

ST. PAUL'S ANGLICAN, LENT DEVOTIONAL
2023

40 WORDS 40 DAYS

A book of devotion, purpose, and prayers

40 Words 40 Days

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Introduction

Bible scholar and pastor N.T. Wright retells the following story about an archbishop who was hearing confessions of sin from three hardened teenagers in the church. All three boys were trying to make a joke out of it so they met with the archbishop and confessed to a long list of ridiculous and grievous sins that they had not committed. It was all a joke. The archbishop, seeing through their bad practical joke, played along with the first two who ran out of the church laughing. But then he listened carefully to the third prankster, and before he got away told the young man, "Okay, you have confessed these sins. Now I want you to do something to show your repentance. I want you to walk up to the far end of the church and I want you to look at the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross, and I want you to look at his face and say, 'You did all that for me and I don't care that much.' And I want you to do that three times."

And so the boy went up to the front, looked at the picture of Jesus and said, "You did all that for me and I don't care that much." And then he said it again, but then he couldn't say it the third time because he broke down in tears. And the archbishop telling the story said, the reason I know that story is that I was that young man.¹

There is something about the cross. When we take time to reflect, meditate, and pray concerning what Christ did for us on the cross, something deeply happens to us.

Like the holy season of Advent, Lent is such a time to reflect on what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. We need these seasons in our lives. We need a season of repentance. Not necessarily a time of feeling shame, but a time of being made aware that sin separates us from God. A time whereby we know and feel the depth of what it cost God to be reunited with us.

What should grieve us is what Lent has become. We must not conflate this season with New Year's resolutions. It should be a time of fasting, but not at the expense of losing weight, or to quit watching pornography, or to give to charity. Lent is another opportunity to fast and contemplate what our Lord did for us on the Cross. We're not meandering with resolutions that focus on "self." Our focus is far more beautiful and glorious. His name is Jesus. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians puts the gospel succinctly: "God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The purpose of this devotional is to give you forty words that will help you ponder that message. A word a day for the forty days of Lent to help you to see and savor the

¹Adapted from N.T. Wright, "Grasped By the Love of God," N.T. Wright Online

glory of God through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. Here's the bonus; Sundays, which are not part of the forty days of Lent, are included.

Our prayer is that this Lent will be a season for devotion, purpose, prayer, and God's presence to fall upon you afresh.

Using the Devotional

The devotional is broken down into seven weeks. As you work your way through the first few weeks, you will notice words that help us to see our own sinfulness—humanness. As you move through the middle weeks, remember who Jesus is, how He changed normal lives, and what He gives. As we draw closer to Easter, the focus will be solely on Jesus' last week on earth.

We also want you to notice that there are multiple authors for these Lenten devotionals. Fourteen to be exact, each with different backgrounds and upbringings, but all united and passionate about their Savior.

A Word to Parents

Like Advent, Lent is a season that is primed with opportunity, an opportunity to teach your children about the life and death of the greatest person who has ever walked the earth. To help toward that end, we have provided Sundays in the devotional to gather the family. Each Sunday is essentially evening prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. My prayer as the Associate Priest of Family Ministries is that by worshipping together, it will open up the door for meaningful discussions and promote connection and unity in your home.

Day 1 Ash Wednesday

DUST

Reverend Chip Strickland

Scripture Reading: Psalm 103:8-14

⁸The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
long-suffering and of great goodness.
⁹He will not always chide us,
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.
¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his mercy also toward those who fear him.
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he set our sins from us.
¹³As a father pities his own children,
so is the Lord merciful to those who fear him.
¹⁴For he knows whereof we are made;
he remembers that we are but dust.

Ps. 103: 8-14

Dust is a powerful metaphor. In Psalm 103, David identifies us with the dust, reminding us that we were made of dust (Gen. 2:7) and that we “are but dust” (v. 14). Several truths come to mind as we reflect upon this stark imagery.

First, dust is elemental. As the unseen atom is the smallest building block of matter, dust is the most basic visible form. Yet in dust we see nothing recognizable or valuable.

Second, dust is lifeless. Unlike water, dust is devoid of life and vitality. The wind stirs it, but otherwise it remains lifeless and motionless. As it gathers on things around us, it reminds us of our neglect.

Third, dust is unpleasant. In the eyes or nose, it irritates us. Dust reminds us of death. In the funeral rite, we say, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” reminding us that our mortal bodies will “return” to the dust.

Fourth, dust is a helpful device for repentance. Our spiritual forebears repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:7) to remind themselves of their mortality and sinful nature. We

continue the practice – a bit less dramatically – by the imposition of ashes with the words, “remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Finally, we remember that we are not left in the dust. David reminds us that God is merciful, that He remembers “whereof we are made” (v. 14) and that he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor reward us according to our wickedness (v. 10). Instead, God meets us more than halfway, knowing our weakness. Jesus redeems us as we put our faith in Him, bringing to us not condemnation but salvation: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17, ESV).

It is useful during Lent to sit for a time in the dust and repent. It reminds us of where we would be without Jesus – as the dust, beaten down and lifeless. But there is an end to repentance, a destination. Repentance ultimately reminds us also that we are a forgiven and redeemed people. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he set our sins from us” (v. 12).

Prayer for the Day

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

Day 2

REPENT

Fr. Fred Ochieng Onyango

Scripture Reading: Matthew 3:1-12

In the East African Revival spirituality, which has greatly influenced East African Anglicanism, conversion is not enough if it is not followed by a commitment to faithfully follow Christ, making daily repentance, restitution, and amendment of life where relationships have been injured. A particular story is told of an East African Revival fellowship meeting at which several women were giving their testimonies. One woman kept grimly silent. She was asked to give her testimony, but she refused. When she was asked why she answered, “Four of these women who have just given their testimony owe me money, and my family and I have not eaten for the past two days because we cannot buy food.” A testimony is utterly worthless unless it is backed by deeds, unless it is backed by a lifestyle that honors God and shows love towards others, especially those who don’t deserve our love. It is not just a mere change of words that Jesus Christ demands when we come to Him; He demands a change of life. As disciples of Christ, we will be known by our fruits, that is our deeds (Matthew 7:16).

John the Baptist’s overarching message was one of repentance. We often talk about repentance as a turning away from sin and turning to God instead. When the Holy Spirit convicts us, we experience a change of mind about sin, Jesus and salvation. This changing of mind does and should lead to a turning away from sin and toward God, ultimately resulting in a change of lifestyle. Or as John would say, “bearing fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). So, how does it look like to bear fruit in keeping with repentance? A perfect illustration is found in the story Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. Zacchaeus’ repentance wasn’t just a simple, “Oops, Jesus, I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.” He went further and gave back what he had previously stolen. He produced good fruit in keeping with repentance, and his repentance was genuine. We, too, must bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And if our repentance is genuine, we can rest assured that we will inevitably bear good fruit. The good news is that the Holy Spirit will help us.

So let us allow John’s voice preaching in the wilderness to echo in our ears. Ask yourself:

- In what areas of my life do I need to repent? How can I bear fruit as I repent?
- Does my lifestyle (words, actions, thoughts and relationships) reflect a genuinely repentant heart and changed mindset?

When we are committed to faithfully following Christ with a penitent heart, we will produce good fruit, and the world will see the power of the Gospel at work in us. Then God, by His grace, works through us to share that good news with others who have wandered from God: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2).

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 3

FASTING

Heather Jackson

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:16-18

In our age of instant gratification and getting any food delivered to your home — day or night — the idea of going without *anything* is unusual. “I want what I want, and I want it NOW!” can be my default mode of operation more often than I’d like to admit. And when I do skip a meal, it’s usually because I’m too busy to eat. But... to intentionally choose to go without food in order to focus my attention on God? It’s radical. It’s unusual in this day and age.

A quick Google search shows that the concept of fasting is not a wholly foreign to our current culture. Celebrities and health gurus around the world will tell you about fasting plans — for a small fee, of course — that is “guaranteed” to promote health, weight-loss, and help you reach your fitness goals.

Whereas the culture uses fasting for health/fitness goals, many in the modern Western church don’t know much about fasting for spiritual reasons. It is a little-practiced and therefore, often, misunderstood discipline.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the people of God fasted. Jesus fasted. The disciples fasted. In this passage of Matthew from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said “when you fast...” not “if you fast.” Jesus assumed His followers would continue the spiritual discipline of fasting, and implored them to do so with right motives.

The Biblical principle of fasting is to choose to go without something (primarily food) in order to focus on and draw closer to God. Jesus warns us not to flaunt our fasting, but to come with right motives. True fasting is to forego food in order that ***we may be freed up to feast on God***. Prayer and fasting are intricately woven together.

Fasting reminds us that we are sustained “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In Christ, “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Therefore, in experiences of fasting, we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. “Fasting is feasting!” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*).

What an amazing gift fasting gives us — this shift in perspective. We can move from depending on the wonderful gifts God has provided to sustain us — oxygen, water,

food — to learning more about depending on ***The Giver*** of these gifts. Fasting is an exercise in humility, allowing our body, soul and spirit to be subject to the lordship of Christ. It is a reminder that our greatest need and our greatest reward are God Himself, and all His good gifts pale in comparison. Through seasons of fasting, God teaches us that we can trust and rely on the Comforter (Him), more than on the comforts of this world.

**Always consult a physician prior to fasting from food. Fasting from other things - social media, TV, etc. - are good alternatives.*

Prayer for the Day

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 your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 4

RECONCILIATION

Jim Beierlein

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:20-22

Colossians 1:20-22: “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”

When Adam and Eve committed original sin, we became separated from God. God was the “Rule Maker,” and we created an image in our minds that the rule maker distanced Himself from us, but the space was due to our behavior towards Him and His gifts. As an attempt to be more like God, the Jewish leaders thought that if they were to create more rules that they would become more like God. This ultimately gave those in charge a sense of power. These rules were created around the idea of good and evil, which is the essence of what separated us from God in the first place, forgetting that God is the ultimate good and on whom we should be focused.

As a parent, it feels like it is an almost daily occurrence of making new rules with my kids to try and keep the peace, thinking that if I can just find the “right” rule that it will solve everything, and we will end up with perfect children who understand about right and wrong and good and evil. Often the additional rule only serves to create resentment and drive us further apart as a family. Basic rules are important. Without any rules our home would turn into “lord of the flies”; however, shifting focus from rules to teaching the love of God is a much more impactful tact, although easier said than done.

In the book *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* by Paul David Tripp he says: “If rules and regulations had the power to change the heart and life of your child, rescuing your child from himself and giving him a heart of submission and faith, Jesus would have never needed to come!” (49).

The Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus reconciled us with God, removing the need for senseless rules and laws that created a fake sense of order. He showed us that

love and sacrifice are what it really takes to create order into the world and what ultimately reconciled us with God. This holds true between us sinners as well.

As you go about your day today, I challenge you to think if there is anyone in your life that you have created unnecessary distance from because they broke some type of rule. Think about how you could reconcile with them. It can be as simple as a phone call, text, or email, or maybe just start with forgiving them and praying for them. Often when someone has crossed us, we label them a rule breaker and paint them with an evil stain in our mind, and there is nothing they can do to get back in our good graces. If God had taken the same stance with us, we would still be dead to our sin, but instead we were saved by Jesus.

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

Evening Prayer

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 3:2

Confession of Sin

Dearly beloved, the Scriptures teach us to acknowledge our many sins and offenses, not concealing them from our heavenly Father, but confessing them with humble and obedient hearts that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before Almighty God, but especially when we come together in his presence to give thanks for the great benefits we have received at his hands, to declare his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for our life and our salvation. Therefore, draw near with me to the throne of heavenly grace.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. **Amen.**

Grant to your faithful people, merciful Lord, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O gladsome light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

The Song of Simeon

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Luke 2:29-32

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:12-21

I want you to think for a moment about some of the greatest comparisons and contrasts in history. Any come to mind? Here are a few that I thought of: Coke vs. Pepsi, Chevrolet vs. Ford, city living vs. country living, Mac vs. PC, iPhone vs. Android, beach vs. mountains, capitalism vs. communism. Perhaps some practical ones: night vs. day, warm vs. cold, sweet vs. sour. As you gander at some of these, we know that there has been some friendly banter back and forth as to which is better. But, Coke vs. Pepsi. Whole geographical locations within the borders of the United States have entered the fray of this debate as to which is better. Families have been torn asunder over the whole Chevy vs. Ford debate. We all have our particulars, preferences, traditions, and biases. But, there is a comparison outlined in the Bible, particularly in Romans 5, that stands as a comparison and a contrast for all to see and know.

Adam and Jesus. Adam and Jesus, how vastly different they both were.

Theologian Herman Ridderbos said:

Adam and Christ stand against each other as two great figures at the entrance of two worlds, two creations, the old and the new. And in their actions and fates, lies the decision for all who belong to them, because these are comprehended in them and thus are reckoned either to death or to life.²

They (Adam and Christ) are leaders of two distinct spiritual destinies for all humanity. The Apostle Paul says:

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to

²Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 60-61.

justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

—Romans 5:17-19

Here in this context, Paul presents his fullest treatment of the Adam/Christ parallel. Essentially communicating to his readers that all humans will finish their life in the light or the shadow of one of these two men, he emphasizes the differences much more than the similarities. Adam and Christ are presented as parallel figures heading in exactly opposite directions. One defined what a man does; the other what a man is. One was all about temporal power; the other transcendent power. One was, through the own demise of his bride, enamored with personal rewards; the other eternal rewards. One was about self; the latter was about others. Two men.

