parent and as a child.

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world. Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Kim Byrd



February 16
Luke 3:21-38

When I first read these Bible verses I thought what can I say about this? At first reading it seemed that there is not much to say beyond what the verses themselves say. Put simply; Jesus is baptized, the heavens open up, the Holy Spirit descends in bodily form like a dove and states, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." That is followed by 16 verses of Jesus's genealogy. It all seems pretty straightforward ... so what can I say about beyond that worth reading by others?

After reflecting a bit more I decided to write about observations that I made while reading these verses. The biggest observation is that Jesus has a genealogy that starts long before Joseph and Mary and includes some folks that I have heard of, such as biblical heavies Adam, Noah, Abraham and King David, and many that I need to learn more about such as Jehoshaphat and Jesse. Secondly, the genealogy in these verses is only from Mary's side of the family ... what about Joseph's side of the family? Third, in many ways our genealogy has an impact on each of us, especially our spiritual lives and how we relate to others ... how did Jesus's genealogy impact him? ... and since Jesus is our savior, how does his genealogy impact us? All good things that I hope to learn more about in the years to come.

Wesley Winterbottom

February 17
Luke 4:1-13

This story occurs just after Jesus is baptized, i.e. anointed with water, by John, which initiated his ministry. The Spirit leads Jesus out into the barren wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Perhaps, for ministry or any work in God's real world, this is a second "initiation," a preparation for work.

Currently in the wide religious world there is a discussion about one line in the Lord's Prayer, specifically where we petition God to "lead us not into temptation." Some trained religious folk say that they can't imagine our All-Good, Almighty God leading us into temptation. They would like the English wording changed to reflect God's goodness in relation to our temptation to sin, as some non-English traditions have done, not God's seeming complicity. Against that view, the text is very clear about the Spirit "leading" Jesus into temptation; and not just a little temptation, but multiple temptations during and after 40 days of fasting.

If this story was written for a general audience in the last 100 years, Jesus and the Spirit might have been the only two characters. We would have heard Jesus struggling with his own thoughts, desires, and inclinations to seize and use the offered magic, authority, and power for his own glory, at least in part. While it is sometimes hard for us to accept that Jesus was fully human, if we let go of our preconceived notions about him, and accept that he had such human thoughts, the encounter takes on a wider, deeper meaning. We witness not a one-dimensional obedient Son, but an adult Man, making a decision, sacrificing himself by setting aside his own thoughts and desires, and choosing to live by God's word, as against the forces of the world that, being human and therefore finite, would make him smaller than God intends him to be. This second "initiation," then, prepares him for the difficult, human real work of God: to heal us, challenge us, to guide us, and suffer for us, all the while loving us, up to and after his death.

Roy McAlpine

February 18
Luke 4:14-44

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”

Luke 4:24

Music of the Prophet



Crashing waves on the shore proclaiming an arrival,
sing out loud with flourish and splash.

A musical interlude for an audience of listeners
is missed, rejected by the cold.

Rolling and steady by day and night, the water
pleas to the coast through storm and sun.

A message praises and anoints the sand
with a fierceness, a crescendo of power.

Water of the sea not bound to burdened land
creates a chord on a vacant beach.

The symphony of nature beckons for one
who is ready, who hears the prophet's voice.

Paul Smith

February 19
Luke 5:1-6

If You Need a Miracle

Say Yes.
Do not say "That's impossible."
Do not say, "This cannot be."
Do not say, "I don't deserve this."

Say Yes to the improbable.
Say Yes to the unfeasible, unimaginable.
Say Yes.
Say, "Come thou, Lord Jesus."

Say Yes to Mystery,
Yes to Love.
Say Yes to the unfathomable,
Say Yes to the healing of your broken life.
Do not say, "I am afraid."
Do not say, "This can't happen."

Do not close your door and weep in your bed.
Say Yes to the Holy Spirit
& let her run straight into
your heart with open wings.

She will bless the holy darkness,
in which miracles abound.
You will hear her voice
in the winds of change,
in the call of the crow,
& in the laughter of children,
who have not been taught
there is no such thing
as a miracle.

