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Services & Programs during Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Day

Wednesday, Feb. 25	Proper Liturgy for Ash Wednesday Imposition of Ashes & Holy Communion 7:00 a.m. & 12:00 noon (Rite I, and 7:30 p.m. (Rite II)
Sunday, Mar. 1	The Great Litany & Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. (Rite I) and 10:30 a.m. (Rite II)
Sunday, Mar. 8	The Penitential Order & Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. (Rite II) and 10:30 a.m. (Rite I)
Sunday, Mar. 15	The Penitential Order & Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. (Rite I) and 10:30 a.m. (Rite II)
Sunday, Mar. 22	The Penitential Order & Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. (Rite II) and 10:30 a.m. (Rite I) Lenten Choral Evensong -- 5:30 p.m. (Rite I)
Sunday, Mar. 29	The Penitential Order & Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. (Rite I) and 10:30 a.m. (Rite II)
Sunday, Apr. 5	The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday & Holy Eucharist 8:30 a.m. (Rite I) and 10:30 a.m. (Rite II)
Tuesday, Apr. 7	The Reading of the Gospel of Mark – 7:00 p.m., concluding with Compline
Thursday, Apr. 9	The Proper Liturgy for Maundy Thursday – 7:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist & the Stripping of the Altar
Friday, Apr. 10	The Proper Liturgy for Good Friday -- 12:00 p.m., after which the Church will remain open for prayer. Stations of the Cross -- 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, Apr. 11	The Proper Liturgy for Holy Saturday -- 9:30 a.m.
Sunday, Apr. 12	Easter Day The Great Vigil of Easter – TBA <i>Easter Morning Potluck Breakfast following the liturgy</i> Festive Holy Eucharist, Rite II – 8:30 a.m. <i>Easter Morning Potluck Breakfast following the liturgy</i> Festive Holy Eucharist, Rite I – 10:30 a.m.

See inside front cover for Adult Forum & Wednesday Evening Schedules

*Note: No Christian Formation classes on Palm Sunday or Easter Day.
The Nursery will be open for the 10:30 a.m. service on Easter Day.*



TO
WHAT
IS
GOD
CALLING
US?

Lenten Meditations 2009
Christ Episcopal Church
Blacksburg, Virginia

“I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.” As a priest, it is my humble privilege to say those words on Ash Wednesday to the gathered faithful. This devotional booklet is offered to compliment your Lenten observance. The booklet has five subdivisions corresponding to the weeks of Lent, containing the collect and the lessons appointed for each Sunday as well as two hymns that will be sung within the Sunday liturgies. The collects are reprinted here. You can find the lessons, of course, in any Bible, and the hymns may be found in *The Hymnal 1982*. If you do not have a hymnal at home, the texts can be found online at www.oremus.org/hymnal/82.html. Thanks to all who were willing to share their reflections and insights to make our Lent all the more rich. My sincerest hope is that this devotional booklet will add depth and thoughtfulness to your Lenten journey. -The Rev. Scott West, Rector

“Walking the Path – Spiritual Journeys for Lent”

Each Sunday morning during the Adult Forum and each Wednesday evening during the Lenten season, we will focus upon a variety of spiritual journeys from the personal to the renown. Sunday’s program will present a theme for the week, and Wednesday’s program will emphasize that theme with more experiential means. The weeks’ themes are:

- Sun., March 1: Spiritual Paths: An Introduction
- Wed., March 4: Spiritual Paths: Part Two
- Sun., March 8: Hildegard of Bingen and John Donne: The Artists’ Paths
- Wed., March 11: Music & Poetry from the Artists’ Paths
- Sun., March 15: Patrick & Cuthbert: Crossing Paths
- Wed., March 28: Crossing Paths: Part Two
- Sun., March 22: The People of the Cloistered Path
- Wed., March 25: One Person’s Experience of the Monastic Life
- Sun., March 29: The New Path at Journey’s End
- Wed., Apr. 1: Liturgy for the Leaving

On Wednesday evening, we will begin at 5:30 p.m. with a simple soup supper, followed by our program at 6:00 p.m. Volunteers to make soup, serve, and clean-up are needed! Sign up in the Commons.

In conjunction with this Lenten program, pending the Vestry’s action on March 10th, Christ Church may engage in the construction of a labyrinth through the grant from Episcopal Relief and Development, in response to the Virginia Tech shootings of April 16, 2007. If the Vestry approves the labyrinth plan, work days will be scheduled to prepare the space for the labyrinth, as well as the laying of the stone pavers, planting the garden borders, and other projects associated with this project. How symbolic it will be, should we build a labyrinth, that ancient pathway symbolic of life’s journey, during this time of Lent when we consider

tained. While this lesson leaves the reader without any final resolve, for it seems that Jesus is dead and buried at this point and that’s all, we know how the story ends – in great triumph of resurrection! No matter how much we might want to seal, secure, and guard against the power of God, we cannot.

To what is God calling us? To get ready for the power of God that changes the world, even our own!
(Scott West)

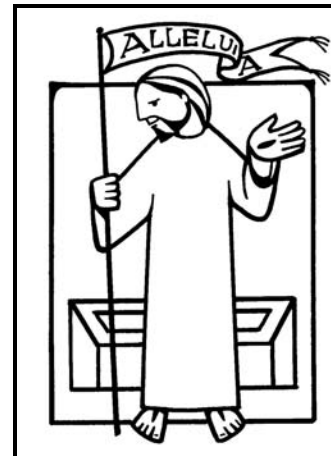
EASTER April 12 John 20:1-18

The disciples must have been despondent; their Lord had been crucified, and laid into a borrowed tomb. Now, instead of arising – his body has been stolen away. There was nothing left to do, but to return home sorrowful.

Mary Magdalene, however, weeps and keeps watch, until the gardener appears, then is revealed to her as the risen Christ. Mary is able to go and tell the disciples “I have seen the Lord”.

We have seen the risen Lord; we know of the power his resurrection brings to us – and how it empowers us when we ask “To what is God calling us?” Christ’s death and resurrection allows us to tell the story of what God has done for us, how we have been blessed, how we are forgiven, how with each new day we have life, and have the opportunity to witness to God’s power working in us. For many whom we encounter in our daily life and work, we may be the only manifestation of the Gospel they meet or see, the only hands or ears or eyes or feet to do God’s work in the week ahead.

How do we witness to the world? How do we do “the work you have given us to do”? As we search for answers to what God asks us to do, we must also ask “How can we be more Christ like in the world?”
(Anonymous)



CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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 Susan Donckers, Parish Nurse
 Judith P. Marsh, Secretary Wardie J. Lovern, Sexton

It seemed an age before we finally saw a middle school boy lead his mother to the chair, kneel and slowly remove her shoes and socks. We watched as he poured water over her feet. He gently scooped water up over one foot and then the other. When he had dried her feet, the mother rose and motioned for him to sit, and she washed his feet. As she was drying her son's feet, others began to slip out of pews and make their way to the front. More and more people lined up to take part in this ancient ritual. What the boy had done was humbling for all of us. What he did had made it possible for us to do the same. Not for the first time, I remembered the prophet's words, "*a little child shall lead them.*"

To what God calling us now? I wouldn't be surprised to see a child leading us into something new.
(Anonymous)

April 10 John 18:1 – 19:42

"I am he." Jesus said.

"I am he." Jesus said.

"I am not!" Peter said. And the cock crowed.

"I am not!" Peter said. And the cock crowed.

"I am not!" Peter said. And the cock crowed.

"Crucify him!" The people said.

"Crucify him!" The people said.

These simple words and actions changed the world.

To what has God called me?

To what has God called you?

Simple words and actions . . .

What has God called us to say and do?

What will I say and do?

What will we say and do?

(Anonymous)

April 11 Matthew 27:57-66

The burial of Jesus is among the most sobering passages of Scripture, and still it shows great compassion on the part of Joseph of Arimathea, in providing a tomb in which to bury Jesus. Usually those crucified were never taken down from the cross, but left to hang there in the final dehumanizing act. The elements, dogs, birds, and eventual decay would destroy the one crucified to the point no trace of him would be left. The Romans used such tactics as a deterrent. For Jesus to be buried was quite unusual.

