

All Saints Lenten Devotional

All Saints Episcopal Church

Daily Devotions for the Season of Lent

Words of Love & Unity

2020

This book of Lenten devotions was written by many people from our church family. The scripture selections are from year A of the three year Common Lectionary, a set of Bible passages agreed to by all of the major Christian denominations.

Stories are a very important part of our lives, sometimes not told enough, not shared with even those we love. Jesus told stories to help those listening to understand his message in the context of their own experiences and their own lives. It is my hope that the thoughts and stories of those recorded here, will stir your heart and encourage you to share your heart.

Thank you to all who contributed to this special collection; thank you to Megan Saylor for assisting with publishing our booklet; and thank you, Father Jonathan, for your support and enthusiasm for this project.

Marilee Tice

The Christian Season of LENT

The forty days (not including Sundays) before Easter are called Lent. The English word “lent” means spring, but this meaning is not inclusive enough for this Christian season of preparation. This time before Easter was used by the Christian church from the very earliest times for instruction of candidates for Baptism at the great Festival of Redemption. The final ceremony for these candidates began on Saturday evening and continued all through the night until the sunrise of Easter Day. It was called “Pascha”, meaning Christian passover. The idea of using forty days to prepare prospective members was both to instruct and to ensure that only those of genuine sincerity would be received into the church at the Paschal Baptism. Other members already baptized were to remember their own Paschal Baptism, to pray for the candidates preparing for their upcoming Baptism, and to identify with the sacrifices of Jesus made on our behalf.

Remembering this original purpose for Lent, what are we called to do? We can surely remember our own Baptism and pray for those considering church membership. What of this identifying with sacrifice? To me it means doing some spiritual house cleaning in order to allow God to do something new in my life. I need to let go of some of my ideas about people and things and let God open my eyes to how God sees people and things. Marilee often says she needs to put on “Jesus eyes”! Often we think of Lent as a time to give up something. Often we think of things we want to give up anyway, like smoking or sugar or Facebook, etc. These are healthy choices but not particularly the kind of sacrifices that reflect what Christ sacrificed. Perhaps this lenten season we might consider focusing on what new thing God wants us to do and what kind of person God wants us to be. To add this focus to our lives, something else will have to go.

Even the very son of God spent time getting ready to be of service as he prayed and fasted for forty days in the wilderness. Our relationships to God are nowhere near that of Jesus’s. Perhaps instead of seeing forty days as too long, we need to see it as too short - barely a beginning of what we need to do to get ready for the great Festival of Redemption.

What is God calling us to do this Lenten season?

Jim Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

Resources for the season of Lent:

- ❖ <https://www.lectionarypage.net/index.html>
- ❖ <http://www.blakleycreative.com/jtb/StMarksNet/ld.htm> (Spanish Lectionary)
- ❖ <https://www.lentmadness.org/>
- ❖ *Book of Common Prayer*
- ❖ <https://www.bcponline.org/> (BCP online version)
- ❖ Bible translation, *The New Revised Standard Version* 1989 (as referenced in the BCP)
- ❖ *Show Me the Way: Daily Lenten Readings*, Henri Nouwen, 1992
- ❖ *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 2, Lent Through Eastertide*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, c. 2010
- ❖ Arts and Faith for Lent: Year A, <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/liturgical-year/lent/arts-and-faith-for-lent>
- ❖ “Forty Days and Forty Nights”, a hymn for the Lenten season, on the following page
- ❖ Various versions of the *Bible*

All Saints Lenten Devotional

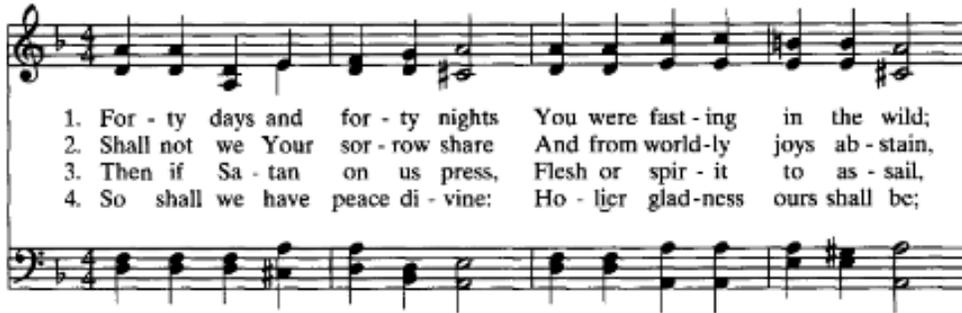
LENT

Forty Days and Forty Nights

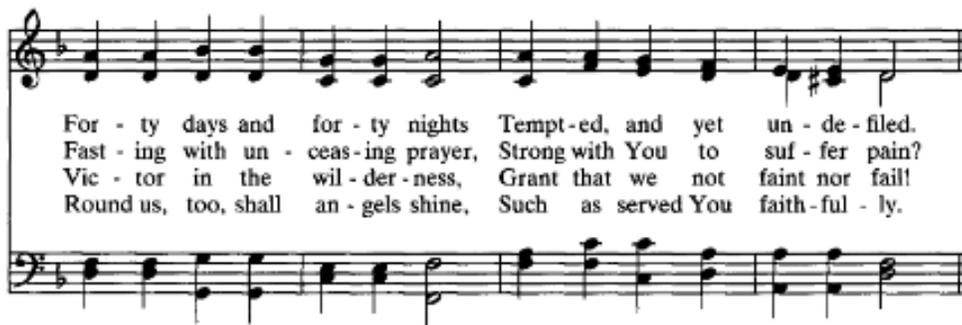
AUS DER TIEFE RUFE ICH 7.7.7

George Hunt Smyttan, 1856; alt.

Attr. Martin Herbst, 1676



1. For - ty days and for - ty nights You were fast - ing in the wild;
2. Shall not we Your sor - row share And from world - ly joys ab - stain,
3. Then if Sa - tan on us press, Flesh or spir - it to as - sail,
4. So shall we have peace di - vine: Ho - lier glad - ness ours shall be;



For - ty days and for - ty nights Tempt - ed, and yet un - de - filed.
Fast - ing with un - ceas - ing prayer, Strong with You to suf - fer pain?
Vic - tor in the wil - der - ness, Grant that we not faint nor fail!
Round us, too, shall an - gels shine, Such as served You faith - ful - ly.

5. Keep, O keep us, Savior dear,
Ever constant by Your side;
That with You we may appear
At the eternal Eastertide.

$\text{♩} = 50-54$

All Saints Lenten Devotional

February 26, 2020
Ash Wednesday
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

What They See

Facing the possibility of being alone again after another relapse, I was working in Asheville delivering pizzas and had been sent to All Soul's Cathedral. I delivered to Reverend Donatelli.

