

I am delighted to commend to you this year's Lenten Devotional booklet. I hope that you will make use of the daily readings, as we journey together through Lent to Easter.

As in year's past, each of the daily devotionals has been written by a different member of our parish. Thank you – one and all! These contributors represent a wide cross section of our church family, including those in their teens as well as those who have more than three score years and ten behind them! I am looking forward to reading the passages of Scripture selected for each day and what my brothers and sisters in Christ have to share about them. The readings are taken from the *Book of Common Prayer*, Daily Readings for Year One. Each author has selected one reading for their devotional reflection. The additional three daily readings are listed should you want to read those as well.

This devotional is designed to be used by individuals or families. I know in our home my three teenagers are happy to engage in this as we sit round the dinner table (sometimes more eagerly than others, I'll admit!) If you are not in the habit of reading Scripture, reflecting on God's Word, and praying each day – this is a great way to get started, or renew your commitment to the same.

On Ash Wednesday you will be invited, “in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word...” This booklet is but one way that you can take seriously and engage with that charge.

In the introduction, you will also find full details of our Wednesday Evening Lenten Series, together with the special services during Lent and Easter. I hope that you will make time to really enter in to this season of Lent.

Finally, I encourage you to attend our Holy Week services on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Come and join us as, together, we reflect on all that our Lord had done for us and as, with open hearts and minds, we worship the Lamb who was slain, Jesus our risen savior and Lord.

Yours in Christ,  
*Jonathan N. Millard*

## **Lent, Holy Week and Easter at Church of the Ascension**

### **Sacramental Confession**

Monday, April 18th thru Wednesday, April 20th (by appointment).

In the Anglican tradition, there is no requirement for private confession (the Rite of Reconciliation). However, James 5:16 reads, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." If you desire to have your conscience unburdened and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind, you are invited to receive reconciliation with God through the aid of a priest.

Jonathan Millard, Josh Miller, and Ann Tefft, will be available by appointment these three days during Holy Week to hear your private confession. Please call or email one of the priests or call the church office in confidence (412-621-4361, ext. 218).

### **Fat Tuesday Festival**

*Tuesday, March 8th*

6:00pm to 8:00pm

A Lenten Eve festival for the entire family. Pancakes will be served. Friends welcome!

### **Ash Wednesday**

*Wednesday, March 9th*

Three services for the imposition of ashes will be held at 7:00am, Noon, 7:00pm. Childcare is available for ages 4 and under at the 7:00 p.m. service. There will also be a children's program for K – 5th grade at the 7:00pm service.

### **Wednesday Evening Lenten Dinner Series:**

#### **Transformed Lives**

*Four Wednesdays*

*(March 16, 23, 30; April 6), 6:00pm to 8:15pm*

Transformation is a word that we use a fair amount in church—but what does it really mean? As a follower of Jesus are you any different from your colleagues at work? What does it mean to have a transformed heart? And what about at home or in church—what does transformation in those contexts look like? These are the questions we are going to be exploring together in this year's Lenten series on Wednesday evenings. Each year many in our parish family make this a priority. I hope you will join us this year as we gather at 6:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall. After dinner together the children go to their own separate teaching time while we worship together with our young people. The youth then have their own teaching time as we spend an hour together for teaching and discussion. Each of our four evenings will finish promptly at 8:15 p.m. Here are the topics and speakers for this year:

March 16: Transformation of the Heart

Sarah Larabee, Director of Youth Ministries

March 23: Transformation in the Workplace

Jim Wilson, Assistant U.S. Attorney

March 30: Transformation in the Church

Paul Cooper, Rector of St. Christopher's, Cranberry

April 6: Transformation in the Home

David and Debbie Kornfield, Missionaries to Brazil

### **Palm Sunday**

*Sunday, April 17th 8:00am*

Rite I Eucharist includes the Blessing of the Palms and reading of the Passion.

8:45 – 10:15am Hot breakfast followed by Adult Discipleship Hour

10:30am Rite II Eucharist includes the Liturgy of the Palms, a Festival Procession and a dramatic reading of the Passion narrative. Children age K and older will remain with their parents for the service. Childcare provided for ages 4 and younger in rooms 101 and 102 of the Education Wing.

### **Maundy Thursday**

*Thursday, April 21st 7:00pm*

The worship of Maundy Thursday is rich in symbolism and will include washing of feet and the dramatic stripping of the altar in preparation for Good Friday. The service concludes in total darkness. Childcare is provided for ages 4 and younger in rooms 101 and 102 of the Education Wing.

### **Good Friday**

*Friday, April 22nd Noon - 3:00pm*

Because these are the hours Jesus hung on the cross, we encourage worshippers to keep vigil for the entire three hour period, but the service will easily allow people to spend any one hour without loss of continuity. Childcare is provided for ages 4 and under in rooms 101 and 102 of the Education Wing. A children's program for ages Kindergarten through 5th grade will be provided in the Hunt Rooms from noon until 2:00pm.

Noon - 1pm: The Good Friday Liturgy of the Word including hymns, the reading of the Passion, the Great Litany and a homily

1 – 2pm: Hymns, silence, meditations

2 – 3pm: Stations of the Cross followed by a period of silent meditation including Veneration of the Cross.

### **Easter Sunday**

*Sunday, April 24th*

6:00am The Great Vigil of Easter (Nave)

The first service of Easter Day begins with darkness and includes the singing of the Exsultet, or Song of Praise, over this year's Easter Candle, the passing of the Light of Easter, scripture, silence and Holy Baptism. Childcare is not provided. Please remember to bring your bells!

*8:00 – 9:00am*

Hot breakfast in the Parish Hall for those who attended The Great Vigil or the 9:00am service.