Also, you see you two acts: Adam's act of disobedience when he ate the forbidden fruit, and Christ's act of obedience when He died on the cross. There was the act of trespass that brought death. But, Jesus' gift brought life. In the trespass, God gave Adam life and Adam brought death. In the gift, God the Son suffered death and brought us life. The trespass is terribly widespread and terribly dangerous for all of humanity. However, the gift is wonderfully available for all and wonderfully effective in bringing new life to any and all who receive it.

The bottom line is this: Jesus is better than Adam. The gift is better than the trespass. Grace is better than sin. As you reflect in these opening days of Lent on your own spiritual life, where are you? Is death reigning in you or is grace reigning? Is sin king in your life? Are you king in your life? Or, is Jesus king in your life? Are you more today, like your father Adam, or more like your Savior Jesus?

Fr. Korey Kincaid

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

O Lord, show your mercy upon us;

And grant us your salvation.

O Lord, guide those who govern us;

And lead us in the way of justice and truth.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

And let your people sing with joy.

O Lord, save your people;

And bless your inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord;

And defend us by your mighty power.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Prayer for the Week

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.**

Prayer for Mission

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. **Amen.**

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

Day 5

TEMPTATION

Charley Albert

Scripture Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Sometimes we feel that if the Holy Spirit leads us, it will always be “beside still waters” (Psalm 23:2). Yet, that is not always the case. Here in Luke 4: 1-2 we see Jesus being led by the Spirit to the desert to face temptation by the Devil.

We need to be prepared to face similar trials. Our first response should always be to ask God if there is sin present in our life. If so, we need to “repent and sin no more” (John 8:11). If not, we need to be aware that God may be allowing temptation to test us or teach us.

I was once called from New York to California to interview for a job as Director for the Diocesan Camp and Conference Center. I was offered this prestigious job along with a boost in salary. My wife and I were quite excited about this opportunity, but on the plane trip home, God spoke to both of us individually, making sure we understood that He did not want me to take this job. This message was too strong to ignore. It took a few years before we clearly understood why He shut that door. He used this event to teach us to recognize temptation and to learn to seek His will above all else.

Temptation may come after a high point in our spiritual growth or in our ministry. Following Elijah’s great victory, he experienced deep despair that he needed to overcome (1 Kings 18, 19). We need to be on our guard in times of victory as well as in times of discouragement.

God blessed me with the opportunity to prevent Camp De Wolfe in New York from closing down, and return to a path of success and growth. I enjoyed many pats on the back, but I was also shocked to be called in for stealing money from the Camp. My elation quickly dropped to depression. Thankfully, we were able to prove that not only did we not take money, but we actually had used our own money to keep the camp running during those times of struggle.

Satan often waits until we are vulnerable to tempt us into sin or rejection of God.

Early in our marriage, as we struggled financially, I was approached by someone who offered me a “once in a lifetime opportunity” to make a lot of money quickly. I was so ready to say yes to this opportunity until my wife encouraged me to open my eyes and see what a scam this truly was. In my time of vulnerability, I was tempted to jump in with both feet into disaster.

The Devil tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, and he also tempted Jesus in the desert. Satan succeeded with Adam and Eve, and he hoped to succeed with Jesus, but the Son of God was prepared to be the victor in that encounter. He used Scripture to counter Satan's attacks and so can we.

Reading God's Word, receiving counsel from the Holy Spirit and obeying His direction are weapons against temptation. Also, communication with God through prayer will help us focus on making decisions according to His will. But to use His Word effectively, we must have faith in God's promises. Satan also knows Scripture and is adept at twisting it to suit his purposes. We must stay alert.

Obedience to God is more important than having a verse to quote. Read the scriptures and apply them to how you live. Then, like Jesus' encounter in the desert, your sword against temptation will be sharp and have the power of the Holy Spirit to withstand temptation.

Prayer for the Day

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 6

ABSTINENCE

Foster Smith

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:1-5

I spent a year in El Paso, Texas, as a missionary in 1975 and 1976. A great place to witness was the *Red Dog Saloon*. To my surprise the entire place formed a large circle and began to dance. The Texas two-step was the call, and off we went. If you only did one step the circle swallowed you, but if you did two steps together the night was a success.

Our Christian journey is outlined by Saint Paul as “two step.”

Step one: seek those things which are above and set your mind on the things above.

Step two: put to death your old ways: fornication, uncleanness, out-of-control passions, evil desires and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Our journey is not putting a Christian veneer over our old fleshly ways. Put those ways to death by the internal power of his Holy Spirit, and you will become a new creation .

Join the dance and be sure to make it “a two step.”

Prayer for the Day

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 7

HOLINESS

Jonathan Ketcham

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:13-16

As we journey together through Lent, holiness is a most fitting topic to reflect on together during this penitential season. Holiness cannot be overlooked as a central element of the gospel. In Christ's death and resurrection, Jesus purchased a bride with His own blood "*so that* he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, *that* she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). Jesus shed His blood not only for our forgiveness but for our holiness.

Because of this, holiness is not an optional aspect of the Christian life. As the author of Hebrews says, there is a "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). This is because holiness is the necessary result of a life lived by faith, abiding in the vine. When we abide in the vine, the Spirit will produce fruit in us that is pleasing to God. And while this holiness is a necessity, and our role in pursuing it must be active, we also must not misidentify the source of our holiness, or else we will strive in the flesh instead of the Spirit (Gal 3:3).

The source of our holiness is not from within ourselves nor through our striving on our own. Holiness is the life of the vine given to us when we are engrafted to that source of life. It is only the Holy Spirit who can produce His fruit. Our efforts apart from Him may produce fruit that, for a season, appears healthy and vibrant, but without abiding in the vine, will only rot in time. To be like Him, we must be near Him. Remember when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after encountering God (Exodus 34:29-35)? What did the terrified people of Israel see? A man who was radiating the glory of God. Notice that the glory shining from Moses' face was not intrinsic to himself; it came from outside himself, from God. Our holiness cannot be mustered up through willpower and efforts at self-reform; it must come from outside ourselves. We, like Moses, can radiate the holiness of God in our lives only when we have intimately encountered The Holy One. And when we do, we will be changed.

Finally, the grace of God in the gospel must be the fuel that encourages us in our efforts to grow in holiness. As today's passage shows us, it is by setting our hope fully on the grace and revelation of Jesus that we will prepare ourselves for action and live as obedient children. A life of striving for holiness without abiding in the gracious vine and encountering a Holy God is not possible. It is only in Christ and the grace He freely

gives that we receive all things necessary for life and godliness (2 Pt. 1:3). So in the end, our holiness is a gracious gift, a gift that we have the honor of striving for in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer for the Day

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day: Defend us by your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin nor run into any danger; and that, guided by your Spirit, we may do what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 8

SIN

Fr. John Scott

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:8-10

You may not like to hear this, but **you are a sinner** and I **am a sinner**. In fact, **all of us are sinners**. That great missionary and champion of the Gospel, Rabbi Paul of Tarsus, taught very matter-of-factly in his Epistle to the Romans: **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Rom. 3:23). You can't get much clearer than that on the matter of the universality of sin.

Now for Christians, the problem with sin is that we are not just breaking any old rules or regulations about unimportant aspects of life. Sin has to do with our willful refusal to obey the laws of God. The laws that He imposed on us are designed to help us stay in His will and maintain a loving relationship with Him. Now if you wish to know how important this is in God's view, that we obey His laws and maintain a loving relationship with Him, consider for a moment the high price Jesus paid to show us the importance of being faithful to His laws. In Paul's letter to his young student, Timothy, Paul says: **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"** (1 Timothy 1:15 emphasis added). Not only did He leave His throne in Heaven to come into our puny little world,, but He did so for a very specific reason: **He came to give His life as a ransom to save us from our sin..**

In the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, every time we gather in church to praise and worship God, we go through a **Rite of Reconciliation**, in which we literally celebrate this vital relationship we have with our God, in which we declare ourselves to be sinners and Jesus to be our Savior. A part of this rite is publicly confessing our sinfulness and reminding ourselves of this **Sinner/Savior relationship** we have with God. Another part is the hearing of what we call the *"Comfortable Words,"* which include quotations from Sacred Scripture, such as **"God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have eternal life"** (John3:16 emphasis added).. This is the basic proof text for the Incarnation (Jesus becoming a human being and taking the full weight of our sins upon Himself).

Perhaps you never thought of it before, but the Passion Accounts of all three of the synoptic Evangelists (Matthew, Chapters 26 & 27; Mark, Chapters 14 & 15; and Luke, Chapters 22 & 23) make it very clear that Jesus both knew and taught that His death

on the cross was the means by which Sin was forgiven and His followers received the assurance of eternal Salvation.

Notice that when Jesus and his Apostles left the Seder meal to await His betrayers, they did not go to the Temple, nor did they go into the desert, but rather, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane, which was an ancient **olive garden** in the heart of Jerusalem.

I truly believe Jesus went there to give us a dramatic illustration of what He was about to do. In every olive garden in those days there was a massive out-cropping of rock with a deep bowl-like indentation, hollowed out by a stone mason, in which the harvested olives were packed. Over these the garden workers carefully stacked a series of heavy boulders to press down on the olives to squeeze the oil out of the olives. Many artists, over the years, have painted or drawn the figure of Jesus laying upon such a rock as He prayed to the Father for courage and strength to hold up under the physical pain of having the weight of the sins of all of mankind pressed down on His mortal body. Among those sins are yours and mine. What message about God's love for you do you get from seeing this dramatic action by Jesus? What does it say to **you**?

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 9

HUMILITY

Sherry Shuman

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:3-4

I have listened to countless sermons on pride (excellent ones, in fact), but I have never heard a better description of pride than the one in a children's song entitled "The Me Monster." This song, which was written and performed by Irene Rose, has captivated my grandchildren and me for hours and led to many meaningful conversations. The lyrics talk about the monster lurking inside all of us:

*There's something in the dark
That's hiding in my heart,
And he comes out far too many times.*

*His head is really huge.
He doesn't like to lose.
I'm talking about the enemy of pride.*

*The Me Monster says, "I, I, I."
The Me Monster says, "My, my, my."
The Me Monster says, "Me, me, me."
Fight the Me Monster with humility.*

When we depend upon our abilities instead of God, pride is in control. When we demand our own way, pride is in control. When we try to earn our way to heaven by being good, pride is in control. When we count ourselves as more important than others, pride is in control. And the minute pride takes control, we become our own idols.

The remedy for pride is humility.

Humility begins when we become Christ-centered instead of self-centered. Andrew Murray said it best: "Humility is nothing more than the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all."³

³ Andrew Murray, *Humility*, 23.

Prayer for the Day

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 your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 10

FLESH

Fr. Fred Ochieng Onyango

Scripture Reading: Galatians 6:6-8

From a biblical perspective, sowing and reaping are not just agricultural principles. They are an axiom of Christian life that we sow and reap. Paul affirms this principle in his letter to the Galatians. He says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (v. 7). When you sow corn, you will reap corn. And when you sow beans, you will reap beans. In other words, there are not only natural but also spiritual consequences to our actions, so that every time we choose an action, we are also essentially choosing the consequences of that action.

Paul seeks to bring clarity to the Galatian Christians who are torn between living by faith in the Spirit and relying on the flesh by engaging in external activities apart from God. He warns them that whoever sows the things of the flesh will reap whatever the flesh naturally produces. And that living a life of carnality and sin and expecting to inherit the kingdom of God is like planting beans and expecting apples. Sowing in the flesh results in destruction, and sowing in the Spirit results in eternal life. In Paul’s day, the Galatian believers struggled with the desires of the flesh and worldliness: “sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like” (Galatians 5:19-20). In our day, there may be several things that amount to sowing to the flesh like the ones on Paul’s list. But it could also include any human action or achievement without dependence upon the Holy Spirit and without glorying in Christ. It may be our obsession with how we look on the outside over our inner disposition, prioritizing our children’s physical and social needs at the expense of their godly character development, or accumulating material possessions rather than investing in living gospel-centered lives and sharing the gospel.

Whatever it is we are doing, we need to re-examine our lives to make sure that we are really sowing to the Spirit. Don’t be deceived; God is not mocked. He knows what we are sowing, whether good or bad. If we have been sowing to the flesh, we must remember that we are not called to live the Christian life by ourselves. We can only live fulfilling Christian lives when we are intentional about surrendering our lives to the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that produces in us desires for God’s way that are stronger than our fleshly desires and tendencies. If you are sowing to the Spirit, especially in an age where materialism and worldliness seem to triumph, don’t give up. By the power of

the Holy Spirit, may you continue to sow and by the grace of God seek to bear witness to Christ.

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

Evening Prayer

Turn your face from my sins, and blot out all my misdeeds.