I turned to leave but was frozen with a million thoughts at once. "I was worthless. I had let down myself, Brian, and my children." *What about God!?! I never considered Jesus walking through it with me. He had not abandoned me. I cried, right there in the middle of the Cathedral. Father Todd heard me, and came out and talked to me about Jesus and the true meanings of grace and mercy. He invited me to their healing services. 3 years later, with Jesus as my sponsor, I was working in a nursing home, learning to be well. We moved here, pregnant with Sal, and I began managing an elementary school cafeteria. I went through confirmation, became a Youth leader, then Stewardship Chairperson, and eventually enrolled in Education for Ministry classes. I graduated with a better understanding of who and Whose I am. Yet people always seem surprised by my relationship with my Lord and my role in the church. They say, "I didn't realize you were religious!" because I don't fit their image of a child of God.*

2 Corinthians has my answer...

I, a sinner and an outcast, was brought to an "acceptable" time. A time when I was brought low enough to pray sincerely, and was heard and helped by God. I was reconciled to God, by the blood of Jesus Christ, so that in him I might become the righteousness of God. I was led in my earnest willingness and brokenness to His grace and mercy through His righteous people. They put no obstacle in my way, but welcomed me, and taught me that I am God's beloved, so that I can do the same for God's next broken child.

"As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain."

Mary Guercio

All Saints Lenten Devotional

February 27, 2020
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Choose Life

God has given us a world to live in that has everything we need. Yes, there is good, but also evil; life, but also death. I think of it as the yin/yang of life, where one balances the other, and we are all interconnected.

We are all responsible for our actions and choices in life. God has set the bar; given us our instructions. We must decide whom we will serve. There are no exceptions!

We will be abundantly blessed, according to the will of God, and life will be full when we love, serve and obey God's voice. It is simple. We can either choose life or death. Death means an existence without the love of God forever. Life means experiencing the joys of God's eternal love.

Listen to the still, small voice of God in your dreams, your waking hours and in everyday activities. It is a blessing to be encircled by His love. He is the Life.

Henrietta Haithcock

All Saints Lenten Devotional

February 28, 2020

Psalm 51:1-10

There is nothing like a long hot shower or bath after an exhausting day. For me, it's like hitting the re-set button on my spirit; all the "sins" of day are washed down the drain. It's mystical and it's not the collection of bubble bath, bath salts and bath bombs that create this effect.

It's simply the water.

Water is healing; water is holy. It is the basis of our baptism and the basic element of our body. Fun fact: the human body is 60% water and our brain and heart are 73%. All our thoughts and emotions are formed from water and we are made in the image of God. When you wash away the dirt and grime of the day don't let that be a missed opportunity to spend time with God.

Bath time is sacred time.

Lord, wash away my troubles and the spirit of the world and renew in me the spirit of your peace and love. "I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Amen

Jada Bryson

All Saints Lenten Devotional

February 29, 2020

Luke 5:27-32

No Healthy Man Needs a Doctor

Whenever I hear this passage, I am always drawn to Jesus' words about why he has come; "not to call righteous people, but sinners, to repentance," he says. And before that he makes the analogy of how only the sick need a physician, not the healthy. With these words I am reminded to be mindful of the needs of others. I invite you to reflect on ways in which you may help those in your community who need it the most – that is to say, the poor and the sick, and not necessarily those who are well-off.

Lord, help me/us to be mindful of the needs of others; help me/us to have the courage and wisdom to follow in your footsteps, and care for those who need it most. Amen.

Emily Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 1, 2020

1st Sunday

Matthew 4:1-11

Famished

“Famished” Mathew says. That’s what Jesus was, after 40 days and nights of fasting, and so would any of us be. We believe that Jesus is fully God and fully human and anyone who is human (you, me, Jesus) is going to become very hungry if they go without food.

If you’re like me, you’ve experienced this while trying to diet. The times in my life that I’ve been on a diet I’ve noticed that my hunger will lead me into all kinds of temptations: the temptation to lose my temper, the temptation to give up and make unhealthy food choices, and the temptation to take out my frustrations on those around me. Nothing weakens our resolve to be kind, caring people like the pangs of hunger. There’s even a word for it: “hangry” – the combination of being hungry and angry because you’re hungry.

Having had that experience I’m even more amazed by Jesus’ response. Where was the “hanger” we might expect to see? How did Jesus face temptation, while being famished, and not give in? In part it was because he had the big picture. He understood that hunger, like all suffering, is temporary, but the choices we make when faced with temptation can have eternal consequences. He had the big picture and he relied on God, not just on his own willpower. He knew himself to be the beloved child of God and he invites us to know the same about ourselves so that whatever temptations we face, and no matter how famished we are when we face them, we can keep the big picture in mind. We are loved and the suffering of this life is only temporary.

Fr. Jonathan Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 2, 2020
Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

What to do, what to do ...

To tell the truth, Leviticus is not the first place I would look to inform a devotional. It's nothing but rules to fit every imaginable situation of life for the people of ancient Israel. It once was called "The Priest's Handbook." BUT – read some of them. The directions are not only about correct worship practice but also about how a person is to relate to and treat the neighbor. And the non-citizens living in their midst. AKA aliens.

In order to give these priestly directions some clout, the writer(s) say Moses is the speaker, and after every verse or two, we read something like, "for I am YAHWEH, your God!" And don't you forget it!

A modern day, condensed version would be Tim McGraw's song, "Humble and Kind." The song says no matter what life brings you, it will turn out to be in your own best interest to always be humble and kind. That's good advice even when we're dealing with decisions that are not clearly good or evil, black or white.

In those cases I try to remember stuff like the following that might help me:

What is the right thing to do?

Do I do only what's legal or is there an ethical action, no matter what the law says?

Will what I decide bring God's kingdom closer to the present and shine like a star?

What allowed is not always desirable.

Punishment is not usually the only consequence.

Will my action be treating others like I would want to be treated?

What to do, what to do... And may God be with you.

Oh YAHWEH, our God, guide our actions to be in line with what you would do when we are faced with the opportunities and disappointments of life. Help us do the right thing, even when nobody is looking. Help us to always be humble and kind. Amen

Jim Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 3, 2020
Matthew 6:7-15

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

1. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
2. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
3. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
4. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 4, 2020

Luke 11:29-32

Repentance

When Jonah was preaching to the Ninevites he was preaching repentance. Lent is a good time to do some self-reflection and maybe some good old-fashioned repentance.

I am reminded that for much of the year I go about my life doing what needs to be done without too much self-reflection. Lent is a good time for me to take inventory of where I have been less than Christ-like and then repent of my shortcomings, ask for forgiveness and try to do better where I have fallen short.

It seems right that Lent occurs at the last of winter when we can look forward to spring. It's when we can clean our spiritual houses and look forward to starting fresh with the coming of new light.