When you hear him coming,
it will be *like the rush of a mighty wind*.
Drop down on your knees!
open your arms
& let your fingers reach
into that blinding light.

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February, 2018

Mary Cole

February 20
Luke 5:17-39

Reading the passage in Luke about Jesus' healing powers took on especially important meaning for me this Lenten season. My husband has been struggling with pain for several months and prayers for healing have been front and center for me lately. I was especially struck by, "and the power of the Lord was with him to heal." I have witnessed many examples of the healing power of prayer in my life and I am grateful for this sustaining force.

The second part of the scripture tells of the Pharisees and scribes complaining to the disciples about Jesus choosing to eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' answer: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." Jesus chose to heal many broken people (in mind, body and spirit), but also showed us that ALL of us are worthy of his attention.

What a comfort it is for me to put my faith in Jesus' example of unconditional love, healing power and deep compassion for all.

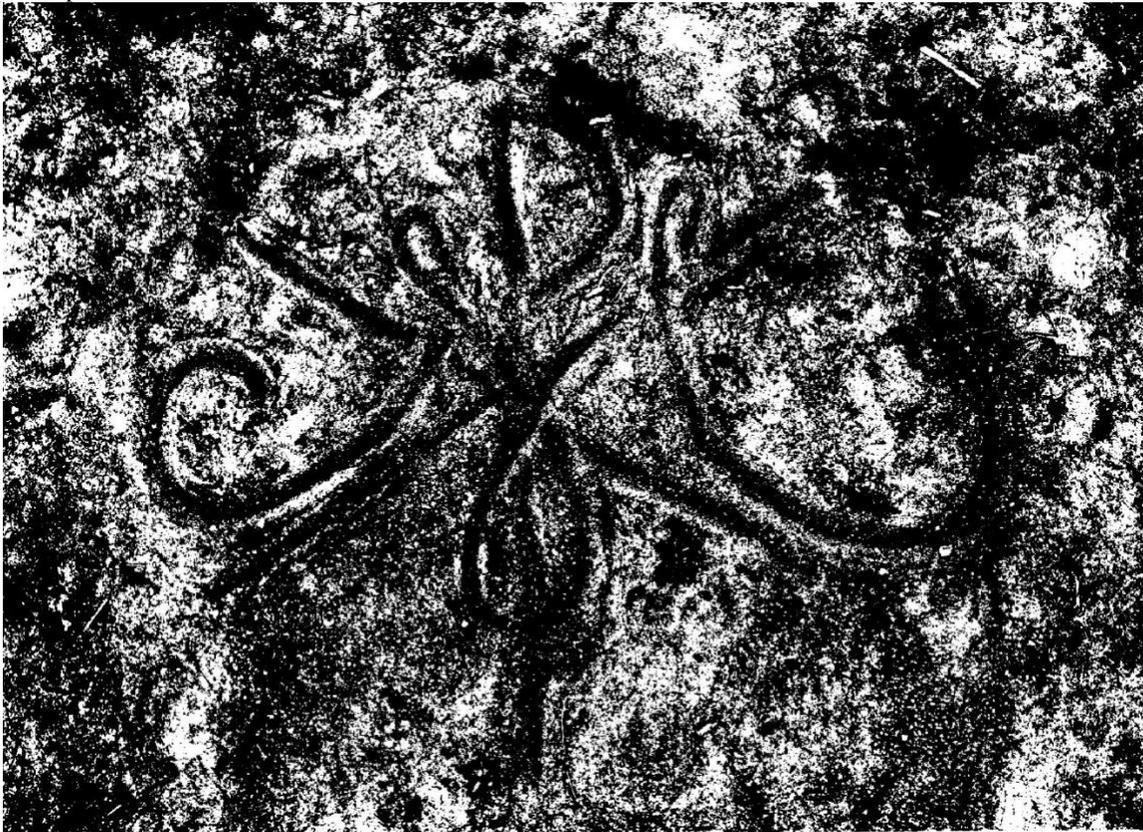


Image courtesy of Jeff Hilliard

Lisa Mahoney

February 21
Luke 6:1-26

In this chapter (Luke 6), the Evangelist describes Christ's exposition of the moral law, which he came not to destroy, but to fulfill, and to fill up, by his Gospel.