The concern over the body of Jesus by the chief priests and the Pharisees seems to come out of their own fear. What might happen to it? If his followers steal it, they will make outlandish claims about Jesus. Despite all the security measures – the great stone at the entrance, sealing the stone, and posting a squad of Roman soldiers – the power of God could not be secured or con-

February 25 Collect for Ash Wednesday



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

So what jumps out at me in this collect is the phrase, "You hate nothing you have made," because it's one I don't remember having heard before. I've spent my entire life hearing that God loves me—it's a refrain that sometimes seems to border on the cliché. *Yeah, yeah, God loves me. Okay, I get it!* But sometimes, in order to understand a truth, you have to re-phrase it. So if God loves everything he has made, it makes sense to say he hates nothing he has made. And nothing means nobody.

Really? Nobody? It's sort of unfathomable, really, since if I let myself, I could easily think of people worthy of revulsion, while God knows and has known everyone and has found, over that time, nobody to hate. I mean, yes, we can easily imagine God not hating kids and grandparents and lovers and the kind-hearted and even the mischievous and possibly the law-breaking. And, if we're gifted with a good imagination, we might be able to imagine God not hating a murderer. But what about terrorists? What about the truly vile—to the perpetrators of atrocities and other heinous crimes against humanity? What about the Philistines? What about Hitler? Osama bin Laden? Bernie Madoff? Sorry. Apparently, God doesn't hate them, either.

As I meditate on this I realize how easy it is to become self-righteous, to fashion an imaginary hierarchy of transgression and look at one's own shortcomings in the context of what others have done (or not done) and say to oneself, "Well at least I'm not doing *that*." But what this not-hating God suggests to me is that we all—*no matter what*—have the ability to become accepted by God, to obtain "perfect remission." God's ability to forgive, then, is a democratizing force. In seeking that perfect remission, we can all be one. Equal.

Perfect remission: that's something else that seems impossible to comprehend. I know I can't do it. Like my grandmother was fond of saying: "There are people you just have to pray to love." And it's the truth. There are people in my life who have wronged me—non-murderers and non-torturers and non-fraudulent folk—who I still have trouble forgiving, much less thinking fondly of. Much less *loving*. Which means, I guess, that this prayer is for me as much as it is for anybody. (Matthew Vollmer)

February 26 Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Why did they leave out verses 3-11? I was suspicious, and that is why I started with the missing verses. Verses 3-11 describe a terrible army marching through the land, turning Eden into a wasteland. Before that in verses 1-2 there is a spirited call to alarm, "Blow the ram's horn in Zion, and sound the alarm in my holy mountain". Something is coming, and it is not nice.

Not much is known about the prophet Joel. He could have been writing any time from the Kings (800 BC) to just after the exile in Babylon (400 BC). The Jewish people experienced giddy periods of peace, strength and prosperity cut short by grim times of drought, famine and invasion by heartless foes. It

is not entirely clear whether Joel was writing about an invasion of locusts or using locusts as a metaphor for an invading army of Northerners (Assyrians or Babylonians). Either one placed God's people in a perilous and desperate situation. It was a time when people of faith were tempted to turn away from the God who promised to care for them. Or it was a time for people to come to terms with their own weakness. Just before verse 12 begins, Joel wrote, "For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"

Joel calls on the people to gather, to weep and mourn, "to rend your heart and not your garments." It is a prophetic call for solemn collective remorse and a plea to God not to abandon His people. Joel tells the priests to ask, "Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" It is with this ancient and disturbing prayer the Church directs us to begin to face our own doubts and swarms of locusts. Lent is here.

(Edward Champion, Jr.)

February 27 Hymn 142 Lord, who throughout these forty days

Fasting and penitence are words that ring unfamiliar to our modern ears and sensibilities. Although it is tempting to try to move through Lent without making much effort to identify or contemplate our sins, this hymn admonishes us to do so.

It isn't too hard to think of **others'** sins. We see new headlines in the paper every day about deplorable transgressions of prominent individuals within our society (Wall Street bankers and brokers, corporate executives, etc.), misdeeds that reveal these individuals to have an alarming capacity for greed and dishonesty, and a stunning disregard for the welfare of others.

Many of us probably feel that we are victims rather than perpetrators of the sins and excesses on Wall Street and corporate America. Yet I wonder if there hasn't been a "trickle down" of these sinful attitudes and behaviors. To a certain extent, haven't we all been greedy and selfish, consuming more than our fair share of resources, and oblivious to the impact that our actions have on those around us?

Each of us shares some of the responsibility (and the blame) for the economic problems - the state budget deficits, store closings, rising unemployment, and mounting debts (a huge burden placed on our children and grandchildren.) It is hard to know what to do, but this season of Lent provides a model for us to follow. We can use these "days of prayer and penitence" to ponder how we can be better stewards of our planet and natural resources, resolving to take specific actions to reduce our carbon footprint and our consumption.

We might also do well to pray for inspiration to find ways to minister to those who have lost their jobs, their homes, or their nest eggs. (Ellen Brown)

February 28 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

I often forget the simplicity of the message in these verses. The examples referenced are easy enough to understand, but often difficult to follow. We like to be praised for doing a good deed, or a job well done but these words remind me that the earthly reward of just having done them, is more than enough.

I think that the best way to spread the word, is by example. How we treat others and live our lives. I personally am uncomfortable with the TV type evangelists. I find them usually to be at direct odds with what the gospels teach and in particular these verses from Matthew.

I do enjoy Sunday worship. It is so moving to feel everyone focused together, but I prefer praying in solitude because I can listen more intently and get things back into perspective. I think Ash Wednesday is

Easter. Through the words and music God is calling us to acknowledge suffering, specifically Christ's physical suffering as a human being during his crucifixion.

Matthew 27:28-29 is the scriptural source: "They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said." If you look closely at the words in our hymnal, they focus specifically on the crown of thorns and the damage and defilement it caused to the head of Jesus.

The original words to this meditation on the crown of thorns are attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) a French abbot and Cistercian monk. He helped define the ideal of Christian nobility for the Knights Templar. He preached the Second Crusade and sent vast armies to Jerusalem on a failed mission.

The original music was written by German composer Hans Leo Hassler in 1601, first as a secular song, and then as a sacred hymn. He wrote church music, organ works, songs, and instrumental music.

Johann Sebastian Bach used Hassler's melody five times in his St. Matthew Passion (the so-called "Passion Chorale") and also used it in his Christmas Oratorio. The St. Matthew Passion was probably first performed on Good Friday 1727 in the *Thomaskirche* in Leipzig.

The depth of the emotions in this hymn is striking. It almost glorifies suffering, but adds a few hints that the suffering has a purpose. When people say, as many do, that Lent is their favorite season of the church year, they are probably appreciating the depth and strength of the raw emotions that are revealed in the suffering of Jesus. During Holy Week, we are led to concentrate on the physical and political realities of Jesus' life. Those realities take on another dimension, but not until Easter.

God calls us to minister to those who are suffering physically, mentally, emotionally, and to those who suffer from political and social oppressions.

Prayer: O God, by whose grace your servants Bernard of Clairvaux, Hans Leo Hassler, and Johann Sebastian Bach created this musical experience of suffering: Grant that we may be moved by the spiritual and physical evidence of suffering to ease the burden of those who suffer; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (Marsha Hertel)

April 9 John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Although footwashing was a normal part of life in first century Palestine, for us in the 21st century America, the thought of washing someone's feet or having someone wash our feet in public makes most of us squirm.

For us, footwashing is just too personal, it's too intimate. It raises anxieties about how our feet smell, our bunions and corns, holey socks and how to deal with nylons.

At a Maundy Thursday service several years ago, it was decided to include a Service of Footwashing. At the appropriate time, a large bowl, pitcher of water, towels and a chair were set in front of the choir. The priest led the chaplain to the chair and washed his feet. The chaplain reciprocated, and when they finished there was a long awkward silence as we waited for someone to follow their lead.

kingly behavior on the part of Jesus. A king would have ridden into Jerusalem on a horse or in a chariot; Jesus, the King of Peace, rode into the city on a donkey's colt. Yet this scene within John's Gospel clearly depicts Jesus' Messiahship.