Father, thank you for a new beginning. Thank you for your forgiveness. Please help me to remember the lesson of repentance throughout the year. Amen

Lynn Cress

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 5, 2020

Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14

Finding the Right Words

Today's verse tells us about beautiful Queen Esther's act of going to God for help for herself and the Jewish people she loves. The Book of Esther found in the Old Testament along with this verse from the Apocrypha, is a story of intrigue, deception, courage, beauty and redemptive love – all the things that make for a great novel or motion picture!

In this passage, a troubled Queen Esther has found herself in a very precarious situation. Because of her place in the Persian King Artaxerxes's court as his Queen, she is charged by her uncle Mordecai to point out wrong doing of the evil Haman who has plotted to kill all the Jews of the region. Going to the King and asking for protection of the Jewish people puts Esther in grave danger of being executed along with her people. Esther humbles herself before God by stripping away all that is beautiful about herself on the outside to go deeper into her heart to pray to the only real and true King, the Lord God of Israel.

Esther goes to God in prayer for forgiveness of her sins and to ask for help in saving the Jewish people from total annihilation by the Persians. She asks God for courage, protection and the right words as she approaches the King.

Esther's story encourages us to humble ourselves before the Lord in prayer, ask for his assistance in reconciling our short comings and showing us a path to restoring our lives to reflect his love of ourselves and others. Like Esther we sometimes need God's help in finding the *right words* to ask for forgiveness from others or to make a change in our lives to reflect his love.

God, please be with me in the coming days of Lent as I examine my life. Give me the right words and courage to speak to those people I have grown distant from through my own fault or who have hurt me. Amen.

Dawn Armfield

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 6, 2020

Acts 6:8-15

That Special Something

Our scripture passage today from the Book of Acts introduces us to Stephen. Stephen was the first of seven deacons elected by the early church community to assist the apostles in spreading the good news of the Gospel. By a laying on of hands by the apostles Stephen was given the same grace and power as the twelve apostles to perform great wonders of healing and signs among the people.

As we learn right off in this passage, Stephen was full of grace and enthusiasm to share what he knew about Jesus Christ. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and it showed by his actions and words when he spoke to his community. But not everyone was as awed by Stephen and what he was proclaiming. A group within the synagogue, the Freedmen, did not like Stephen. But even they could not ignore or deny that Stephen had this *something* going on in his person. Stephen looked and sounded like an angel – an angel sent by God. Stephen was an example of the Holy Spirit.

Stephen reminds me of a girl I met during a college internship whose name is April. April just sparkled with this *something* that I learned in time was the Holy Spirit.

April was not afraid to share about God and Jesus Christ. As we worked together in a cardiac rehabilitation program at Duke Medical Center there was plenty of reasons to call on the Lord as we helped encourage patients in their recovery. There were happy times to praise God when a participant achieved a milestone. But there were also difficult times when a participant had a setback or we would learn that they had passed away. Through April, God's spirit comforted and encouraged the participants that grieved for their friends and fellow participants.

Do you have a Stephen or April in your life? Lent is a time to look back and remember those who gave us the gift of feeling and seeing the Holy Spirit.

Lord, this day help me to look for the Holy Spirit in others and help me to share the grace and love you have shown me. Amen

Dawn Armfield

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 7, 2020
Matthew 5:43-48

Love Your Enemies

Christianity is often incredibly difficult. In today's passage Christ instructs us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." This command is one that most find very challenging.

Whether at work, home or community- we've all been hurt, abused, unjustly or unfairly treated at some time. Our natural, human response is to be defensive or strike back - to protect ourselves from further hurt.

Some events leave us with deep, long lasting wounds – scarred over or buried deep. Others linger like a dull ache – or a nagging thought we're unable to release. All put us on guard, in protective mode, preventing us from trusting or living fully and joyfully.

Intellectually, I know forgiveness & letting go of the pain is a gift to myself. (It does not mean forgetting, accepting abuse or not fighting for justice.) Praying for someone who caused us pain feels impossible, even unreasonable.

So how do we pray for those who have hurt us?

The Prayer of St. Francis has always been special for me. I believe it gives a model for how to follow this command.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; discord, union; doubt, faith; despair, hope; darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy."

Sowing peace is an action that blesses others, and is also a gift to ourselves.

In this prayer I envision the Holy Spirit's seeds of love, light, pardon, hope, joy & faith falling gently and filling my soul and the souls of those who have hurt me. (I also see them falling onto those I may have hurt). I pray these seeds take root and blossom - displacing hatred, doubt, injury, despair, doubt and darkness.

Over time, with God's love- I know it will.

Lord, help us sow peace, love and pardon in ourselves and those who have hurt us. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned. Amen

Janet Sweimler

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 8, 2020

2nd Sunday

John 3:1-17

Jesus As a Snake

Jesus says, “just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” What the heck does that mean?

The incident that Jesus is referring to took place when Israel was wandering in the wilderness. A plague of poisonous snakes entered the camp and began biting people, so God told Moses to make a bronze snake, lift it up on a pole, and everyone who looked at it was healed. (Numbers 21:4-9) Jesus says he’s like that snake: he will be lifted up on a pole and everyone who looks to him will be saved.

A snake seems like a strange image for Jesus – usually we think of a lamb or, maybe a lion, as an animal that matches up with Jesus. But I think his use of the snake imagery carries a profound meaning. The snake was to the Hebrew people, as in many cultures, a symbol of evil, poison, and death (see, for example, the story of Adam and Eve.) Jesus’ willingness to connect himself to something that symbolized evil in their culture reflects the fact that Jesus is the Son of God fully, really, and completely in the flesh as a human being. God did not become “sort-of” human and experience a life free from the burdens of evil, sin, and death that humanity experiences. God became really and fully human, to the point of sharing in all the suffering that evil brings upon us. As St. Paul says, “For our sake God made Christ to be sin, even though he knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The ancient Christians often expressed this in a simple phrase: “the unassumed is the unhealed.” What they meant is that every part of human nature needs healing and that therefore the Son of God had to assume (i.e. “take on himself” or “clothe himself in”) every aspect of evil, poison, and death that we experience in order to heal our humanity of all those things.

To use Jesus’ own imagery from John’s Gospel, we might go so far as to say “Jesus became a snake so that we might be healed of whatever is like a snake in ourselves.”

Fr. Jonathan Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 9, 2020

Daniel 9:3-10

Mother of Mine

In much of the Old Testament I feel like God comes across as a very powerful Father. There are also many glimpses of God as a compassionate Mother, as in today's scripture passage. Daniel is recalling a time of intense repentance, a time of sackcloth and ashes, a time of fasting. Yet compassion is the word of hope and the path for Daniel to see his and his people's disregard for God and God's gifts. In other words, hindsight is 20/20 and the eyeglasses are compassion.

All of this brought forward some very cherished and heart-forming experiences in my life involving my mother. I could go on and on about her as an amazing person and who I strive to be like as I "grow up". Compassion could be her middle name as she taught us to love others and to see their motivations for choices with eyes that see pain, need, or suffering.

