Go forth with Grace

Lenten Devotionals & Meditations

Daily devotionals and meditations, written by members of the Daughters of the Holy Cross, Brotherhood of St. Andrew and Grace Parish, humbly offering spiritual guidance through this season of Lent.

Grace Episcopal Church
"Be not conformed to this world, 
but be reformed in the newness of your mind 
that you may prove what is the good and the acceptable, 
and the perfect will of God.”

Romans 12:2

Lent is a season of preparation. The liturgy for Ash Wednesday invites us in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent. One of the means by which we can do this is by reading and meditating on God’s Holy Word. The meditations contained in this booklet have been submitted by members of the Daughters of the King and the Brotherhood of St. Andrew. The meditations are based on the daily lectionary readings for Year Two beginning with Ash Wednesday on page 951 in The Book of Common Prayer. They have been written with the intent that you will add them to your Lenten discipline. It is my prayer that these meditations aid in your reflection and stimulate your prayers as you prepare yourself spiritually to celebrate anew the joy and surprise of Easter.

May you have a blessed Lent,

Father Jon+
Many have associated this little song with the great plague of London in 1665. It is said that a rosey rash was a symptom of the plague, posies of herbs were carried as protection, sneezing was a final fatal symptom, and “all fall down” was exactly what happened. The line “ashes, ashes” refers to the cremation of the bodies, the burning of the victim’s houses, or blackening of the skin. I am sure that this little song is a familiar one to all of us. Most, if not all of us sang it at one time or another as children without giving a thought to what it really meant. Lent is like that for many of us as well.

We have all entered into the Lenten season many times, perhaps as often as we have sung this song, without really giving a second thought to what the ashes of Lent really mean. These forty days are meant to bring us closer to God in Christ. Lent is a time to pray and fast, to repent of our sins, in order to prepare for the celebration of Easter. It is a solemn time of spiritual preparation. Far too often it becomes a mini “New Year” with its associated resolutions. At the beginning of Lent we concern ourselves with what we are going to give up or perhaps what we are going to add to our spiritual discipline. Sadly, after a few days or perhaps a week or two, our resolutions have gone by the board and the days of Lent become ordinary days.

But we all know that the season of penitence is more than that, or at least it should be. The prophet Joel calls for the people of Israel to “turn to the Lord with all of their heart...to return to the Lord.” Repentance is an ascetic effort. The penitent is to fast, weep, and mourn, all physical acts. These acts done in the right manner only assist our repentance. If in fact we are justified by confessing our sins (I John 1:9), how much more so when our repentance is expressed physically, that is, through our bodies, and as the community of the faithful through our prayers and worship? So let the journey begin, and may we remain steadfast in our discipline so that we might be prepared to receive with joy the surprise of Easter.
"However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."

Philippians 3:16

Recently, we had our home full of family members in celebration of Thanksgiving. I found myself full of joy as I prepared my heart to receive my parents and extended family. Making the grocery list, cleaning the house, placing pumpkins by the back door and cooking their favorite dishes were all to say, "I have prepared for you and I love you!"

My family gathering was a special time shared, but not without a few disappointments. I realized that relationships are at the heart of why Christ is everything and must be! In observing my loved ones' conversations, it was clear tensions were present and some were not "good listeners." The spirit of self-control was not abounding. Most cared about being right, rather than about being in relationship. More importantly, I saw the necessity of having Christ as our standard. His standard is of genuine truth, peace and excellence. At the end of the day, His opinion is all that matters. When we die to what we "think we know" and lean only on His commentary and His opinion, then we are free. He will transform our thoughts to His and will conform our lives to reflect His will and desire for us.

Yes, preparing is important. Keeping Christ first in our hearts and minds will, ultimately, overflow into our earthly relationships. Open the home of your heart to Christ and let go of man's commentary. Experience Jesus as the most honored guest and friend you will ever know. Prepare and welcome Him. See His transforming power, as it operates freely in your life. All to say, "I love you, Lord!"
I compose this meditation on Thanksgiving Eve, the day on the Church’s calendar honoring James Otis Sargent Huntington, a priest and monk, who once wrote: “Holiness is the brightness of divine love, and love is never idle; it must accomplish great things.” These words say quite a lot, particularly when I think about them within the broader context of today’s assigned readings.

Just how bright is divine love? Can you even imagine it? Something tells me that it is one of those concepts that our limited human minds simply cannot grasp. It is, I think, much like trying to describe holiness. How can we possibly do that since we have yet to experience God’s real presence, the only presence that is truly holy? No matter, though, for it is enough that we believe that however bright we can imagine brightness as being, and however deeply we can imagine divine love as being, God’s brightness is infinitely brighter and His love is infinitely deeper.

Believing that God’s love for us is infinitely deeper than we can imagine love to be is profoundly important for our human psyche when we address the text from Ezekiel and the Psalm that pointedly remind us that God is God; that He is our Maker, King, and Lord; that we belong to Him; that He made the rules (there is nothing democratic about it). The only choice that matters in our earthly lives (in the sense of eternal consequence) is whether we accept His Lordship and willingly submit to live by His rules and whether we, as Saint John tells us that Christ prayed in the garden at Gethsemane, choose to be one with the Father, or whether we do not. Wait a minute you say; surely our options cannot be so limited! And, if they are, why is it of such profound importance whether God loves us deeply or not? The answer is quite simply that either a magnificent gift or a significant adverse consequence flows from our choice. Accept, obey, and live eternally in the brightness of God’s holy presence. Or, turn away and die! Fairly profound, do you not agree?

The good news is that because God loved us so deeply and so wanted us to choose wisely and become one with Him, that He, in Christ, became human. God, the Divine, chose to walk our path as God in human form in order to personally show us the way to His heavenly kingdom. Father Huntington hit the nail on the head: God’s divine love is incredibly bright, never idle, and always accomplishes great things.
As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
Psalm: 42:1-2

Oh, to be one with God; to be one with Jesus! This is the true longing of our souls just as the hart (deer) longs for flowing streams. Just prior to crossing the Kidron valley to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed this prayer demonstrating His desire to be as one with us:

"The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou has sent me and hast loved them even as thou has loved me.... " (John 17:22-23)

Fellowship with God is what the true Christian life is all about. How we need His Grace to accomplish this relationship! The longing is there and the formula is simple. We must learn to imitate Christ, and thus the Father, in all things we do. We can do this by our obedience to the Father and by loving as we are loved by Him.