Both works of necessity (picking corn when hungry) and mercy (healing the sick) (verses 1-12) are lawful on Sabbath day, in contrary to the held beliefs by the scribes and Pharisees concerning bodily rest on Sabbath day. So while Sabbath day is meant to be a day of rest, there should be an appropriateness of things that can and cannot be done.

Further on, Luke describes Jesus' acts in secret, in his family and in public (verses 12-19): in secret, he prays to God, in his family, he calls his immediate attendants and in public, he preaches and heals. In all three spaces, secret, family and private, he acts like himself and is true to himself.

Moreover, a practical discourse of Christ is part of this passage (verses 20-26). Jesus contrasts the blessings of his disciples with the woes of the non-believers. We can see this primarily as an encouragement and instruction to us as followers of Christ. In the end, Christ's kingdom will prevail. On a second note, however, Jesus warns those pre-occupied with earthly things (verses 24-26) of a coming emptiness if they do not repent.

Christoph Stretz

February 22
Luke 6:27-49

Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (Luke 6:31-32)

This is Luke's version of the Golden Rule, one of the first things we learn as small children. Treat others the way you want to be treated, don't throw sand in the sandbox, always say you are sorry, say "please and thank you," and share with your neighbor. Sounds easy enough, right? Well, not always. We know that life gets a great deal more complicated as we grow up and go out into the world. It becomes more of a challenge to own up to when we are wrong or have made a mistake. Our ego often gets in the way and we worry about appearing silly or not being taken seriously if we admit an error or misstep. We may become uncomfortable and maybe even suspicious of those who appear different from ourselves. Out of our own fear or anxiety we may go out of our way to avoid being around those unlike ourselves. We may hold and nurse a grudge for a wrong someone did to us so long ago, we forget what the wrong was!

When we allow our fears, anger and anxiety to take over and rule our lives, we cheat ourselves out of living the life God has given us. We are the losers. Hate and suspicion distort our view of the world and each other. Our hearts get hardened and we become blind to the beauty and blessings that surround us and miss out on opportunities to know the liberation that comes for simply saying, "I am sorry." We forgo the joy of expanding our world by getting to know someone who sounds and looks totally unlike ourselves. In today's divisive and intolerant world, we need to know more than ever that it doesn't have to be this way. God wants more for us.

If we are willing to let go of these fears we discover that despite our many differences, we all want pretty much the same things. We want to provide a home for our loved ones and make sure they are clothed and fed. We want to make sure our children can go to school and be safe from harm's way. We want reliable medical care and to be assured that our loved ones are taken care of in old age. When we let our guard down our hearts begin to soften and we see that we are all connected to one another. These vital, human connections help us to acknowledge our shared frailties and common concerns. And, we truly see each other as Jesus sees us, as God's children. Life is more fun and rewarding when we stop throwing sand in the sand box and share our cookie with a new friend.

Susan Pinkerton

February 23
Luke 7:1-35

A Lenten Prayer

O, Compassionate One,

You renew, and bring back life.
Your unconditional love
and understanding are demonstrated
in your every action
and in your very being.
Heal my selfish spirit.
Let me see my life
in the light of your truth,
and walk with me
as I make my way.
Amen.

Cindy Lawler

February 24
Luke 7:36-50

Jesus is anointed by a sinful woman. In Jesus' day women had a very low standing in society and sinful women even lower. Jesus is not turned off by this event, however, but uses it as a teaching moment. She has many sins to be forgiven, but yet is paying homage to the savior and by doing so has been forgiven. In turn, one with few sins has less homage to pay and does not show as great a love to the savior.

It strikes me that the woman goes beyond the custom of washing a visitor's feet upon entering to washing with her tears, drying with her own hair, and then steps it up even further and anoints his feet with oil and kisses his feet. This last part, the anointing and kissing of feet, is where I truly see her devotion. I have grown up in a strongly faithful and religious family, and together we went to many family retreats. One day of the retreat was about forgiveness and there would be a foot washing ceremony. As a child, it being the summer plus my distaste for shoes, my feet were always filthy! I always was amazed though that my parents would together wash and dry my feet and then kiss them. I thought to myself, this is true love.

