



**Christ Episcopal Church
Bowling Green, Kentucky**

2025 Lenten Devotionals

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

“Some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous”? Yikes, Luke, we could have done without that detail, especially as we embark on this Season of Lent in which the Church invites us to specific practices in the pursuit of righteousness. These Lenten practices can go one of two ways, I suppose. We can engage in self-examination and repentance; prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and reading and meditating on God's holy Word so that the world sees us as holy. We can exalt ourselves and our righteousness by self-involved social media posts or scornful looks at those who are still eating chocolate. Or we can engage in those same practices with the only goal in mind being a closer relationship with God in Christ. Lent is a season that invites us to lay down our pride and to reconnect with God in a deep and profound way. Maybe the list of practices in the Ash Wednesday liturgy feels daunting. Maybe you don't know where to start. Allow me to suggest the prayer of the tax collector. Slightly adapted, it is known as the Jesus Prayer, and it goes like this.

Breathe in – “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God.”

Breathe out – “Have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Try it five times. Then maybe ten. Eventually, it'll be as natural as your breath, and it makes for a great way to observe a holy Lent.

Bonus - John 1:6-8**Paula Maier**

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

John was a man sent by God to teach and do good works. When asked he said he was not the messiah, not a prophet, just a man with a voice. John's words spoke of Jesus and his disciples traveling together spreading the words of God; whether at the Jewish wedding turning water into wine for all of the guests or feeding the large crowd who had started to follow Jesus with loaves of bread and a few fish. Jesus knew that teaching was difficult, and not all would believe in his words, but he did say he was the light of the world and if we followed him and his teachings, we would have the light of life.

During this Lenten season I want to slow down and look around me to find God in others. I want to take time to pray with those I see. I want to turn to Jesus when I am fearful and look for the light in the world.

John 1:29-34

Nancy Minix

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

Renew and Reflect

John baptizes Jesus preparing Him for His wilderness journey and spiritual reflection. Dear Jesus, please renew my spirit and fill me with Your love and divine grace. Help me grow closer to You and live a life reflecting Your goodness. Amen.

John 1:35-42

Kevin Brooks

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

“What are you looking for?” Now there is a lenten question for you! Most of us can provide a quick list if asked why we attend Christ Church. For me, just entering the Church provides a familiar comfort that I treasure. But the question “What are you looking for?” is a bit more heavy duty. It is an invitation into introspection. Lent is thus a time not only for penitence, but also for reflection. We reflect inwardly on the message of Jesus. And we reflect, or we should, upon how we act on that message. This Lent let us reflect on how we act on the message of Jesus for it is in action that we are transformed. We rightfully cherish our Church, our Parish, our regular attendance at worship services. As Richard Rohr notes, these are the trappings of belonging to Church, but the trappings of belonging, alone, do not lead to the transformation which Jesus offers. In fact, the trappings, paradoxically, can become as Rohr notes, an “inoculation” against transformation. And so during

this season of Lent, let's reflect on Jesus' message of love and mercy and how we might live out that message in our daily lives.

John 1:43-51

Justin Chaffin

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you,^[a] you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

There is such a simple and profound message in today's reading. When Jesus Calls Phillip, he utters two simple words: "Follow me." There is no sales pitch. There is no arm twisting. There is no attempt to persuade. There was simply a directive. I often find beauty in simplicity. I find it here not only in Jesus' charge to Phillip but in how Phillip responded. He followed.

As we go through this Lenten season, it is my hope that we are reminded of the example of how Jesus desired that we navigate this World. And, just as importantly, I hope that we follow Jesus' path in the same way that Phillip did: without hesitation or precondition. Jesus has called us to feed the poor, clothe the naked, love our enemies, and above all to love each other the way that he loves us. Let's simply follow.

Mark 2:18-22 – The First Sunday in Lent

Steve Pankey

¹⁸Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁹Jesus said to them, "The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

²¹"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²²Similarly, no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

It's the First Sunday in Lent, and if you are like me, you've already failed at your Lenten fast. I was never really good at fasting. From anything, really. So, one year, about a decade ago, I gave up Lent for Lent. It was freeing. Stepping away from the obligation of Lent, I was set free to explore what it really meant for me. Lent is supposed to be a season in which we find a deeper connection with

God. The things we give up are supposed to make room for God's presence in our lives, and I never quite understood how refraining from chocolate made room for God, so I just quit. I refused to participate. Which opened up to me all kinds of new possibilities. What if, instead of giving up something that I probably could live without anyway, I took something on? What if I made intentional time with God each day? What if, I added five minutes of prayer, ten minutes of Bible study, or fifteen minutes of connecting with my fellow humans to my daily routine? It didn't take long to realize that this is where God actually shows up for me. Not in fasting, but making room of Jesus to be alive and at work in my life and in my relationships. If fasting works for you, that's awesome! But, if not, maybe give up Lent this year and instead, pick up some intentional time with God.

John 2:1-12

Ellie and Drews Rash and Mickey Sieber

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. 9 When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they remained there a few days.

How did Jesus do that? He didn't have any money to go buy it. Jesus took all of that water and he turned it into wine. How did he do that if he just had water? He flavored it? Jesus is God's son. God helps us. Jesus did it by magic. He is magical because he was born on Christmas. He is God's son. Jesus got a lot of things from his dad like the ability to turn water into wine, because he was magical, like God.

John 2:13-22

Ellie and Drews Rash and Mickey Sieber

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the

temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

We go to church to worship God and Jesus. In our church we give our money to other people and to the church to help other people. We learn about God and Jesus in church. He didn't like it that the people were selling stuff. When we give back to people in the community we are showing sharing, worship, love, and compassion for people in our community, but the people were keeping the money for themselves instead of giving it away to those in need, it's not being respectful of the church. Sometimes my sister kicks stuff. Jesus was really mad that people were selling things in the temple which was supposed to be a sacred place. We shouldn't have animals in church 'cause they cause chaos. Jesus was very angry and disappointed. The people got scared. How is he going to build the temple in three days? Well, because he's Jesus, but it's so hard to use magic if you don't know how to use it. He could have used his magic to rebuild the temple, but he didn't.

John 2:23-3:15

John Parker

²³ When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to testify about anyone, for he himself knew what was in everyone.

³ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

I was trained in the "scientific method," which relies on empirical evidence to establish the basis for our knowledge. We sometimes say that "seeing is believing." Thus, it's understandable that Nicodemus and other witnesses to Jesus's "signs" should believe that he was special. But Jesus knew that sustainable faith required more than tangible evidence.