Here’s the hard part: obedience requires effort and discipline. To do God’s will we must resist the daily temptation of the flesh and the devil. The only way to do this is to live in order to please God – every moment of every day. We must rely on faith and practice, practice, practice doing His will.

Oh, for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin free,
A heart that always feels the blood
So freely shed for me,
A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
My dear Redeemer’s throne,
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone,
A heart in every thought renewed,
Full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of thine.

Charles Wesley
Lenten Day Five  
Monday, February 27, 2012

Psalms 41, 52 † 44  
Genesis 37:1-11 † 1 Corinthians 1:1-19 † Mark 1:1-13

And he was in the wilderness forty days,  
tempted by Satan;  
and he was with the wild beasts;  
and the angels ministered to him.  
Mark 1:13

Welcome to the wilderness! For forty days, we will be on a journey to discover more of God and to think less of ourselves. We shall fast and sacrifice. We will study to learn the deeper things of God. At times we will think, “I can’t do this any longer,” but we will hold fast. We may fall once or twice, but we’ll pick ourselves up and continue our journey. We may even sound like the Israelites as they traveled across the desert whining and complaining, but we will all be making this journey to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Even if we decide to do nothing, we will all journey because journey we must. To not journey means we are not living.

Make the most of your journey. Know that there will be temptation. Many times we will feel like we are living with the wild beasts. However, as we study and draw near to our Lord, the angels will minister to us.

Slow down. Meditate on the word. Seek the higher things and enjoy the journey. At the end we will find a fabulous feast and a wonderful celebration. We will find a closer relationship to our Lord and Savior, as well as new life.

Welcome to the Wilderness!
The portion of the Gospel of Mark appointed to be read (and studied) today begins with the news that John the Baptist had been arrested. John’s ministry was over; his work was done. “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” These words of Isaiah the prophet -- so familiar to many of us from Handel’s Messiah -- had been fulfilled. Gospel, as we know, literally means “good news.” The good news that Jesus brought is that the Kingdom of God is here. How do we get in? Jesus already told us: repent and believe. Most of us think we know what repentance is all about, but we need to not just be sorry for the consequences of sin but to truly change not just our ways but also our attitudes and thinking. This can only be accomplished through the “Grace of God which passeth all understanding,” and not by ourselves.

“Repent and believe.” Believe in what or whom? At the synagogue at Capernaum even the demons recognized Him, saying, “I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” Mark 1:22 tells us: “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” Jesus taught as no one had ever taught before, because he needed no outside authority to back his words. According to one commentator, “He was authority incarnate – the Word of God made flesh. When he spoke, God spoke.”

Teach us to know and love you, Lord, and humbly follow in your way.
Speak to our souls the quickening word, and turn our darkness into day.
Paul returned to Corinth. He had heard that there was much discord among believers including such things as jealousy, divisiveness, sexual immorality, and failure to discipline members. He reminded them, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”

We can not imagine all God has in store for us. The gift of the Holy Spirit comforts and guides us, giving us hope and courage to press on in this earthly life. We have either experienced or known those who have experienced unthinkable hardships and daily temptations, such as greed, gossip, infidelity, apathy, addiction, victimizing, broken relationships, unemployment, betrayal, illness, death of a loved one and many more. How do any of us survive such experiences? The only answer for a true believer is through faith in the promises of God. God does not lie!

“The depths of God,” means God’s never-failing love, the gifts of The Holy Spirit, and our hope of eternal salvation through the sacrifice of His own son. As a parent, I have experienced the pain and grief one goes through watching a child or children making poor choices and suffering the consequences. Is our pain and grief any different than that of our Heavenly Father’s? No, God grieves each time we turn away from Him and sin against Him and/or our neighbor, just as He grieved watching His own son be sacrificed for the sins of the world and for the gift of salvation.

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:1-13 were not his words, but were the words of God Himself inspired in Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit. As we focus our prayers and meditations this Lent, let each of us search our souls, and examine what we can do to help unbelievers experience “The depths of God.”
Psalms 50 † [59, 60] or 19, 46
Genesis 39:1-23 † 1 Corinthians 2:14 - 3:15 † Mark 2:1-12

“I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home”

Jesus had returned to Capernaum, speaking The Word in a house so crowded with listeners that even the entrances were blocked. Some friends of a paralyzed man sought unsuccessfully to enter to bring the man to Jesus. Industrially, they dug a hole in the roof to lower the man to Jesus for a blessing. Jesus blessed the man, and in doing so, cured him with the words: “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Nearby were Scribes, ever ready to find fault with Our Lord, accusing him of blasphemy. Jesus replied: “Why do you raise such questions?” He then went on to say that the words He spoke in healing are not important. It is God’s healing that matters. He, then, spoke the words in italics above, and admonished the Scribes concerning His Words versus His Deeds.

How often do we mindlessly quote Our Lord to prove or reinforce one point or another of our own? How often do we pause to reflect on what He meant instead of what we understand him to say? We are frequently guilty of using His Word to our own advantage.

Let us rather study The Word of God to seek the real message. Jesus, Lord of All, help us to avoid misusing Your Sacred Text for our own selfish purposes and gain.

Lord, grant us a prayerful Lent in preparation for your Resurrection in Glory. May The Peace of God which passes our human understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the Knowledge of God; and the Blessing of God, The Father, God, the Son, and God, The Holy Spirit, be with us during this Holy Lent!
“Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

Have you been forgotten? Being single, I have felt like I have been forgotten many times. But sometimes God allows us to go through those “forgotten” times for His purpose. Sometimes we are too focused on ourselves. Sometimes we’re looking for the wrong things in our lives. Most times we are focusing on anything but God.

As we begin this season of Lent we need to rededicate our lives to Christ Jesus. We need to look beyond ourselves and on to others. We need to remember what each one of us have been commanded to do – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matthew 28:19). We make disciples by leading by example. We do what is right all of the time. We pray for each other. We listen to others, not in just the big things, the showy things, but in the small things. The things when you think no one is watching. Someone is always watching. And to that one, you may be the only example of Christ they ever see.