How do we respond to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem? We could fall to our knees as one might do before a king. We could fondly wave palm branches and shout, "Hosanna." We could ignore it completely. I am struck by the message of Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey's colt, as the one coming in peace, not war or political victory. What does it say to us as Christians, that the one we follow as Lord, comes in peace? My hope is that I am more peaceable in my day to day actions, and that "the peace of God which surpassing all understanding" manifests itself in what I do, say, and feel, no matter how "unpeaceable" others may act around me. (Scott West)

April 7 Isaiah 50:4-9a

In a community that contains many educators of different kinds, the first words of this extract from Isaiah sound like self-gratifying fantasy rather than a call to difficult reality. What teacher doesn't hope to speak timely words to the weary, whether that involves waking up drowsy undergrads in an 8 a.m. class, or kindling the love of learning in someone plodding through degree requirements, or inspiring a bored pew occupant to read her way through the four Gospels?

But Isaiah, speaking as a prophetic teacher rather than as the trained practitioner of a scholarly discipline, soon complicates things. His teaching involves ear as well as tongue—dutiful listening to God, not laying down the law from his own personal or professional vantage point. For many people listening is harder and perhaps less enjoyable than talking. Still, most of us teachers, whether we're concerned parents, academics, religious educators, or activists, have learned to listen, whether our motive is good manners, pragmatism, or a prudent desire to stay current with knowledge in our fields.

Things get tougher for Isaiah, though. He must not only heed God's voice and then faithfully speak the truth he's heard to the powers that be: he also has to pay the palpable costs. For Isaiah, walking the walk means taking verbal and corporal abuse for his teaching words. He does so, resolute and unconfounded. He's confident that his words will be justified, that they will outlast his opponents and their words even if his body's paid a price.

How many of us can be teachers who share Isaiah's confidence in his message and his willingness to suffer for what truth has been revealed to him? Even the secular world has its brave prophets, unheeded and occasionally reviled but vindicated over time: think, for example, of environmental activists from Rachel Carson through Al Gore or of the generations of civil rights leaders whose words and pains led step by step to the election of our newest president. Can we have the individual clarity to see what's right and say what we see no matter what the personal price?

(Peter Graham)

April 8 Hymn 168 *O sacred head, sore wounded*

This wonderful and profound piece of music gathers the contributions of several geniuses over several centuries. It captures and intensifies the Holy Week theme of suffering that leads up to

good practice for those verses from Matthew.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth..." I find this one to be a challenge. We are fearful of the economic conditions, jobs, homes, food, education for our children and retirement, just to mention a few. We are truly blessed and know that we need to be somewhat healthy in order to help others, whether that is financially or physically, but that saving up those treasures doesn't guarantee our future as much as trusting in God. How can we feel good about consuming and saving so much extra, when there are those who don't have enough? (Anonymous)

SUNDAY March 1 Collect for Lent I



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.

Jesus was tempted by Satan. I really don't know exactly what tactics Satan used to tempt Jesus. I mean, not really. God only knows.

But I am all too familiar with the sort of temptations we face daily. Indeed, assault is just how I feel when I am tempted. It overtakes me.

Temptation comes in many forms: We are tempted to envy, to be greedy, to over eat, to gossip, to judge ourselves and others harshly. We are tempted to drink to much, to over spend, to neglect our health, and to ignore the beautiful in search of the bountiful, to waste, and alas, to be complacent. And, we are tempted to forget about the power of the Holy Spirit, let alone invite the Spirit to live within us.

But, each of us, exactly as Jesus, has perfect freedom to access Almighty God, who is poised at this and every moment to be "mighty to save" us from our weaknesses, our temptations.

Thank you, Christ Jesus, for making this known and available to us through you. (Anonymous)

March 2 Genesis 9:8-17

"Look! A rainbow!" How many times have we said or heard those words with excitement and wonder? A rainbow is one of nature's most beautiful phenomena and also rather rare. From childhood on we smile over stories like the leprechaun's buried gold or try to paint a rainbow with the colors in the correct order-- red to the outside and violet on the innermost arch. We remember the legends; the ancient Greeks believed the rainbow was the path of Iris, the messenger between the gods and earth. Norse mythology imagines the arch as a bridge that spans the home of the gods and the middle earth of humankind. For Jews and Christians the rainbow is a covenant, a promise. God will never again destroy His creation, His people, His animals or birds by flood. Perhaps the multihued, subtle shadings of the rainbow remind us of the infinite variety that exists upon the earth. Whenever we think of flora or fauna, fish of the sea or bird of the air, we can summon up examples in every color, hue, and pattern. Why should there be a pink flamingo or a boldly striped zebra except to delight the eye? The rainbow tells us of the richness and visual beauty of creation. Because God has created the earth, and because He has promised not to destroy it, to what is God calling us? It now looks as if WE have the power to destroy the earth, and we can choose our methods—fire or ice? Global warming or

nuclear winter? Eradication of entire species on which the tenuous balance of nature might hang? We know that we want none of these catastrophes to occur. The stewardship of the earth is in our hands, and every day we are called to make a difference, to preserve and protect. (Kaye Graham)

March 3 Hymn 449 *Oh Love How Deep, How Broad, How High*

What a wonderful survival of late-medieval choral music this hymn is. It really warms my history-loving blood. To begin with, the tune, *Deo Gratias* is a top-10 popular melody that is best known as the tune for that 1416 hit, *The Agincourt Carol* that celebrates God's and King Henry V's great victory over the French at Agincourt. Note that God is given the credit over King and army:

*Owre Kyng went forth to Normandy
With grace and myght of chyvalry
Ther God for hym wrought mervelusly;
Wherefore Englonde may call and cry
Chorus*

Deo gratias:

Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria.

Perhaps you will remember it from one of the cinematic versions of Shakespeare's "Henry V."

Our hymnal version does not celebrate God as warrior but God the lover of humankind. How deep God's love is, how broad, how high. We can imagine being surrounded by great open, enveloping spaces of the Gothic cathedrals that were being built at this time. See the sun shine in through the stained glass. Remember that God loves us. Jesus came, taught, healed, prayed, suffered, died and rose again for us, the author repeats over and over. God loves us—Jesus sacrificed himself for us out of his surpassing love. The Lutheran hymnal credits the authorship of this hymn to Thomas a Kempis, and for serious Lenten devotion, I direct you to that wise little book. Glory to God. (Annonymous)

March 4 Psalm 25:1-9

God is our only hope, our only source of strength. Without him we would be sunk, but we are not without him. We are free to ask him to give us what we need, as the psalmist asks that he not be put to shame.

We also need to know what God wants of us; we need him to teach us the way and the truth. Centuries after this psalm was written, he came to us as the way and the truth. We still need to learn from him, to be open to what he wants to teach us. Amid the distractions of day-to-day life, it is very easy to forget about this. Most of us are juggling various responsibilities; we tend not to think that we have responsibilities to God. Failure to meet those responsibilities is sin

After asking to be given his needs and to be taught, the psalmist asks that God forgive and forget his sins. He asks God to forgive because mercy and goodness are God's nature. The psalmist doesn't say he deserves forgiveness because of something he has done. He asks God to give it because God is who he is.

God will guide those who let him. Lord, give me the grace to be aware of your goodness and mercy. Let me be eager to learn what you want me to do and be. Let me be as aware and eager as the psalmist, and let me trust you as he trusted you. Amen (Anonymus)

with more chances to serve others.

When my dog and I go for our daily walks in Radford, we have a chance to observe the whole gamut of lawns and houses, from those with well-manicured front lawns and mulched flower beds all the way to those with trash, twigs and tree limbs scattered on the ground, and perhaps an abandoned car in the back yard. I have begun to realize that some of these families with the untidy yards may be trying very hard to put food on the table, and they just cannot make lawn care a priority. I just hope that if they do take time to notice what is going on in the neighborhood, they'll recognize me as a friend, and someone eager to do a favor. A few weeks ago I felt a rush of pleasure when my neighbor made a frantic phone call, and asked me to take her daughter to the high school for cheerleader practice. It was so nice to be asked, and to be available for such favors. It is a little thing, but I like being part of a "village" again, and perhaps even to be one of the village elders. (Ellen Brown)

PALM SUNDAY April 5 Collect for Palm Sunday



Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him 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 also 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.

"Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering and also share in his resurrection...."

At this time of year, I always recall the week in late March, eighteen years ago, when my family learned that our dad had died suddenly. I flew to Florida on Palm Sunday, and his funeral took place two days later, in the little town where he and my mother lived.

My father was a devoted and beloved member of his Catholic church; he was its organist, and was one of the church's "wise men", much sought for his advice. The affable Irish priest who conducted his funeral was a Benedictine abbot, a friend of his. The abbot enumerated my dad's fine qualities and contributions, as we all wept. He looked down at the floor, and shook his head, and said, "How hard it is, to have to bury a man like this during Holy Week." And then he paused, looked up and smiled broadly, and said, "But what an Easter he's going to have! What an Easter!"

May we all have a blessed Holy Week, and, in time, share in Jesus' resurrection on a magnificent Easter Day. (Anonymous)

April 6 John 12:12-16

Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem forms a hinge in John's Gospel, after which Jesus' public ministry is closed and the last days of his life are portrayed. The scene is one of great celebration, welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem as the crowds would have welcomed a king. There are a few exceptions in

wondrous love is this, O my soul” is repeated three times, then the lines continue, “That caused the Lord of bliss, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.” “Wondrous love” is juxtaposed to “dreadful curse” in the original version; our hymnal uses the second half of the second stanza to pair “wondrous love” with “Christ laid aside his crown, for my soul.” Yet the theme of the hymn remains: amazement at the love of Christ for humanity combined with the response of singing praise to God in this life and in the next, singing on through eternity. Combined with the beautifully simple and easily sung tune, “Wondrous Love” has become a favorite of contemporary Episcopalians. The hymn expresses our deepest recognition and thanksgivings.

To what is God calling us, within the context of this hymn? I would offer that we’re called as people of faith to recognize and realize the many ways in which God’s love for us is revealed. Times in life make that obvious, and at other times, God’s love feels remarkably distant from us. However, we are never far from God’s love, and as St. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, “Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The Lenten journey helps us to reconnect to God’s love and fosters a recognition and realization of that love, when it may have felt distant. How else do we best express our thanksgivings than to offer song? The music wells up within us, and we lift our voices in praise: “To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing.” (Scott West.)

April 4 John 12:20-33

Verse 24: (RSV) Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit...

(King James) Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit...

Verse 25: (RSV) He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...

(King James) He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal...

Verse 26: (RSV) If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him...

(King James) If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour...

These verses seem to speak to our present day financial crisis, in several ways.

Many of us have spent a lifetime keeping ourselves safe and comfortable, and well insulated from hunger, homelessness or poverty. We have done everything possible to get ahead, enjoying the privileges of a good education, good upbringing, and often a nice inheritance of money and material possessions. But just like that grain of wheat, hard times may be forcing many of us to fall to the ground, shed our outer protective layers (retirement funds, health benefits, and over-sized homes) and seek a simpler, and more modest life style.

In our new soil, where we are rubbing up against the real life dramas confronting many others who are struggling with significant stresses and worries, we’re beginning to get out of our old shells and find ways to be useful. Instead of being so self-absorbed, we’re finding a new life that is more fruitful,

March 5 I Peter 3:18-22

This letter of Peter’s to the Christian’s of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia came at a time when these people were facing persecution at the hands of the Roman empire. As the leader of the church in Rome, Peter had the job of trying to encourage them to keep their faith strong, and continue to follow God instead of lashing out against their oppressors or succumbing to the evil around them.

In the first part of the letter Peter urges them to be holy in all they do. Then he explains *why* they need to be holy and what effect it will have on those who persecute them. This brings us to our passage. In verses 18-22, Peter’s language gets pretty complicated. He’s talking about Noah, and spirits and baptism. What is he talking about? In the context of the entire letter, what I get from this passage is this: 1) God suffered to save you, 2) he saves you through baptism, 3) baptism isn’t just the washing away of your sin, it is an agreement to live with a clear conscience before God. This is more than a wet forehead!

It is one thing to think of God passively saving us from those who persecute us, and carrying us off to heaven, forgiving us of all our sins. But this passage, in the context of the whole letter, is telling us that our salvation – though given by God – requires something of us. For the people in the provinces of Rome it meant standing up to persecution with a life of holiness and obedience to God’s will. What does it mean for *us* (you, me, Christ Church) to live with a “clear conscience before God”? Isn’t this what God is calling us to? To hold up our end of the baptismal covenant? Okay, so what *is* my end? Fortunately, Peter’s letter doesn’t end here. He ends his letter with more encouragement to soldier on, love each other, and bear the worst. The advice that speaks to me is this: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (4:10)

I encourage you to read Peter’s entire letter and meditate for yourself on your gifts and how God is calling you to use them. If we each can do that, we can begin to unravel the mystery of where He is calling us, both as individuals and as Christ Church. (Hillary Shemes)

March 6 Hymn 150 *Forty days and forty nights*

Over the years, as I have gone through some thorny and painful episodes (divorce, the loss of a job, etc.), I have tended to refer to these rough patches as my “wilderness experiences.” When forced to leave behind all sorts of comforts that I had been taking for granted (home, furniture, routines, familiar faces, and roles – as wife, boss, or employee), I wondered if I could survive.

I feel that I have been blessed with a strong survivor gene – perhaps passed down from my ancestor, Mary Draper Ingles – that has helped me to understand these wilderness experiences as more of a blessing than a curse. I believe that Mary Ingles survived (captivity among the Shawnee, in 1755) because of her irrational faith – that she could walk hundreds of miles through the wilderness and make it home safely to be reunited with her husband, William. She did not allow herself to be a victim, but chose to find her way out of the overwhelming disasters of her life, and refused to give up hope.

I recently heard from an old friend whose husband has been laid off, and has a history of suffering from depression. I struggled to think of what I could do or say to offer encouragement. I wish I could find the wisdom to help him cope with his wilderness experience, but I don’t know if I can provide him with the help he needs. Here are a few things I’d like to say, based on my own experience:

God may be calling you to do something different for this next leg of your journey, and you may find that you’ll be much happier once you find your way.

If you look around, you'll notice that many others are going through the same sort of wilderness as you, and you'll be amazed to discover how joyful it is to start thinking about someone else's problems instead of your own.

You have gifts that you have only partially claimed. Make a list of those things you love to do, and start doing them more often. Think about how you might express your creativity...with gardening, collecting, building, networking, or learning how to use a new software program on your computer. Creativity, I am convinced, is a wonderful source of health and healing.

Try not to worry about the family finances, and the burdens of responsibility that you have always carried on your shoulders. Let go, and let God... carry them for you. Enjoy the bird songs returning to your garden, and all the green buds about to burst open, and take it as a hopeful sign of God's bounty.

Ask your children to help you think of new possibilities. They can be a remarkable source of inspiration. I hope we all will find strength and inspiration to continue our journeys through our wilderness experiences. (Ellen Brown)

March 7 Mark 1:9-15

The story of Jesus' baptism is very familiar.

In Advent, we read the beginning of the narrative, when John the Baptizer arrives on the scene to "prepare the way of the Lord." On the first Sunday after the Epiphany, we read the story of John baptizing Jesus. And now, in Lent, we hear it again. This time I see something new.

True to his narrative style, Mark draws us into the scene with a sense of high drama.

"Just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him."

The heavens were "torn apart!" What a wonderfully vivid picture. Those who were there, who had eyes to see and ears to hear, would have witnessed the parting of the veil between heaven and earth. They would have seen the spiritual world break into the material world.

The image of the sky being torn reminds me of the fifteenth chapter of Mark, when Jesus breathes his last and, "the curtain in the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom." That curtain had for generations stood between man and the Holy of Holies where God was thought to dwell. Now Mark gives us a dramatic picture of God doing something new.