Psalm 51:9

Confession of Sin

Dearly beloved, the Scriptures teach us to acknowledge our many sins and offenses, not concealing them from our heavenly Father, but confessing them with humble and obedient hearts that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before Almighty God, but especially when we come together in his presence to give thanks for the great benefits we have received at his hands, to declare his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for our life and our salvation. Therefore, draw near with me to the throne of heavenly grace.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. **Amen.**

Grant to your faithful people, merciful Lord, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O gladsome light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

The Song of Simeon

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Luke 2:29-32

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-16

One day, Jesus had a theological conversation with a teacher of the law named Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the “supreme court” in ancient Israel. John says ol’ Nick came to Jesus at night . . . get it? Nick at night! It is clear that this educated, well-respected, teacher of Israel - still hasn’t found what he’s looking for (a loose quote from U2’s 1987 hit song). There is a gap in his theology, but he is too prideful to ask Jesus in the daylight where others might see him. So he goes to Jesus at night.

So what is the gap? At issue is this business about being “born again.” Nicodemus is told by Jesus that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3). Born again comes from the Greek word, “*anōthen*,” which means to be “born anew,” “all over again,” or “born from above (heaven)”.

So Nicodemus is lacking something crucial to becoming a Christian. Sometimes the secular media and progressive Christians will use the phrase “born again” as a derogatory term, dismissing Bible-believing Christians as “those born again” types (anti-intellectual). But what Jesus is saying in this passage is that BORN AGAIN is not a category or subset of Christians--it is Christianity itself! Jesus said in verse 7, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

Jesus made it clear that day--new birth is essential for our understanding the Christian faith. Religion doesn’t cut it. Good works aren’t enough. Charitable giving won’t get you to heaven, neither will baptism nor church membership. However, new birth, says Jesus, is essential for seeing the Kingdom and for entering the Kingdom. It is essential for everyone, even learned religious types like ol’ Nick. It is for all of us!

The next time we hear about Nicodemus, it will NOT be in the darkness of night, ashamed at his own spiritual ignorance. No, it will be in broad daylight...with chapter seven of John’s Gospel Nicodemus becoming a Christ-follower, filled with boldness. In chapter 7, Nick is making a dangerous defense of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Jewish

Law Court). No longer in fear and night, Nick stood forth in the daytime with great boldness. This boldness and courage came from being born again. This courage caused his own fellow court members to mock Nicodemus, saying, "So, are you a Galilean too?" They might as well have mocked him by saying, "Are you one of those radical born-again types now?"

The wind (God's Holy Spirit) had blown into Nicodemus' soul. Jesus had promised as much: "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3: 7-8).

Are you filled with the joy of new birth? The boldness of new life from God above? The courage to speak biblical truth in an age of doubt and hostility? Are you born again?

Fr. Tripp Jeffords

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

O Lord, show your mercy upon us;

And grant us your salvation.

O Lord, guide those who govern us;

And lead us in the way of justice and truth.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

And let your people sing with joy.

O Lord, save your people;

And bless your inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord;

And defend us by your mighty power.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Prayer for the Week

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

Prayer for Mission

O God and Father of all, whom the whole heavens adore: Let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men, women, and children everywhere love you and serve you in peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

Day 11

BREAD

Reverend Beverly Berry

Scripture Reading: John 6:32-35

In teaching people about who He is, Jesus frequently used images from daily life with which folks were familiar. Bread is a staple of our diets, so we know that bread satisfies our physical need of hunger.

Jesus is teaching us about much more than bread, He is teaching about our spiritual hunger and spiritual life. When the people heard Jesus speak of Moses who gave them “bread from heaven,” they remembered the manna from heaven. (I encourage you to read Exodus, chapter 16.) Exactly one month after Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, we find the people grumbling because they missed the food there. They accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness to kill them! So God steps right in to respond to all this fussing and tells Moses He will rain down bread from heaven in the mornings, six days out of seven. And God is true to His word—manna (which literally means “what is it?”) sustained the people for forty years, until they reached the Promised Land, Canaan.

But Jesus took something which the people knew about, and which was an important part of their heritage, *changing* and challenging their understanding. Jesus tells them plainly that *He* is the bread of life because He wants the people to come to a deeper understanding of who He is. He wants them to move beyond asking not only what He can do for them, to knowing and believing in their hearts that He is the very bread of life, indeed their—and our---only source of eternal life.

Jesus is teaching the true meaning of the manna their ancestors ate in the desert. The manna was from God, not Moses. And there’s more—Jesus says true bread from heaven is, “He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus wants *everyone* to know that “true bread” isn’t a thing—it’s a person—and He is that person. Christianity isn’t a set of dry rules or doctrines—it’s a relationship with a person, with Jesus, the living Son of God. When Jesus says He is the bread of life, He is teaching that until we recognize who He truly is, and invite Him into our lives as Lord and Savior, we will always have a deep hunger in our hearts which will not be satisfied by physical bread.

As Anglicans, we're blessed to be reminded every Sunday as we share in communion that Jesus is our true bread of life. I invite you to read through the liturgy on pages 132-137 of our *Book of Common Prayer* and focus on that glorious truth. When the priest puts the wafer into your hands at the altar rail, you hear the truth: "This is the Body of Christ, the bread of heaven." My prayer is that, during this season of Lent, the Holy Spirit will draw us all closer to Jesus that we may know and make known to others that He is the true bread of life.

Prayer for the Day

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 12

LIGHT

Fr. Korey Kincaid

Scripture Reading: John 8:12

One weekend, author Paul Tripp gave his teenage son permission to spend the weekend at a friend's house. But during the weekend Tripp received a call from the friend's mother, informing him that his son was not at her home. (Her son had felt guilty about covering for Tripp's son and confessed to his mom.).

After giving his son a couple of hours to relax upon his return, Tripp asked him if they could talk.

"Do you ever think about how much God loves you?," Tripp asked his son.

"Sometimes," he answered.

"Do you ever think how much God's grace operates in your life every day?"

His son looked up but didn't speak. "Do you know how much God's grace was working in your life even this weekend?"

"Who told you?" his son asked.

Tripp said: "You have lived your life in the light. You've made good choices. You've been an easy son to parent, but this weekend you took a step toward the darkness. You can live in the darkness if you want. You can learn to lie and deceive. You can use your friends as your cover ... You can step over God's boundaries. Or you can determine to live in God's light. I'm pleading with you: don't live in the darkness; live in the light."

As I turned to walk away, I heard his voice from behind me saying, "Dad, don't go." As I turned around, with tears in his eyes, he said, "Dad, I want to live in the light, but it's so hard. Will you help me?"⁴

⁴Paul David Tripp, *Forever: Why You Can't Live Without It*, (Zondervan, 2011), pp. 151-153.

The darkness is all around us, isn't it? There are two choices in this world: you can live in darkness and all that comes with it, or you can live in the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness" (v. 12). That means that if we don't follow him, we do walk in darkness. And where is that darkness? It is in the world and in our hearts.

So when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" (v. 12), He's not saying that He's removing all darkness as He walks through it. He's saying that the world has no other light than Him. If there is going to be a light for the world, it will be Jesus. There is no third alternative—no other light. It is Jesus or darkness. It means that all the world and everyone in it, past, present, and future, needs the light of Jesus. It means that the world was made for the light of Jesus. It is His light that makes sin plain and ugly, but it also makes everything good in the world shine with its full and true beauty. This world was made to be illumined by this light. Finally, it means that there is a day coming when this light will fill the earth in its entirety. All darkness, all works of darkness, and all sons and demons of darkness will be cast out. In that day, all there will be is light—Jesus, the radiance of the Father will fill the world and all that is in it.

For now, if you follow Him, He is your light! Like Paul Tripp's son, we at times lose our way. We need help: "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons and daughters of light" (John 12:36). Amazing truth, isn't it? When you take Jesus as your Savior, as your light, when you follow Him as your truth and wisdom and your way and your beauty, you have His life and you are a child of light. Even in the moments of our death when the world thinks that all lights go out, for you and me the light will shine even brighter. It will be the light of heaven.

I pray today that you are a child of the light!

Prayer for the Day

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 13

DOOR

Cathy Jacobs

Scripture Reading: John 10:1-9

Do you know that the Lord loves *you*? I mean, do you KNOW that He simply adores you. Think of that one person in your life who is extra-special. That person who lights up your world when he enters it. That, my friend, is how The God of this gigantic universe feels about you – except, He loves you, oh, so much more.

One of the main ways our God communicates His amazing love is through His Word, the Bible. In the words of John 10: 1-9, He describes his deep care and concern for His people through the beautiful picture of a shepherd and his sheep. This familiar image spoke volumes to God's people.

For most of us, it might be a stretch to understand Jesus. But if we listen, we can hear the clarion voice of The Good Shepherd speaking as dearly to us in the twenty-first century as to those in the first century.

The disciple John opens this passage by quoting Jesus, “Truly, truly, I say to you” (v. 1). Truth! In today's relativistic world, that is a complicated topic. Jesus did not have any problem with Truth. He spoke what He knew to be True.

Twice in this passage Jesus uses the image of a “door.” The first discussion is in verse 2. Jesus says, “he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door . . . is a thief and a robber.” Jesus continues, “But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep” (v. 2). Jesus is claiming to be THE Shepherd. He is the one the sheep will follow. They follow because they know His voice. He calls each one by name. Then He leads them out of the sheepfold safely so that all their needs are beautifully met.

Did you catch that? Jesus leads his flock by calling their *name*. Yes! Jesus knows His flock intimately. That, my friend, means that Jesus knows *your* name. He knows your heart, your mind, your thoughts. He even knows the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7). He knows *everything* about you!

The second reference to Jesus as the “door” is in verses 7 and 9. This statement is one of the well-known “I am” statements. Jesus is clear. If anyone enters through Him, he will be saved. The first reference to the “door” is special. Jesus knows MY name. But this second door reference is critical. Jesus is THE way to salvation, both for today and forever.

Have you passed through this door? Not all doors are the same, you know. Many are alluring. But “The Truth” of the matter is that only *one* leads to eternal life. Yes, God adores you. He’s longing, as your personal Shepherd, for a precious relationship where you come to Him to enter into life everlasting. He’s calling your name. How do you respond?

Prayer for the Day

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day: Defend us by your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin nor run into any danger; and that, guided by your Spirit, we may do what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 14

SHEPHERD

Reverend Chip Strickland

Scripture Reading: John 10:11-18

¹¹ Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

John 10:11-18

In this passage, Jesus gives a strong affirmation of his authority as the Good Shepherd, the one who can be trusted, above all others, for protection, provision and guidance. That was the shepherd’s role in practical terms, and it is Jesus’ role in spiritual terms. He tells us that if we put our trust in Him, He will protect, provide and guide. He also makes it clear that He is the only one who can do this for us. He stands alone above all humanity, and above all lesser gods and idols, above and distinct from the bad shepherds.

I’m sure that Jesus knows how many times we have been misled, mistreated, and abandoned. Surely we can remember many times when one in whom we put our trust and loyalty “sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees” (v. 12). Having been abandoned leaves us cynical and guarded. How much more are we prone to caution in this culture, as we are confronted daily with countless empty promises of protection, provision, and guidance from the bad shepherds?

In Lent we are called to be particularly vulnerable in the acts of confession and repentance, and then to place or re-place our trust in Jesus as our Good Shepherd. He has come to save us, heal us, teach us, and then to die for us and rise again. Only

the Good Shepherd could or would do that. We don't need to be cautious or afraid of being abandoned. The One who did all this for us will never abandon us.

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 15

LOVE

Reverend Beverly Berry

Scripture Reading: John 3:16-18

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” This refrain from a familiar children’s hymn echoed frequently through the ancient chapel at a church where I served as a priest, as the day school children came to worship and learn to know God and Jesus.

Indeed, the Bible tells us over and over of God’s love for us. John 3:16 is one of the most well-known verses in all of Scripture, known even by folks who are not Christians: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” As Anglicans, we often hear this “comfortable word” in our Sunday services (Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 130). One short, simple sentence that communicates so much about who God is. So let’s unpack this a bit.

God loves every one of us sinful folks, whether we know Him or not. Most of us have people and things in our lives that we love, but God’s love is so much greater! As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:38-39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Love is an intentional choice reflected in our actions. Today’s Bible passage tells us *how* God expressed His love for us. God sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world, to become fully human as we are, so that He could save us from our sins and offer us the gift of eternal life with Him. So what, exactly, did Jesus have to do to accomplish His Father’s plan to save us? Paul answers that question in Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus’ great love for us is shown in His voluntary, intentional *choice to die for our sins*.

As soon as we say “yes” to Jesus, we step into His gift of eternal life. The season of Lent is a time when those who follow Jesus may renew and deepen that commitment. For those who have not yet made this choice, my prayer is that you will seek and find the One who seeks you. There’s a simple prayer you can use to do that, from Jan

Karon's novel, *At Home in Mitford*: "Thank you, God, for loving me, and for sending your Son to die for my sins. I sincerely repent of my sins, and receive Christ as my personal savior. Now, as your child, I turn my entire life over to you. Amen" (184).