We are never truly forgotten. Even when one single person seems not to have remembered you, Our God cannot forget you. He delights in you. Isn’t it time for you to delight in Him?
Lenten Day Ten
Saturday, March 3, 2012

Psalms 55 † 138, 139:1-17 (18-23)
Genesis 41:1-13 † 1 Corinthians 4:1-7 † Mark 2:23 - 3:6

“But I will trust in thee.”
Psalm 55:23b

I love the Psalms! They speak to me in my trials, in my sorrows, in my joy. In Psalm 55, the Psalmist cried out to the Lord in his time of trouble. He trusted in Him, even in much anguish. “When I call upon God, the Lord will save me.” If we trust that God will sustain us, we also will be able to “cast our burdens on the Lord.” Will you call upon Him and give Him your troubles and anxieties?

Psalm 138 reminds us that because we can trust in our Lord, we should always be praising and thanking him in our hearts and in our worship. “For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly.” What a gracious God we serve! It is amazing that He would care so much for us! Our Lord deserves all honor and praise and glory. Will you take time today to praise and thank Him?

In Psalm 139, we see that God knows all about us, even our thoughts and what we are going to say before we say it. We cannot deceive our Lord. He knows us through and through; yet, He loves us. Neither does it matter where we go, for God is our Companion. We cannot hide from him anywhere in his creation. Even the darkness is light to Him. He formed us in our mother’s womb, and saw us there, in secret. He is our Maker and knew us from our very beginning.

Are you aware of his abiding presence?

“I give thee thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart...
for thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness...
thy name and thy word are exalted above everything.”
“(Jesus)...called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him.”

The Gospel according to Mark is the shortest, and most likely, the earliest written of the Gospels of the New Testament. The very first sentence in the book leaves no doubt as to who Mark believes Jesus to be: “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark seems to be in a hurry as he recounts the urgency of Jesus’ mission. After his baptism, Jesus immediately (a favorite word of Mark) begins to preach the “gospel, the good news that the kingdom of God was now at hand for all who were ready to receive it.” Jesus’ ministry in Galilee upset the religious authorities who became determined to stop him. He was drawing huge crowds through his preaching and his healing miracles. Jesus’ healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (and in the synagogue no less) apparently so enraged the authorities, that they wished to have him killed.

The first part of today’s reading, Mark 3:7-12, summarizes the Galilean ministry of Jesus and described what was being seen and heard. “A great multitude” from Galilee and far beyond seeks him out. All come to hear him, but many come to be healed. Even the unclean spirits recognize him as the Son of God but are commanded to be silent. Probably because of the danger from the crowds and the authorities, Jesus and his disciples cross the Sea of Galilee into the hill country (Mark 3:13-19). Here on a mountaintop, he chooses the Twelve, “the first step in organizing the church.” As one author has stated “there was not a preacher or an expert in the Scriptures in the lot. Yet, it was with these men that Jesus established his church and disseminated his Good News to the end of the earth.”

All who would follow Jesus oftentimes feel completely inadequate and otherwise not up to the tasks to which we are called. We must remember that God always gives us the gifts that we need to do his work. When we look back from our perspective 2000 years later, we can see what God can do with “an unimpressive eleven rough Galileans -- including four fishermen, a hated tax-collector, a former anarchist, and a bunch of no-names.”

“Lord, fill me with gratitude and generosity for all you have done for me. Take my life and all that I have as an offering of love for you, who is my All.”
The Psalmist commits himself to God and has trust or faith to know that if he is faithful, he will be rewarded.

We are taught that if we have faith, all things can be accomplished. This does not necessarily mean we will have all we desire, but it might be that, with faith, we can assist others in faith, to reach a reward of righteousness.

"He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken."

With faith, we can achieve deliverance or safe passage for ourselves and from others. This allows us to overcome our transgressions and help others as well. The psalmist recognizes if we give ourselves, God will answer.

"Trust in him at all times, O people, pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

vs. 8

Life presents challenges which test us as individuals as well as test our relationships with others. God is both strong and loving and through faith, ultimately all of us will experience God's righteousness. This reward will mirror our faith.

"One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: That you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."

vs. 11-12
“Then Jesus said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

The parable of the sower can be so familiar that we may lose sight of the urgency it imparts. The Word is broadcast... scattered about. However, it - and He, "the word made flesh” - may be received or not.

The seed that falls on the hard path never has a chance to sprout. It is devoured immediately by the enemy. Pray that hard hearts may be softened.

The seed that falls on the rocky place springs up immediately in the sparse soil. It withers just as quickly, for there is no root to sustain it. Pray for deep roots of faith to sustain the believers, when trouble and persecution arise because of their faith.

The seed that falls on the thorny ground comes up, but it is choked out by the “cares of this world.” Pray that the hearts of believers will not be deceived by the cares of what this world has to offer.

Finally, the seed that falls on the “good soil” will bear much fruit. Pray that all who hear the word will accept and believe and bear much fruit for His kingdom.
"Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; 
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise."

Psalm 95:2

The psalmist reminds us to approach our Lord in a spirit of thankfulness and reminds us of the trials of the Israelite when they forgot this. The ancient Israelites had just been freed from bondage in Egypt and contended with the Lord because they were not satisfied with his provision for them. This psalm reminds me of the way we Americans live today. Our Lord allowed the United States to become the most prosperous and free society the world has ever known, yet we constantly complain like ungrateful children. We do this because we have an unhealthy focus on self. Jesus himself told us that he did not come to be served but to serve. Today we tend to live for ourselves and seem to have forgotten how to serve, to put the good of the world or our fellow man above our own good. If you doubt this, go to any bookstore and see how many books you find on self help and self realization. Then, look at how many books exist that tell us how to help others. Even churches have risen to grand status without preaching a gospel of soberness of thought and discipline focused on helping others. Instead, they “do church,” so that God will bless them with their life’s desires.

Lent allows us to reflect on our lives, to begin denying ourselves, even if just a little, and to remember Christ’s life giving act of self denial and love. Let’s celebrate Easter by finding a way to serve others like our Lord serves
This passage speaks directly to those not married. Paul's letter to the Corinthians spells it out so frankly and easily. If you are not married, it is a sin to abide with another. Jesus lived alone and Paul is stating here that if we are not married, we are to live as Christ did upon this earth and to use Christ as our example.