Compassion from my mother included compassion for her children. The three of us have been through events of intense emotional pain, physical trial, and brushes with death a few too many times. Two of us have been through divorce and one, the birth and near death of a child with birth defects. We didn't always know it at the time, but Mom was there, even if she couldn't be in person. Mom was present in the form of compassion. Like Daniel, she was continuously praying, and many times fasting. My sister remembers her leaning against the wall of her son's hospital room for hours, head slightly bowed, praying continuously. Always there, never relenting, present and loving. Just like God.

In our times, we don't think of fasting as Daniel did. We fast before medical tests; we fast as part of a diet plan. Fasting like Daniel takes effort and intense focus on purpose. Fasting involves lots of praying. And we are just too busy. Not Mom. I remember a harrowing day long ago, when I was praying and deciding about my marriage, abuse, and options. Later that evening, Mom called to check on me. I caught her up and then she said, "I have been praying and fasting for you all day. I love you so much. I am so sorry you are hurting."

Mother God, please forgive me for being too busy to recognize all that is given to me. Help me wear the eyeglasses of compassion, so that I can see the clear picture of what is around me and how I can be that hope to others that you have given to me. Amen.

Marilee Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 10, 2020
Psalm 50:7-15, 22-24

Call On Me

“Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Psalm 50:15 NRSV

God wants us to call on him for anything we need. He wants us to allow him into our hearts and minds to help us work out our troubles. And just as we say to a friend or a child “*call me if you need anything*” we really want to be of help or lend an ear to listen. It is the act of helping that connects us with each other and God.

God wants us to accept his help – accept his deliverance from what is laying heavy on our hearts. Acceptance of well-meaning help or a kind word blesses the heart of the giver just as much as the soul of the receiver.

It pleases God when we give him thanks for the good that is happening in our lives and praise for his help when we are confused or lost. Our prayers of thanksgiving and praise glorify and satisfy God. And as it is with God, the two simple words ‘*thank you*’ are just what make us feel appreciated, needed and loved.

Lent is a good time to sit with God and reflect on what is going on in our life. He can assist us in figuring out how we can do better for ourselves and others. God is waiting for us to call.

Dear God, I know you love me and are waiting on me to come to you with my troubles and my concerns. Help me to accept your love and willingness to help. Please accept my praises of thanksgiving now and in the days to come. Amen

Dawn Armfield

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 11, 2020
Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20

Around and Around; Again and Again

These verses bring out a beautiful analogy for God's presence in our lives – the potter's wheel. As we are molded in our spiritual journeys, we are clay and can be reformed by God's hands into more spiritual vessels. The connection of the potter's hands to his pot is similar to the way God touches us in our lives. This touch is firm when we err and gentle when we show grace.

The wadded-up lump of clay from a prior spin is given new life as we are forgiven again and again.

Bill Crawford

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 12, 2020
Luke 16:19-31

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

1. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
2. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
3. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
4. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 13, 2020
Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

1. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
2. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
3. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
4. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 14, 2020

Psalm 103:1-12

What We Need Now

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

Psalm 103: 8 NRSV

Today’s Psalm is a joyful song of praise to the Lord for his forgiveness and a reminder of his continued blessings even when people forget the covenant that they made with God.

The Psalm was written in a time when the people of Israel recall quickly their experience of sin and suffering. They remember that as firm as God was in his expectations and punishments he always did forgive them and brought them out of the desert. God never stopped loving them and never will stop loving and forgiving.

Forgiveness has the power to heal our minds and our physical bodies. God’s forgiveness can heal an individual or a nation of people. God’s love stretches way beyond what we as humans can even imagine.

It seems that the world needs some forgiveness and healing right now. It seems that as blessed as we are with good things there is just as many people who suffer. Perhaps God is needing our assistance in showing others what we already know to be true – his steadfast love.

Most merciful God, you have blessed me with so much. You have forgiven and healed my soul and my body more times than I can remember or deserve. Thank you for your love and help me to show others the same patience and love you have shown me. Amen

Dawn Armfield

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 15, 2020

3rd Sunday

Romans 5:1-11

Love of Enemies

We all know that Jesus calls us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48) but I've noticed in my years of pastoral ministry that lots of people don't believe that God loves his enemies. Many times I have talked with people, often in the midst of crisis, and they have told me that they just can't believe that God has forgiven them. In extreme cases, which are surprisingly all too common, I've even had people tell me that they are sure they'll be going to hell when they die.

St. Paul goes right to the heart of this struggle in this section of Romans when he says "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God." (Romans 5:10) Notice that St. Paul doesn't say "once we stopped being enemies of God, then we were reconciled." Instead he says "*while* we were enemies." God's love, grace, and forgiveness are already active and at work in our lives when we are in the midst of fighting against God or resisting God's grace. God doesn't wait for us to get our act together before he will accept us. He knows that if he did that he would be waiting forever! God comes to us in the midst of our sin, struggle, and brokenness, and reconciles us to himself before and apart from anything we do. And by such amazing grace he enables us to begin to get our act together and be the people we were created to be.

Fr. Jonathan Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 16, 2020
2 Kings 5:1-15b

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

5. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
6. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
7. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
8. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 17, 2020

Psalm 25:3-10

Learning God's Path

Psalm 25, the passage appointed for today, appropriately falls on the feast day of St. Patrick:

⁴ Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths.

⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,

St. Patrick was no stranger to adversity and hardship. As a teenager he was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland as a slave to herd sheep. During countless hours outdoors tending sheep, Patrick felt God calling him through the beauty and magnificence of creation- and opened his heart and mind to God's voice and presence. At the age of 20, acting upon a dream, God told him to leave Ireland by going to the coast. There, Patrick found some sailors who took him back to Britain. He reunited with his family and then joined the priesthood.

As a young Priest, it must have been confusing and frightening for Patrick to feel God calling him to return and share Christ with the pagan people that had captured and enslaved him. Yet he humbly listened and obeyed. In the decades Patrick served in Ireland he led thousands to Christ - and countless more in the generations that followed.

Patrick's message is simple, yet profound, as expressed in his prayer:

"Christ be within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ inquired, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger."

Our lives may not be as dramatic as St. Patrick's, but God's presence and guidance surrounds us. We have only to ask, be open and listen. In the quietness of a sunrise, the song of a bird, whisper of the wind- we surely hear God's voice. We can feel His closeness blanket us, and His love warm our heart.

Lord Christ, surround and be within me. Open my heart and mind. Show me your ways, teach me your paths. Amen

Janet Sweimler

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 18, 2020
Matthew 5:17-19

Completing God's Law

17-18 “Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working.

19-20 “Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom. *The Message*

I found this reading curious, even a little peculiar. It comes in the midst of a number of Jesus’ teachings; right between why we should be the salt and the light, and why we shouldn’t murder. It’s almost as if Jesus stops and says, ‘*Oh, by the way*’.