EFM members often report on “where they saw God” in the past week. It may be in something physical and ephemeral, such as a spectacular sunrise or sunset. But more often it is in the actions of humans, living out their faith.

I think that the faith that Jesus emphasized goes beyond the observable, though we might see it manifested in people’s lives. It is an unwavering, sustained trust in God, involving both belief and action.

The last verse of a hymn familiar from childhood says:

Faith of our fathers, we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife,
And preach thee, too, as love knows how
By kindly words and virtuous life.
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!

John 3:16-21

Ellie and Drews Rash and Mickey Sieber

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. **20** For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. **21** But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

I know *that*. Sacrificing. He sacrificed his son for others. He made it for everyone. He died so we could go to Heaven. We couldn’t do that before Jesus died. Was this easy for God to do this to Jesus? No. Do you think it was easy for Jesus to know this was what was going to happen at the end of His life? No. Is it easy for you to give away something you love very much? No, it’s really hard. Is this really going to happen in real life? Jesus is the Light, and God sent Jesus to us. How? Magic. What is something that is darkness? Darkness is when you don’t believe in someone, like Martin Luther King, Jr. Somebody didn’t believe in him and shot him. Martin Luther King, Jr. was another light and the people that shot him loved the darkness. Sometimes our sadness and anger is part of the darkness. We should all turn towards the light instead of the darkness. We are all the light. When I am in the darkness I feel scared, but Mommy and Dad help me out of the darkness. When we come to the light, we are making good choices and doing good stuff. Sometimes you have to think of good choices.

John 3:22-36

Shelley Carter

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there, and people kept coming and were being baptized. ²⁴ (John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.)

²⁵ Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

³¹ The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. ³³ Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. ³⁴ He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's wrath.

John's disciples, full of devotion toward their teacher, are expressing concern that more people are now following Jesus than John. Despite what John prophesied to them before, about preparing the way for Jesus, they still believe John's baptisms must be greater. He was the one who baptized Jesus; doesn't that make John's baptism superior? I imagine some of those hurt feelings were embedded in their love of their teacher, but some were likely the result of feeling their own sting of the call to, as John put it, "become less". This feels counter-cultural, both now and then.

Choosing to become "less" or making something less important is not an easy thing to do. But when you think about it, this is a natural process and it is healthy, perhaps even transformative. Lent is a time of making things less to make way for the greater. If you participate in lenten fasting (whatever that fasting looks like) you are likely choosing to fast from something that in your mind you need to reduce in order to make space for something greater. I am reminded that the years I have chosen wisely and been most devoted to my fast have often turned into long-term (transformational) changes for me. Jesus showed us death makes way for new life.

John 4:1-26

Steve Pankey

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" ² (although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized), ³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living

water?¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Photini. That’s the name the Church has given the Samaritan Woman at the Well. It seems to be totally made up, and yet, it is a name we should get to know. Most of the Biblical Saints are dudes, all of them are flawed, and it would behoove us to learn the story of people like Photini in the same way we learn the name Matthias. Photini is at the well during the heat of the day. She’s there because it’s the only time she can get water in peace. And then Jesus shows up with his, “hey, give me a drink of water.”

The well was the center of social life and as such, that’s where everyone talked about what was going on in the community. It’s where they all whispered about Photini and the terrible luck she had with husbands and how the guy she was with now wasn’t her husband, but at least she was being taken care of. She was an outcast – as a Samaritan, as a woman, and as a person with a hard to explain past. And it is to her that Jesus comes in search of and offering water. The water that Jesus offers is the living water. If she drinks of it she will never be thirsty again. Photini, hungry and thirsty for an escape from the hardship of life would love some of that water. And Jesus, to his credit, is eager to give it.

“Sir, give me this water!”

Mark 3:31-4:9 – The Second Sunday in Lent

Steve Pankey

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him.³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.”³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

4 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ²He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³“Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell on a path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” ⁹And he said, “If you have ears to hear, then hear!”

One of my favorite 50¢ words is “profligate.” It means “recklessly extravagant or wasteful use of resources,” and it perfectly describes Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. This person is wildly wasteful with a most precious resource. Throwing seeds extravagantly on rocky soil, foot paths, and thorny ground makes no sense. No self-respecting farmer would sow seeds that recklessly. Not even a hired hand would be so callous with the landowner’s supplies. Jesus is clearly not instructing us in good farming practices.

Rather, Jesus is trying to share with anyone who will listen of the profligate nature of God’s love. It was recklessly extravagant for God’s love to overflow and create humanity. It was recklessly extravagant to invite Abraham and Sarah into a special, covenantal relationship in the hope of restoring all of humanity through their children. It was recklessly extravagant for God to be born as a human baby, to live and teach the way of love, and to die on the cross, and rise again for our redemption. It was recklessly extravagant to use Peter, Paul, Anna, and Junia to bring the Good News of Jesus to the Gentiles. And it is recklessly extravagant of God to love you, and me, and the whole world despite our daily mistakes and poor decisions. When the stress of this world starts to feel like too much, when I feel particularly vulnerable and broken, I like to remember by favorite 50¢ word and say, “God’s love is profligate.”

John 4:27-42

Kellie Mysinger

27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, [a] can he?” 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” 32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” 34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest?’ But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving [b] wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Evangelism. What do we think about when we hear this word? There are several definitions of this word listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, including "the action or work of spreading the Christian gospel by public preaching or by giving personal testimony about the experience of conversion," "a message of spiritual good news," and "zealous advocacy for a particular cause." Quite often, when faced with the challenge to engage in evangelism as a Christian, instead of embracing our role in spreading the Good News of Jesus, we can be tempted to pass on the opportunity - uncomfortable with being seen as too pushy or sure that we are unqualified to be an evangelist or afraid that if we share our precious, personal experiences we will be mocked or rebuffed.

The story we hear today of this woman gives us a very encouraging example to ponder when we struggle with evangelism. The woman referenced in this reading is the Samaritan woman at the well. She is the least likely person to be chosen as an evangelist. She is a woman, who we know from the disciples' reaction shouldn't even be speaking with Jesus. She is a Samaritan, an identity that is the embodiment of "other" to those traveling with Jesus. Her personal history also puts her in a position of outsider in her own community. But in this story, this woman is absolutely an Evangelist - and a pretty successful one at that. After speaking with Jesus, the woman goes back to her community to share the Good News that she hears, and as a result "Samaritans from that city believed in him because of (her) testimony."