In this day and age, many Christians use excuses to live together such as “God understands me and he knows my heart”. But, God is calling us to a higher level of living as Christians. This reading states it perfectly. In the second verse it says, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband.” Living in sin is a very scary thought. God is not happy when we continually sin against Him. We cannot be a Christian in name only. We must step up to a higher level and work hard to do God's will, repenting all along the way.
"Coat of many Colors"

The Old Testament reading is taken from the story of Joseph, of the “Coat of Many Colors,” whose story probably stirs memories of your earliest Sunday school classes. The story is long and involved, consuming the entire week of 2 Lent, as well as the week before, and the week after.

In this reading, Joseph’s brothers have been forced to come to Egypt for food, where they encounter the brother whom they sold into slavery. By his honesty and ability to interpret dreams, he has earned the trust of the Pharaoh. Joseph sends them away, not only with the grain they had bought, but also with their money returned to them in their grain sacks.

There is much else in the saga of Joseph, and much with which to instruct small children – and ourselves -- in the workings of God’s grace. Joseph sometimes suffers setbacks for his rectitude, and sometimes he is rewarded. However, he bears the cost of his virtuous behavior, as well as the rewards, with equal serenity and without veering from the path of righteousness.

In the end, he trusts in God to sort things out. “...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” Since Sunday school days we adults have seen, to our chagrin, that doing the right thing seems to come at a price, as it sometimes did for Joseph. Do we have to see that good is rewarded and bad is punished in every case in order to remain steadfast in the faith, or do we follow the example of Joseph? As Christians, and as a Church, let us do the right thing and let God sort out the costs and benefits according to his plan.
"And he said... 'your faith has made you well; go in peace...'

This is the story of Jesus walking through a town. A woman in a crowd touched his cloak and she was healed of an ailment. It also tells about Jairus’ daughter dying. Jairus came to Jesus and asked him to come heal her. With just Jesus' spoken word, she was also healed.

These two people put their trust in Jesus. He gave them a miracle. I can’t help but wonder, how does one thank someone for such magnificent acts? I would never feel like I could show enough gratitude. Jesus didn’t require anything of these people. They didn’t have to give up anything for him. He just let God’s love be known to others. These random acts changed people’s lives, and their lives became better because of him.

We all strive to be a better person. God has given us the opportunity to believe in him. He has given us our guideline for living an honorable life. We’ve all had our own miracles happen. How do we thank God? He has asked us to love, worship and praise him. During this season, let us all reflect upon how we thank God.
“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.”

The first nine verses of Psalm 78 are meant to get our attention or to put us on the “right” and “straight” path. If we do not set our hearts on the “right” path set before us by our God, then we will not be “right” with Him. We are charged to teach our children the wonders He has done for us, so the next generation will know them. We are to put our trust in Him and keep his commands. “That they would not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation.”

Forgetfulness of God’s work and His mercy toward us causes us to be disobedient to His laws. We continue to lust after those earthly, sinful things, and lust cannot be satisfied. If we continue on this path, we will never be close to God. If we keep on sinning, we must then expect to always be in distress. The reason we live with so little comfort and to so little purpose is because we do not live by faith. We harden our hearts to God’s mercy, patience, and everlasting love for us when times are good. Why is it we only turn back to Him when we our lives get so out of control?
"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

In this letter to his congregation in Corinth, Paul is answering their questions regarding the eating of meat which has been involved in idol worship. We can hardly realize how closely this issue affected the whole life of the early Christians. When Paul wrote his letter around 56 AD, Christianity was still in its infancy. The great majority were still worshiping their idols. Priests would offer parts of an animal in their sacrificial ceremonies, but most of the meat was left for after-ceremony dinners or for selling in the market. Paul didn’t want his congregation to eat any of the idol-worship meat. His primary objection wasn’t the meat but the association. Many were such new Christians that he feared they might be tempted to fall back into idol worship. In Paul’s church, just as in ours, there were old and new Christians, strong and weak Christians. In our verse, Paul is appealing to the older, stronger Christians to set good examples and abstain from eating the meat. "Your action might become a stumbling block." His wisdom still applies. We never want our actions to become stumbling blocks to others.

Churches have always had questions and issues. As our church deals with its challenges, may we carefully weigh our speech and actions. As Paul asked members of his congregation to sacrifice for the greater good, may we be willing to do the same. What better time than the Lenten season to ask ourselves, "How am I influencing others? What kind of example am I setting; what am I doing and failing to do? What kind of life am I living?" During Lent let us take time to look inward.
Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him,
the help of my countenance and my God.

What in the world is happening with my country? My church? My profession? My family? Adultery, immorality, cruelty, and lies are everywhere. What in the world can I do about it? Nothing?

Sound familiar? Downcast and disquieted to say the least! The only answer that has ever answered this eternal question is the same one that the Psalmist gave it - Hope in God. Walking in hope means that you know who God is and how He has worked in the past. Mercy and truth and righteousness always surround wherever He is. There is no need to think that these won’t be surrounding you in current circumstances. You know in your heart that God has always led His people and given them a myriad of reasons to praise Him, for He is the help of their countenance and real joy giver. Act accordingly.

The key is in Psalm 85:13 and 86:11 “Walking in Your Truth” and “Being united to His name” Without obedience there can be no trust. Without walking today where you know in your heart God is leading, you will have a difficult time seeing the path tomorrow.

If you feel that you are wandering and are frightened about the future, go back to the behaviors and heart attitude that you know please God. Begin obeying there. He promises to show His truth, lead you in His path, and to quiet your down-cast soul.

Pray and start today...
Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid!
Mark 6:50

This passage comes immediately after the miracle of the feeding of the multitude from the scant five loaves and two fish. Jesus had made enough food through His miracle to feed five thousand men with twelve baskets left over. Surely this miracle was sufficiently astounding to have made a profound impression on all, especially his frequently dubious disciples. Yet apparently, this event did not convince the disciples of His Divinity.

Immediately after feeding the multitude, Jesus put the disciples in a boat which encountered adverse weather. They were “terrified,” requiring His reassurance as He states above, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid!"