This Lenten season let us try to acknowledge our sinfulness and become the sinful woman, do the deeds that others do not want and show respect to all we meet, forgive past sins and seek to be forgiven. Let us show love in all that we do.

Elizabeth Nelson

February 25
Luke 8:1-25

February 26
Luke 8:26-56

Do you know a "Legion" in your life? Can you relate to being chained by fear and stresses in your life?

Like Legion, when we let go of the power and destruction of the "evil spirits" in our lives and live our faith in Jesus, we can be healed.

"Return home and tell how much God has done for you," Jesus says to Legion. He wants us to share the healing power of Jesus with others! We are called to go out in the world and let the light of Jesus shine through us.

Janet Babbitt

February 27
Luke 9:1-27



Emma and Stokes Bass

February 28
Luke 9:28-62

March 1
Luke 10:1-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road." (Luke 10: 1-4)

Oh boy. Can you imagine what it would be like to have Jesus to ask you to be one of the 72 others? Don't bring a purse or bag or sandals? Don't greet anyone on the road? And right before this passage Jesus tells folks not to go say goodbye to their family or bury their dead before following him. Could you imagine this? You're at work and Jesus shows up and asks you to follow him and you say "sure, but I need to finish up this email" and he says "let someone else finish it." Or you're at school and Jesus taps you on the shoulder and says, "Will you follow me?" and you say "as soon as I finish this paper." And Jesus replies "I need you

now!” And let’s imagine that in both situations you say “sure” and drop everything but add “let me just grab my cell phone” and Jesus replies, “You don’t need your cell phone.”

Wow, could any of us really do this? A contemporary version of this can be heard in the lyrics of U2’s *Walk On*: “Leave it behind, you’ve got to leave it behind, all that you fashion, all that you make, all that you build, all that your break, all that you measure, all that you steal, all this you can leave behind.” It’s one thing if you’re consciously choosing to let go of things and leave them behind; Pam and I spent this weekend loading up a dumpster with all sorts of memories as we try to de-clutter our house, and I must admit that I felt lighter and better able to look to the future after getting rid of things that have accumulated in our house over the past 25 years and would have no value to others. But, leaving everything behind to follow Jesus, including family, friends, all possessions, home, and what you had assumed your future would be? Phew, that’s harder than I could ever imagine, but the 72 others were able to do it. And here we are, talking about them over 2000 years later.

I have always found a home in Jesus by trying to live up to his teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount. But I have to be honest with myself, if I was asked to do what the 72 others did, I’m not sure I could do it. Could you?

Jeff Verney

March 2

Luke 10:21–42

In the Good Samaritan parable, Jesus picks the Samaritan for a reason in response from one of the scholars of the law that asks, “Who is my neighbor?” In Greek “neighbor” means someone who you live near, while in Hebrew it means someone that you have an association with. The Samaritans were half Jewish and half Gentile; when the northern kingdoms were taken captive by the Assyrians, they intermarried to settle in a place that was called Samaria which was north of Judea. Samaritans believed Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem, is the one true sanctuary chosen by Israel’s God, and because of this the Jews at the time believed that they worshiped pagan gods and were unclean. During this period the Samaritans did not like the Jews, and the Jews did not like the Samaritans. What Jesus was doing was redefining the word “neighbor” to not exclude Romans, Gentiles, Samaritans, etc. This take-away would be that our neighbor is anyone we encounter and that we are all children of God; that we must show compassion.

The man coming from Jerusalem to Jericho who was robbed and beaten was ignored by both a priest and a Levite, who is an expert in the law. Both of these people knew what was moral and what was taught in the Torah and yet chose to cross the street to avoid the man. How many times in life do we metaphorically cross the street to ignore people in anguish and pain who are suffering in mental and/or physical agony? In my interpretation, we should not just help those who are naked, beaten, robbed on the side of the road (those who are asking for help). We should keep an attentive eye for those who need comfort but who are too afraid ask for assistance. The young veteran who just came back from his tour in Afghanistan, the old homeless woman, the child that goes to bed hungry every night.