For me these two "tearings" are like bookends for the story of Jesus' ministry--the first, a blessing of Jesus' new ministry, when God bursts into our world in a new way. The other bookend stands at the conclusion of Jesus' ministry when the curtain is torn in two, throwing open our path to God.

As familiar as this story is, because I am not the same person I was last year or last month, I hear with new ears and see with new eyes and God is breaks into my world again. (Elizabeth Foster)



If I didn't already know my frailty, by the end of Lent "*I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*"

Knowing my frailty is a good thing, because I am reminded that it is God, not I, who washes me through and through. It is God, not I, who creates a clean heart within me, who gives me the joy of his saving help, and sustains me with his bountiful Spirit. I do not have to measure up to God. God has come to me.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving-kindness." (Anonymous)

April 2 Hebrews 5:5-10

We read in this passage that Jesus' call -- that life work to which he was devoted -- was not his own idea. His life work was not of his own choosing, but given to him by God. However, God is not a tyrant: it was Jesus' choice to listen for that call; it was his choice to obey it.

How closely do we listen for that call to God's work in our own lives? Are our lives too busy to discern that which our little voice is telling us? There is much in our lives that distracts us -- work, families, society, entertainment. We could easily pass through life without listening for, much less engaging, God's purpose for us.

Removing these distractions and sitting in silence gives us the chance to listen to the whisperings of that little voice -- but listening is not easy. Like any skill, it requires regular practice and self-discipline to remain in-tuned to what we must do, to that work which is vital for us and which makes our souls sing. Moreover, it takes great courage to listen, first of all to take the time to remove ourselves from worldly distractions to do deep soul work, but also to expose ourselves to what might be asked of us and what we might find in the silence.

Hearing the message is difficult and crucial to begin with, but accepting one's assignment and taking action -- having the courage to obey the call -- is just as challenging, as it is often contrary to our own plans and desires. Often, we do not hear what we want to hear. Sometimes, we resist or run from the call, or argue with God for asking us to give up our own plans for God's. In the passage, we are told that Jesus, our very role-model, "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears," because he knew that not responding to God's call brought him suffering: avoiding God's call leaves us feeling empty and unfulfilled and distances us from God. However, in letting go and loving and trusting God enough to allow ourselves to be swept up by God, life reveals itself in beautiful and mysterious ways. We find peace when we listen and obey.

Shall we take the time to listen? Shall we take the initiative to act? (Hilary Camblos)

April 3 Hymn 439 *What wondrous love is this, O my soul!*

"Wondrous Love" first appeared in 1835 in William Walker's shaped-note hymnal, *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*. The simple tunes and harmonies paired with easily sung words and phrases made *The Southern Harmony* immensely popular among Protestants. Over 600,000 copies were sold at a time when advertising was limited to word of mouth and small displays in weekly and monthly papers. By 1854, the hymnal was in its third edition.

The words in *The Hymnal 1982* combine the first and second verses of the original hymn. "What

March 30 Jeremiah 31:31-34

I was baptized and confirmed as an Episcopalian as a child, but I left the church in my early 20s because nothing was going the way I wanted it to in my life, and I had no one to blame but God (or so I thought). For many, many years I kept my distance from church and shied away from any mention of God, church or Christianity.

About 10 years ago, I found myself in a personal physical and emotional crisis. Having tea with a friend of mine one day, I said, “I think there’s a place down deep inside me where I can draw strength when I need it.” My very astute friend replied, “Have you *been* to this place?” My answer (which still surprises me even today) was, “No, but I have FAITH that it’s there.” I fondly call this the first time I ever used the “F” word.

From then on, I realized there was an important leg missing from the conventional “three-legged stool” in my overall well-being. The spiritual leg had been hiding.

When I ponder the question, “To what is God calling me?” it is very clear that He was calling me back. He hadn’t been shouting in my ear all those years, but rather gently calling me. This passage from Jeremiah touches me when it says, “I will put my law in their minds and write on their heart.”

My moment of discernment in that coffee shop years ago was that indeed it was God who was down deep inside me waiting for me to call on him for strength. He had put his law in my mind and had written on my heart. I just didn’t know it at the time. (Anonymous)

March 31 Hymn 170 To mock your reign, O dearest Lord,

I love music by Thomas Tallis. The poetic words by F. Pratt Green fit so beautifully with this tune.

The lyrics and music are full of emotion and let you feel the pain, outcry and shame that must have been felt that day. Yet the music even in its minor tone tells us the love, hope and forgiveness that came from it.

This hymn makes one weep with sadness and joy. (Anonymous)

April 1 Psalm 51:1-13

Here it is again. Psalm 51 which I read weeks ago as part of the Ash Wednesday service.

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.*

What has happened in the weeks which followed the Ash Wednesday service, when the priest formed a cross with ashes on my forehead, and spoke the awful and comforting words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return?” What have I done, since I prayed that I would “keep a holy Lent?”

I am prone to make Lenten commitments the way I make New Year’s resolutions with broad sweeping promises to myself and God. “For six weeks I will unplug the TV, and I will work in the garden everyday—rain or shine, and I will read Morning and Evening Prayer, and I will not say anything harsh or unkind.”

SUNDAY March 8 Collect for Lent II

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

“Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways.” As we look at the world about us, it seems we have gone astray in many directions. Our economy is suffering from severe dislocations and our environment is deteriorating. The economy, based on consumption, has diverted our attention from god’s way to the acquisition of things.

There will need to be adjustments in our way of life, and it is hard to know where to begin. In his book, *In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollan has made a proposal for us to consider. He claims that food is so fundamental to our lives that its importance should not be neglected. In the interest of producing cheap food, we have created a subsidized farm industry that has degraded the quality of water in the farm region and become the biggest contributor to greenhouse gases. Instead of food, we are consuming a substance that is not the product of nature but of food science. The result has contributed to poor health as seen in the high incidence of obesity and type 2 diabetes. And a poor diet relying on soft drinks could be a contributor to the low achievement levels of children in our schools. Pollan advocates the consumption of food that is healthy, food that our grandmothers would recognize as food. We may do well to emulate Pollan’s example of reconnecting to the production of food by growing vegetables in our own gardens. As persons created in the image of god, we should be more concerned with what we eat.

The times are full of possibilities, both exciting and unsettling. As we begin to address our present situation, we can consider the words of the collect that reminds us to return with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to the unchangeable truth of God’s word. (Anonymous)

March 9 Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

One of the reassuring things about the Old Testament is that it is *old*: one prefers to have some distance between ourselves and the lurid sex and egregious violence, the heroes and heroines of doubtful character, the seeming bad behavior of a willful deity, and all those schedules of regulations. The reading for today conveniently omits the business about slaves and their foreskins. Can the calling of Abraham arouse an echo in these modern times? Sarah was old at ninety and Abraham older at ninety-and-nine, both well beyond the age of bearing and raising children. But then, how old are we? If they were old in that youth of the world how much more ancient are we who dwell in these tired and weary times, barren of faith? What is not possible, the story leads us to inquire, for a God of history who is forever timeless? (David Radcliffe)

March 10 Hymn 401 The God of Abraham praise

Thomas Olivers, the author of this hymn text was inspired to transcribe and adapt this 1404 text somewhere between 1763 and 1770. The text is paraphrased from the thirteen creeds of Moses Maimon-

ides (ca. 1130- ca. 1204). One account calls this text the Hebrew Doxology. In The Hymnal 1982 this text is set to the tune *Leoni* which was also adapted from a Hebrew chant and harmonized by Mr. Oliver. This hymn has come from the melding of Jewish and Christian expressions of praise and thanksgiving.

This continued renewal of ancient text and music through the ages is a reflection of God's call for his "glorious saints in light" and "the whole triumphant host" to "sing the wonders of his grace forever more". God then calls us to join the throng of angels and saints in singing in "endless praise".