If the woman weighed whether or not she should tell others about Jesus, if she chose to keep quiet rather than to share the Good News, what would have been lost? Who would have missed a chance to hear about Jesus? If this woman decided to just go home and keep her experience to herself, rather than to take up her role as an evangelist, it would have been a very different story. What opportunities do we have to be an evangelist? What is stopping us from sharing the Good News? Can we be encouraged by this woman's story and be more ready to do our own evangelism?

John 4:43-54

David Kem

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to

recover, and they said to him, “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

The obvious place where my mind goes after reading this, is that those that welcomed Jesus were rewarded. And while that may be true, I think there’s a deeper meaning here. One group of people (“in the prophet’s own country”) knew Jesus too well; they couldn’t get past their own experiences to accept Jesus’s message. Another group (the Galileans) didn’t know Jesus well enough; they wouldn’t accept his message without a miracle being performed. Both groups had expectations for who Jesus might be and those expectations got in the way of the Gospel. It was the royal official, however, who saw Jesus clearly for who he was and trusted him prior to any outward sign. May we have the faith of the royal official, to set aside our expectations of who God is, listen to what He is telling us, and trust in his plan for humankind.

John 5:1-18

Sue Edwards

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

²Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. ⁵One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. **⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷The ill man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” ⁹At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.**

Now that day was a Sabbath. ¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” ¹¹But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. ¹⁴Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” ¹⁸For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the festival and walks by a pool called Bethesda where many invalids would wait for help. It was a place of healing, but you had to be the first in the pool when the waters were stirred up in order to be healed. Jesus walks over and chooses one man whom he realizes has been there for thirty-eight years and asks him if he wants to be healed. I wonder if Jesus

stooped down and looked him in the eye. In my imagination, considering the man's answer, Jesus might have been behind him and the man might never looked into his face. The man offers what he believes are the reasons for his lack of healing; he had no one to help him. His focus is on what he lacks. Jesus just tells him "Stand up, take your mat and walk" and disappears into the crowd. If you had been waiting for thirty-eight years to be healed what would you have done? I wonder what about that voice made the man willing to try. Did hearing Jesus' words give him hope that changed his focus? Something happened to cause him to believe, because we are told that at once the man was made well and took up his mat and began to walk.

If you are like me, there have probably been times in your life when you stewed over a situation for a long time and found yourself entrenched in what you thought was the way out? "If only" are words we have all used. But maybe the way to a fuller life, is to listen for Jesus' voice and be willing to change our focus from what we lack to what Jesus tells us we can do.

John 5:19-29

Carol Dubose

¹⁹Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. ²²The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.

²⁵"Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, ²⁷and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and will come out: those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

The passage assigned for today is sometimes referred to as the Authority of Jesus. In response to accusations that he is breaking Jewish law by healing on the Sabbath and declaring himself equal to God, Jesus tells the crowd that God works through him and that he does what he sees God, the Father do. As we attempt to do what God would have us do, we rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance but we have an even more tangible source of direction. Jesus is a first-hand witness and follower of what God does and therefore we need only adhere to his teachings and example to do the will of God.

The New Testament is our instruction manual for how Jesus teaches us to carry out the work of the Kingdom of God. Through parables, sermons and his ministry, Jesus reveals the nature and love of God and shows us the way to live. It is up to us to discern our path as we strive to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Dear God, please open my eyes and ears and heart to know your will for me. Guide me in my days to serve you with purpose and gladness. Forgive me when I choose selfish and sinful ways. Thank you for the abundance you have provided for me and may I always use my blessings in service to others. In Christ's name I pray. Amen

John 5:30-47

Kevin Brooks

³⁰“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

³¹“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³²There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. ³³You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. ³⁴Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. ³⁷And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

³⁹“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹I do not accept glory from humans. ⁴²But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? ⁴⁵Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

At times it can be maddeningly difficult to unpack a Bible passage. This is one of those. Here, Jesus gives a long discourse addressing, among other things, his authority from God. He provides “proofs” that the works he has undertaken come from God. Jesus is speaking here to Jews, a people of the book who lived with these passages. They scoured the Bible to understand it and, more importantly to them, to know how to please their God. But Jesus is also speaking to us, particularly in verses 39 and 40 where he says “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life”. Sometimes reading scripture can get us into trouble. For some it may be proof-texting with closed minds, searching the Bible for passages supporting our own preconceived notions. For some of us our scripture reading may be the study of text on a never-ending pursuit to understand precisely what it means. This can be an appropriate intellectual pursuit. But while an intellectual pursuit may be worthwhile, do we sometimes, as Jesus seems to suggest, read the Bible the wrong way or for the wrong reason? Can reading the Bible in the wrong way be a substitute for reading the Bible in a way that brings us into a closer relationship with God? During Lent, as we set aside extra time to pray, study and read scripture, let's consider Bible reading as akin to prayer. Let's allow the words of the Bible to flow over us and into us as we seek a closer relationship with God.

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. ² Now the Jewish Festival of Booths was near. ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing, ⁴ for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ (For not even his brothers believed in him.) ⁶ Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. ⁸ Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come." ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but, as it were, in secret. ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, "Where is he?" ¹² And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, "He is a good man," others were saying, "No, he is deceiving the crowd." ¹³ Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

In this passage, Jesus is not sure whether to go to the Festival of the Booths or not. He changes his mind more than once. Jesus is concerned that the Jews are trying to kill him, but it's not yet his time. Jesus isn't afraid of dying but wants to do it in God's time not in man's time.

When Jesus is urged by his brothers to go to the Festival he replies in verse 7, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil." Jesus' words, thoughts, and ideas are so completely different from what seems to be important to and in the world. Jesus' way of being is foreign to the way of the world. The more I read of Jesus, the more I realize Jesus' teachings are the direct opposite of what the world teaches. Love your enemies rather than destroy those against you. Give to the poor, the widowed, the oppressed, and the homeless rather than take care only of you and yours. Come to God for your needs rather than satisfy your needs with wealth and power.

So often I have heard and even said "God wants me to give, but God doesn't want me to be without." Jesus came to earth to show us how to be in the world. Jesus is our guide. Jesus gave and gave and gave. Jesus gave his mind, his teachings, his heart, his love, his life. Does Jesus truly expect the same of me?