But I think Jesus was really saying, ‘*Let me clarify something right here and now. I am fulfilling scripture. I am talking about God’s law. I am ridding God’s law of the thousands of man-made laws that distract you*. You can’t see the forest for the trees. I am distilling it down for you. I am bringing it home. Through me God’s law will come full circle*’.

Jesus adds a cosmic view that God’s law has been, is and will be alive through all ages and all creation. Don’t trivialize it by not following it wholly. Live and love wholly. Omit no one thing, no one person, no one ocean, no one cloud, no one muskrat, and yes, even no one Pharisee**.

Dear God, You are one with me, and it is my prayer I will become one with You. Through humble and right living help me to love and honor all You have created. Keep me from distracting or being distracted. In the name of Your son Jesus Christ, Amen

*It’s easy to assume that the Ten Commandments that Moses downloaded from the cloud to his tablet made up the majority of Jewish law.

In fact, there are 613 commandments for the Jewish people. And there are thousands of laws in the Talmud, (the family album of Judaism). They had a dot for every ‘I’, and a cross for every ‘T’.

The Talmud, including all its’ laws and commandments was memorized and passed down orally generation to generation. This was something the everyday Jew of the time was not equipped or inclined to do. It was not until 500 years after Jesus’ death that The Talmud became a written record.

Most of the laws and commandments in the Talmud were authored by the Pharisees. Since they were the writers, the memorizers and the keepers, they could, and did play a little fast & loose with these laws and commandments; they did this by requiring observance by others while not always being observant themselves. Jesus referred to them as hypocrites.

** The chief sect among the Jews was the Pharisees (Formalists), the Sadducees (Freethinkers), and the Essenes (Puritans). The Pharisees were the rule makers and the rule ‘rememberers’.

John Russell

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 19, 2020

Feast of Saint Joseph

Luke 2:41-52

Be Sure in One's Calling

At first glance, this passage seems rather... unrelatable. Jesus goes to the temple at a young age and is able to argue with the teachers there – a thing that is impressive, but may not be something that the average person can relate to. I am no theologian, yet I want to be like Jesus in embodying his ministry. But in looking closer, I think there is something to be said for Jesus' own confidence and surety in himself. Here he is, only twelve years old, yet he is so sure of his calling to go to the temple that he seems unafraid; when his parents ask him where he has been, he is very calm in explaining, "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"

I wonder, then, if I might also be able to be so sure of my own calling that I go after it unafraid. I invite you to reflect on what your callings are in life, and how you might take action to see them realized, with as much surety as Jesus in the temple.

Lord, help me/us to know the things to which you have called me/us, and to have the surety and faith in myself/ourselves and in you, O Christ, to see them made real. Amen

Emily Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 20, 2020
Matthew 12:24-38

Love God.
Love your neighbor.
What could more simple?

Many of us of an appropriate age might remember something posted in our school classrooms: “Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You.”

Again, what could be more simple?

But in our current world, somehow revenge has crept into our culture as well as hate and lies and just plain ugliness. But do we want revenge or hate or lies or ugliness given to us? And if you think about it, do you really want to be known as a revengeful or hateful or a lying jerk? And none of us want to be ugly much less be known as someone who spreads ugliness. It’s difficult to love other persons if you don’t agree with much of their thoughts or actions. However, you are not loving what they are saying or perhaps even doing, but you can love the person for some part of their worth—perhaps if only the person they were when they came from the womb.

While there are many right now with whom I disagree on some political sphere, that does not constitute hate; it does make it hard to love them, but we are commanded to love, commanded to have feelings for that person.

So perhaps if I truly cannot love those with whom I have a strong feeling of dislike, I need to remember that to love my neighbor (or to care about my neighbor), I am also loving God. Or perhaps rename the word to mean I am CARING ABOUT God, caring about my neighbor, caring about being in relationships with others.

And perhaps if we can start by acknowledging (aka, loving) our “neighbor”, we are, at the very least, showing our Love for God by being willing to Love our Neighbor.

Do unto others...
KISS-Keep it super simple...
WWJD=What would Jesus Do?

Lee Berger

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 21, 2020

Luke 18:9-14

The Tax Man and the Pharisee

9-12 He told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people: “Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: ‘Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.’”

13 “Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, ‘God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.’”

14 Jesus commented, “This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face, but if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.” *The Message*

Pharisees* and tax collectors were popular characters in New Testament stories. The word Pharisee appears ninety-eight times in the New Testament. All but ten in the four gospels. Twenty-nine New Testament stories involve tax collectors; many of whom, according to Jesus, will see heaven long before the Pharisees. (Matthew 21:31-32) **

Both the Pharisees and the tax collectors had negative images: the Pharisee for being so high and mighty, and the tax collector for being, well, a tax collector.

Pot meets kettle. Jesus uses the juxtaposition of these two characters in this reading. The “holy” and arrogant Pharisee gratuitously offers a prayer thanking God for allowing him to be better than the others. The despicable tax collector on the other hand, bows his head, and with his face in his hands, asks for God’s mercy. “God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.” – The Sinners Prayer

One believed he was complete; one knew he was incomplete.

It’s the last sentence of this reading where Jesus makes his point. If you really want to become more than you are, you must confess, like the tax collector and unlike the Pharisee, that you are not already as good as you can get.

Dear God, please give the humility to know that alone I m not complete. You love, and your ways, complete me. Grant me the strength to empty out to let you in. Amen.

* The chief sect among the Jews was the Pharisees (Formalists), the Sadducees (Freethinkers), and the Essenes (Puritans). The Pharisees were the rule makers.

** Matthew himself was a tax collector. (Paul, ‘Saul’, was a Pharisee)

John Russell

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 22, 2020
4th Sunday
Ephesians 5:8-14

Rise and Shine

Sleep is a fascinating phenomenon. We take it for granted because we've always experienced it, but isn't it strange to realize that every 24 hours virtually every human being on the planet spends some portion of those hours unconscious? If we didn't experience sleep, and someone wrote it into a science fiction story, we'd probably find it too unbelievable and stop reading the story. Sleep can even be a little bit disturbing if we really stop to think about it because sleep looks a lot like death. We've probably all had that experience of looking closely at a sleeping relative just to be sure that we saw them still breathing.

It's no surprise, then, that sleep shows up in the Scriptures as a metaphor for all sorts of difficult human experiences: ignorance, laziness, and even death, for example. We'd like to break free from some of these experiences (especially death!) but our human nature seems to inevitably draw us back into dark places where we aren't fully conscious and aren't fully living the lives we want to live. This is where the gospel gives us hope. "Awake, O Sleeper, rise from the dead," Christ says to us in this passage from Ephesians, and so we awaken, arise, and are set free from darkness, ignorance, and laziness.