Prayer for the Day

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 your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 16

VINE

Dr. Mark Greenslit

Scripture Reading: John 15:1-11

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he is it that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.”

John 15:5-6

In this passage, Jesus presents us with a clear choice: flourish or wither.

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, a twentieth century Russian dissident and author of the *“Gulag Archipelago,”* a story written about his time in a Russian prison camp, said in 1983, “Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: ‘Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this happened.’”

Russia, under the brutal oppression of communism, forgot about God and became a nation of withered branches, leaving sixty million dead in its wake.⁵

Look around. Our society is struggling. It is littered with withered branches. Drug overdoses and suicides are at all-time highs, not to mention, raging political and social turmoil, seeming to affect every sphere of our lives.

It seems that, we too, have forgotten about God. In 2017, Barna Research revealed that only 6% of Americans hold a Biblical world view. This number drops to 2% among 18-29 year olds . This is despite the fact that 65% claim to be Christian.⁶

But, Jesus wants us to flourish and loves enough to give us the means to do so. He gives us Himself.

He tells us to abide in Him, not just believe in Him. Abide in Him. Live deeply in His presence through His words, through prayer and through worship music. Give Him

“‘Men Have Forgotten God’: Aleksander Solzhenitsyn’s 1983 Templeton Address.” *National Review* on line. December 11, 2018.

⁶“Faithfully Different.” Natasha Crain. Pp, 23, 26.

times of silence, so that he can live deeply in you. Get off social media and turn off the news. We become what we give our attention to.

Give Jesus permission to rule your life, as the Lord of your life. Attach yourself firmly to Him, so that you can grow spiritually, prosper, and produce good fruit for yourself and for those around you.

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT

Evening Prayer

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Mark 8:34

Confession of Sin

Dearly beloved, the Scriptures teach us to acknowledge our many sins and offenses, not concealing them from our heavenly Father, but confessing them with humble and obedient hearts that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before Almighty God, but especially when we come together in his presence to give thanks for the great benefits we have received at his hands, to declare his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for our life and our salvation. Therefore, draw near with me to the throne of heavenly grace.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. **Amen.**

Grant to your faithful people, merciful Lord, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O gladsome light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

The Song of Simeon

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Luke 2:29-32

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

It is one of the clearest and articulated sentences pertaining to the Creator of the Universe coming into the world,

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

1 Timothy 1:15

It is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance isn't it? Yet, millions of people every year go on about their lives as if Jesus didn't mean anything to Christmas. And, they don't because most do not see themselves as sinners, but good by nature. Christ Jesus coming into the world to save sinners will typically get a, "must not be talking about me", response. This is the real predicament of many around us. After all who needs a Savior, when you deem yourself not needing to be saved in the first place.

It doesn't go without noticing that every human struggles with hardship, disappointments, and pain. Not only that but we live in a world where disease, sickness, and death are ever present. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). And, these are just the outward expression of human predicament, for underneath our situation are hearts that are darkened and hard and sinful. Jesus came into our world to give us new hearts. A new heart and a new spirit in us—removing from us our hearts of stone and giving us hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

And, what about us to whom Jesus has changed? Are we now to go around to those who don't know Jesus and stick out our chests a little farther? No. Our words are those of the apostles, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." I am the foremost of sinners. On our hearts there should be empathy and love and humility. Knowing that I am a sinner like other sinners. That salvation in Jesus did not come from being better than anyone but from the finished work of Christ. And because I know me better than I know others, it is true, acknowledged or not, that I am the worst sinner I know.

Allow this to percolate. May this truth allow you to carry yourself differently, to see others differently, and love others like Jesus loves others. May it soften your words this week. May it change how you see other fellow humans.

Jesus came into my world to save me a sinner, of whom I am the foremost. Thank you Jesus!

Fr. Fred Ochieng Onyango

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

O Lord, show your mercy upon us;

And grant us your salvation.

O Lord, guide those who govern us;

And lead us in the way of justice and truth.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

And let your people sing with joy.

O Lord, save your people;

And bless your inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord;

And defend us by your mighty power.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Prayer for the Week

Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you: Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants, and purify our disordered affections, that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer for Mission

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the Spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

Day 17

BORN

Foster Smith

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-7

Are you just a bunch of B. S.?

It was a special day for me in 1971 to discover I was only a bunch of B. S. (body and soul). Like Nicodemus, I was ignorant concerning the threefold man.

After studying the Bible in an intense class, I realized that Jesus was not just talking to the leading Pharisee, but to me! I must be born again. Not reborn of my mother, but from above.

I sat quietly alone at 10:30 p.m. in the dark living room of my sister's apartment at 32 State St. I asked God to fill me with His Holy Spirit, to be born of the spirit as Jesus instructed Nicodemus.

It was a soft June night in Charleston, South Carolina. There weather was unexceptional, but at that moment the door blew open, the palmetto fronds on the street rattled, and I was startled!

I opened one eye and asked, "Is that you Lord?" Indeed. it was his Holy Spirit. I was gloriously filled to overflowing. As Jesus predicted in Mark 16: 17: "And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues."

They shall speak with new tongues and indeed I did.

That night I change from being just a bunch of B. S. (body and soul) to being completely restored to being body soul and spirit.

Don't settle for being incomplete. Ask God to fill you to overflowing.

Have you been born again? Ask and you shall receive. Not every experience will be as dramatic as the apostle Paul's conversion or the wind of my experience, but every sincere petition will be heard, and you will be filled!

Prayer for the Day

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 18

DRINK

Sherry Shuman

Scripture Reading: John 4:7-15

A woman readjusts the goatskin carelessly flung over her shoulder and takes a quick swipe at the sweat on her brow. She moves silently towards a well on the outskirts of Sychar. The siesta sun is relentless, but she doesn't care. She prefers traveling alone.

She is never alone, however. Shame paid its initial visit after her first marriage failed and increased its visits, one marriage after another. Now it's her constant companion.

The woman reaches her destination and is surprised to encounter a Hebrew man resting at the edge of the well. She is curt when He asks her for a drink. "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?"

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink," this man replies, "you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Unlike other men she has known, He neither leers at her with lust nor looks upon her with disgust. His words offer her gifts of mercy and grace. She has not encountered just any man; she has encountered the LORD.

In what ways do you identify with this Samaritan woman found in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. Are you disheartened by guilt, regret, shame or a sense of failure? Are you embarrassed by the questioning glances you receive from neighbors who don't understand your circumstances? Are you sick of the daily grind?

Are you thirsty?

In Jesus' day, living water referred to water that was in motion. Unlike stagnant or standing water—which was often infested by nematodes and larvae or contaminated by urine and feces from flocks of sheep—living water flowed from a stream or deep pool. When Jesus mentioned living water, the Samaritan woman mistakenly assumed He was referring to water that was safe to drink.

Our Lord wasn't talking about quenching one's physical thirst with water; He was speaking metaphorically about satisfying one's spiritual thirst with the Spirit of God.

Like Jesus did with the woman at the well, the Holy Spirit creatively chooses a sundry of places, times and circumstances to provide sacred moments in which to deliver mercy and grace. He transcends everything from our busy schedules and lengthy to-do lists to the hardened areas of our hearts. He soothes our wounds.

A spiritual practice to adopt this Lenten season is to begin each day with four simple words: "Come, Holy Spirit, Come." This prayer will be life-changing. For the first time in what may feel like an incredibly long time, many of us will experience indescribable JOY.

Prayer for the Day

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 19

SEEK

Charley Albert

Scripture Reading: John 19:1-10

It was a regular day in my life. I got up, dressed, grabbed some coffee, picked up my lesson plans, and off to school I went. This day turned out to be a sad one because when I reached school, there was news that one of my colleagues, who had cancer, had taken a turn for the worst and was in critical condition. We prayed together in the faculty room and went on with the day.

Have you ever had the Holy Spirit press upon your thoughts and not leave you alone? Well, that's what happened to me. "Charley, Debbie is ready to pray for salvation. You need to visit her. Remember your last conversation when she said, 'You are right, I just need a little time.'" The Spirit pressed on my thoughts all day. Yet, I went from teaching to coaching baseball, finished the practice and went home. I corrected papers, watched some TV and went to bed.

I went through my normal routine the next morning, planning to visit Debbie right after school. The faculty was overwhelmed with the news: Debbie had passed away last night. I didn't get to say goodbye or pray with her. Even though this happened years ago, the regret I felt is still with me.

Opportunities to share our faith are presented to us every day. Jesus did not miss the chance with Zaccheaus in Luke 19. Here we read about Jesus visiting the home of a Tax Collector and a thief, but Jesus saw Zaccheaus as a child of God. He had been born into the lineage of Abraham and had lost his faith. However, a person is not saved by a good heritage or condemned by a poor one. Faith and obedience are more important than genealogy.

Jesus loves to bring the lost into His kingdom no matter what their background. Through witnessing and loving care, faith can become a reality. Repentance, forgiveness and a changed life emerge. We see new creations in Christ, free to serve God and live a righteous life. Zaccheaus was lost, but because of a visit from Jesus he was transformed and entered the Kingdom of God.

The Great Commission directs all believers to "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Do you have that unquenchable desire to do what Jesus has asked of you? Jesus is asking you to use

all that He has given you to reach out to those he places in your path. Fill your lanterns with spiritual light so the lost will be attracted to God in you. We are God's hands, feet and voice to reach the lost.

Jesus' disciples did not want Him to visit Zaccheaus, yet He went and Zaccheaus heard and repented. He also changed his life. When opportunity comes, don't put off until tomorrow; follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

I thank God that I followed His leading when a new family came to our church in Delaware. This was a very dysfunctional family. I knew God was calling me to befriend the husband, Pete. He was extremely loud, with crude language. His marriage was falling apart. His home was a mess as were his finances. I took time to pray about what God was asking me to do. God's answer to me was to invite Pete to have breakfast with me. To my amazement, he said yes. This was the beginning of a weekly meeting that lasted for three years.

Our time together began very awkwardly, but trust was established and we begin to share our life stories. Years ago, Pete had a stable life. He and his wife adopted two children with special needs. Everything radically changed when he was in an accident while driving a tractor trailer carrying nuclear waste. He was covered with poisonous waste which caused severe injuries and permanent damage.

After three years of meetings, Pete asked me to pray with him to recommit his life to God. During the next three years, Pete has consistently grown in his faith, there has been healing in his family, and his life has been transformed. All I had to do was be obedient and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer for the Day

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day: Defend us by your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin nor run into any danger; and that, guided by your Spirit, we may do what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 20

FOLLOW

Fr. Korey Kincaid

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:17-22

At times I sit and reflect on my life and God's beautiful sovereign grace. When I was young, I had two visions for my life. One was to be rich. Like many youth today the goal was treasure—earthly treasure, lots of it. The second was mildly more virtuous. I wanted a perfect family—a perfect home. A beautiful wife and beautiful daughters. I grew up in a home with two older brothers; therefore, I wanted girls to fill my home. I wanted to braid hair and love on them like only a doting father could.

Then Jesus came and intervened in my life. I was nineteen, and He hit me like a ton of bricks. I had never heard the audible voice of God, but that night I clearly heard Him say, "Follow me." I knew in order to do that I had to scrap my dreams, my desires, my visions. Oh—how many young people today hear and hearken the voice of Jesus saying those two words, "Follow me," and simply can't surrender their lives? The scene has no doubt been playing out since the beginning of time, just like it did in my life and in Mark's gospel:

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

Mark 10:17-22

The key to the context is Jesus' words, "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me'" (v. 21). Jesus is not playing a game with him; He is driving down deep into his heart where there was an idol that

needed to be dismantled. You want eternal life? Jesus says you first must receive Him. Is He worth dismantling your idols? Is He worth your heart, your joy, your home, your all?

For this young man and countless others, the cost was too great. His face falls a mile. He realizes this is beyond him. His love for himself is too great, and his love for others is too weak. He wanted eternal life as a add-on to his other god, and Jesus shows him and us that this will not work.

We need to remember the rich young ruler as this passage teaches us that there is a denial of self in following Jesus. There is a surrender that lays down our desires as we follow what Jesus desires for our life. In so doing, in the end, we find that what we ultimately desired and what Jesus gives us is not that incompatible. We have traded earthly treasures for heavenly treasures. Our desires are met, but much deeper and more fulfilling. And, in the end, we get Him. We get Jesus—the greatest treasure of all.

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 21

BELIEVE

Lisa Greenslit

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:17-27

In the Gospel of Mark, a father brought his son to Jesus for healing. He cried “if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.’ And Jesus said to him, “If you can”! All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9: 22-24)

If we are honest, most of us have wrestled with doubt and disbelief at times. We desperately want to believe that God will answer our prayers. That He will provide. That He will heal. Nevertheless, we struggle.

Keep in mind that this father must have had faith, or he would not have brought his son to Jesus. “I believe.” Yet he realized his faith was far from perfect. “Help my unbelief!”

The Passion translation reads, “I do believe, Lord; help my little faith!” The Good News translation says, “I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!”

I think Jesus must have been pleased with the father’s heartfelt response. He immediately healed the son.