The Bible has many references to the angel choirs, such as the Christmas angels in Luke 2: 13-14. Another favorite account is in Isaiah 6:1-4. "The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called..." This endless music of praise, this angelic sanctus; how can we refuse the invitation to be part of such a wondrous chorus?
(Pamela Trent)

March 11 Psalm 22:22-30

In Psalm 22, the praise of God comes not from the mouth of a person amply blessed with everything. It comes from one who, in his pain, asks if he has been abandoned by God. His haunting words in this psalm are repeated by Christ in his final desolate moments on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Yet by the end of Psalm 22, in the verses 22-30 that we read today, the sufferer has begun to glorify God, "You who fear the Lord, praise him." We learn in vs. 25 that the writer has been restored and returned to community. Yet I believe this poem is more than just a grateful way of saying: "Whew, thank God, I'm better."

His words do not reflect a "smiley" God who promises to grant our every wish, cure our illness, ease our pain. This is a God, instead, who promises to abide with us in the midst of our unease, in the midst of our pain or in moments of loss. "...He did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him."

Yes, we recognize that this is also a God of tremendous power. "To him, indeed, shall all who sleep/in the earth bow down;..." Yet this powerful God is also the one who will always be present to listen to our fears in the dead of night, when we are alone, when we seek the loving comfort of his presence.
(Elizabeth Obenshain)

March 12 Romans 4:13-25

Christ's teaching is simple and straightforward, yet full of nuance and irony. This simplicity shrouded in implication puts us at a competitive disadvantage with religions like Judaism and Islam. In these religions things are simple:

- God spoke to prophets, telling people the rules
- The prophets wrote it down
- You're damned if you break the rules.

Paul says Christ introduced God's new approach. God's ultimate concern is not so much specific acts as attitude. Faith alone can reconcile us with God. Or viewed from another angle, Paul might say that nothing we can do pleases God without faith and love. He also elaborately observes that being a

but have eternal life."

This is surely one of the most fundamental statements in Christianity, and worthy of a great deal of contemplation. However, I notice something rather unsettling about the two verses that follow:

"For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (17) He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the Son of God" (18)

This is the sort of statement that encourages us to be self-righteous and judgmental, and to regard Christianity, especially the particular brand of Christianity we adhere to, as the only source of light in the world.

Years ago, working at Kanuga Conference Center one summer, I had a conversation with a student, a summer intern from Sri Lanka, named San Giva. He expressed sadness about many conversations he was having with Christians, mostly Episcopalians visiting at the Conference Center, in which they conveyed their belief that Christianity was the only true religion. He was surprised by the level of intolerance expressed for other religions, and wondered how the churches could teach their people to be so haughty and insensitive.

His words have stayed with me, and I think of him often, especially as our nation continues to act with so much intolerance on the world stage. I wonder what has happened to him, and wonder what he has been thinking about the Americans. He probably continues to be sad about the intolerance in the world.

Perhaps we all should rent the movie, "Ghandi," and be reminded again of the powerful wisdom and truth that have blossomed in other religions and faiths, and not exclusively in our own. (Ellen Brown)

SUNDAY March 29 Collect for Lent V



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 the world, our hearts may surely 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 forever, Amen.

"Unruly wills", "unruly affections", "swift and varied changes of the world" -- what an eerily apt description of my life! Unfocused, rushing, wanting all the wrong things, dragged in too many directions, nothing ever quite finished, disorder everywhere, afraid for the present, apprehensive about the future.

But it was to this very unruly life that God came in the Incarnation. It is in this very unruly and scary life that he calls me to repent and be renewed and promises that my heart can be fixed where true joys are to be found. .

"Love what you command" "Desire what you promise" -- Wow! What a clear prescription to write on my heart and take with me as I start each day. Thanks be to God!
(Anonymous)

seems strange that the people in the Psalm abhorred all manner of food and were afflicted for their sins. In our family, we customarily abstain from meat during Lent, and this makes us mindful of the hunger of people and the suffering of animals. At the end of the tunnel, we are glad for the feasting. But the Lord in the Psalm healed not with food but with his word. Perhaps by dwelling so much on the flesh, we are missing the real sacrifice, and the real thanksgiving. But delivered from our distress or not, I am thankful for you other travelers. (Kim Homer)

March 26 Ephesians 2:1-10

It seems only fitting that in an age of anxiety we discuss the “Ruler of the Air”—a windy spirit that blows through the changes and chances of this life for the sole purpose of stealing our breath away—a spirit that induces sleepless nights, troubled dreams, wearisome worries and anxiety induced panic—a spirit that is present in the very air we breathe. Of course our modern minds find it difficult to imagine a force that somehow “possesses us” because we are convinced of our own Self-possession; we think there are no spiritual “principalities or powers” that hold us captive. However, our language betrays us. Despite our resistance to the idea of a force that “possesses us,” it is rather common to hear of a person being “gripped by depression” and “attacked by panic.” Someone needs only to have experienced a panic-*attack*, a *bout* of depression, or an illness to realize that we do not possess these things, rather, they possess us. Possession is the “course of the world”—a world possessed by the power of meanness and self-love—a world that should make us extremely anxious.

Thankfully, the Christian way is not the “course of the world”. Rather, we are pilgrims on a journey towards God. The God who created both the heavens and the earth, the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God who split the Red Sea and set the pathways upon the deep is the same God who has set the path before each one of us. We worship the very God “who made us.” This God “prepared beforehand our way of life” so that even our faltering, clumsy steps are set to the steady cadence of a restless heart longing for God. Above the steady commotion caused by the spirits of this world God is calling us by name to God’s self. Amen. (Ben Shelton)

March 27 Hymn 620 *Jerusalem, my happy home*

Destination. We all have one, whether we think about our day to day lives or eternally, we are moving toward our destination. This glorious hymn is given the heading “The Church Triumphant” and can be found among hymns commonly used at funerals and on All Saints’ Day. It is about our ultimate destination, the most happy place where we will not only see God face to face but also be reunited with all the saints that have made that final journey before us. The writer envisions it as the city of Jerusalem, with King David, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the communion of saints residing within her walls. These days, such a peaceful place can seem a distant dream, but I believe God is calling us to work for such peace now, in our time, on this earth. May our harmony of peace ring in every street.

(Scott Russell)

March 28 John 3:14-21

This passage from John includes the familiar verse (16), “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish

descendant of Abraham, by itself, is no big deal to God anymore, either.

What does it take to be favored by God? Paul points out that Abraham was a favorite of God because he had faith that God could do the impossible things He promised, not because Abraham followed detailed laws. The Jewish Romans who read this would have known that Abraham lived long before the elaborate rules in Leviticus were established. And David? God’s favorite king was an extravagant sinner...fornicator, murderer...but nevertheless, a favorite. Paul quotes David’s psalm 32, “Contemplation”, for some insight: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” Here was a man who possessed deep faith and repented mightily. God loved him mightily in return.

Is Paul saying we can sin indiscriminately as long as we have faith and fear God? Certainly not! Paul was a task-master on subjects like being a law-abiding citizen, sobriety, working for a living and sexual morality, reflecting Jesus’ own teachings. But in Jesus’ and Paul’s view, following the rules is inspired by faith and love of God, not a prerequisite for God’s favor and goodness towards us.

(Edward Champion, Jr)

March 13 Hymn 707 *Take my life, and let it be consecrated*

The hymn for this week is a favorite, #707! The opening verse is “Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord to thee;” So, how can God be calling me a wife, mother, sister, nurse, teacher, LEV, to have a life that is consecrated (or to include both genders, how as a husband, father, brother, or maybe even more broadly just as a so-called Christian person) can God want me to have a consecrated life? Webster’s Dictionary states that consecrated means “To render sacred, to make holy!” My life?? It can also mean, “To dedicate or devote to some particular purpose.” Hmmmm, well maybe I could try to dedicate my life to . . . what? God? Christ? the purpose of what? OK, I need to think about this a little more, well, a lot more!

“Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love.” Well, as a mother and a nurse, I have been able to comfort a few people. Hopefully, they felt the comfort of God’s love, too. Could God be calling us to comfort others? Listen more closely? Be there for others – the homeless or those sick, alone or in need? Could my hands move graciously to write a bigger check? (Gulp!!!)

“Take my heart it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.” Does this mean that God should sit on or in our hearts? There are many days when I wish he were there; things might go a bit smoother. Maybe I would be more cheerful or forgiving if God were always in my heart. Would you be? Is God calling us to be more loving and thoughtful?