Alex Nelson

March 3

Luke 11:1–13

Luke 11 begins with Jesus praying in a certain place. When he has finished praying, one of his disciples asks him to teach them to pray. In response, Jesus offers a three-part teaching, including what we now know as The Lord’s Prayer, a parable about prayer, and some sayings about prayer.

In the sayings about prayer, Jesus say: “Ask, and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives; and everyone who searches finds; and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” (11:9-10)

This passage may be difficult to understand. So many times it seems as if our prayers are not answered, especially in these turbulent and difficult times when so many people are homeless and hungry, war continues to be waged, and loved ones suffer from disease and natural disasters.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray: “Thy will be done.” And we need to continue to bring our needs and hopes to our heavenly Father, because Jesus tells us to do so, trusting in God’s loving purpose for us. Not everything that happens is God’s will. But we can affirm with St. Paul: “in all things God works for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Lynn Brooks

March 4

Luke 11:14-54

March 5

Luke 12:1-21

Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops. “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.”

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Jesus our only Savior and Redeemer, you renounced the way of ease for the way of truth. Help us to seek God’s kingdom whatever the cost, for the sake of the true treasure in heaven. Lead us away from selfish greed towards compassionate generosity. Let us be not be like the rich fool but humble disciples—strengthened by faith and rich in the knowledge of your infinite love.

Geoff Emerick

March 6
Luke 12:22-59

March 7
Luke 13:1-21

March 8
Luke 13:22-35

March 9
Luke 14:1-24

In this passage of Jesus healing the ill man, he shows us his humility and his willingness to heal all. He is invited to have a meal with those in high society at that time. They try to catch him and test him by presenting him with a task/work to do on the Sabbath. They have invited a man with dropsy (edema) to the dinner also. Jesus asks his host and the others that were there if they would not save their own son or ox if it were to fall down a well. The men do not answer, knowing that they would be willing to do this work on the Sabbath. It is understood. Jesus heals the man without question then sends him away. Jesus is not asked to heal the man, but the man is obviously ill. Jesus shows us that he went about doing good where it was needed; he was not asked to, nor was he concerned what others thought of him doing good, He just did it....an example for all of us.

In verses 7-14 Jesus gives us a lesson in humility. This verse brings to mind the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. "The meek shall inherit the Earth." As the guests arrive, Jesus recognizes that the men chose to take the most important seats at the table. The lesson here is that those that take the high seats may be asked to vacate their seat and move to a lower seat and in this way disgrace themselves. Pride will have shame, and will at last fall. Those who come to the table and take the lower seats will be asked to move up and will then be noticed by the rest of the company. "He that humble himself will be exalted!"

"A man's pride will bring him low, but honor shall uphold shall uphold the humble in spirit, and before honor is humility."

Jesus advises us to invite all to dinner not just the rich with the intention that we will be invited by them and in so doing a recompense will be made to us. Be ready and willing to help the poor. Our recompense will be in Heaven; strive to do good.

he parable of the wedding feast is the likeness of God inviting us to His table. We all come up with excuses not to be there. Grace despised is grace forfeited. It is not just the wealthy and healthy that are invited to eat at the table of our Lord, but the ill, the outcast of society, the vagrants. Jesus loves all.

Craig Wilkinson

March 10
Luke 14:25-25

March 11
Luke 15:1-10

These stories make me feel like God truly cares about me, even if for a portion of my life I don't attend church as much. It is comforting to know that he will always welcome me back with open arms. I like how God is more welcoming to people who have wandered from the faith and returned, because I think those people have been through the harshness of life. It is much harder to return to something that you have left behind, because you must face things that you have turned your back on. It comforts me to know that God will always accept people back no matter how long they wander from him.