As we travel these Lenten paths, moving faithfully towards the sunrise of Easter, may we hear and respond to the voice of the God who loves us in Christ as he awakens us to new life.

"Rise and shine!" God seems to say, for a new day is dawning.

Fr. Jonathan Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 23, 2020
Isaiah 65:17-25

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

9. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
10. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
11. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
12. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 24, 2020
Psalm 46:1-8

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

13. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
14. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
15. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
16. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 25, 2020

The Annunciation

Luke 1:46-55

What Can I Do to Help?

Mary's song is interesting to me, in that not only does she praise God for his power, but makes a point to mention that "He filled hungry people with good things, and sent rich people away with nothing." This appears to be of the same level of significance to her as acts of power; it reminds me that God is not necessarily meant to be like a great king performing feats of strength or power for their own gain, but rather that his power is used ultimately to raise up the humble and the poor – whereas those who were already doing well do not necessarily need his help in that regard.

I invite you to reflect on how you might use the advantages you may possess in life to help those who are less fortunate; maybe you are blessed in having more money than you need, or you have food that could be donated – or maybe you have time to spare to spend with those who need someone to listen.

Lord, help *me/us* to use *my/our* gifts you have so graciously given, in order to help lift up the poor, to feed the hungry, to be a friend to the lonely, that in so-doing *we/I* might be more like your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Emily Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 26, 2020

Exodus 32:7-14

A Lesson In Forgiveness

In this passage, God is speaking to Moses and letting him know that the people he brought out of Egypt have been corrupted. The masses have chosen a false idol to worship, directly defying the first great commandment.

God is so angry that he tells Moses to leave, so the Lord's "anger may burn against them." Moses asks God not to retaliate against his people, but to remember why he brought them from Egypt initially. After some thought, God relents and decides against bringing destruction to Moses' people.

It's in this passage that we see God at his best and worst in just a few lines. God is fierce, angry and set on being vengeful, only to realize that retaliating is not the proper course of action. We all have been faced with such a dilemma in our lives at some point, and the ability to turn the other cheek is tested routinely in our modern society.

For me personally, what I take from Exodus 32, is not that Moses talked God out of being vengeful, but rather the Lord reflected and thought better of his actions. No matter what trespass is committed against us, it is possible to stay calm, follow the example of the Lord, and provide mercy, compassion and ultimately forgiveness.

God we pray to bestow upon us the great gifts of understanding and forgiveness as we make our way through the trials and tribulations of this transitory life. May we always see the impact of thoughtfulness and compassion in our daily activities and human interactions. Amen

Ryan Hanchett

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 27, 2020
Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24

Wisdom of Acceptance

The Wisdom of Solomon offers just what the name implies - words and thoughts that give advice and sound wisdom of the right way to live before God. Today's passage in particular sounds prophetic as we move through Lent thinking about Jesus and the stories leading up to his crucifixion.

The people described in the passages read today are not very righteous folks. They don't want to obey anyone but themselves. The easy way is the right way for them. When they encounter men who strive to be more God-like in their work and relationships they get put out. They don't like how righteous God-fearing men make them feel ungodly. The ungodly don't like the fact that the godly do good and obey a being larger than themselves. They just plain do not like it.

Jesus was a godly man who lived on the edge mingling with the inferiors of society – the sick, the mentally ill, women and the poor. Jesus knew the work God had sent him to do and he was going to do it. The ungodly people we meet in the book of Wisdom are the same people that killed Jesus and the same people who saw Christ resurrected to life.

Following God can be challenging and figuring out what work he has for each of us to do can take a lifetime. And if done right, we too may encounter resistance from ungodly people trying to lead us down another path. God will protect us and allow us to do his work.

Lent gives us the time to check our attitude towards people who we see as inferior or different. Lent gives us a chance to ask God for guidance of understanding of our feelings and show us a way to be more accepting and open.

Dear God, help me to be accepting of all people. Please guide my mind and heart. Help me to be an example your love and grace towards all people. Amen

Dawn Armfield

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 28, 2020

Psalm 7:6-11

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

1. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
2. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
3. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
4. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 29, 2020

5th Sunday

John 11:1-45

Jesus Wept

I was 15 when my Grandmother died. It was the first time I had experienced the death of someone close to me and her funeral was my first experience of worship in a small, rural South Carolina Baptist Church. I was skeptical as the service began because I had learned from my Mother that the Pastor who would be leading the service was not like any of the Pastors I had known in the Christian tradition I was growing up in. He was not college educated and he was not a professional who was blessed to be able to devote himself to pastoral ministry full-time. In fact, he drove a soda delivery truck during the week and preached on Sundays. In my 15-year-old arrogance I waited to see what the Coke man could possibly have to say.

His sermon was based on a single verse of scripture, which, as he pointed out, is the shortest verse in the Bible: John 11:35, “Jesus wept.” When Jesus sees our grief, he grieves, even though he is God in the flesh. When Jesus see our despair, he weeps, even though he knows that resurrection is coming. When Jesus sees our hopelessness, he hopes for us, and carries us when we cannot walk.

I learned some good lessons that day – about God, about grief, and about what it means to preach the gospel whether you do it full-time or part-time and whether you’ve been blessed with formal education or whether you’re self-taught. After all, Jesus had no formal education and “nowhere to lay his head” but he had learned how to weep with those who weep.

May we all learn to share each other’s burdens and carry each other’s grief.

Fr. Jonathan Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 30, 2020

Susanna 1-62

Everyone has a moral compass; it's either pointed towards heaven or it's not. Just like with one you can hold in your hand, north is north. But nobody is perfect and we can be pointed northeast. In Susanna we see how two important members of the community who are supposed to be moral and just find themselves on a slippery slope. They start with a thought that had no consequence and that thought lead to stalking, blackmail, and murder, leading to their own demise. That is a big leap.

They didn't wake up one day and say "today is a good day to have a innocent person murdered" No, this took time; it took not repenting and returning to God. They lost their way. When they first had that "insignificant" thought and could have seen into the future they probably wouldn't believed that they were capable of such things.

We as members of the human race are capable of doing awful things. What they did isn't isolated to the Old Testament. Susanna did the opposite, when forced into making a hard choice she kept her moral compass fixed.

Lord, help me to be like Susanna, to keep my eyes on heaven. When I am faced with insignificant and/or hard choices that could lead me astray, come into my heart and point me home.

Jada Bryson

All Saints Lenten Devotional

March 31, 2020
John 8:21-30

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

17. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
18. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
19. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
20. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 1, 2020
Daniel 3:14-28

The Name

Ok. Let's get this out of the way first. Who in their right mind has a name with 14 letters anyway? And what about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Never are they referred to with a collective pronoun! Someone was just showing off.

Seriously though, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego made a name for themselves. By standing up for what they knew was right and true, others, even King Nebuchadnezzar admired them and their God. Walking out of a fire 7 times hotter than usual didn't hurt either.