Next verse, “take my voice and let me sing.” Well, I’ve heard our choir’s lovely voices that Pam directs, so I know I won’t be singing in Christ Church’s choir (maybe in my shower)! So, moving along, the next phrase is, “Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose;” Think of where we might be in our church, if we let God use our intellect/power and talents for God. Christ Church has so many educated and talented people – young and old. Could God be calling us to use our talents and intellect to the fullest? I’ll bet he doesn’t want us to hide our lights under a bushel basket! So maybe he wants us to shine – to contribute our time, talents, intellect (and probably some of our money!) to make our church, town, and universe a better place! If this would happen, we all could be “ever, only, all for *him*.”

If this is to what God is calling us, may he give us the grace and courage so to do! (Susan Donckers)



March 14 Mark 8:31-38

Jesus never promised following him would be easy or popular. After he rebukes Peter, Jesus says to all those within earshot, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." These days we often euphemize the idea of "taking up your cross," thinking of it as a burden to bear or a hardship in life. The words Jesus spoke to the listening crowd that day were much more akin to saying, "If any want to become my followers, you'd better be prepared to give up everything and follow me to the death." This is Jesus at his most realistic. Walking the journey with Jesus, doing what he would do, saying what he would say, speaking up when it isn't popular, all of these can mean hardship for us, and, in some cases, imprisonment or death. God grant us grace to have the courage to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, no matter what, no matter where. (Scott Russell)

SUNDAY March 15 Collect for Lent II

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 which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which 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.

With this prayer I am talking to God as the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who upholds us and gives us strength. As water supports a swimmer, so God supports me in all that I try to do well.

I try to be transparent to God's will. Just as when I play Beethoven, it is Beethoven's music that shines through me, not my own thought - so it is God who acts through me, not my personal motives. "Make me an instrument of thy peace": may I be a clear channel for God to pour through.

This thought keeps me safe from pride and vainglory. Tripping over my own ego is the surest way to ruin a performance, or a good intention. The opposite is the attitude that when things go well: "I did it, I'm so clever, I deserve a bonus!" but when things go badly, "It's not my fault, it was just bad luck, I deserve a bonus for trying." On the contrary, what goes well is of God, and what goes badly may well be due to our own incapacity, or sin.

"For though the last light o'er the black west went,/ Lo, morning at the brown brink eastward springs;/ Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/ World broods, with warm breast, and with ah! bright wings." (Gerard Manley Hopkins) (Margaret Hasselman)

March 16 Exodus 20:1-17

When I read the Ten Commandments, I am immediately struck by the frequency with which they are broken. Reading these laws, in other words, brings into sharp relief the contrast between what we (or some of us) say we are—a nation rooted in Judeo-Christian principles—and what we see and hear and experience in our lives on a daily basis. That's not to say that individually we go out and lie or steal or murder every day. The great majority of us do none of those things. But on a larger, cultural level it's not so easy to exempt ourselves from such sins. Of course I am thinking about the war, social injustice, greed, poverty, and violence that characterize our society. From this perspective, it seems like we couldn't do

The text clearly states that God sent poisonous, sometimes translated as "fiery," serpents to be among the people, biting them, and resulting in people dying. Quickly they realized their complaining against God and Moses had resulted in this menace to the community, and they appealed for help. Oddly, God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole or staff, so that the people could look upon it and be healed of their snake bites. Now you know from whence the symbol used for the practice of medicine comes!

The Israelites' repentance, the literally turning of their hearts and minds from complaining, looms large in this passage. To what is God calling us/me in light of this lesson? To remember the parts of life where I have complained, failing to depend on God, and to call me back – repent – into that relationship with the Almighty that I have so arrogantly forsook in my complaining. (Scott West)

March 24 Hymn 473 Lift high the cross

Any Episcopalian could likely hum the rousing melody of this familiar hymn. The refrain is so uplifting that even a staid non-singer might glance at the choir as they pass and decide to give it a go. The content is clear and simple: a classic song of praise. But when seen through the lens of questions we are asking ourselves at this time, there is more to take with us than a feel-good tune.

The cross is at once a symbol of death and of triumph over death. We give it prominence in sacred spaces to remind us of the dualities we struggle with: good and evil, light and darkness, divinity and humanity. As the second verse of the hymn recalls, each baptized child is marked on the brow with this important seal, in order to call to the front the essence of Christ's message. Many, like my Ida last year on Pentecost, yell out at that moment to show us! Life on this earth will include struggle and suffering, sin and doubt, but ultimately to have faith in the resurrected Lord is to be free. The hymn feels good to sing because it proclaims the victory of God's love. And it asks us to proclaim it as well.

How do we manifest this message of hope in our community? Episcopalians tend to shudder a little at the word "evangelism". It has come to mean something entirely new in our lifetimes. But there are many ways to spread good news. Jesus set the example. By living in love, reaching out to the marginalized, and daring to wrestle with history, authority and scripture, Jesus showed us that we must be active in faith. God is calling us to go where there is hurt, and use our gifts to bring comfort. God is calling us to be bold and daring in finding new ways to work for peace and justice. God is calling us to widen our focus from self into community with others. God is calling us to pray quietly and gracefully, and to serve tirelessly and loudly.

The triumph of Jesus over death is sure, but does not give permission for polite apathy. Faith is not passive. Your light is not meant to be under a bushel. Take the risk of serving in a new way. Get involved in a ministry that matters to you. Make friends with someone you normally wouldn't. Give more money than you normally would. Sing in church. Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim. (Kat Mills Polys)

March 25 Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

When I read about the Lord redeeming the people from the hand of the foe, gathered from the east, west, north, and south, first I think about the Israelites leaving Egypt, but then I think about our parish, or maybe it's the larger collection of God's children, entering the dark tunnel that is Lent. It

on a team. It might be hard to do, depending on the situation. There might be pressure from your friends or team to treat someone differently than you might think is right. Maybe the group you are with won't accept you if you stand up for someone outside the group. It might change your own status for better or worse, but you have to try. You have to get involved, you can't just let stuff happen and not try to say something to make it better. We have to be the change to make things better. (High School Class)

SUNDAY March 22 Collect for Lent IV



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.

At first glance there seems an irony of sorts in a collect for a penitential season that, instead of invoking sacrifice and our need for forgiveness, speaks instead of our being so thoroughly nourished by “the true bread which gives life to the world” that “He may evermore dwell in us and we in Him.”

At our Diocesan Council this winter, I was struck by a point made by one of the speakers who is a scholar of the Muslim religion and has many Muslim friends but is himself a thoroughly committed Christian and an Episcopal priest. The speaker remarked that he is often asked by his Muslim friends why he remains so thoroughly committed to Christianity while all the while appreciating so many teachings and tenets of Islam. This priest’s answer is – emphatically and unequivocally – that Christianity is the only religion built around the fact that God Himself has thoroughly, personally and intentionally experienced the pain and suffering of the human condition, “even unto death.” The fact that God became one of us and sacrificed himself for our sins trumps the beliefs of all other world religions, in this scholar’s opinion, and I also felt nourished and uplifted by his answer to his Muslim friends.

This gesture – taking on the mantle of complete humanity on behalf of all humanity – is God’s supreme sacrifice that we contemplate during Lent. Yet this gesture is also the “true bread which gives life to the world” and sustains us through the darkness of Good Friday and the inevitable tribulations of our life on earth. To the degree that we accept this sustenance and allow Him to live in us and through us, we in turn will continue to dwell in Him. – *Amen.* (Lisa Hammett)

March 23 Numbers 21:4-9

This portion of the epoch of the Exodus places the reader in the wilderness with the Israelites, long after they had left the land of Egypt. The Israelites have bemoaned their condition, lamented for water, rebelled against Moses’ leadership, and battled the tribes which they encountered. In this lesson, the Israelites seemed to understand finally that not all of their travails were due to Moses’ leading; God was, in fact, the one leading them. Thus they were impatient, or as the Hebrew can be translated, “their souls were getting short” as in short-tempered or short of breath. The Israelites believed that life in Egypt was better than what they were experiencing at that moment.

more to break our covenant with God if we tried. And that’s depressing. But then I remember that, in effect, this is what the Bible is about: people breaking their covenant with God, being punished, learning a lesson, trying to do better, and, of course, giving thanks for their Savior, Jesus. Evolutionarily speaking, this isn’t really the silver lining that I was looking for. But it does speak to complicated nature of the Ten Commandments, namely to the fact that they are both eminently reasonable requests and lofty ideals— laws that connect us to the Divine while simultaneously highlighting the imperfection of our humanity. (Kelly Pender)

March 17 Hymn 140 Wilt thou forgive

John Donne, the author of the words to Hymn 140, exhibits such strength of faith in his words. It is his passionate emotions that move me in this hymn. His sorrow is heavy, and his doubt seems palpable in the first two verses. How can God forgive us when we repent and return to Him, just to repeat our mistakes? When we bring others along in our sins? We fear that we will not be forgiven; we wonder how we can be worthy.