Christine Babbitt

March 12
Luke 15:11-32

LOVE IS JUST
A WORD UNTIL
SOMEONE
COMES ALONG
AND GIVES
IT MEANING

Jesus wanted us to realize that what we do is more important than what we say we will do. Jesus wants us to answer, “Yes,” when he tells us to “Love one another,” but what he really wants is for us to love one another! Jesus wants us to answer, “Yes,” when he says, “Follow me,” but what he really wants is for us to follow him!

Susan Murphy

March 13
Luke 16:1–18

March 14
Luke 16:19–31

When I read this passage I am reminded of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Let us not forget to look out our window and consider those less fortunate than ourselves. To realize we have been given by God the tools to live a compassionate life.

Buffy Ineson

March 15
Luke 17:1–10

March 16
Luke 17:11–37

We are in the midst of a terrible cold and flu season. I was in the walk-in clinic the other day and was told I had to wear a mask. I was not the only one. These masks quickly set you apart. I was making a statement that I was somehow “unclean,” and that people should stay away from me. When someone is sick, coughing and sneezing, others will say, “Stay far away from me!” The plight of the leper was far worse. If others came near them, they would have to cry out, “Unclean!” It was clear that you did not belong.

It was interesting that the one who did come back to praise God and thank Jesus was a **Samaritan**. In the Parables, Jesus would tell a common story and end it with a punchline that would make you think. Jesus did not want His words to go in one ear and out the other. He wanted to SHOCK the people so they would really THINK. He wanted to have His words get in and make a change. He wanted others to have a profound healing, not only in body, not only skin deep, but right down in the soul. Jesus wanted to change their lives forever.

Samaritans, as we know, were despised by the Jews. This would be like Jesus telling us that Kim Jung Un was the one who came back praising God. “What?! How could *he* be the good guy?!”

I can imagine this Samaritan got a double whammy. He was shunned by the healthy *and* shunned by the Jews who had leprosy. “Sit over there. We have leprosy but at least we are Pure Jews.” The Jewish lepers at least could support each other. I wonder if this Samaritan leper’s isolation, shaming, rejection, illness, watching his flesh rot off was something that caused him to go deep into his soul because of the intense emotional pain. Maybe that’s why his joy was that much more profound when he was healed. Jesus did not reject him. Jesus did not call him a dirty Samaritan. Jesus did not shun him. The man’s pain drove him to Jesus. The pain carved out a larger space in his heart for healing.

Kahlil Gibran wrote that the flute is carved from within, that the pain of being carved makes the music that much more sweet. Our hearts are the same. Pain, sadness, rejection, isolation can carve out the heart and leave more room for love to more fully fill it. The questions asked through pain can prepare us for a healing that is far from skin deep. “Why did my girlfriend leave me? Why did my mother die? This pain is so deep.” It can also make us bitter and filled with hate. I have seen both.

As a gay man, I started realizing that I was different. The people who said they loved me would laugh at gay people. I prayed that God would change me. Make me “normal”. Then, I would pray that God take my life if He couldn’t change it. The gay men wearing the pink triangles in the German Concentration Camps cheered like the others when the Allied Forces came to liberate them. They were told to get lost when the Allied soldiers realized that the pink triangles meant they were gay. The non-athletic kid knows what it means to be rejected and shamed—the last kid to be picked in gym class when the two captains pick their teams. The teen who does not have the right clothes, isn’t skinny enough.

Then, I met Jesus. The love I knew through my Grandfather who would read the Bible with me, my Grandmother whose face would light up when she talked about God, started to filter down into my heart. “I made you as you are. I love you as you are.” Every day I get lost in that Love. I came to know the profound joy of our God originally through the pain of rejection. Being welcomed at the table at St. John’s AS I AM stops me in my tracks, makes me turn around and give thanks to God every day.

Paul Shaker

March 17
Luke 18:1–17

March 18
John 18:18–43

The New Testament surely has its share of challenging passages and this portion of Luke 18 is no exception. As is shown in the middle of the text, Jesus knows His days are numbered. I suspect His somewhat rough handling of the obstinate rich ruler as well as His own disciples, speaks to His desire to make certain that core legacies will be furthered when He is gone. The legacy here is straightforward: they who have true faith and act upon it will be rewarded in heaven and possibly even on earth. Hence, the blind man, who likely has no wealth to share, sincerely declares his belief and immediately receives sight.