How often must we also be convinced that when turning to Our Lord, we have nothing to fear? How many times must we be told that He is our rock and salvation?

Let us ponder our frequent unjustified apprehensions as we prayerfully await our Savior’s Resurrection. Does He not come to deliver us from such daily trivialities! Instead of fear and trepidation, let us embrace the joy and acceptance of our Blessed Lord’s Promise of Everlasting Life with Him. With Him, by Him, and through Him we are brought from darkness into light, from fear to reassurance, from doubt to confidence, from death to life.

Let us go forth with the assurance that what He has said He will do, will transpire. His word cannot be broken. Let us have a prayerful Lent and a joyous Easter!
Lenten Day Twenty-Two
Saturday, March 17, 2012

Psalms 87, 90 † 136

“...for his steadfast loves endures forever.”

In this Psalm of thanksgiving, we explore our history with God. The psalmist calls out a word of praise. The verse begins with an elaboration of what God is and does, from God’s work in Creation (verses 1-9), to the history of God redeeming his people as Israel’s God and Savior (verses 10-22), and finally to the blessings God gives everyone (verses 23-26). After each half verse, the people respond with these powerful words, “His steadfast love endures forever.” With this response, the people are linking a result, such as in verse 15, “... (God) overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,” to its cause which is God’s constant, resolute love for his people through endless ages.

Starting with the history in Psalm 136, write your own history with God. Search out and discover instances of God’s steadfast love in your life. When we see this accounting, we become even more aware of God’s real and ever presence in our lives. He cares for us. He delivers us from our enemies and pronounces judgment on them. He redeems us. Where would we be without those “second chances” of redemption? Oh, what a mighty God we serve! He is deserving of great praise and adoration.

Be relentless in your praise. And don’t forget --

“O give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.”
Psalm 136:26

Oh Lord, make us more alive to the world of grace,
more alert to your many mercies, and more responsive to your Spirit. Amen.
“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demon.”

What are the consequences of sin? Today’s reading from the Psalms tells us that if we do not keep God’s commandments, He will “punish the transgression with the rod.” That is easy to understand; sin leads to punishment, plain and simple.

The Epistle reading for today portrays a different result, and one which upon first reading seems far more palatable. But is it? St. Paul tells us that we “cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demon.” He gives this admonition to the Corinthians concerning idols and pagan sacrifices.

While we do not face that situation, the same principle applies. We have to choose between following Jesus Christ or the path that the world offers to us. The danger is that it is often difficult to know when we are faced with that decision. It is so easy to “straddle the fence,” following God while accommodating the world and its demands. What happens then?

Inevitably, the world increases and God diminishes in importance. Clearly, that leads to sin, which further separates us from God. That is the consequence of sin, separation from God. Often, it is difficult to realize just how far we have drifted away from God.

Our Gospel reading gives us the way to avoid sin and the resulting separation from God. Like the Syrophoenician mother and the deaf man, we must always seek God. If we do, then our desire to “drink the cup of the Lord” will prevent a desire to “drink the cup of the demon.”
Lenten Day Twenty-Four
Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Psalms 97, 99, [100] † 94, [95]
Genesis 49:29 - 50:14 † 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 † Mark 8:1-10

“Know that he, Yahweh, is God, he made us and we belong to him, we are his people, the flock that he pastures.”

Sheep are not very bright! They wander off. If they get separated from the flock, they can not find their way home. They do not even sense danger. Sounds like many of us, does it not? That is why we need a Shepherd!

We did not create ourselves! Each of us has encountered many people who live their lives as though they are not only the creator, but also are the most important person in the center of their world. This is a very dangerous mind set. In less than a blink of an eye, it could all be taken away. Remember Job?

We are blessed, for we know our Creator. God gives us all that we possess. If all that God has given to us was suddenly gone, we would still have God! As followers of the one true God, we place our trust for today and tomorrow in Him and Him alone.

Therefore, God alone is worthy of being thanked, praised and worshipped. What is your attitude toward praising God? Do you willingly and joyfully come into the house of God to truly be in His presence, or are you just going through the motions? In other words, are you reluctantly coming to church? As parents, do you teach your children to put God first in their lives? Do you make sure that at each meal there is a thankful prayer to God for supplying their need for food and for the hands that have prepared the meal? Do you teach your children to say bedtime prayers? Do the same rules of attendance and preparation apply to Sunday School and Worship as apply during the week to their earthly education?

This Lent examine your daily and weekly routines. Do you start your day by saying, “Good Morning, God,” rather than “Good God, it is morning”? Do you offer your day to God, asking Him to guide your thoughts, words, and deeds, so whomever He places in your path or whatever behavior you exhibit will be well pleasing in His sight?

Set aside the time in your busy life this Lent to be alone with our Creator, God the Father. Ask Him to help you change those things in your life that separates you from Him. Offer yourself to His service in your family and for the entire community in which you live, move and have your being. May God’s name be Blessed, Praised, and Adored! Have a Blessed Lent!
Jesus was a man of miracles. He performed these miracles out of love and to show the people that he was indeed the Messiah, God’s own anointed son. What a period of time that must have been to witness Jesus raising the dead, feeding the multitudes, healing and teaching! Some, however, wanted more – they wanted a sign from heaven. Why did they need continuing signs when Jesus Christ was in their midst? Frustrated, Jesus said, “Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear?” Could Jesus say this about us?

Jesus asks us to build our relationship with him through faith in his word. As we continue on our journey this Lenten Season and approach Holy Week, let us not forget the trials and temptations that the Lord has brought us through, the never-ending love that He continues to bless us with, and his promise of eternal life with him. We cannot comprehend what God can do if we open the door and let him into our lives completely.

We thank you Lord for all the blessings you have given us. Help us in our daily walk to be continually aware of your presence, and grant that we may honor you in all that we say or do.
"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..."