Unbelief is not a failure of faith. It is a need for God. Growing in faith is a lifelong process, and we are meant to walk with God in that process. After all, faith is a gift from God himself; “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Kathleen Norris, in her book *Amazing Grace*, shares wisdom she received from an old Benedictine monk: “doubt is merely the seed of faith, a sign that faith is alive and ready to grow” (63).

Even the disciples struggled with unbelief at times. In Matthew 28:17, they encountered the Risen Christ on a mountain in Galilee, and “when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.”

We can be honest with God. Admit when we struggle. He can handle it. Let us remember to ask God for more faith. By His grace and power, our faith will grow.

Prayer for the Day

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 your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 22

FORGIVE

Jim Beierlein

Scripture Reading: John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

John 8:1-11

We have probably all been on both sides of this situation; we have all sinned and have all been on the side of persecuting someone for doing wrong. I know that I have received more grace than I deserve.

A world where we all got exactly what we deserved for our indiscretions would be an evil, intolerable place to live. In some ways with modern social media and cancel culture, we are very similar to the days that Jesus walked the earth in human form. We put out a “perfect” image to the world, hiding all the parts of our lives that “didn’t make the cut,” all while judging, and in some cases persecuting, ones who have a different world view than our own or have been caught doing something they should not have. In some cases, we find ourselves weighing our sins against others while saying to ourselves, “I know I have done some bad things, but by comparison I am not that bad.”

As Christians we have an obligation to our Savior, to love our neighbors. Loving your neighbor does not mean that this woman's husband should take her back and forget what she did. In fact Jesus said in Matthew 14 that adultery was the only cause for lawful divorce. This woman still has a long hard battle ahead of her, being labeled an adulterer, probably getting divorced by her husband. Her husband may have been in the crowd ready to stone her to death, but thanks to Jesus she got what she deserved, and she deserves life and a chance to change her ways. She did leave alive that day.

We tend to think that our sense of moral superiority is going to have a difference on people's lives. The reality is that people rarely change because they want *your* approval; they change because they reach a point and realize that it is their own actions that are leading to the current situation that they do not like. The grudge that you are holding is only hurting you. You do not need to forget what someone did; it is okay to be more cautious around someone that hurts you. But forgiving them is the first step in healing; they deserve the same grace that God grants you and me. Most of us have someone in our lives against whom we are holding a grudge. Maybe that grudge is against yourself. As you go about your day, remember that it is time to forgive. Jesus already has. When will you?

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT

Evening Prayer

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 3:2

Confession of Sin

Dearly beloved, the Scriptures teach us to acknowledge our many sins and offenses, not concealing them from our heavenly Father, but confessing them with humble and obedient hearts that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before Almighty God, but especially when we come together in his presence to give thanks for the great benefits we have received at his hands, to declare his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for our life and our salvation. Therefore, draw near with me to the throne of heavenly grace.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. **Amen.**

Grant to your faithful people, merciful Lord, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O gladsome light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

The Song of Simeon

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a

light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Luke 2:29-32

Scripture Reading: John 9:1-41

Today's Gospel story is St. John's account of Jesus healing the man born blind. This is a story of healing to be sure, but it is more a story about coming to faith. Notice the steady progression of the healed man's faith and courageous witness as he is interrogated by the Pharisees. At first he can only recite his visceral experience: **“I was blind, but now I see”** (v. 25 emphasis added). The one thing he knew for sure, with all of his being, was that his dark world, the only world he had known all of his life, was now bathed in light and color.

But now he found himself in the middle of a confusing debate over the character and integrity of Jesus. The poor man was no match for the poisoned questions of his learned interrogators, and yet, in his simple innocence and persistence, he proved to be equal to the occasion. And by the end of the debate he is lecturing the entire assembly, and he has become the interrogator, asking questions of them. Now, of course this was not a welcome change of positions for the Pharisees, and they promptly threw him out of their midst. But in the end, Jesus appeared to the man again, and his journey to the light is complete as he sees in Jesus the true Light of the World; and having truly seen this insight, he worships Jesus. This is a story of emerging from the darkness into the light, if ever there was one.

But at the same time, this formerly blind man is emerging from his darkness to the light,, the Pharisees are shown descending from the light into their own self-imposed darkness. It is a story oozing with irony.

At first the Pharisees are more curious than perturbed by the actions of Jesus. But, as they press this healed man, their arguments become more and more shaded, and it soon becomes clear that they are not seeking the truth but are desperately trying to protect their version of it. They needed to keep the debate focused on the detail that Jesus had done this healing on the Sabbath, technically violating a prohibition, whereas the man wanted to keep the debate focused on the larger detail that he had been blind, but now he could see. Him. Finally, the Pharisees excommunicate the healed man from the Temple, hurling one final epitaph at him: **“you were born utterly in sin. And you dare to teach us?”** (v. 34 emphasis added). These Pharisees thought they were speaking for God, and most people of that day granted them that

authority, since they were educated and committed scholars of the Mosaic Law and the Prophets. But recall that this whole story began with the disciples asking Jesus if the blind man had sinned and thus was born blind as a punishment for his sin, to which Jesus had flatly answered "No." Once again the final verdict of the Pharisees, attempting to speak for God's perspective on this healed man, was completely and categorically wrong. How crucial it is for us to learn that disaster is not always tied to deserving, nor suffering to sinfulness. And this from no less authority than Jesus Christ Himself. If anyone should know the real heart and action of God in this world, it would certainly be Jesus, don't you think?

As the passage concludes, Jesus declares, "***I came into this world for judgement, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind***" (v.39 emphasis added). When the Pharisees heard this statement, they remarked with astonishment,, "***Surely we are not also blind, are we?***" (v. 40 emphasis added). And of course, they had just pronounced their own judgement. Bats, angler fish, and now we can add some Pharisees to the list of creatures who prefer the darkness to the light. There is no blindness more stubborn than the person whose eyes are clenched tightly shut. Or as Helen Keller once observed, "***The only thing worse than being blind, is having sight but no vision..***" The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

Fr. John Scott

The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

O Lord, show your mercy upon us;

And grant us your salvation.

O Lord, guide those who govern us;

And lead us in the way of justice and truth.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

And let your people sing with joy.

O Lord, save your people;

And bless your inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord;

And defend us by your mighty power.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Prayer for the Week

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

Prayer for Mission

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the Spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus

Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

Day 23

NEW

Foster Smith

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-5

Generally speaking, who gets an inheritance? I have been the beneficiary of an inheritance only once in my life. Not because I deserved it, but simply because I was my parents' son.

Saint Peter informed me that I have another inheritance coming! Why? Because I deserve it? No, but because the heavenly father has begotten me onto a living hope. What is this hope? Consider the following scriptures:

Titus 2:13: looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Titus 3:7: that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Colossians 1:27: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory.

What is this inheritance to come? Well, it is incorruptible (not like a beach house that a hurricane destroys), it is undefiled (no sibling fights over it), it fades not away (like the sinking stock market), and it is reserved in heaven for you (no changing of the will at the last minute).

There are five crowns listed in scripture.

Crown incorruptible -- to those who finished their course.

Crown of rejoicing – the people won for Christ

Crown of righteousness – given to those who love His appearing (second coming)

Crown of life – promised to all who love Christ

Crown of glory - given to those who oversee a flock

This is a great inspiration to fully live the Christian life. To faithfully run with patience the race that is set out before you. To be a witness for Christ. Not to live for this world, but to long for his coming again. To love Christ and serve his people. What a glorious future we have to look forward to!

“To an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven FOR YOU” (1 Peter 1:4, emphasis added).

Prayer for the Day

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 24

SALVATION

Reverend Beverly Berry

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:8-12

Are you as encouraged and inspired by Peter's life and ministry as I am? Peter was a family man, a fisherman, who accepted Jesus' invitation to follow Him without hesitation. He was plain and hardworking; Luke calls him an "unschooled, ordinary man" (Acts 4:13). Yet, because Peter said "yes" to Jesus, he witnessed miracles of all sorts, heard Jesus' teaching, and came to know without a doubt that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Peter knew he was sinful, and he knew what the apostle Paul would later teach: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). And Peter knew that Jesus came to save him -- and us -- from our sins.

Our passage for today describes part of what happened after Peter was jailed because God used him to heal a man crippled from birth, when he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). Peter, standing before the Jewish leaders, was filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to boldly proclaim the foundation of our Christian faith: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)..

Jesus' name, the Greek form of Joshua, *means* "the Lord saves" (Matt. 1:21). Jesus Himself put it this way: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Peter heard this truth from Jesus' own lips—and so he wants us all to hear this and become a follower of Jesus, so that we may receive salvation.

"The Solid Rock" is one of my favorite hymns, the words penned in 1834 by Edward Mote and the music by William B. Bradbury in 1863. Here's the first verse:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.

God used Peter, an ordinary human being like you and me, to proclaim this truth to the world, so that through the name of Jesus, we might be saved. My prayer is that we will spend some time this Lenten season praying about how God is calling us to make the same bold Gospel proclamation as Peter did.

Prayer for the Day

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 25

GRACE

Fr. Tripp Jeffords

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and was seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:1-10

From the English *Book of Common Prayer* 1662 to our own ACNA BCP 2019, we have prayed a penitential opening rite called *The Great Litany*. There is one section of the litany where we pray: “From all disordered and sinful affections; and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, **Good Lord, deliver us**” (p. 92).

Throughout Anglican history, we have pointed at three primary sources against which we battle: the world, the flesh, and the devil. From where does this come? From today’s reading in Ephesians 2, Paul tells us that we “once walked, following the course of the world.” We followed the “Prince of the Air.” We lived “in the passions of our flesh.” What do all these have in common? Pride! Pride, self-confidence, and self-righteousness have been our downfall. It is everyone’s condition.

The world promotes pride in accomplishments. The flesh draws us to use our bodies to pursue self-gratification in mind and body. The “Prince of the Air” is the prideful angel who challenged God’s unequaled supremacy and was cast out of heaven.

Due to this condition, Paul says we are all “dead in our sins and trespasses,” until we trust in Jesus alone for salvation. Paul uses the term “dead” with great precision. We can do NOTHING AT ALL to be forgiven, to be accepted into the household of God, or to spring our own souls out of eternal damnation. Paul sums it up beautifully: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We are dead men walking, until we are made alive in Christ Jesus!

It is the moment at which we stop pursuing our own pride and are drawn to Christ alone, that all boasting is destroyed, and a new life under God’s grace emerges.

Consider today if you are desperately leaning on Jesus for salvation and for all other good gifts the Father seeks to give you. Consider the immense love poured out for you as Christ died for your sin and won the victory over death, hell, and Satan. And enter spiritual warfare in your personal prayer life, praying against the contamination of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and all inordinate and sinful affections. Amen.

Prayer for the Day

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day: Defend us by your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin nor run into any danger; and that, guided by your Spirit, we may do what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 26

MERCY

Cathy Jacobs

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51:1-2

I remember it like it was yesterday. I was five years old when I disobediently crossed the street to go to Johnny's house. Johnny was my best friend. On this rainy morning, I wanted to play with him. He was not willing to wait for me to get Mama to safely cross the street.

I dashed across the wet road, avoiding puddles. I ran after Johnny. This proved not to be a good idea as later I found myself standing in my garage, dripping wet, under the stern look of my mother. I was covered in mud. "Mama, Johnny *pushed* me into that huge mud hole at the new house construction." Shivering, I moved to go inside our warm house. Mama stepped directly into my path. She told me I was dirty. I was NOT allowed into her clean home.

At that point, she disappeared. Distressed, I stood weeping in my muddy filth. Swiftly, she returned with towels. Firmly, but lovingly, she took my hand, guiding me to the outside faucet. Stripping me of my grimy clothes, she determinedly hosed me up and down. After scrubbing my slimy skin clean, she swaddled me in a fuzzy towel. In one huge sweep, she scooped me into her arms towards her chest, saying, "Now you can come into our home."

Mercy. It is the compassionate treatment of those in distress, especially when it is within one's power to punish or harm them (*Webster's Dictionary*, p. 743). Mama definitely had the power to harm me! She probably had a few vindictive thoughts. Being a merciful mother, she devotedly cleaned me from my mess. After saying I was sorry, I don't remember her mentioning the event again.

Jesus is like that. He is full of mercy and compassion. How many times has He seen you covered in your personal sludge? Have you taken a moment this Lenten season to look honestly at yourself? Have you fallen on your face, repenting? In Romans 3:23, Paul says, "all have sinned." Every one of us has sin sticking to us like a miry glue. It can be difficult to be rid of it. Yet this only Son of the Almighty God is heart-bent on scrubbing us clean through the power of His redeeming blood. He longs to swoop us up, draw us close to Him and bring us eternally into His heavenly home, both for today and forever more.

I have three questions for you: Why do you think the Lord had you read these words today? What do you think He wants you to learn? How are you going to respond? Praying Psalm 51:1-2 is a great place to begin. Jesus is waiting to wash you clean.

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 27

SACRIFICE

Fr. Tripp Jeffords

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:11-18

11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.** 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” 17 then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. (emphasis added)

Hebrews 10:11-18

I was just out of seminary. Leslie and I had made our new home in Beaufort, S.C. One day, I visited someone out on Lady’s Island who had fallen away from the church. We had a nice visit. I encouraged the man to make faith a personal priority once again.