Mark 5:1-20 – The Third Sunday in Lent**Steve Pankey**

⁵ They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes. ² And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³ He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, ⁷ and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹ Then Jesus asked him,

“What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.”¹⁰ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region.¹¹ Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding,¹² and the unclean spirits begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.”¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

¹⁴The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened.¹⁵ They came to Jesus and saw the man possessed by demons sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion, and they became frightened.¹⁶ Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the swine reported it.¹⁷ Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him.¹⁹ But Jesus refused and said to him, “Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you.”²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

I wonder what I would do if I had been healed by Jesus in such a miraculous fashion. How long do you think he had been tormented by those spirits? The story makes it sound like months, maybe even years of torment. Shackled, self-mutilation, ostracism, humiliation, fear – the experience of the Gerasene Demoniac sounds grotesque. Suddenly, there appears Jesus. Of all the boats to dock on all the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, here at the tombs outside Gerasa lands Jesus and his disciples fresh off an hard night of them fighting and him stilling a storm. Suddenly, the tortured soul’s whole life changed as he was restored to wholeness by the one who came to set all of humanity free from its bondage to sin and death.

What would you do if you were healed by Jesus in such a miraculous fashion? Would you beg to follow him? That’s what this man did first. After years of living as an outcast, he certainly couldn’t imagine just strolling back into town and picking up where he left off. He knew the comments they would mutter. He could already hear the questions. Heck, Jesus had just killed a whole herd of swine to heal the man, certainly there was a cost to be paid. The man wanted to escape with Jesus, and I don’t blame him. Jesus had different plans for him. Jesus made him an apostle – one who is sent – to tell first his own people and then anyone in a ten-city region who would listen what Jesus had done for him. I don’t know if I’d of had that courage, but I suppose, after all he had been through, telling people about Jesus’ miracle of compassion couldn’t be that scary.

John 7:14-36

Cathie Huston

¹⁴About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.¹⁵ The Jews were astonished at it, saying, “How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?”¹⁶ Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me.¹⁷ Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.¹⁸ Those who speak on their own seek their own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing unjust in him.

¹⁹“Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” ²⁰The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?” ²¹Jesus answered them, “I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. ²²Because of this Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man’s whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

²⁵Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? ²⁶And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? ²⁷Yet we know where this man is from, but when the Messiah comes no one will know where he is from.” ²⁸Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. ²⁹I know him because I am from him, and he sent me.” ³⁰Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him because his hour had not yet come. ³¹Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?”

³²The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. ³³Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴You will search for me, but you will not find me, and where I am, you cannot come.” ³⁵The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶What does he mean by saying, ‘You will search for me, but you will not find me’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come?’”

Jesus tells the festival crowds “My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.”

No matter how difficult the situation we find ourselves in, God will see us through it.

“I don’t know how you do it.” Were Father Peter Booke’s words as I wrestled my twin babies in their double wide stroller and my two year old holding on to the stroller side bar through the double doors of the base chapel.

Several weeks prior, I had given birth to twin boys ten weeks premature and through all the difficulties, stress, and worry: God carried us through. My babies came home to complete our family. This is when my mother, as mothers will, commented to me: “Don’t you think its time you went and said thank you?” You see I had been angry with God for several years over the death of a loved one which I couldn’t understand was taken from our family so soon after uniting our family. Therefore, as punishment to God, I refused to go to church; I refused prayer, and pretty much anything related to God, Jesus, and/or a church.

But that day at the church doors, I replied to Father Booke, “I just say Yes Sir, Lord!”

That very day changed me in ways I never thought possible. I wasn't that angry child anymore. By saying "Yes!" to God, I found that God had never betrayed me and that I had only punished myself, not God, by staying estranged for so long. My love for God and faith in Him, He replenished.

As Jesus did, so should we all do: Say Yes to God! I'm thankful, I did.

John 7:37-52

Patrick Gilbert

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?" ⁴² Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" ⁴³ So there was a division in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵ Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" ⁴⁶ The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" ⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived, too, have you?" ⁴⁸ Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd, which does not know the law, they are accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before and who was one of them, asked, ⁵¹ "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" ⁵² They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."

This is a unique chapter that represents every bit of our Christian lives today. We are all slowly crucifying Jesus everyday with our sinful acts. In the beginning of the chapter, Jesus states that he must stay in Galilee versus Judaea because the Jews were out to kill him—this is important because it foreshadows the true course of events that would ultimately come to pass.

As the chapter progresses, we discover that we can insert ourselves into the present moment and let's briefly consider ourselves as the Jews. Jesus states that this world hates him. The same is overly true today. We constantly sin against Jesus and God, and constantly need to ask for forgiveness. Jesus goes on to state that the reason the world hates him is because he shows us it's true evil. This is the same today. The devil, which is the ultimate manifestation of evil, is alive and well and works in unique ways. Christ, which truly embodies love, is the antithesis of evil. Therefore, Jesus at this present moment in time gave direct evidence to the Jews that the world, which is full of sin, and evil hates him because he is love.

Later on we enter the tabernacle festival where Jesus truly tests people's understanding of the concept of what he truly is. Just as today, there are many lost and confused souls who are wandering through this life unaware of even worse blasphemous to the existential Christ. Christ states "why do

you want to kill me?” Confused everyone shouts out, “what are you talking about?” Jesus points out the mosaic law of circumcision on the eighth day as a commandant, which superseded the commandment to obey the sabbath. He says if it is ok to cut a man on the sabbath, why cannot I make a man whole? They continue to question whether or not Jesus is divinely inspired versus taught in the rabbi Hebrew tradition, Jesus chose to perform one miracle here as his work. Just as today, we must accept that Jesus does not always perform the works or miracles that we might pray for, and we cannot question the rationale of why-we must accept it.

The last and final day of the festival is the most important because it truly foreshadows what faith in Christ entails. He says ‘if any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let that man come and drink—who believes in me!’ This is the central core principle of Christian doctrine which separates it from Judaism. The Jews were looking for their messiah, and some believed Jesus when he said he was divine; however, many remained skeptical—the chapter ends with semantics regarding Jesus’ birth location whether it be in Galilea or in Bethlehem of Judaea. What is very powerful about this chapter is Jesus foreshadows his own demise and promise of the resurrection before anyone truly knew what was to come.

John 8:12-20

Steve Pankey

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” ¹⁴ Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid, for it is not I alone who judge but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” ¹⁹ Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰ He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

In a society built on the original sin of slavery, the light and dark dichotomy can be a tricky one. Yet, it is important not to lose sight of the reality that we humans are really comfortable with shadows. We like to hide parts of our lives in the shadows, hoping that no one will see that prejudice, that vice, that judgmental look. We like to think that Jesus, the light of the world, won’t shine a light even into that crevice in which we’ve hidden our deepest, darkest, secret. Yet Jesus is keen to bring it all to light. There is nowhere we can hide from the light of Christ. Here, just about the midpoint of Lent, what are you still trying to hide from God? What have you not brought out into the light of self-reflection and repentance. Let the light of Christ shine in your heart. All of it.