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, St. Paul teaches the nature of the Church with an analogy to the human body. The body has many different parts, yet it is one body, not many. In the same way the Church consists of many and different types of people, yet through the Holy Spirit they are one body -- the Body of Christ. St. Paul continues his analogy by pointing out that the parts of the body have different functions, but each one is equally as important as the rest of them. If the whole body were an “eye,” there would be no sense of hearing. The “eye” cannot say that it has no use for the “hands,” nor can the “head” reject the “feet.” God has formed the body into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The seemingly less important parts of the body are important and deserve honor. As the parts of the body work together in different ways for the benefit of the whole, the variety of people forming the Church should work together and respect one another for the greater good of the whole. If one person suffers, all should feel his suffering. If one is honored, then all should rejoice. As St. Paul says later in this letter, all people should “pursue” love.
Lent provides a splendid time for “the faithful” to contemplate our awesome God and our relationship with Him. How fortunate we are to be blessed with God’s Holy Word, the Bible, to be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. As we can plainly see from scripture studies, such as our annual Lenten meditation series, the inspired words of scripture indeed light our path as we daily continue our life long journey to the foot of Christ’s cross.

Looking to the selected text from today’s assigned readings, we see that the psalmist reminds us just how awesome is our God. He describes God as a great king, in fact the great King above all gods – so great that the heavens and the earth are the work of His hands (and His alone). Things made by God, including man, are changed like a garment (the psalmist says of himself, “I wither away”), but God remains the same. His years have no end.

Unlike everything else in God’s creation that is initially created, and then, over time evolves and sometimes changes its nature, God Himself is unchanging. It is indeed a comforting thought to realize that He who is our eternal Father and God is the same today as He was yesterday; and that tomorrow He will be no different. Neither His life, nor character, nor truth, nor ways, ever change. What more could a faithful people desire, than to know that we who are God’s servants, generation after generation, shall live securely, knowing that we are established in His presence? Happy should we be, knowing that singing psalms of prayer equips our eye of faith to see God’s ultimate purpose for the whole of God’s people and to look forward to our participation in that blessedness.
“All things are possible to him who believes.”

Mark tells us that the pleading father is greatly disappointed that the disciples have failed to heal his possessed son. The disciples could not heal the boy due to their wrong attitudes (they had been arguing with the scribes). Jesus calls for the boy to be brought to him and upon seeing Jesus, he falls to the ground convulsing. Jesus and the boy’s father discuss his sickness and the length of time that he has been like this. The father says that it has been from childhood and pleads with Jesus if he can do anything, to have pity on them and asks for help. And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” After Jesus cast out the evil spirit, the disciples asked why they were not able to heal the boy. Jesus told them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.” Jesus wants us to pray “with expectant faith, trust(ing) in God’s unfailing love and mercy.”

“Lord Jesus, help my unbelief!
Increase my faith and trust in your saving power.
Give me confidence and perseverance, especially in prayer.
And help me to bring your healing love and truth to those I meet.” Amen.
"...strive to excel in building up the church."

In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 14, St. Paul admonishes the Christians at Corinth to “pursue love” and to “strive” for spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophesy. Then, he makes a distinction between speaking in “tongues” that are not understood by the hearers and prophesy which can be comprehended. Since only the speaker in tongues understands his conversation with God, only the speaker benefits. The hearers do not understand the message unless the speaker or another person is able to interpret it. St. Paul says unless the language is intelligible, the speaker uses his “spirit” but not his mind.” As we know from reading his Epistles, St. Paul challenges us to use our minds as well as our emotions. He says we should use both in our prayers. If we give thanks in an unintelligible tongue, how can the hearer understand the meaning enough to agree and say “Amen”? Although St. Paul gives thanks that he can speak in tongues, he would rather speak “five words with his mind” to instruct the Church than to speak “ten thousand words in a tongue.” He has indeed done this in the rich treasure of his epistles that continue to direct us in our beliefs.
In Exodus 5, Pharaoh says, “Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go?” Do we sometimes have this same attitude? Do we sometimes forget who created us? Do we sometimes forget who died for us? Do we sometimes forget who redeemed us? Do we sometimes want to have things our way and be the boss? A buzz phrase these days is “attitude adjustment.” Mother’s usual phrase was “God willing,” which is a reminder that God is in control. Pharaoh didn’t know that he was part of God’s plan in history. Can we sometimes realize that God has a plan for us? Can we see how God has worked in our lives, through good times and rough times?

Our cents are imprinted with the phrase “In God We Trust.” That makes sense. Trust! It is a small word with a powerful meaning shown by the following definitions: 1. a firm belief in the honesty, truthfulness, justice or power of a person or thing; 2. faith, confidence, credence, reliance, confident expectation or hope; 3. keeping, care. What does it mean to trust God? It means having faith in God as our Savior and believing what Scripture teaches us about Him. It means putting our lives in His hands and knowing He is in control. True joy and peace come from realizing the Source of all love, our Heavenly Father.

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”
Psalm 124:8

“Father, help us to trust you so implicitly that we can walk confidently with You always. Amen”
"What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

The question of divorce is put to Jesus by the Pharisees. Jesus was in the land of Judah which was ruled by Herod Antipas who was remarried to Herodias. The question was a hostile one. Herod Antipas had seized John the Baptist for his open denouncement of him for divorce and remarriage to Herodias. The Pharisees were perhaps hoping for a similar end to Jesus. His answer “What did Moses command you?” was meant to show them that he respected the law of Moses.

Moses suffered or permitted divorce as an orderly way to put away one's wife. It had to be done in writing and delivered to her hand. Then, he must never return to her again. This was granted only because of the “hardness of their hearts,” because if they were not permitted to divorce them, they might murder them.

Moses granted this permission to the Jews because of the hardness of their hearts but wrote that Adam and Eve were not permitted to divorce and by intimation their sons must not either. For God joined them together in Holy Matrimony, and the law was that a man should leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife that they should be one. The union between them is the most intimate that can be, and a sacred thing that must not be violated.

Marriage is not an invention of man, but a divine institution, and therefore, is to be religiously observed, because it is a figure of the mystical inseparable union between Christ and his church. Those who divorce their wives would do well to consider what would become of them if God treated them in the same way.
Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”

Do you really believe that all things are possible with God? We say it, but do we really believe it? So often we tell someone that we will pray for them and their situation. But do we? And when we do, do we really believe He will answer our prayer? We say we believe God will heal. However, when we do not get the answer we want and expect, our faith is knocked down a notch. We believe we have God’s blessing on an activity WE want to do. Then, when all falls through, our faith is knocked down another notch. And so it goes – over and over and over again until we have little faith. And we blame God for not listening to us, or we say that God has more important business to attend to rather than worrying about our problems.