The man responded, “Father, I plan to come back to church. I’ve just been dealing with some stuff lately. Once I get my life cleaned up, I promise you, I’ll be back.” It so heartbreaking to listen to someone who thinks that a prerequisite to coming back to church is to first “get my life cleaned up.”

As many have said through the years, “The church is not a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners.” What an altogether different approach!

The first thing to remember is that Jesus came into the world to be our sacrifice for sin. His offering of blood atonement was all-encompassing and everlasting. Paul wrote, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to **be received by faith**” (Rom. 3:25 emphasis added). FAITH is the key. Our faith in

His work is all we need to be acceptable to God the Father: “For by a single offering He (Jesus) has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

The second thing to remember is that the process of sanctification is about us growing into God’s amazing grace. The writer of Hebrews quotes the ancient prophecy of Jeremiah 31:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds.”

Hebrews 10:16

In this new covenant, God’s Holy Spirit will begin to soften the hardness of our human hearts so that we will WANT TO share in the kind of life Jesus embodied and will WANT TO embrace the moral character of God for the world to see. The law says, “have to.” The Gospel says, “want to.”

The last thing to remember - back to my friend in Beaufort - is that sin has once and forever been dealt with through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. The writer of Hebrews quotes God from Jeremiah 31: “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more” (v. 17). If you have confessed your sins and pleaded for God’s mercy in the blood of Jesus, it’s done! It’s over! That sin is not only forgiven by God, but also “forgotten.”

What would it look like if you truly forgave yourself as God has forgiven you?

Bishop Lawrence preached a sermon at St. Paul’s in which he said when we meet Jesus in faith and trust Him as our Lord, immediately Jesus rushes toward the seashore and plants a big ol’ sign in the sand that reads, “NO FISHING!” It is the promise that Jesus will not fish for your sins anymore - and neither should you! God promised, “I will remember their sins no more.” I encourage you to draw from that mercy and comfort this Lenten season!

Prayer for the Day

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 your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 28

LIFE

Sherry Shuman

Scripture Reading: John 11:17-27

I struggled to write this devotion. After all, the raising of Lazarus is a familiar story.

We know that as a result of Jesus' delay, Lazarus had been dead for four days before help arrived. And despite the stench and Jewish belief that Lazarus' soul had already left his body, our Lord directed the mourners, "Take away the stone."

We've noted the authority in Jesus' command, "Lazarus, come out," and tried to imagine what it was like for Mary and Martha's brother emerging from the tomb, dazed and wearing his grave clothes. His feet bound by linen strips; his face covered in cloth.

I prayerfully pondered John 11:1-44, reading it repeatedly. Pouring into my favorite podcasts, commentaries and Bible studies, I searched for clues that would point me in the direction of God's will for this devotion. Slowly, ever so slowly, two words began to resonate within my heart: *grave clothes*.

If Jesus came "that (we) may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10), why do so many of us fail to enjoy a joy-filled, abundant life? I've considered the answer to this question for years. I believe that instead of being fully clothed in the righteousness of Christ, we are still wearing bits and pieces of our grave clothes.

A.W. Tozier wrote, "The devil makes it his business to keep Christians in bondage, bound and gagged, actually imprisoned by their own grave clothes."

Smelly and rotting, grave clothes are the unhealed remnants of our old sinful nature. They are the bad habits, damaged self-images, crippling fear, rebellious attitudes, and insatiable appetites and addictions, which keep us from enjoying the freedom and victory Christ won for us on the cross. Scripture refers to these as strongholds.

A stronghold is a fortress or citadel. Because of limited access to the areas of our hearts and minds where strongholds exist, few, if any of us, can successfully battle a stronghold without the healing power of Christ Jesus. Our Lord came "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isaiah 61:1). Isaiah's words are as true today as they were

when Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth from the tomb. Our Lord calls us away from the stumbling blocks that prevent us from enjoying an abundant life of freedom, and He provides the power to make this possible.

Did you notice that Lazarus didn't remove his own grave clothes? Jesus directed the family and friends gathered around the tomb to assist. In addition to Christ's healing power, we need the prayers and support of others to help us in our battle against strongholds. It's not a one-way street, either. We need to help others in their battles, as well.

Lent is a time of self-examination. Isn't it time to remove our grave clothes?
Prayer for the Day

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT

Evening Prayer

Turn your face from my sins, and blot out all my misdeeds.

Psalm 51:9

Confession of Sin

Dearly beloved, the Scriptures teach us to acknowledge our many sins and offenses, not concealing them from our heavenly Father, but confessing them with humble and obedient hearts that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before Almighty God, but especially when we come together in his presence to give thanks for the great benefits we have received at his hands, to declare his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for our life and our salvation. Therefore, draw near with me to the throne of heavenly grace.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. **Amen.**

Grant to your faithful people, merciful Lord, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O gladsome light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

The Song of Simeon

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a

light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Luke 2:29-32

Scripture Reading: John 11:1-16

Jesus meets us in our suffering. No labor and no suffering in the path of Christians' obedience is ever in vain. Easier said than done, right? Those are tough pills to swallow in the midst of suffering and death.

In his book *Unspeakable*, Os Guinness tells the story about a well-known Christian leader whose son had been killed in a cycling accident. Although the leader was devastated, somehow he managed to suppress his grief, even preaching eloquently at his son's funeral. His display of hope in the midst of tragedy earned him the admiration of many.

But a few weeks after the funeral, the man invited Guinness and a few friends to his home. According to Guinness, this man spoke and even screamed "not with the hope of a preacher but with the hurt of the father—pained and furious at God, dark and bilious in his blasphemy."⁷ In his agony, he blamed God for his son's death.⁸ Rather than rebuke him, one of Guinness's friends gently reminded the enraged father of the story of Jesus at Lazarus' tomb.

Three underlying themes flow out of John 11: death, love, and the glory of God. What I want us to see, know, and feel is Jesus' love. Lazarus is about to die:

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

John 11:1-2

John begins by painting this extraordinary relationship that exists between Mary and Jesus. There is an unusual love between her and Jesus. But not only that, we see that there is a deep love for Lazarus in verse three: "So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he who you *love* is ill.'" Again John means for us to see and feel the love that

⁷Os Guinness, *Unspeakable* (Harper: San Francisco, 2005), pp. 144-145

⁸Ibid, 144-145.

Jesus has for this family. The cry for help is not coming from strangers—it's coming from Jesus' close friends. And again, John points out the love that Jesus had for the three in verse five: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." There is a repetitive nature to John wanting his readers to know: Jesus loves them, Jesus loves them, Jesus loves them. And the reason he is doing this is because what Jesus is about to do here does not feel like love to most people. Very few human beings think of love this way. You and I don't think of love this way. John knows what he is about to say in verse six goes against all ordinary human experience where God is not supreme. So putting verses five and six together this is what we read:

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So [therefore], when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

John 11:5-6

See what's happened? It *seems* Jesus is saying, "I love you all, so instead of rushing to his side, I'm going to stay here for a few more days." Doesn't it beg the question in our human minds, "How is that love?" I know, we are treading in some deep waters, but we need to understand why this is love. Jesus gives us the answer in verses four and again in verse fifteen: "This illness does not lead to death (the point is not death). It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4). Love lets him die because his death will help them see, in more ways than they know, the glory of God. Love means giving us what we need most. We parents should know this all too well. Love means giving us what will bring the fullest and longest joy. And what is that? What will give you full and eternal joy? The answer in John 11 is clear: a revelation to your soul of the glory of God. To see it, to admire it, to marvel at it, to savor it. The glory of God in Jesus Christ. And Jesus didn't just let Lazarus die for this. Jesus died for this: "Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Fr. Korey Kincaid

The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

O Lord, show your mercy upon us;

And grant us your salvation.

O Lord, guide those who govern us;

And lead us in the way of justice and truth.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

And let your people sing with joy.

O Lord, save your people;

And bless your inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord;

And defend us by your mighty power.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Prayer for the Week

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

Prayer for Mission

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the Spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus

Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

FAITHFULNESS

Lisa Greenslit

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Tumultuous events rock our weary, broken world. Pandemics, natural disasters, school shootings, wars. Technology allows us to witness far more than the human heart was ever created to bear. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, crippled by sadness and anxiety in these uncertain and rapidly changing times. But we have a God who is faithful, a God who is with us, and a God who will never leave or forsake us.

If so for us, then how much more for Maia Mikhaluk. Maia is a Christian leader in Ukraine. She and her husband pastor the Kyiv Church of Faith, Hope and Love. When the Russian invasion began, they made the decision to stay with their people. They partner with other churches to provide prayer, comfort, food, blankets, medicine, and other humanitarian aid to the war-torn areas of their country.⁹

Through her inspiring words and powerful photographs, Maia daily shares her wartime experiences on Facebook. As massive missile strikes target power and water structures, resulting in long blackouts during the cold winter days, Maia encourages her followers to pray, and to put their trust and hope in our faithful God. She reminds them that peace is found, not in our selves or in our circumstances, but in Him alone.

In a recent interview “Faithfulness in a Time of War,” Maia says, that while the title implies the faithfulness of Ukrainian Christians, what she and her followers have experienced is, in fact, God’s faithfulness: “That’s what we cling to during the nights when the air battles against enemy drones are raging above our heads. When the night is darkest, the presence of God is the brightest. We can trust Him to turn even the worst circumstances for our good.”¹⁰

Two weeks after the start of the war, to the sound of piercing air raids, Maia’s daughter gave birth to her first child, Briana. It was a terrifying but joyful time. Of her granddaughter’s arrival, Maia believes this was God reminding her that He is with

⁹ <https://www.Facebook.com/Maia.Mikhaluk>

¹⁰Interview: Faithfulness in a Time of War – Ukraine Intervarsity Urbana 22 on Vimeo / <https://vimeo.com/763865628>

them: “She is just a little baby, but through her, God has given us strength and is bringing light even at the darkest times.” (Reminds me of Jesus!)

The constant state of stress and fear causes many new mothers to be unable to nurse. Maia recalls being very worried about finding formula for the baby. She prayed for God’s provision. Very soon after, a humanitarian volunteer, knowing Maia and her church were helping civilians, called and asked if Maia could take five tons of formula to distribute to those in need. *Five tons!* More than enough for Briana and many other babies. God is faithful. Sometimes He makes *very* large gestures to remind us of that!

In these turbulent days, I need to remember God’s faithfulness. We have a Creator who is in control. He has begun a work in us, and He will see it through. He is with us in all things, working for our good. He keeps His promises. He is worthy of our faith.

The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises, and faithful in all he does.

Psalm 145:13

Prayer for the Day

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 30

KINDNESS

Reverend Chip Strickland

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:32

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Ephesians 4:32

Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus to be kind; he does the same in a letter to the church at Colossae, reminding them to “clothe yourselves with kindness” (Col. 3:12). Peter does the same, encouraging the church to “have sympathy, love, a tender heart” (1 Pet. 3:8).

I have a friend named John. John and I met when we were in our twenties, just coming out of school and into our first jobs. We became fast friends quickly. We have remained friends for almost forty years. Except for a few of those years, we have lived far apart from one another. But there is a quality of character in John which I treasure and admire, and it has motivated me to maintain my friendship with him. During the pandemic, he invited me into his Bible study, which at that time had shifted from in-person to Zoom-based. One of the participants observed that John is “tender-hearted,” which is another way of saying that he is kind. It was then that I understood what had drawn me to develop and maintain a friendship with John over many years. I like kindness. I want to be around it. I want to practice it.

Kindness is given much lip service in the secular culture. I am beginning to see it on bumper stickers and tee shirts: “be kind.” Secular culture often copies Christian values but without acknowledging the source of the motive to practice those values. But we will not usually adopt habits just because they’re popular, or just because those habits are practiced by people we admire. We need a deeper source of motivation.

And what is that source? Does Jesus call us to be kind, sympathetic, tender-hearted, forgiving? Certainly he does, if not by direct admonition in Scripture, then in His life, which is a testament to kindness. In the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus reminds us to forgive others who have hurt us, remembering that God has forgiven us for much more: “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (Matt. 18:33). In his letter to the Ephesians quoted above, Paul reminds us of this, and reminds us that Jesus’ life and example are the source of our motivation to be kind and tender-hearted toward others.

We are kind, then, not just because it sounds like a good idea, or to imitate admirable people, but because Jesus is kind, and we desire to be like Jesus because we believe in Him. My friend John has made me a better person. John's life affirms and even models kindness. But I don't want to be more like John. I want to be more like Jesus.

Prayer for the Day

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 31

PATIENCE

Charley Albert

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27:14

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!
Psalm 27:14

David knew from experience what it meant to wait for the Lord. He had been anointed King at age sixteen but did not become King until he was thirty. During the interim, he was chased through the desert by jealous King Saul. David had to wait on God for the fulfillment of his promise to reign.