The repeated final line of the first two verses is said to be a play on Donne’s name. “When thou hast done/Donne, though has not done/Donne, for I have more.” As we read this, can we substitute “Donne” for “me”? “When you have me, you have not me, for I have more.” More what? Could it mean more sin, implying that God’s grace and mercy may suffice, until I sin again? Perhaps it is a call to service: God has me, but I’m holding something back. I have more.

The final verse mirrors our fear of God until the final crescendo of Donne’s great faith in God’s grace, through our savior, Jesus Christ. May we have that same faith to ask for redemption, to go out in the world knowing that we will sin again, but offering to give more. May we have that same faith in God’s love for us, that we should have no fear. (Katie Dredger)

March 18 Psalm 19

This psalm is an example of our daily life with the Lord and a reminder of our connection to Him. David is meditating on the thought of God’s amazing creation, taking solace in the laws God has created, and it leads him to pray. Look around you today. The heavens and the sun that David saw are sure to look just as glorious to you (although more rarely in the winter, when it’s hard to see past those gloomy gray clouds), as described in this psalm. Does your mind wander at such an image...when you’re looking out of an airplane at twenty-five thousand feet on a clear beautiful morning or when you’re out for a walk and the sunset is a perfect shade of yellow, orange and red? These heavenly images certainly “declare the glory of God” and upon seeing them, shift our thoughts towards thinking about God. By seeing these images perhaps you are reminded of God’s awesome power and the laws. His laws, laid out through scripture are to show us the way. Stumble along the path and God will forgive us, or He will help us when we really just want to stray or run from the path altogether. We can pray and ask for forgiveness, with the faith that He will take care of us. We are acknowledging Him by appreciating his creation, following the laws, and living a life counseled by him.

Take part in the daily journey.

(Chris Shemes)

March 19 I Corinthians 1:18-25

The most wonderful things that have happened in my life have not necessarily been choices I have made. Not that it is for a lack of trying. Most of the time, I spend days/weeks/months trying to sort through something, come to what I think is the right decision, and then for one reason or another, the total opposite happens. Because of these non-choices I have not made, my life is overwhelming blessed. The 'one reason or another' is of course God, working in my life when I am stubbornly trying to do it on my own because I think I am wise enough, intelligent enough to make the correct decision (which likely falls under the category of "foolishness" in God's eyes). And yet, the best things, the major life-changing things (e.g., which academic path should I choose, what career do I want to pursue, who is my life partner?) always seem to follow a direction totally opposite from the one I initially think is correct. While this is often painful and confusing at the beginning, I can honestly say that my life is working out beautifully. But this beauty only comes once I trust in God and His plan, rather than my plan. (Hopefully, by approaching these questions hand-in-hand with God, at least one will be answered at some point in life . . . but if not, that will be beautiful too, I am sure).

In hindsight, some of the hardest times in life have actually been some of the best times, as these were often periods when everything in my life fell apart except my relationship with God. I have reached the level of hopelessness (as we all have at some point) when I was terrified and felt I had nowhere to turn, and of course the only solace and true peace came from God. I could feel Him holding me up, when I could not do it myself. During other, calmer times when I am free to become distracted by details of daily life, I actually find myself missing the pure peace I have had with God during these difficult periods. This of course is not how it should be; true intimacy with God must be on a daily basis, not just during times of trouble. This feeling of distance is primarily due to me focusing on other parts of my life, most of which could be attributed to gaining more 'knowledge', as I am currently a grad student. Regardless of your profession, however, it is quite common that our pursuit of work/knowledge demands a majority of our time and largely defines who we are. I believe that God is calling us to reverse this pattern. Everything should fall away in comparison to our relationship with God, not by force via difficult times or events, but by choice. I think we are being called to allow God to live through us while we grow; gaining knowledge about ourselves and this amazing world, but always centering Him in our growth and gaining true wisdom.

(Anonymous)

March 20 Hymn 318 *Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face*

This hymn seems to address the universal need for refuge, forgiveness, and peace. As someone who pushes herself really hard to achieve recognition and be good at my craft (essentially writing & research) I recognize my need for a place that feels like home, where I can be accepted and embraced by friends and family, and where it is not necessary for me to try so hard to prove myself.

So, I think this hymn reminds me of that place, that "here" . . . where weariness fades away, worries disappear, and a sense of calm, contentment, creativity, and laughter prevail. (It reminds me of the playful, almost boisterous atmosphere of Wednesday night choir rehearsals, too)

Sometimes I wonder if I should be more conscious and concerned about feeling guilty and sinful, but I'd rather expend my energy trying to understand and forgive those who have been hurtful to me.

The words to this hymn can be useful as a reminder that we are called to help others find and experience refuge, forgiveness and peace. We are part of the Body of Christ . . . when we provide a listening ear, encouragement, or hospitality (wine and bread) to strangers and friends.

I have made friends with two little girls in my neighborhood who come out each morning at 7:50 to wait for the school bus. My dog, Roscoe, sits patiently, allowing the girls to take turns reaching into my pocket and pulling out a bone for him. Last September Sarah and Maggie were nervous and cautious about getting too close, but now they often tell me that Roscoe is the "best dog in the world."

With the help of my gentle, lovable canine friend, I have had a chance to learn something about the circumstances both little girls face – that Sarah's mother has a "leg that is infected," making it impossible for her to move around some days, and that Maggie's eyes tear-up some mornings when her Dad (apparently unemployed) loses his temper.

Here, in this humble, blue-collar neighborhood, I can "see Thee face to face." (Ellen Brown)

2nd Meditation on Hymn 318 *Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face*

The "prince of Scottish hymn writers," as one source dubs Horatius Bonar, wrote poetry and books in addition to hundreds of hymns, seven of which are included in our hymnal. He penned this particular hymn when he was a mature man of forty-seven.

A minister and Doctor of Divinity, Bonar wrote in Not Faith, But Christ, "The believed gospel saves, but it is the believed promise [of eternal life] that assures us of . . . salvation." To me this hymn for Holy Eucharist relates the journey to the altar rail by a thoughtful believer and the resulting confirmation of the promise of eternal life.

On the way to receive the Holy Eucharist, the believer feels that s/he encounters God face to face and "would," or wants to, touch and handle the body and blood of Christ represented by the bread and wine. In this physical encounter, the person, weary in body and soul, can actually lean upon Christ. At the altar rail the believer in reality receives the bread and wine and desires to lay aside the burdens he carries, perhaps not the least of which is his acknowledgement of his own sin and guilt.

Yet the final solace is the believed promise of eternal life and salvation. It is enough to be able to lean on the arm of the Lord and draw strength from His might.

The human being knows his own sin and guilt but knows too that Christ is the source of the righteousness and cleansing Blood that he needs. Secure in the robe of promised salvation he finds refuge and peace.

During Lent perhaps we can look at the familiar act of receiving Communion as, in fact, a journey of faith wherein we let go of our failings and rest in the peace of God. (Anonymous)

March 21 John 2:13-22

What are we called to do? We learn that we should always politely listen to what our teachers and authority figures say and do as we are told. But Jesus turns that around. He gets angry at the people selling things in the temple for their own benefit, even though that is how it has always been. He doesn't stand by passively because this is something really important. It's OK to get angry once in awhile. Stand up for what is right! Sometimes you need to stand up to a person who can impact a grade or your position