But Jesus tells us that all things are possible with God. So what makes it so hard to believe that God can do things for us? Maybe we are misunderstanding what God is telling us. We ask for healing and God brings the person home. God has made that person whole again. We ask God to bless what we want, but do we ask God what He wants us to do?

“With men it is impossible.” In other words, we look within ourselves, and we come up empty. But when we look to God for even the smallest portion of our lives, He will bless us abundantly. “For all things are possible with God!”
"Teach me the way I should go, for to thee I lift up my soul."

The three readings for today’s meditation involve human attributes that haven’t changed throughout history. In Exodus, we find that great power and influence can harden our hearts even when we witness God’s will. In this reading, Pharaoh was warned by Moses that if he didn’t let the people go, God would send a seventh plague of Hail. He didn’t agree and the plague occurred. Pharaoh did agree to let the Hebrews go. When the thunder, rain, and hail ceased, Pharaoh’s heart again hardened, and he refused to let them go. In our lives today, we turn to the Lord when facing difficult times. However, when things get better, we tend to turn away from God and do our on will.

In 2 Corinthians, we find Paul being accused by false teachers of being a deceiver and hypocrite. They said he was teaching an antiquated message. This once powerful Roman, who in the past killed Christians, now reacted to this harsh criticism with humility. After his conversion, he never promoted himself and was totally focused on Christ and His mission of ministering his new covenant.

In Mark, we read of Jesus teaching his disciples and being frustrated because they were focused on worldly things. As Jesus was predicting his death and the fact he would be betrayed, mocked, scourged, and spat upon, James and John were focused on maneuvering for the places of prominence in His kingdom. He told them that being granted a place on his right or left was not his to give. Honors in the kingdom are bestowed not on the basis of selfish ambition, but of divine sovereign will. He reminded them that even he came not to be served, but to serve. That is his expectation of each of us as we attempt to do His will in His Kingdom.

Help us to remember, Lord, that pride is the work of Satan.
We must remember to keep our focus on You as we go about the Great Commission with humility.”
“But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go.”

How often do we take God for granted? We live in a time enriched by our past. It is documented through art, music, and spoken and written words. We have the opportunity to learn from those who came before us by their response to blessings and hardships. We too are given chance after chance to acknowledge Him in our lives. We have the whole story of Jesus Christ our Savior. Our Lord loved us so much that “He came to live and die as one of us.” Through His life, death, and resurrection we may have life eternal with Him.

So I ask, then, why do we fall back as Pharaoh did and deny our Lord? Why do we try to solve our problems by ourselves? Why do we forget to thank Him during our times of contentment and happiness? This is the most important relationship we will ever have. God desires our love and our true selves. This relationship has to be developed and nurtured. This not only takes our faith and practice but requires us to practice our faith. Steadfast as Moses, we must be ready and aware of opportunities that come our way. Wherever God leads us, whatever job we are asked to do, we must have faith and belief, that through His mercy and grace, we will be given the gifts we need to attain His goal, as he did with Moses.

“Lord, what will you have me do?”
Forgive. Sometimes this is the hardest thing in the world to do. When we feel we have been wronged, we want someone to pay. When someone hurts us, our natural instinct is to hurt back. And if someone hurts our children – well, you had just better get out of our way!

Forgive.…. so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But, wait a minute. You mean that if I cannot forgive, then all my wrongs will be held against me? But I didn’t mean to _____. It wasn’t MY fault. If they hadn’t ____ then I wouldn’t have ___. You mean I really must forgive?

Forgiveness doesn’t necessarily mean that we forget the wrong. It means that the wrong no longer has power over us. We no longer feel the need to be “righted”. It means we give the payment of the debt owed us to God. When God pays a debt, he not only pays it in full but abundantly – even overflowing, more than any man can do. God fills ALL the emptiness; even the areas we never realized were empty.

Many times the persons who wronged us never knows how they have hurt us -- never know they have wronged us. Yet we sit suffering or plotting our revenge.

Your forgiveness may do nothing for the other person, but it will make a world of difference for you. The burden you carry will be taken away and you will feel like a new person.

So, when you stand praying this week, forgive, so that your Father may forgive you!
Help, O Lord, for there is no one longer anyone who is godly; the faithful have disappeared from humankind.

Psalm 12:1

Does this Psalm describe a situation in King David’s time, or is it a newspaper article published today? It seems every day the depth of human depravity gets deeper and human life gets cheaper. In the Middle East, suicide attacks are the preferred method of warfare and each new scandal in the financial system shows human greed unchecked and even rewarded. Many of us just wind up begging the Lord to return and put an end to this world and its suffering.

In the midst of all this doom and gloom, we sometimes are reminded that our God is real -- when we find a person who unselfishly gives an organ to a stranger, or folks at church are glad to see you every time you show up. We know people who staff the meals-on-wheels truck or work at the homeless shelter, and unlike King David, we do know the rest of the story. We know Jesus came into the world to love us. We know that he died on the cross, but then rose again. He taught us that we must open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, so that we can love one another, Then, he called us into community, so we could support each other. With this knowledge, we can face the world where bad things happen to good people. We can still love each other and be hopeful that one day we will see Jesus, and all the world will be an Eden again.
HOLY WEEK: LENTEN DAY THIRTY-SEVEN
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 2012

Psalms 55 † 74

“Hear my prayer, O God; don’t turn away from my plea! Listen to me and answer me; I am worn out by my worries. I am terrified by the threats of my enemies and crushed by the oppression of the wicked.”

The Psalm begins with a cry for help, a real heartfelt pleading of someone who feels too much the troubles of his world. It is a feeling very real to most of us, for who has not felt overwhelmed at some time or another. We see the wretchedness around us and know the heartbreak felt when we, just as this psalmist, are betrayed by a friend or loved one. When we put time and energy into developing a relationship and have “intimate talks with each other and worship together in the Temple,” we are devastated when that relationship fails.