One of the world's greatest golden idols is money. We bow to it every day. But take a look at R.G. LeTourneau (1888-1969). LeTourneau gave 90% of his income and stocks to God and kept 10%. When LeTourneau was 30-yrs-old and deeply in debt he decided to make God his business partner. "Chastised by his missionary sister to get serious about serving God, LeTourneau was confused. Like most people, he believed that sincere dedication to God required that he become a preacher, an evangelist, or a missionary. He attended a revival meeting at church and gave in. ...he sought guidance from his pastor. After praying together, his pastor said, "You know Brother LeTourneau, God needs businessmen as well as preachers and missionaries." LeTourneau responded, "All right, if that's what God wants me to be, I'll try to be His businessman."

LeTourneau took his business partnership with God seriously... When financial success came years later, he believed this made him a debtor to God as well as his fellow man. His commitment to give away so much of his wealth was not a flash of generosity as much as a logical progression from his earlier decision to make God his business partner.

When people understand that their work matters to God and recognize that He is their business partner, LeTourneau's perspective is a natural response: "The question is not how much of my money I give to God, but rather how much of God's money I keep for myself."

Is God is your business partner? How do you view money: as a measurement of your worth or a tool for serving God and others?"¹

God, help me make a name for myself worthy of you. Amen

Marilee Tice

¹ Bill Peel, Center for Faith & Work at LaTourneau University, <https://centerforfaithandwork.com/article/why-rg-letourneau-gave-90-percent>
Read more about L.G. LeTourneau in his books or on the Internet.

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 2, 2020
Psalm 105:4-11

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

21. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
22. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
23. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
24. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 3, 2020
John 10:31-42

Blasphemy?

31-32 Again the Jews picked up rocks to throw at him. Jesus said, “I have made a present to you from the Father of a great many good actions. For which of these acts do you stone me?”

33 The Jews said, “We’re not stoning you for anything good you did, but for what you said—this blasphemy of calling yourself God.”

34-38 Jesus said, “I’m only quoting your inspired Scriptures, where God said, ‘I tell you—you are gods.’ If God called your ancestors ‘gods’—and Scripture doesn’t lie—why do you yell, ‘Blasphemer! Blasphemer!’ at the unique One the Father consecrated and sent into the world, just because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I don’t do the things my Father does, well and good; don’t believe me. But if I am doing them, put aside for a moment what you hear me say about myself and just take the evidence of the actions that are right before your eyes. Then perhaps things will come together for you, and you’ll see that not only are we doing the same thing, we *are* the same—Father and Son. He is in me; I am in him.”

39-42 They tried yet again to arrest him, but he slipped through their fingers. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and stayed there. A lot of people followed him over. They were saying, “John did no miracles, but everything he said about this man has come true.” Many believed in him then and there. *The Message*

It was Mark Twain who noted that there was quite a difference between lightning and the lightning bug. These few verses from John once again show us there is also quite a difference between the righteous and the self-righteous.

A love of rules is often ungodly; a love of God is often unruly. Once again Jesus is stoned by the Jews and Pharisees; not for the God-like good he is doing, but for claiming that he is in God as God is in him. Blasphemy, ‘how dare you’, they cried out; even as Jesus reminds them of their own scriptures which said we are all of God. Again, the Jews try to arrest Him. Again, Jesus escapes. And again, Jesus attracts new believers.

Again and again. It must have been frustrating for Jesus to endure these experiences, again and again. Jesus loved, healed, taught, comforted and prayed only to be confronted and judged by the self-righteous, the rule makers. It is a repeating story that will eventually become a crucifixion. Being Jesus was not easy.

Dear God, as wholly as you are in me may I wholly be in you. Amen

John Russell

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 4, 2020

John 11:45-53

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

25. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
26. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
27. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
28. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday

Philippians 2:5-11

Let it Go

A lot can hinge on a little word. For example, the first word of Philippians 2:5 – “let.” It’s a little word but it has a big implication.

In this passage St. Paul invites us to have the same mind as Christ. Allow that to sink in for a minute. We are invited to have the same mind as the Second Person of the Trinity, the God through whom all things were made, the Creator and the Savior of the world. Doesn’t that seem like a pretty big expectation to set down? How could we, mere mortals, have the same mind as God?

Our little word (“let”) gives us a clue. When we “let” something happen we don’t so much make it happen as we simply give up on resisting it. “Let the chips fall where they may” we sometimes say – meaning that we won’t be causing consequences to flow from certain actions, we simply won’t resist allowing those consequences to occur.

So, when St. Paul tells us to “*let* the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” he’s not telling us that we have to work hard to try to be like Christ. He’s telling us that the Holy Spirit is actively trying to transform our minds, to make our minds more like the mind of Christ, and our job is to stop resisting and let it happen. Let it happen by letting go of our vanity, letting go of our need to be right, letting go of our fears, and letting the grace of God flow freely to us through the scriptures, the sacraments, and our lives of prayer.

May this coming Holy Week be a week of letting go for all of us and a week of letting God into our hearts and minds so that we might be transformed into the image of Christ.

Fr. Jonathan Stepp

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 6, 2020
Hebrews 9:11-15

Too Much Religion

Once for all! It's hard to wrap my head around that. That's because I've had to ask others over and over to forgive me for the things I've done that hurt or wronged them. I'm hoping they will come through. God, too. But with God, we can be sure our bad acts will be forgotten and erased and have already been taken care of. We can ask for forgiveness over and over, but the truth is we have already been forgiven because of what Jesus has done.

The writer of Hebrews is explaining to the people that all of those religious, cultic practices once required for ritual cleansing of the hurts and wrongs they've done - these are no longer necessary. They are the "dead Work" of verse 14. Now when we are forgiven because of the unblemished sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah; it's over and done with. No more going back to the tent over and over. No more animal to kill and take it and it's blood to church. No gold-covered ark to guard, no golden altar for incense.

Instead we can work on loving one another. With 7.53 billion people in the world, we have a lot of love-one-anothering left to do.

We can't have too much faith, hope, God, obedience, love and worship, but we can have too much religion. Too much religion is a bad thing. It gets in the way of what God wants to do for us.

It's like that old hymn says that I sang growing up. "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe! (My) sin had left a crimson stain - He washed it white as snow."

Jim Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 7, 2020
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

VS.

Israel vs. Palestine	49ers vs. Chiefs	Barbarians vs. Romans	Macy's vs. Gimbals
Wile E. Coyote vs. Road Runner	Foxes vs. Chickens	Harvard vs. Yale	
Dorothy vs. Wicked Witch of the West	Hatfield's vs. McCoy's	Creation vs.	Evolution
Democrats vs. Republicans	Global Warming vs. Climate Change	Cain vs. Able	
Good vs. Evil	Martin Luther King Jr. vs. Malcolm X	Publix vs. Ingles	

Did you laugh? Did you get a bit miffed? Did some old memories come up? Did it start to sound rather silly? Paul reminds us of the basis of God's love and the extent to which that love is expressed, in the death of God's Son and His resurrection. He talks about the silliness of good vs. evil, education vs. wisdom, Jews vs. mediocre, Greeks vs. facts, human assumption vs. God Almighty.