A parable also recorded in Mark 10: 17-31 and Matthew 19: 16-30, the rich ruler with vast resources incurs our Lord's wrath because he is reluctant, as a matter of faith, to share with those in need. It seems to me that Jesus, perhaps in a moment of growing frustration, may have overstated His demand that the ruler can gain salvation only by selling everything he owns as the first step. However, the happenstance of attaining wealth is of itself no guarantee of condemnation. A little later, in a much calmer setting also from Luke (19:8-9), Jesus gave salvation to a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus when he "stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor...'" Whether half or whole, or some other measure, the point is that one path to salvation is sacrificing for the sake of others.

And finally, Jesus reminds us that sacrifices are not a one-time affair when He tells His disciples that even they, who have already given so much, must be prepared to do more when the need arises. If so, they will receive "very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" – something available to anyone, regardless of economic or social status, who will heed His call.



Notes:

1. I consulted a biblical commentary published three years before St. John's was established in Hartford to gain some then-contemporary flavor for how this passage was perceived in earlier times. It was refreshingly relevant. *The Comprehensive Commentary of the Holy Bible* (1838), based to large extent on the work of an English Anglican priest named Thomas Scott (1747-1821), provided analysis by the good Reverend Doctor including: "Let us pray to be enabled to part with every earthly object for Christ's sake; and to use all which we are allowed to keep, in his service, as faithful stewards...Whatever our circumstances be, we shall be called on to prove our sincerity..." (p. 362 and available to read online at Google Books).
2. The "Rich Young Ruler" graphic is Copyright 1999, higherpraise.com, and is reprinted with permission.

William Uricchio

March 19
Luke 19:1-27

March 20
Luke 19:28-48

March 21
Luke 20:1-47

March 22
Luke 21:1-38

March 23
Luke 22:1-23

March 24
Luke 22:24-46

March 25 - Palm Sunday
Luke 22:47-71

March 26
Luke 23:1-25

March 27
Luke 23:26-43

March 28
Luke 23:44-56

March 29 - Maundy Thursday
Luke 24:1-12

This is an essay I wrote for Easter 2010. - EPD

My 10-year-old daughter Leah and I are spending two days in the hospital. Leah and I both have a bone disorder called osteogenesis imperfecta, which causes brittle bones. Because Leah has had several bad fractures this year requiring surgery, we put her back on a medication protocol she was on as a preschooler, and that (we think) contributed to a nearly four-year stretch when she did not have any fractures. Because the medication is delivered via IV over several days, it requires an inpatient stay.

So this is a hospitalization without acute sickness or significant pain. As far as hospitalizations go, not so bad. Leah watches movies, does art projects and plays Nintendo, while I read for luxurious long periods that I rarely get as a mother of three. The nurses and other staff are, as always, attentive and warm. Leah orders whatever she wants to eat via "room service." Sounds almost like a vacation. And yet it is mostly torturous—long, dull hours in a climate-controlled bubble, in which trips to the bathroom or the play area are complicated by Leah's being tethered to an IV pole attached to her arm at one end and a wall socket on the other.

Leah's roommate is a young girl just coming out of spine surgery. Though the curtain between us gives an illusion of privacy, we can hear everything. We hear her vomit after trying to drink something. We hear her cry a hoarse, high-pitched, "Mooommmmy!" every time the nurses reposition her—a cry so quietly desperate that I want to cry too. In that cry, I hear Leah, lying in the ER trauma room with a badly fractured femur, as the nurse explains they'll have to move her leg to get a good X-ray. I hear myself, waking from surgery, my legs on fire inside their heavy plaster casts, sickened by the lingering taste and smell of surgical gas.

And I'm not sure which story to believe: The one about the miraculous ability of modern medicine to fix problems that used to be unfixable, or the one about the pain that no amount of drugs or toys or soothing words can banish.

The girl's mother speaks so gently to her, tells her she loves her often, spends 10 minutes at the sink rinsing vomit out of a new Barbie doll's dress because she knows the dirty dress will make the pain worse and the pain will make the ruined dress worse. Later, I learn this mother has eight children, all of whom, including the girl having surgery, are living with foster parents or relatives. The mother is pregnant again.