So, where are we to go? The answer is as simple as it is difficult. We go to our Lord, the one true and constant friend. Through building that relationship, we can then build better and more substantial relationships with our brothers and sisters here on earth and become better able to deal with the daily difficulties that life dishes out to us all. One of my former neighbors used to say that all we have to do is “remember to keep the main thing the main thing”. When we get too sidetracked with the troubles and trivialities of this world, we lose our focus and our foothold. When we lose our footing, we fall. If we can remember to keep in contact with our Lord at various times during the day, we can keep our footing. Or, as we see in this reading, “But I call to the Lord God for help and he will save me. Morning, noon, and night my complaints and groans go up to him (and maybe even my adorations and thanksgivings) and he will hear my voice. He will bring me safely back from the battles that I fight against so many enemies.”

We are not quick to trust our lives to anything but our own well developed sense of control. “If I do it myself, I know it will be done right” is a phrase we often quip. What we really mean is that if we do it ourselves, it will be done the way we want it to be done. But, as the psalm tells us, if we leave our troubles with the Lord, he will defend us. Handing our difficulties over to Him ultimately frees us of their weight and gives us time for the one relationship that counts.
Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were so closely associated that both terms were used interchangeably to refer to the eight-day celebration that began with the Passover. The lambs were killed on 14 Nisan at twilight, between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m. After the lamb was slaughtered and some of its blood sprinkled on the altar, the lamb was taken home, roasted whole, and eaten in the evening meal with unleavened bread, bitter herbs, charoseth (a paste made of crushed apples, dates, pomegranates, and nuts), into which they dipped bread and wine.

When the disciples asked Jesus where they should go so He could eat the Passover, He sent Peter and John into the city looking for a man carrying a pitcher of water. They were to follow him. (This man would stand out since women usually carried the pitcher of water.) When the man arrived at the house, he was to ask the master of the house, "where is my guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared; there prepare for us." That evening, Jesus came with the twelve disciples. When they sat and ate, Jesus informed them that one of them would betray him. They were sorrowful.

Jesus was no victim. His betrayal by Judas was prophesied in the Old Testament and was part of God’s predetermined plan to provide salvation. He goes on to say, however, "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." This is one of the strongest statements in Scripture on human responsibility for believing in Jesus Christ, coupled with the consequences of such unbelief.

It appears that it is at this point Judas had gone and Jesus was alone with the faithful eleven disciples. It was then that he transformed the Passover of the Old Covenant into the Lord’s Supper of the New Covenant, creating a new memorial feast to remember God’s deliverance from sin.

“Lord, every Sunday as we prepare to take communion,
help us to remember its significance.
Help us to come to the Table with a clean heart and a contrite spirit,
asking forgiveness from a loving and gracious God,
who offers it to Jew and Gentile alike.
Help us always to remember that God’s grace is not to be taken lightly. Amen.”
Richard Holloway wrote a Lenten book several years ago entitled, “A Death in Jerusalem.” Good Friday reminds us of that death. It wasn’t just an ordinary death we remember today, but an extremely cruel one that only occurred after hours of excruciating pain. Death by crucifixion was an ancient method of execution that was used by the Persians, Seleucids, and Carthaginians before the Romans adopted it as a means of putting to death common criminals. Early accounts of its use date from the 6th century BC and up to the 4th century AD. In the year 337, Emperor Constantine I abolished it in the Roman Empire out of veneration for our Lord, the most famous victim of crucifixion.

If we had been the architects of the divine plan of salvation, we would have done things much differently, especially when it comes to the death of Jesus. Why crucifixion? Why not stoning by the Jewish leaders, for example, because they viewed Jesus as a blasphemer? Why not simply have him stabbed in a crowded marketplace while teaching Kingdom concepts by some disgruntled zealot who did not believe that he was radical enough? But that was not God’s plan. If Jesus had to die for the sins of the world, he would have to die by the cruelest method of the time.

Our sins and the sins of the world could only be cleansed by His blood, by Atonement. The Jews understood the concept of Atonement: one death for many. The Gentiles would only come to understand it through the death in Jerusalem and their acceptance of Him who died as the Son of God. Only the blood of the sinless one could wash away the stain of our sin. If Jesus had died by any other method than crucifixion, would the world remember it? Good Friday reminds us of the price that was paid for our salvation; Good Friday reminds us of the inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world through the merits of this one death in Jerusalem of His Son, Our Savior, Jesus Christ. None of us likes to think about death -- any death -- ours or that of a loved one or a friend. But this one death -- the death of Jesus on the cross -- was good for us, good for the world. Without it we would remain estranged from God with no means of our own to effect reconciliation to God, no means of grace, and no hope of glory. As cruel as it was, it was a good death, and the world has never forgotten it.
"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."  
Hebrews 4:16

This part of our journey is complete. We have sacrificed, taken on additional study, fasted and reflected. This past week we have watched our Lord and Savior go from a triumphant entry into Jerusalem to betrayal to crucifixion and to burial. And now we are in the last hours of our waiting. Tomorrow we celebrate the joyous resurrection.

But today let us reflect on one more thing: Drawing near to the throne of grace. Our verse today tells us that we can draw near with confidence. The Bible footnotes say that, “At God’s throne of grace men receive mercy form past sins and find grace for present and future needs.” This is the perfect time to draw near, just before the feast, the celebration. This is what all the sacrificing and fasting was all about.

As we draw near, we learn more of our God and his immeasurable love. We see others in a new light. “You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13) Let us reflect a little longer and look for the Lord.

Now, go forth and celebrate our Lord’s resurrection in the way God celebrates each one of us every day of our lives – whole-heartedly, completely, and with all that we are!

Alleluia. The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!
“Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will.
All I have and possess, Thou hast given all this to me. To Thee, O Lord, I restore it; all is Thine, dispose of it entirely according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me.”
The Lenten Devotionals and Meditations in this booklet were originally printed for the season of Lent in 2008 and 2010. We are very grateful to the authors for allowing us to republish their faith-inspired works. Thank you to Dennis Anders, Verda Anders, Gretchen Dean, Bryan Caldwell, Dale Dimos, Jim Dimos, Gerry Emerel, Janette Emerel, Kathy Gardner, Sharen Haddad, Belinda Hooton, Amelia Jordan, Sharon Marchman, Bill Mattison, Gladys Emma Murphy, Jan Phillips, Ran Phillips, Julie Pruitt, Carlene Riley, the Rev. Canon Gregg Riley, Joe Roberts, Ed Theus, Burton Wade and Fran Winter.

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