So, when two people end up arguing about the same thing, don't you think that is so silly? Is it because both think they are right? Is it because someone told them their knowledge is more correct? Are they really listening to each other? Does Wile E. Coyote meet Road Runner for breakfast at Rollie Pollie's to talk over their different opinions? Do Publix and Ingles plan altruistic events as a team? (Macy's and Gimbal's did.) What if the story of the beginning doesn't fall in either creation or evolution camps but somewhere we can't even conceive? Isn't foxes eating chickens just the way nature works? And do chicken's have ears anyway?

God sent his Son to everyone, focusing especially on those who were more vulnerable, who needed someone to take their side, to love them anyway, to assure them of their worth. In the tug of war, Jesus grabbed the rope for the lepers, the poor, the lonely, the widowed, the prisoners. He helped them see the power of dropping that rope and helping each other, loving each other. The opposing team, the vs., fell, laughed, screamed and didn't understand... At least some of them. But they all saw the Power. They saw what it was like to be right with God, to enter into holiness by way of Jesus Christ, to disregard the culture that exploits and abuses them in order to reach for the Kingdom. God's chosen "last" vs. human "prestige". The Kingdom wins!

God of all, everything and more, please, please help us recognize that we are more when we are together, when we love each other, when we let Jesus guide us straight to the Kingdom. Let the rope go and let us fall when we think too much of ourselves, have too much, give too little. We want to be on your team. Amen

Marilee Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 8, 2020
Hebrews 12:1-3

After reading the Bible passage, use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you have read.

1. What speaks to you in this Bible passage?
2. Do you have a story that comes to mind when you read this scripture?
3. Do you have a special connection to this passage?
4. What does the scripture lead you and others to pray for?

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 9, 2020

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Jim had a heart attack in early December 2019 and miraculously was saved from 100% blockage in the coronary artery. It was an amazing experience and a harrowing, life-changing experience.

Right after my heart attack I kept thinking I could have died. Easily. What is really important to me? What is next in my life? Repairing band instruments didn't seem so important anymore.

I watched Jim when all of our children and grandchildren were here for a Christmas visit just 2 weeks after his surgery. We seemed to just drink every movement, every laugh, every word into our souls. We watched them from our vantage point only glancing knowingly toward each other once. Instantly knowing each other's thoughts and hearts.

I was watching and listening to my family, as I never had before. It was a gift to hear them laugh and talk about ordinary things and daily life. But once in a while it would flash into my mind that if I have another heart attack this might be the last time I am with them all together. And then I would pull myself back into the moment. I think it was as if I was watching my loved ones and myself all at once.

Although it sounds like a long time, this moment was just fleeting. And then we ate together. We loved each other, told stories, changed diapers, took hikes in the woods. *When they left it was quiet as it is when company leaves. But this year it was very, very quiet.*

It was our Maundy Thursday. It was our recognition of the real reason for living and loving. Our home was turned into holy ground. That's what happened at the Last Supper... Jesus, with love for his companions washed their feet and had a meal together and turned that moment and place into Holy Ground.

Jim & Marilee Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 10, 2020

Good Friday

Hebrews 10:16-25

What Are You Wearing Today?

I recently read a blog post entitled “Please Stop Wearing These 3 Things at Any Age”. I sincerely thought that it would help me make better clothing choices and maybe clean out my closet a bit.

Lo and behold, it wasn't talking about clothes! Courtney Carver listed 3 things to let go of:

1. Stop wearing the guilt of your past.
2. Stop wearing the pressure to prove yourself.
3. Stop wearing the weight of other people's expectations and judgments.

In this Good Friday Epistle, the writer is sharing the beautiful gifts and promises of the Holy Spirit, helping Jewish Christians transition from the old way of doing things to the accessibility of God through Jesus. The new Christians are being encouraged not to wear 3 things!

First, they are reminded that the slate has been wiped clean of their sins and there is no need to offer sacrifices! A clean slate is a clean slate. In other words, you can stop wearing the guilt of the past! Period. Second, as believers they can be confident they are presentable inside and out! God keeps God's word. You can let proving yourself go. With the Holy Spirit residing within, you are free of proving anything. You are freed to worship and serve as you are led. Period. Third, Jesus has cleared the way as their priest, and through His sacrifice that we remember today, they can walk right up to God. We can step in the Holy Place with God and know how to live a God life. God is who we let guide our lives and direct our paths. The weight of other people's expectations and judgments can be dropped, especially since determining what is good for you is above their pay grade! Period.

Holy One, please accept our thanks for your amazing gifts and sacrifice of your Son allowing us to know and wear joyfully your wardrobe of grace and love. Period.

Marilee Tice

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 11, 2020

Easter Vigil

John 19:38-42

Out of the Darkness

In John's gospel we are taken to the Garden Tomb of Jesus. He has been brought there by Joseph of Arimethea and Nicodemus, placed with care and tended to with love.

This passage brings to mind the scene of a vigil. We have all had the experience of tending to the needs of someone: parent, child or friend. I never considered it as a vigil but that really is what it is. It can be a lonely and maybe even an emotional time.

It is in these dark and lonely times that we should remember we are not alone. God is with us.

As I observe the Vigil of Easter this year my prayer will be to seek the light coming out of the darkness. The tomb is not the final place; rather, the resurrection is coming.

“God grant me peace and the awareness of your presence in times of darkness. Please help me to remember your Light is with me always. Amen”

Lynn Cress

All Saints Lenten Devotional

April 12, 2020

Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

I was nervous the day I got married – you probably were too – even though it was one of the most joyful days of my life. I was nervous the days my kids were born, the days I was ordained, and the days I started new jobs, even though those were also joyful days of great expectation. Just because something is joyful, wonderful, and long anticipated, doesn't mean that it isn't also scary.

Part of what's scary about these big, joyful moments is that we know our lives will never be the same. We are crossing over a profound threshold – our old lives are being left behind, a new life is beginning, and the old, comfortable ways we had been living will no longer be possible. A new day is dawning and we must rise to meet the occasion.

I think that's why, on resurrection day here in Matthew's gospel, both the angel and Jesus have to tell everyone "do not be afraid." A new day has dawned and nothing in the life of humanity will ever be the same – our old lives are being left behind and that is scary. Yes, it's joyful and wonderful but it's also scary. And Jesus wants us to know that we don't have to be afraid to step across that threshold into this new world. It's scary at the moment, but as soon as we cross over to the other side of that line we will find more joy, wonder, and fulfillment than we could ever have imagined possible.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen, do not be afraid!

Fr. Jonathan Stepp