John 8:21-32

Belinda Palmer

²¹ Again he said to them, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” ²² Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” ²³ He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are from this world, I am not from this world. ²⁴ I told you that you

would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.”²⁵ They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all? ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”²⁷ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.”²⁹ And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.”³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

³¹ Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

By the time you have gotten to this portion of scripture, John 8: 21-32, we will be about midway through Lent. Twenty something days to create a habit or so they say. So, perhaps forty days will help us become more disciplined as we take the time to read scripture everyday of Lent. When we practice, whether it be by prayer, fasting, acts of service, repentance or silence may we find renewal. For those following Jesus he is the defining mark over our lives. As we read scripture or hear stories from scripture Jesus doesn't always seem clear in his message. After teaching Godly Play for several years I've come to WONDER if not being totally clear is HIS purpose. In this conversation with Jesus the Pharisees are not clear on the meaning of the message behind it all. They have questions just as we do and that is all perfectly fine I think. I believe when we are allowed to wrestle and wonder with our questions and wonder in awe we come to HIM knowing within our hearts that we have chosen to follow God because of HIS love and truth. I think our mission statement sums up beautifully what was happening in these scripture verses. Jesus was speaking to a community that was seeking truth. With wonder they were learning and growing together. And those that chose to follow God would share it with all.

Christ Church is a community of Christ's servants who seek to Worship (and I like to add Follow) God with JOY and Wonder, Learn and Grow together and Radiate God's love to all.

John 8:33-47

Mary Lloyd Moore

³³ They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.³⁷ I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word.³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did,⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one Father, God

himself.”⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God, and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.”⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

Yesterday’s lectionary revealed that Jesus told the Jews who had been following him “The truth will make you free.” Today John tells us the Jews say, in response to Jesus, that they “are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying ‘you will be made free?’” They seem indignant that Jesus insinuated they were not already free as a result of their storied heritage.

This begs the question of what is freedom? Webster says that freedom “is the ability to act, speak and change without restraint.” The 1st thing that crosses my mind when I think of freedom is the ability to do what I want, and think what I want. But, is that true freedom? My ability to do and think what I want could be seen as a form of slavery...being a slave to my own human will to do things that I may want to do, but that are not what is in my best interest or the best interest of others, i.e. sin.

John tells us that true freedom comes from Christ. John 8:36 says Jesus said “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Jesus offers freedom from our sin (and ultimate death) if we follow his teaching/ truth. The key is in following his teaching and truth. In order to follow Jesus’ teaching/truth we must have the ears to hear his words and the strength to follow them, both of which require God’s grace.

I pray that God grant each of us the grace to hear Jesus’ words and the strength to follow his teaching/truth so that we may indeed know, without a doubt, “if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed.”

John 8:47-59

Justin Chaffin

⁴⁷Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

⁴⁸The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.”⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.⁵¹ Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.”⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?”⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’⁵⁵ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him,

and I keep his word. ⁵⁶Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

There is a lot going on in today’s reading! We find Jesus getting questioned in a not so friendly way by a not so friendly crowd. It was quite literally an interrogation that ended with a group of folks picking up stones to throw because Jesus was a demon possessed rabble rouser that had upset A LOT of folks. Jesus handled this in Jesus’ ways. Consistently, He took the heat. He refocused the conversation about how humans are to be in community with each other and God. Wow.

We live in a world where it’s very common for us to verbally and sometimes physically attack those that we disagree with. It was rough being different 2,000 years ago and it’s rough being different today. In the face of a relentless verbal and almost physical attack, Jesus placed his ego aside and focused on the need for us to find our way to good through obedience to him. Not obedience in a way that glorifies him, but obedient in a way that allows us to experience harmony by being in community with God and each other. This example of grace under fire and an unwavering focus on God is yet another demonstration that Jesus understood what humanity needed and was always willing to show us a path to goodness and love. Be selfless. Serve God. Love each other.

Mark 8:11-21 – The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Steve Pankey

¹¹The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. ¹²And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.” ¹³And he left them, and getting into the boat again he went across to the other side.

¹⁴Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” ¹⁶They said to one another, “It is because we have no bread.” ¹⁷And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸Do you have eyes and fail to see? Do you have ears and fail to hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” ²⁰“And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” ²¹Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”



This statue of Jesus sits at the entrance of the Oklahoma City National Memorial. It was given by members of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church whose fellowship hall was destroyed in the blast that took out the Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995. Its official title is "And Jesus Wept," but it has become much more famous as an internet meme known as "Face Palm Jesus." You are no doubt familiar with the concept of face palming. It's the physical reaction you make to something dumb or frustrating happening in the world around you. Like, when your child asks you for the thirteenth time for a piece of candy at the checkout. Face Palm.

I suspect Jesus did quite a bit of face palming in today's appointed reading. Between the Pharisees and their desire for a sign and the disciples and their obsession with a single loaf of bread, everywhere Jesus looks in this story there are people missing the point. Of course, being frustrating is not the exclusive domain of the Pharisees or the disciples. You and I

probably do our fair share of frustrating Jesus too. I can only imagine some of the epic face palms Jesus has done about me. Still, even when we don't understand, Jesus has compassion. He won't leave his disciples in the dark. He will constantly remind them of their shared mission – to preach the Good News to a world that desperately needs it. Here near the mid-point of Lent, we would do well to remember that despite our mistakes, even when we frustrate him to no end, Jesus won't leave us to flounder in our errors; forgiveness is always possible.

John 6:1-15

Dean Gilbert

6 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw

the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus fed the thousand hungry men with bread and two fish. He fed them with the kid’s food. It was a miracle!

John 6:16-27

David Kem

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

I always assumed that the disciples’ terror at Jesus walking on water was akin to someone seeing a ghost and fearing for their own safety. However, some of that terror, I think, was a fear for Jesus’ safety. They had truly experienced the divine presence and must have been terrified to see their beloved savior in such a predicament. Much like the crowd that came frantically looking for Jesus, the disciples couldn’t stomach the thought of losing the presence of the Lord. Jesus is found and explains the reason for the zeal; the people are seeking Jesus not because of the miracles they may have witnessed; but because they had eaten of “the food that endures for eternal life.” It isn’t the miracle that converts us, but the experience of God that the miracle opens our hearts to. Perhaps we should spend less time seeking miracles and more time eating the food that endures.