Waiting for God is not easy. Often it seems that He is not answering our prayers, or He does not understand the urgency of our situation. This kind of thinking implies that God is not in control, or He is not fair. But He IS God, omniscient and worth waiting for. Lamentations 3: 24-27 calls us to wait for the Lord because God uses waiting to refresh and teach us. Make good use of your waiting times in prayer, Scripture reading, and journaling. You will be able to discover what God is teaching you or why He is asking you to wait.

We first visited Summerville and St. Paul's Church more than twelve years ago. God told us "this church is where you will be planted." But God clearly told us "not now," as our responsibilities to family had to come first. We were disappointed, but our trust in God helped us be patient about the move. God opened the door in 2020, and our patience was rewarded.

Prayer for the Day

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day: Defend us by your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin nor run into any danger; and that, guided by your Spirit, we may do what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 32

PEACE

Jim Beierlein

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

As I try and reconcile in my mind the peace and immensity of God, I think about the relationship between a parent and a young child. Children tend to be on an emotional rollercoaster, getting upset about seemingly trivial items. Before I was a parent, I did not realize that I could “ruin” someone’s entire day by giving them the wrong color cup. The child cannot understand how the parent is not as emotional about the wrong that has been done. This is because as we age, we have gained perspective through experience and time, realizing that the color of the cup does not matter; what matters is what is in the cup. How many things am I getting upset about that from God’s perspective amounts to the color of cup? If your favorite sports team wins or loses, buying the “right” house in the “right” neighborhood, getting the “right” job, losing a job, the color of the cup does not matter. Give thanks for any cup that you are given, but that does not mean you cannot ask for your favorite cup. Just as a parent would not deny their child their favorite cup and would delight in the joy that it brings them, God want to give you what you ask for, but you need to ask, and if it is His will He will give you that cup.

Since God transcends space and time, He has eternal perspective far greater than anything we are capable of understanding. This perspective leads to Peace as He knows how it will all work out. Just as a parent knows that even if their child must drink their morning juice from the “wrong” cup, the rest of the day will bring plenty of great joys. Keep on the look-out in your day for “cups” in your life and go to God in prayer to help you determine the difference between the cups and what is in the cups. If you allow God’s eternal perspective and peace to show you what is worth getting upset about, you will find that most of time you are simply getting upset about the color of a cup.

Prayer for the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 33

JOY

Cathy Jacobs

Scripture Reading: Psalm 30:11

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.

Psalm 30:11

On September 29, 2022, I stood in the Charleston International Airport and watched my son, Jeff, and his precious family leave for Cairo, Egypt. Truly, it was not my finest moment. In fact, it was a low point of my life. When Jeff was fifteen, he received a calling from the Lord to become a missionary in North Africa. This September day was a step closer to the fulfillment of that calling.

For Jeff and Kristin, it was an exciting day! With three young children, twelve bags of luggage, one guitar, four back packs, one car seat and a stroller, they bounced out of the car and into the Delta check-in line. I stood nearby forcing back tears and a flood of sadness. The overwhelming weight of a Mother/Grandmother's "sackcloth" plummeted upon me.

I'm sure you have had "sackcloth" moments. Maybe you lost your job. Or you received a dreadful medical report. Perhaps a loved one passed away prematurely. Or maybe your husband moved onto another "wife" leaving you alone. Death and divorce are definitely "sackcloth" incidents.

King David had his share of "sackcloth" experiences, too. In Psalm 30, he frames his song with declarations of praise. But in between the opening and closing verses, David vividly describes situations of distress. Each time his anguish is removed. David then declares, "weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (v. 5).

How can this happen? In this psalm, David shows us his commitment to praising the Lord in all situations. We all know that David was not a perfect man. But he is referred to as a "man after God's heart." When he praised the Lord for all situations, he went from "wailing" to "dancing" (v. 11). By following this example, we too can be "lifted . . . out of the depths" (v. 1) by the Lord. These acts of praise are not based on feelings. Instead, they are grounded on faith in Christ to do what He promises to do.

I do not write these words lightly. That September morning in the airport was not a moment where my heart soared with happiness. But it was joyful. There is a difference between being “happy” and “joyful”. Happiness depends on circumstances. Is life going my way? But joy is based on my relationship with the Lord. Am I drawing close to Him?

Do you struggle with “sackcloths” oppressing you? Regardless of your circumstances, you can be filled with joy. During these forty days of Lent, ask the Lord to give you His grace to praise Him in all matters. Then grab your dancing shoes. This could be the dance of your life!

Prayer for the Day

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 your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

Day 34

CONVERSION

Jonathan Ketcham

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:38-39

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Acts 2:38-39

What is conversion? Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind for many of us is the experience of a *convert*, someone who, after much rigorous intellectual work (or perhaps none at all), comes to new conclusions and belief about the nature of the world around them that they previously had not held. Or maybe more common, someone has a profound emotional experience that leads them to these new beliefs. And while both intellectual and emotional experiences can and are used by God to draw people to Himself, true conversion runs much deeper than mere intellectual assent or drastic swings of emotional experience.

As today’s passage shows us, conversion is God calling an individual to Himself through the gift of the Holy Spirit who works repentance in our hearts and unites us to Christ through faith and baptism. What happens in true conversion is that through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, there is renewal and transformation of our inner person, a fundamental change to our nature. We are brought from spiritual death to spiritual life (Col 2:13). Our heart of stone is turned to a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). Our desires and affections are new, and while still tainted by indwelling sin, they are imperfectly, yet progressively reoriented to God. God gives us new-found desires for communion with Him and to be in worship, love, repentance, and fellowship with His body the Church. These are just a few of the many evidences that scripture gives us of a true conversion.

Conversion can sometimes be dramatic and swift, but just as often, conversion is a slow process by which God draws a person to Himself and shows them their sin, their need for the gospel, the beauty of Christ and His grace, and of a life abiding in the vine. Yet conversion is not only about the *entrance* into the Christian life. There is a sense in which conversion is the ongoing life of the Christian. Inasmuch as conversion is the gift of faith in Christ’s finished work, repentance, and the implantation of God’s

new life in us, we are always, through the power of the Holy Spirit, converting, that is, conforming our lives to Christlikeness. No matter how long ago we “converted,” may this Lent be a time where we continue to live into the ongoing realities that conversion calls us to and that Christ has purchased for us. We do this by asking ourselves, what areas of my life are not converted? Where in my heart does the old man still reign over the new man? We humbly ask the Holy Spirit to show us these parts of our hearts. And we can do this with confidence knowing that although we were far off, the promises of forgiveness and the Spirit's empowerment in sanctification are for us because the Lord our God has called us to Himself.

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PALM SUNDAY

Evening Prayer

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

Lamentations 1:12

Confession of Sin

Dearly beloved, the Scriptures teach us to acknowledge our many sins and offenses, not concealing them from our heavenly Father, but confessing them with humble and obedient hearts that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before Almighty God, but especially when we come together in his presence to give thanks for the great benefits we have received at his hands, to declare his most worthy praise, to hear his holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for our life and our salvation. Therefore, draw near with me to the throne of heavenly grace.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and apart from your grace, there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare all those who confess their faults. Restore all those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may now live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name. **Amen.**

Grant to your faithful people, merciful Lord, pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O gladsome light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

The Song of Simeon

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Luke 2:29-32

Scripture Reading: Matthew 27:15-26

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. 19 Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" 23 And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25 And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

Matthew 27:15-26

Welcome to Palm Sunday! Such an odd day, it is. We enter the church, gathered together with our ancient ancestors of the faith to welcome in the King of Kings and Lord of Lords...Jesus. We welcome Him into the gates of Jerusalem, into the doors of the church...with these words:

*Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel.
Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Just moments after singing Jesus' praises on Palm Sunday, the church gathers with the same crowd, but the mood has changed. Now the well-wishers are saying, "crucify him!" Pilate asked the crowd, "Whom do you want me to release for you?" The crowd replied, "Give us Barabbas!"

Why the change of heart? Why turn on Jesus so quickly? It is highly unsettling to think that some of the very people who hailed Jesus as King were, most likely, some of the ones who later called for His death!

All this is set to music in the great hymn of the church "My Song is Love Unknown," which says:

Sometimes they strew His way,
And His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King:
Then "Crucify!"
Is all their breath,
And for His death
They thirst and cry.
A murderer they save,
The Prince of life they slay.¹¹

Why do they slay the Prince of Peace? The reality of the situation is that not only are two men on trial that day, but TRUTH ITSELF WAS ON TRIAL.

The first guy was Barabbas. His name may be broken down into "Bar" (which means "SON OF") and "ABBA" (which means father). Literally, Son of the Father. Some ancient Greek manuscripts give us his first name as well...drum roll please...it was Jesus.

"Jesus" in Hebrew is "Yeshua," meaning one who comes "to rescue," "to deliver," or "to save."

So we have JESUS BARABBAS on trial and we have JESUS BAR JOSEPH. Of course, his name is "Jesus" (savior) "bar" (son of) "Joseph" (Jesus' earthly father).

So Pilate's question is really deeper than we might realize. What Pilate - in essence - is asking is, "Which Jesus Will You Choose?" Which "rescuer" will you follow? To which truth will you cling?

¹¹"My Song is Love Unknown," *Episcopal Hymnal*, 1982, p. 458.

Barabbas represented a form of salvation based on the power of the sword. He was on trial for insurrection and sedition against Rome. He was a Jewish hero due to his work with a dagger to slit the throats of Roman politicians. We know this as right-handed power. Today, it is seen in politics, celebrities, big-money elites and athletes.

Jesus Son of Joseph came with left-handed power. Jesus did not come to bring temporary earthly peace. Jesus came to offer the peace of God to us, through the everlasting blood of the New Covenant. Rather than “call down legions of angels” to destroy His enemies, which clearly Jesus could have done, Jesus calls on His Father to “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” Jesus invites us to join Him in His work through love, not force.

On Palm Sunday we join the crowd saying, “Crucify Him!” Why? Because Jesus’ blood is on our hands, too. Sometimes, instead of waiting for Jesus to save and deliver us on His terms, we try and take up our swords and solve our own problems. We choose to sit on the throne made for Jesus.

Perhaps we would do well to join with Paul in the Lenten season as he says in II Corinthians 12:9, “My (Jesus’) grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I (Paul) will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Fr. Tripp Jeffords

The Prayers

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

O Lord, show your mercy upon us;

And grant us your salvation.

O Lord, guide those who govern us;

And lead us in the way of justice and truth.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

And let your people sing with joy.

O Lord, save your people;

And bless your inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord;

And defend us by your mighty power.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Prayer for the Week

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

Prayer for Mission

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the Spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have

made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time, with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

Day 35

HOSANNA

Jonathan Ketcham

Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:6-11

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” **10** And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” **11** And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Matthew 21:6-11

“Hosanna!” was the cry from the crowded Jerusalem streets on this first day of the most important week in history. Before Jesus completed His work as king, He processed into the city of the king and received worship befitting a king. Hosanna is a word that we often reduce to a mere acclamation of worship. And while that is certainly an aspect of what the crowd intended to proclaim in their shouts, as this word was on their lips, it would’ve had a more complete meaning. These Jewish worshippers, steeped in the Psalms and Prophets, understood the significance of these events and what they were affirming. They would certainly have had Psalm 118:25 in mind, in which the Hebrew word “hosanna” is best translated as “save us, we pray!.” And it is from the very next verse, Psalm 118:26, that they recite, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!.” For the crowd, most fundamentally, “hosanna” was a plea for salvation as much as it was an expression of praise.

This crowd pleaded for salvation because they knew who Jesus was, not only through His life and ministry that they had witnessed, but through His fulfillment of the prophecies they had put their hope in for so long. As Mathew points out in 21:5, the crowds also would’ve had in mind Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey.” It is this messianic hope of salvation that causes them to cry out “save us, we pray!,” or “hosanna!.” That they had this passage in mind is again shown in how they address their praise to Jesus. First, they say “hosanna *to the Son of David.*” The crowd acknowledged Jesus as the king who would usher in the kingdom of God, rule over the nations with peace

and justice, and bring salvation to His people. And finally, they recognized Him as “The Prophet from Nazareth,” the branch (*nē’ser*) from the stump of Jesse who would bring the Word of the Lord, pronouncing salvation and the good news of the kingdom.

As we begin this Holy Week, may our cry be the same: “save us, we pray, O LORD!” In this cry, we recognize not only that we are lost in darkness, but also our prophet who illuminates it. We confess our sin and the great high priest who has atoned for it. And we acknowledge our rebellion and the king who lovingly subdues us.

Prayer for the Day

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, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Day 36

GETHSEMANE

Fr. Korey Kincaid

Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:36-39

Charles Spurgeon said of Gethsemane:

Since it would not be possible for any believer, however experienced, to know for himself all that our Lord endured in the place of the olive-press, when he was crushed beneath the upper and the nether mill-stone of mental suffering and hellish malice, it is clearly far beyond the preacher's capacity to set it forth to you. Jesus himself must give you access to the wonders of Gethsemane: as for me, I can but invite you to enter the garden, bidding you put your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon we stand is holy ground.¹²

I couldn't help but feel that it was indeed holy ground as I set foot in that garden a decade ago. Like Spurgeon and so many preachers, when you come to Gethsemane, there is a complete feeling of inadequacy to even begin to convey the mysteries of the agonies of our Savior. The majority of the disciples were not there. Only the inner three, Peter and the sons of Zebedee, were within the proximity of his grief. Spurgeon said, "Yet I say, even these, the elect out of the elect, these choice and peculiar favorites among the king's courtiers, even these cannot penetrate the secret places of the Savior's woe, so as to comprehend all his agonies."¹³ Why? They couldn't stay awake with Him to pray (Matt. 26:40).