And I'm not sure which story to believe: The one about the doting mother ministering to her ailing daughter with gentle strength, or the one about the mother whose life is so out of control that she can neither care for her children nor stop having children she cannot care for.

There are several Haitian children who were airlifted to this hospital because the surgeries they had to treat fractures and crush injuries from the January 12 earthquake were threatened by infections running rampant in their poorly equipped hospitals at home. Their family members were not allowed to accompany them. The children look good. They play and smile, sporting themselves around in wheelchairs or hopping through the halls on crutches. A girl of about seven grins as a volunteer helps her nail together a small wooden house, which she then paints. I hear from nurses and doctors that the children are, of course, so needy. So very, very needy. They have temper tantrums often, and I hear several of these—wailing that goes on for 30 or 40 minutes at a time, because they cannot go outside due to the rain, or just...because.

Our doctor tells us that the youngest, a little boy of about two, was so malnourished when he arrived that he just lay in bed, completely still. I pass a staff member holding him on her hip, and he gives me a grin, saying "Hi" over and over as he clasps and unclasps his chubby hand in a baby-style wave.

And I'm not sure which story to believe: The one about dying children's lives and limbs restored in a place offering them food, shelter, care and love, or the one about children who were crushed under tons of concrete and metal, who are hundreds of miles from their families, and who will return to their chaotic, chronically poor country when they recover.

I am reminded of Yann Martel's novel *The Life of Pi*. Pi, an Indian boy, is the only human survivor of a shipwreck. He ends up in a lifeboat with several zoo animals, including a Bengal tiger he names Richard Parker. When Pi is rescued and tells his story, his tale is met with disbelief. So he tells a different story, in which he was on the lifeboat with his mother, a cannibalistic cook and a sailor, all of whom die in various grisly ways. The ultimate question of the book is: Which story do you believe? Both stories are frightening and full of death, but one—the one with the tiger—also tells of mystery, hope and miracle. Early in the book, Pi writes:

I can well imagine an atheist's last words: "White, white! L-L-Love! My God!"—and the deathbed leap of faith. Whereas the agnostic, if he stays true to his reasonable self, if he stays beholden to dry, yeastless factuality, might try to explain the warm light bathing him by saying, "Possibly a f-f-failing oxygenation of the b-b-brain," and, to the very end, lack imagination and miss the better story.

I am attuned more closely than I would like to the world's pain. I often find it hard to believe "the better story." The memory of that little Haitian boy's fisty wave mostly haunts me, as I think of what might become of him when he returns home. Will his few months in an American hospital change everything for him? Or not nearly enough? I tend to believe it might not be enough.

But it is Easter. And what, after all, is Easter about but believing in the better story? I have worshipped alongside those who cannot accept the resurrection as fact, who come to church to be in the company of those who believe in the mystery although they do not. I respect them, but I can't be like them. I need the resurrection. I need it to be the *way things actually happened*, because without the resurrection, Christianity is just a bunch of nice people doing nice things in the name of a nice guy who lived a few thousand years ago. That may be something, but it does not provide nearly enough light to take on this world's deep darkness. Without the bright light of the resurrection, I would always believe the sadder stories. They are, after all, so much more common.

I am reminded, too, of my favorite poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer's Liberation Front*, in which poet Wendell Berry tells us to "Be joyful though you have considered all the facts."

This Easter, be joyful though you have considered all the facts. Believe the better story.

Ellen Painter Dollar

March 30 – Good Friday
Luke 24:13–35

March 31 – Holy Saturday
Luke 24:36–43

April 1 – Easter Sunday
Acts 1:1–11

St. John's Episcopal Church

A place to discover connections with God and one another

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5:00 p.m. Evensong on selected last Sundays of the month

4:30 p.m. Celtic contemplative service on the first Sunday of the month, October - June

5:30 p.m. Evening Prayer each Monday, Wednesday and Friday

Christian Education: Sundays at 9:30 a.m. September – May

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