John 6:27-40

Mark Hopper

²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work

of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?”³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away,³⁸ for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day.⁴⁰ This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

The Gospel of John takes the Jesus material – what he said and did – and writes an historiography of what it means that Jesus “dwelt among us.” In this season in the life of the church we are invited to follow Jesus as he approaches “his hour” of being lifted up on the cross. And the crowds which are following him consistently misunderstand him. They think he is talking about material and physical things when he is talking about deeper and higher realities. They are not on the same page. When the crowd asks him “Who are you?” one can almost hear the sneer of “Who do you think you are?”

His simple answer of “I am” in the original language of the New Testament is to be understood as an emphatic “I myself am!” We should make it bold letters and underlined to get at its meaning. It’s the startling claim of divinity God gave to Moses at the burning bush. I Am. Here Jesus claims to be the true bread from heaven who gives life to all. The crowd (and we) are to understand that Jesus is not just local troublemaker the state is going to execute. He himself, in death, gives life to all.

I find myself often in the crowd who was miraculously fed and asking Jesus “What else can you do?” Then we’ll believe.

Jesus gives us a promise. We are reminded in baptism and at the table that God is with us wherever we may go, holding on to us no matter what. – even in death – and gives us eternal life. What an audacious promise of life and wholeness exactly when most of us have become adept at shielding ourselves from the pain and frustration and hurt and despair of life in the world. Jesus promises us himself and shows the foolishness of such self-reliance. I AM promises us more than we could have ever hoped for.

At the table we are promised forgiveness, acceptance, wholeness both now and forever. Given to us as a gift. God gives us God’s self to us the sacrificial love. The last two words we hear at the table are “for you.” This is Christ’s body given for you. This is Christ’s blood shed for you.

God’s unexpected, unforeseen gift of self. The great I AM. It’s absolutely startling!

"At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I came down from heaven"?"

'Stop grumbling among yourselves,' Jesus answered. 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'"

In these verses, Jesus proclaims Himself as the bread that came down from heaven. This declaration was met with grumbling and disbelief from the people who thought they knew Him too well. They saw Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary, not as the Son of God. Their familiarity with Jesus' earthly background blinded them to the divine truth He was revealing.

Jesus reminds us that it is not our own wisdom or understanding that brings us to faith, but the drawing of the Father. Just as bread sustains physical life, Jesus, the Bread of Life, sustains our spiritual life. He provides for our deepest needs and offers eternal life to those who believe in Him.

As we reflect on this passage, let's consider how we view Jesus. Do we limit Him by our own understanding? Are we open to the divine mystery of His presence and provision in our lives? Let's not grumble or doubt, but instead, embrace Jesus as the living bread, given for the life of the world.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Jesus, the Bread of Life, to sustain us and give us eternal life. Help us to see beyond our limited understanding and to embrace the truth of who Jesus is. Draw us closer to You, and fill us with the sustaining presence of Your Son. May we find our nourishment and hope in Him alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.

I like peas....now. That was not always the case.

Peas were not to my liking when I was young.

They were disgusting tasteless little green orbs that existed to prevent me from getting my dessert. Growing up my parents insisted that we eat our vegetables before we were excused from the table and of course before getting dessert.

If I gave in and consumed the dreaded peas,(sometimes with the help of a sib or hungry pet,) I received the longed for sweet. My parents knew and now I know that those green orbs ,distasteful to me at the time, were good for me.

Most parents want what is best for their children.

I believe that I am a child of God.

God knows what I need.

Jesus said that to have life we must eat his flesh and drink his blood.

I believe that that WE, God's people are the body and blood of Christ for us today.

In the Lord's Prayer we ask God to give us this day our daily bread.

I think this bread is always there for our taking.

To get this bread,I believe means having an open heart that at times may be broken.

It means to have eyes that see ,ears that hear and strength to do.

Is this possible ?

Yes!

With God all things are possible!

(And we have creatures living with us that are willing to help.)

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Thanks be to God !

John 6:60-71

Kellie Mysinger

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you?”

62 Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! **63** The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit^[a] and life.

64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. **65** He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67 “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

69 We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

70 Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” **71** (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

How often is it that we react to Jesus’ words this way? Hearing in what Jesus says things that seem too difficult to be able to do? Are we tempted to respond like those disciples who turn back and no longer follow? Do we want to go down an easier path, take a different journey?

Simon Peter and the other apostles have heard Jesus teach. They probably aren’t much different from the other disciples who listen to his words and think what they hear sounds difficult to follow. The people who leave have made the effort to listen to Jesus, but they don’t like what they hear. Yet, the twelve have experienced just enough to know that the journey with Jesus is the only path they want to take. It might be tempting to join the crowd walking away from Jesus, but Simon Peter and the others choose to stay.

What are your experiences of Jesus? What have you seen or heard that tempts you to walk away from Jesus and his teaching? What causes you to stay?

Mark 8:31-9:1 – The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Steve Pankey

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” ⁹¹And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

The tone is shifting. We’re eeking every closer to Holy Week: the final week of Lent in which we hear the story of Jesus’ betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. You can feel the tension rising as Jesus teaches his inner circle that being the Messiah means being killed **and after three days rising again**. Of course, his disciples can’t hear it yet. They aren’t ready to consider their friend, mentor, and teacher isn’t going to just snap his finger and fix everything. They don’t hear anything after the word “killed.” I can imagine everyone looking directly at Peter. Their eyes all saying, “you’re the closest to him, DO SOMETHING!” And so he does.

Get behind me, Satan! Yes, the tone is definitely shifting. Jesus is on a mission; a one way trip to the cross, and no amount of rebuttal or bargaining or misguided expectation is going to change that. Peter and the rest won’t truly understand what he had told them until they see him risen from the grave. They never hear the promise, but they get to see it with their own eyes. Two thousand years later, we don’t see him with our eyes, but hear the promise, and we hold onto it. In a world that

feels heavy, where we wish God would just snap those divine fingers and set everything straight, we are left standing with disciples wondering, can it really be?

John 9:1-17

Henry Gilbert

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7 saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” 10 But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11 He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” 16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

I think that is one great story and I watched it before. It is crazy that someone got mud on their face and got unblind, and they can see again. Is that crazy? The Pharisees getting mad is horrible, they should go to jail.

John 9:18-41

Kate Cline

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

24So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” 25He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26They said to him, “What did he do to

you? How did he open your eyes?” 27He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” 28Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. 39Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

What stands out to me the most is when Jesus says to them “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ you sin remains.” It reminds me of the phrase “Hindsight is 20/20.” Often, after the fact, I see God’s hand in the events leading me on my journey with God. Usually this leads to a paradigm shift and a new perspective in my thoughts about people, situations, or circumstances. However, sometimes I stay “blind with sin” because I want to keep thinking in the same circles, even though God is whispering in my ear, “Look, look, can’t you see what I am trying to show you?” It makes me wonder how much easier our lives would be if we just remained blind and trusted God all the time without reservation.