Matthew's and Mark's gospels make it clear that Jesus was feeling relational abandonment. In the garden is the movement of making His way to Calvary alone. Jesus is not just feeling alone; rather, He truly was alone.

His soul is in complete distress. Notice:

Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

¹²Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Gethsemane," preached at Metropolitan Tabernacle, February 8, 1863.

¹³ Ibid.

The distress is so great that death draws near to Him in that very moment. He is drawing near to the experience of death before His crucifixion. He falls on the ground. His legs will no longer support the weight of this moment, the moment whereby He is contemplating drinking the contents of the cup. His impending death was no surprise to Him. He just finished inaugurating the meal by which His death would be remembered. So why the sudden distress of His total being? In his gospel, Luke says He was “in agony,” and “his sweat became like drops of blood, falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). It was not the prospect of mortality that was a shuddering terror. Rather, it was the prospect of Him who knew no sin being made sin for us—sin that would receive the piercing, crushing wrath of God.

He emerges from the garden differently than He entered the garden. He emerges with determination to fulfill His purpose for coming into our world: to bear our sin.

What does Gethsemane mean for you and me? Other than His crucifixion, it is the primary scene whereby we recognize Christ’s love for you and me. You cannot accompany Jesus into Gethsemane and emerge from it unaware of your sin because it is your sin that required Him to experience this. Gethsemane interprets and reveals Calvary. In the prophets, it was the wicked nations that would drink the cup of wrath because of their sin. But here, it’s the only innocent one. He takes the cup with both hands and drinks wrath dry. The very cup that was in our hands that we should have drunk from in all this life and all eternity, He took and drank! He drank our damnation dry. And not only that, but then He puts into our hands a different cup: the cup of salvation.

The blood of Christ, THE CUP of salvation. Thank you, Jesus!

Prayer for the Day

O Lord our God, whose blessed Son gave his back to be whipped and did not hide his face from shame and spitting: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Day 37

BETRAYAL

Fr. Fred Ochieng Onyango

Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:47-50

There have been and there will always be those who turn on their friends for their selfish gain. Even so, of all the traitors in the world, no matter how evil they are, they seem to pale in comparison with Judas Iscariot, the epitome of betrayal. Perhaps because his act of betrayal is contrasted with the privileges he had received from Jesus. His betrayal is more wretched because he not only shared bread and fellowship with Jesus from the beginning, but he was also supposed to have shared His dreams, hope and mission. Judas was a witness to His compassion for sinners, the sick and the lost. He was close enough to have become a friend of Jesus.

In the Middle East, friends would kiss each other's cheek, and close friends would embrace and kiss both cheeks. It was a sign of close affection and love. So when Judas approaches Jesus as a friend would, he calls out a respectful greeting, then comes up to Jesus and kisses him with seeming warmth and devotion. At this point, Jesus should have been revolted by Judas' kiss. He knew exactly what Judas was doing, yet still accepted his greeting and kiss. Even at the point of betrayal, all the gospel writers refer to Judas as "one of the twelve." But Jesus refers to him as a friend. The act of betrayal by Judas, the friend of Jesus, serves to reveal the wickedness of man's heart.

But before we look down on Judas, it would be good to consider the last verses of Michael Card's song, "Traitor's Look:"

Now Judas, don't you come to close
I fear that I might see
That traitor's look upon your face
Might look too much like me

'Cause just like you I've sold the Lord
And often for much less
And like a wretched traitor
I betrayed Him with a kiss

Many have made professions of faith in Jesus not because they believed in Him and His mission, but because they wanted to gain something from Him. And things go fine

until they realize that the Christian life is a demanding life – a life of bearing the cross daily and following Christ. That the Christian's will must be submitted to God's will. And that a Christian's priority is serving the Lord, and that costs time and money. And then they become disillusioned with Christ, deny the Lord and become his enemy, whether active or passive.

At the same time, I think the root causes of our sins are not so different from Judas. Judas thought he knew the Lord and understood his mission, and when Jesus did not live up to his expectations, he gave up on him, going his own way, even to the point of betraying Him. Like Judas, we often want to be in control. And when things don't go according to *our* plan, we get easily frustrated, disappointed, angry, and tempted to despair. This is perhaps the central cause of all sin, that we are confident that we know better – even better than God -- and desire to have our own way. Rather than yield to God's will, we so often set our own course and miss the mark. The good news is, if Jesus can not only call Judas "friend," but also endure his betrayal and ultimately use it to demonstrate the power of God's love, then there is nothing that can diminish God's love for us. God can and will forgive our sins if we sincerely turn to Him in repentance.

Prayer for the Day

Assist us mercifully with your grace, Lord God of our salvation, that we may enter with joy upon the meditation of those mighty acts by which you have promised us life and immortality; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Day 38 MAUNDY THURSDAY

PASSOVER

Fr. John Scott

Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:47-50

I consider myself to be a very fortunate person. In addition to having had loving parents in a safe and secure home, my sister and I had the added blessing of being raised in a multi-generational family. My mom's mother actually lived in our home much of the time as we were growing up, and my dad's mother and Father, and several of his brothers and sisters, lived on the same block in the same neighborhood, as did several of my dad's brothers and sisters and twelve of my cousins. So I grew up with a strong sense of family.

This strong identification with my family makes me feel close to Jesus. You see, He too was raised with a strong sense of family. In fact the entire culture in which he grew up, as a human being, constantly urged him to remember and to honor his family ties; both to his immediate family of Mary and Joseph and his brothers and sisters as well as his eternal family of our Father, God. This strong sense of family was nurtured and experienced in the Jewish people's greatest Feast Day . . . that of the annual Passover Feast, which Matthew refers to in today's Scripture, which celebrates God's faithfulness to his people.

At the start of The Great Exodus from Egypt (c. 1490 B.C.; Chapter 12 of Exodus), Moses commanded the people never to forget this experience and to celebrate each and every year with a family Seder meal. As an observant Jew, Jesus would have kept this celebration every year with his family in the village of Nazareth. In Matthew 26, we get a glimpse of that celebration by Jesus and His followers on the Thursday before His betrayal, death and Resurrection, at which time Jesus gave that observance a new dimension. Whereas the Mosaic Passover looked to the past and celebrated God's faithfulness to his people in delivering them from slavery in Egypt, "The New Commandment," which Jesus gave his followers, looks to the future, celebrating the fact that He is the Messiah promised by the Father, who came to deliver us from slavery to sin, and to establish God's eternal kingdom here on earth.

You may not consider yourself to be living in a multi-generational family, but you are. You live in the "family" of St. Paul's Anglican Church. And all the people here love you and are proud to have you as a brother or sister in Christ. I pray that reality becomes more and more clear to you during this 2023 Lenten Season, as we journey on our various exoduses from sin and indifference as followers of Jesus, our Messiah.

Prayer for the Day

Almighty Father, whose most dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it in thankful remembrance of Jesus Christ our Savior, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Day 39 GOOD FRIDAY

FINISHED

Fr. Korey Kincaid

Scripture Reading: John 19:28-30

Michelangelo. The name brings to our mind great artistry, architecture, and sculpture. To say his name is to be reminded of the Sistine Chapel ceiling in the Vatican at Rome. Yet time and again he left that work, tiring of it, to return to his beloved and native Florence—only to be coaxed back by the Pope, insisting that he finish that work. When we think of his name, we think of those statues of Moses or David. What we may not know, however, is that he left far more works unfinished than finished. In the sacristy of a church in Florence, the unfinished masterpieces of Michelangelo were gathered together, and by count, he left more works unfinished than complete.

One man said toward the end of life, "So much to do, so little done."

What do you suppose the most significant word in human history might be? Was it a word of wisdom uttered by a philosopher, Aristotle or Socrates? Was it spoken by a poet who—in perfect rhyme and meter—arrived at just the right word? Was it spoken by a statesman, Churchill or Roosevelt?

I propose to you, it is one word, spoken by Jesus, in the Greek found in John 19:30—*TETELESTAI*. *Tetelestai* translated into English means "It is finished." There needs to be no ambiguity, there need not be a great deal of verbiage. When a task is done, it is enough to say, "finished." Indeed, in the words of the New Testament, it is only a singular word: *tetelestai*.

Remember Caesar's famous three-word message? *Veni, vidi, vici*. "I came, I saw, I conquered." It was enough to be said; it was a word of brevity and a word of intensity.

"A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

—John 19:29-30

When pains and groans attend the last hour of those dying, they frequently (not always) effect and agitate the mind, so that it is not possible for the dying man to collect his thoughts, or having collected them, to utter them so that they can be

understood by others. Not so with our Lord. He threads together all ceremonies, all sacrifices, all prophecies, all promises, and then says of the whole, “It is finished!” Or, to put it more literally, Jesus says they are all, “Finished in Me.”¹⁴

All promises, and prophecies are now fully accomplished in Him.

Charles Spurgeon said, “An ocean of meaning in a drop of language, a mere drop, for that is all that we can call one word! ‘Tetelestai.’ Yet it would need all the other words that ever were spoken, or ever can be spoken, to explain this one word. It is altogether immeasurable! ‘Finished.’ It was a Conqueror’s cry – it was uttered with a loud voice! There is nothing of anguish about it, there is no wailing in it. It is the cry of One who has completed a tremendous labor and is about to die – and before He utters His death-prayer, ‘Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit,’ He shouts His life’s last hymn in that one word, ‘tetelestai’.”¹⁵

Jesus says take them all, they are “Finished in Me.”

All sacrifices of the old Jewish Law were now abolished, as well as explained. Think on this—from the times of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, there were altars. Year after year, the high priest sprinkles the Mercy Seat with blood; the next year sees him do the same, and the next, and again, and again. Which no doubt always begged the question, “Will it never be complete?” Will the sacrifice never be finished? But here is Jesus, on the cross saying take them all, they are “Finished in Me.”

His perfect obedience was finished!

What are we to do with these three powerful words from the lips of our Lord, our Savior?

If you find a despairing soul crying out to God asking for forgiveness of their offenses, tell them, it is finished!

If you find a person despairing, working out in their mind how this God could accept such a person as I, tell them, it is finished.

¹⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “It is Finished”, preached on December 1, 1861 Metropolitan Tabernacle.

¹⁵ Ibid.

If you find the poor of heart despairing and giving up on themselves wondering how anyone could escape from the clutches of sin and be saved from its punishment, tell them, it is finished.

If you find yourself this day keeping your good works in check, tell yourself, it is finished. Why add to that which is complete?

Jesus says, "It is Finished in me." To God be the glory!

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, we beseech you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the Cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Day 40 HOLY SATURDAY / EASTER EVE

EASTER

Fr. Tripp Jeffords

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-6

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Matthew 28:1-6

We often describe the most important values in our lives as "non-negotiable." These values are so very important that they must be defended and held onto at any cost. For the early Christians, Good Friday and Easter Sunday were at the top of this list.

The apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 15, presses home the importance of the Resurrection: "For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (vv. 3-4). Easter is THE watershed moment in human history! Paul stresses, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Remove Easter and the church collapses like a house of cards!

Paul then adds this assessment, "**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**" (1 Cor. 15:20). Our hope of eternal life is directly connected to the historical reality of Easter. Believers, with saving faith in their hearts, will become the second-fruits to follow our Lord into Easter life and glory. And we will share that eternal life "With angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven," as the Prayer Book reminds us.¹⁶

In Matthew's Gospel today we read about some astounding events that took place on that first Easter morning. A few of the women had come to a tomb in the wee hours of

¹⁶"With angels..." ACNA *Book of Common Prayer*, 2019, p. 132

the morning carrying around seventy-five pounds of precious spices and ointments to prepare the body of their friend for decay in the darkness of this tomb. Understandably, they were very sad. They had come to honor the man they had just seen die - just two days earlier.

And then it happened! A great earthquake broke the morning silence. A two ton stone, which was a daunting obstacle in their path, was suddenly rolled away by an angel of the Lord, dressed in radiant clothing, descending from heaven. Fear swept over the guards. But the angel spoke words of comfort to the women, saying, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay” (Matt. 28:5-6).

It was their invitation to receive Easter faith. Come on in! Look around! He is not here. Jesus is risen!

Have you accepted God’s invitation to explore the empty tomb of Easter for yourself?

In a powerful poem, John Updike summed it all up far better than I could.

Updike wrote:

Make no mistake about it: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells’ dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,
each soft Spring recurrent;
it was not as his Spirit in the mouths and fuddled
eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as His Flesh . . .

Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping transcendence;
making of the event a parable...
let us walk through the door. . . .

The stone is rolled back.¹⁷

¹⁷Updike, John. “Seven Stanzas at Easter.” (1960).

Prayers for the Day

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**