I have found one way that helps me is a rule of three-if three different people are telling me the same thing-especially if it has even been a fleeting thought about a choice or a different resolution, then it’s not three people talking to me. It is three people God has set in my path to help me “see” just as the blind man did. Sometimes it is difficult to discern if it is the blind man or the Pharisees talking to me though, which leads me to have my own round-about conversation with God because the discernment forces me to focus on my choices and think about my options and possible outcomes.

John 10:1-18

Patrick McReynolds

10 “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. **2** The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. **5** They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” **6** Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me[a] are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes[b] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Jesus is the shepherd who helps people and takes care of them. Jesus protects people with his staff. Jesus teaches everyone and protects the sheep. Jesus keeps the sheep safe from all the wild animals, because he’s Jesus.

John 10:19-42

Kevin Brown

¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?” ²¹ Others were saying, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

²² At that time the Festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, in regard to what he has given me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.”

³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human, are making yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled— ³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. ⁴¹ Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And many believed in him there.

John 10:19-42 recounts the events following Jesus' declaration of being the Good Shepherd. The passage reveals a divided response among the Jews to His claims. Some accused Him of blasphemy and demon possession, while others recognized His words as aligning with the works of God. This passage concludes with Jesus at the Feast of Dedication, reaffirming His identity as the Son of God and eluding those who sought to harm Him.

As I read this scripture, I am struck by the stark division among the people who heard Jesus' words. This division is not unlike the diverse responses to Jesus in our world today. Some are quick to dismiss His claims, while others see the evidence of His work in their lives and in the world around them. It reminds me that the message of Jesus is polarizing and powerful, challenging each of us to confront who He truly is.

In my own life, I often find myself in situations where my faith is questioned or misunderstood. This passage encourages me to stand firm in my belief, even when faced with opposition. Jesus Himself faced skepticism and hostility, yet He remained unwavering in His mission. His example inspires me to be bold in my faith and to trust in His divine identity and purpose.

John 10:19-42 reminds us of the profound impact of Jesus' words and works. It calls us to a deeper understanding and commitment to our faith, urging us to be bold and unwavering in our witness to His truth. As we navigate a world filled with diverse beliefs and opinions, may we find strength and inspiration in the steadfast example of our Good Shepherd.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank You for the powerful example of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Help me to remain steadfast in my faith, even when others around me may doubt or oppose it. Grant me the courage to speak Your truth with love and conviction. May I always recognize Your voice and follow You, trusting in Your guidance and protection. Amen.

John 11:1-27

Kate Cline

1Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” 9Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is

not in them.” 11After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” 12The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” 23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

Even in her grief, Martha believes in the resurrection and all that Jesus has spoken about and her faith is powerful. Because even in his own grief, Jesus knows God is there and listening. When my dad died, there were no opportunities for contemplation, only a consuming grief that I have only felt one other time. After the celebration of life (we never referred to it as a funeral), this is when the contemplation came. We got to sit down and talk about all of the stories we heard and all of the lives dad touched. And while we were still grief-stricken, we also laughed together with collective memories. We all talked to different people at the visitation and shared those stories with one another. All of those lives he had touched were a comfort to us. We know he is always around us because there is a song that plays on the radio, a facial expression, or a mannerism that is distinctly Sonny Travelsted’s when we look at one another and especially his grandchildren. Even in the midst of grief, God is there listening to us and sending us comfort in hundreds of little ways that we don’t realize until we sit down in quiet contemplation or collective community. For Mary and Martha, Jesus was the comfort that God sent to them and reaffirmed their trust in the resurrection and truth of Jesus.

John 11:28-44

Eliza Pankey

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

In John 11 verses 28-44, Jesus finds out that his dear friend, Lazarus, has been dead and in his tomb for many days. He is very upset by this news and in verse 35 it says, "Jesus wept." This is a very short but very important verse. I love this line because it shows that Jesus is emotional. Many people think that it's weak to show emotion or it's not ok to cry, but it is. Even Jesus, the most perfect human, cried. So you don't have to bury your emotions, it's ok to express them. He wept and the Jews responded with, "See how he loved him!" They see that Jesus really cared and loved Lazarus by his reaction. But others are showing doubt saying, why didn't he save this man before he died if he can open the eyes of a blind man. Jesus then asks Martha, Lazarus's sister, to remove the stone from the tomb. She replies that there will be a bad odor since he's been in there for 4 days. Then Jesus says, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" This quote gives me hope. It makes me think that if you trust in God, then good things will happen. You will see his Glory if you just believe. That's why I think having a relationship with God is so important. If you trust in him and if you give your life to him, you can see all of the wonderful things he does for us. They then take away the stone and Jesus talks to God then tells Lazarus to come out. Lazarus emerges from the tomb, alive, in linen clothes. He tells the people to let him go. Jesus is a miracle worker. He brought someone back from the dead, and he can do anything if you just put your faith and trust in him. Even though sometimes it can be really hard or even scary, you just have to trust and know that he has a plan for you and he's right there.

Matthew 21:12-17 – Palm Sunday

Steve Pankey

¹²Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³He said to them, "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'
but you are making it a den of robbers."

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did and heard the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry ¹⁶and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'"

¹⁷He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Palm Sunday is the only Sunday I can think of where we hear two different Gospel lessons. The Liturgy of the Palms begins with the crowd shouting “Hosanna – God save us!” as Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, and they threw down their coats and palm branches as a royal welcome to the one they hoped would restore the kingship of David to Israel. Not long after, we find ourselves five days later in the story, as Jesus is handed over to the authorities, put on a sham trial, and the crowds cry out “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Do you ever wonder what happened in between?

A lot.

One thing that certainly played a role is what Jesus did immediately after entering Jerusalem. He went to the Temple, the center of religious, political, social, and economic life in the holy city, and he upended it all. He ran out the money changers – economic. He flipped over the tables – social. He was called the Son of David by the crowds – political. And he called the powers-that-be out for operating a “den of robbers” – religious. No wonder they decided that Jesus needed to go. He left no stone unturned by his ire (and spoiler alert – things get worse from here). It is going to be a long, hard week for Jesus, and it all starts here, when he makes the choice to confront the evils of this world rather than kowtow to them.

John 12:9-19

Kevin Brooks

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!”

¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵“Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify.^[a] ¹⁸It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

A heading in my NRSVUE Bible calls this scene “Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem”. The use of the word “triumphal” implies a military conqueror or a King. But this was a humble entrance into Jerusalem, and intentionally so. This scene was wonderfully laid out by Marcus J. Borg and John

Dominic Crossen in their fine little book, The Last Week. They describe a humble procession of peasants entering Jerusalem from the East while from the West, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, enters Jerusalem at the head of a grand military column. It is Pilate's procession that has all of the trappings of a military triumph. Imagine, grand horses, fine armor, golden eagles on poles. Jesus has intentionally planned his entrance as a contrast to the entrance by Pilate. Riding on a donkey, he leads a procession of peasants, symbolizing a different kind of Kingdom – the Kingdom of God. Jesus thus challenges the established power structures: the political elite, the religious elite, and the wealthy. It has always been so for Jesus. For millennia, the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, have looked to Jesus for hope. It has ever been so and, we pray, may it be so now.

John 12:20-26

David Kem

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Jesus knows his time has come. And he makes it crystal clear that he understands the sacrificial nature of his impending execution. At the biggest climax in history, he explains the paradoxical way the world really works. It's all sacrificial love. We have to give to receive. We have to serve to be honored. We are called to follow Jesus, to be where he is. We are called to serve and suffer for others. I pray that we heed Jesus' call to love and sacrifice.

John 12:27-36

Whitaker Massey

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴ The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

What jumps out immediately is the intensity and urgency in Jesus' words, His soul is troubled, yet He fully embraces His purpose. The dialogue between Jesus and the crowd highlights a contrast between divine understanding and human confusion. The crowd struggles to grasp his message, questioning how the Son of Man must be "lifted up," while Jesus speaks of light and darkness, urging them to believe before it's too late.

The imagery of light and darkness is powerful. It evokes a sense of hope but also a warning; walk in the light while you have it, or risk being lost in the darkness. This feels deeply personal, like an invitation to trust even when things are uncertain. Coming from personal experience of being lost in the darkness you have to trust in God to find your way out. There will always be a light at the end of the road one day. The passage stirs a mix of awe, reflection, and even a little bit of sorrow, knowing this moment is leading to Jesus' death. Yet, there is also comfort in His words; the promise that believe in the light transforms us into "children of light."

John 17:1-11 – Maundy Thursday

Kellie Mysinger

7 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

"I will remain in the world no longer; but they are still in the world..."

There are times when being in the world is difficult. Every person is acquainted with hurt and trouble. The violence and brokenness we know other people experience causes us pain. We may be hopeless and scared when our own problems overwhelm us. During these struggles, we can feel very alone.

Today's reading takes place shortly before Jesus is arrested and crucified. In this time, when he knows the pain and suffering that he will soon endure, his prayer is for the protection of those who follow him. He knows that hurt and trouble will continue for his followers as they continue their journey without his physical presence, and he petitions for their care.

May we hear this prayer and remember that even in the middle of situations where everything around us seems broken and hopeless, we are not alone.

John 19:38-42 – Good Friday

Lara Ellison

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

The integrity of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus stands as a powerful testimony of courage and devotion. These two men risked everything to give Jesus a dignified burial, an act that was both dangerous and deeply reverent.

Joseph, a respected member of the Sanhedrin—the very council that condemned Jesus—boldly approached Pilate, requesting permission to take Jesus’s body. This act alone could have cost him his status, yet he chose to honor Christ over personal security. Nicodemus, once a secret follower who had visited Jesus under the cover of night, stepped forward publicly, bringing a costly mixture of myrrh and aloes to prepare the body.

Their actions were not mere gestures of sympathy; they were declarations of faith. Removing Jesus’s broken body from the cross was no easy task. The blood, the lifeless weight—these were harsh realities they willingly faced. They did not turn away in fear or shame but embraced the responsibility with unwavering integrity.

Joseph’s unused tomb, a burial fit for the wealthy, became the resting place of the One who had no place to lay His head in life. Nicodemus’s expensive spices reflected the honor due to a king. Though they could not prevent Jesus’s death, they ensured He was buried with dignity. True integrity means doing what is right, even at great personal cost. Joseph and Nicodemus demonstrated this by standing for Jesus when it mattered most. Their courage challenges us to ask: Do we honor Christ only in private, or are we willing to stand for his word when the world is watching?

Matthew 27:62-66 – Holly Saturday

Steve Pankey

⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” ⁶⁶So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Holy Saturday is probably the oddest day on the Christian calendar. It somehow lasts two days and none days all at the same time. For Jesus to be resurrected on the third day, if he was crucified on a Friday, somehow, Saturday has some extra work to do. And, in a few short hours, as the sun sets, we'll gather to light the new fire of Easter, meaning we didn't even get a full Saturday before the resurrection gets proclaimed. Whether it lasts two days or none, the hardest part of Holy Saturday is that it is a time of waiting.

Waiting is no fun for anyone. If you think you are a patient person, check in with yourself today when you're in line at Kroger waiting for three people with full carts and coupons to remember if they need mint jelly for their lamb chops. We would all rather skip to the joy of Easter, but waiting is a worthwhile spiritual discipline. It invites us to sit in the discomfort. It requires us to have patience. It means not having all the answers right now, and in our smartphone culture, that's a really weird place to be. So, take it slow today. Don't rush to the empty tomb. Sit with the reality that Jesus is dead, working miracles in the underworld, waiting for the appointed hour.

John 20:1-18 – Easter Day

Steve Pankey

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb, ¹²and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir,^[b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[c] "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Go!

The operative word of the post-resurrection Jesus experience is "go." It is what turns disciples – those who are taught – into apostles – those who are sent. It might be the most frightening word

Jesus speaks in the Gospels. To go means to be sent, and to be sent means to be given a task, a job, even more so, a responsibility. The first person entrusted with the sacred responsibility of telling the Good News of the resurrection is Mary Magdalene. She is our primary example of what it means to be a follower of the post-resurrection Jesus. And what does she do? She goes to the men who should have been there in the first place and tells them exactly what she knows, "I have seen the Lord."

We who follow Jesus today have the same responsibility. The call to go didn't end with Mary Magdalene or the eleven remaining male disciples. The call to go is still our primary calling today. Go, and share the Good News that Jesus is alive! Go, and teach the nations that love is the way. Go, and show the world that caring for the poor, the outcast, the oppressed, the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow isn't just good economic policy or good political policy or even something we do to make ourselves feel good. Go and live the love of God because it is your calling as a disciple of Jesus. Go, and see the Lord's face in every person you meet.

Go!