*9:00am Easter Eucharist, Rite I (Nave)*

A service of Holy Eucharist in traditional language with hymns in celebration of the resurrection. Childcare is provided, ages 4 and under, in rooms 101 and 102 of the Education Wing. Please remember to bring your bells!

*10:30am Festival Eucharist, Rite II (Nave)*

This service will be much like our usual 10:30am worship, but with a Festival Procession and the hymns and anthems of Easter Day. It should be about 90 minutes long. Childcare is provided for ages 4 and under in rooms 101 and 102 of the Education Wing. Please remember to bring your bells!

## March 9, 2011 Ash Wednesday Hebrews 12:1–14

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. <sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup>And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; <sup>6</sup>for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” <sup>7</sup>Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? <sup>8</sup>If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ...<sup>11</sup>Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup>Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup>and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. <sup>14</sup>Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Despite its opening encouragement and rallying cry, Hebrews 12 humbles me. I take solace from that great cloud of witnesses, and I sense it on many levels. From the feeling of a full sanctuary on Sunday to the evidence around the church of those believers who have gone before us to an awareness of a worldwide church of which we are but one small fellowship to the realization that throughout human history, people have related to our Lord, I embrace the cloud of many witnesses and prepare to “throw off everything that hinders.” Almost immediately, though, the chapter’s direction humbles. When I’m good and laid low, it zigs again to rally to the true purpose.

We’re directed to relentlessly focus on and pursue Christ. For someone who can’t remember why he came upstairs when he gets there, this is humbling direction. In our attention deficit culture, we must make a radical choice if we are going to focus on anything. Hebrews 12 says, though, that we stop concentrating on God because of our own sinful nature, not because of any current distraction. We chafe at the very discipline that shows God loves us enough to refine us.

This call to relentless pursuit of holiness comes all bound up with promises. This humbles me because it shows the tawdry, ephemeral nature of the earthly rewards that tempt me away from the only correct pursuit. If we will but commit to fixing our eyes on Jesus, we will know the father’s love, garner a “harvest of righteousness and peace”, share in God’s holiness, experience healing and receive “a kingdom that cannot be shaken”. Love, righteousness, peace, holiness, healing and a kingdom on which we can depend? Sign me up. Shake the earth and heavens, Lord. I’m in a cloud already.

— *Jeff Forster, Regent Square, Consultant/At-home Dad*  
*Ps. 130, Jon. 3:1–4:11, Heb. 12:1–14, Luke 18:9–14*

**March 10, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**Deuteronomy 7:6–11**

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. <sup>7</sup>It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup>It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, <sup>10</sup>and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes, and the ordinances—that I am commanding you today.

This passage deals with the status of Israel as a chosen people. The explanation offered by the writer is pretty straightforward, “It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he...redeemed you from the land of slavery.” (Note to self...chosen-ness all comes from God - his love, his oath, his redemption.) Okay, I’m alright with thinking about Israel as a chosen nation. But I am less comfortable with the notion that the church (that’s you and me!) has inherited this mantle of ‘chosen-ness’. But that’s the case. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are God’s chosen and special people... Now you must tell all the wonderful things he has done...” Reading the Deuteronomy and 1 Peter passages together yields something like this, ‘It was because the Lord loved you and kept his oath to the patriarchs that you are special, a chosen people. And the purpose of your being chosen? Is to tell of all the wonderful things he has done...tell it to all people, everywhere.’

This stuff is hard for me. At times I want to bask in the blessing of a relationship with God and at the same time preserve for myself the right to shirk the obligation to be a blessing to others. But the two notions, chosen people and blessing others, are always joined at the hip. In the Bible the blessing of God is never given in isolation for the personal enjoyment of the one receiving the blessing. (See, Abraham - Gen 12:1-3; Isaac - Gen 26:2-5; Jacob - Gen 28:10-15)

I know I am blessed in nearly every way a person can be and, in theory at least, I want to bless others. But I am overcome so often by my own laziness; my time and energy are spent on things both good (my family) and not so good (television anyone?) and I substitute my good intentions and doctrinal orthodoxy for actually doing anything. So let me ask you - Can we figure out how we, you and me and all of us together, can be the blessing God intends for us to be - here in our own place and time. This much I am sure of, I cannot figure it out alone.

—James Wilson, *Franklin Park, Husband, father, chauffeur, Assistant U.S. Attorney*  
*Psalm 37:1–18, Deuteronomy 7:6–11, Titus 1:1–16, John 1:29–34*

**March 11, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**John 1:35–42**

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>When 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?” <sup>39</sup>He 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. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup>He 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).

We humans are a bit like cats. We are curious creatures. Moses saw a burning bush that could not be consumed and went to take a closer look. There he encountered the presence of the living God and it changed his life forever! Here two disciples were curious about a man whom their teacher called “the Lamb of God.” They followed him one morning determined to take a closer look. Jesus noticed and asked: “what are you looking for?” Their response was more timid and hesitant than you might expect. Did they openly declare “we are seeking the Messiah and we want to meet you?” No! They politely addressed him as “Rabbi” and inquired where he lived! Jesus drew them closer: “come and see.” What was probably intended as a short visit became the whole day! They did “see” and it changed their lives forever!

In May, 1998 I was invited to Cursillo, a “religious” retreat. I was looking for “something” but I was definitely timid and hesitant. I certainly did not recognize I was looking for a person, let alone that his name was Jesus. I decided I was too busy to go and cancelled my reservation to attend. One of my close friends called to tell me I was making a bad decision — I should go, I would not be sorry. I was curious. I went. There I spent three days hearing about Jesus. On the evening of the third day, like millions of disciples before me, I met a living Jesus! The memory of that event is etched on my mind and my life has never been the same. It is much more wonderful!

I am so grateful that God has implanted in each of us the curiosity to draw us to Him. If you are looking for “something” more in your life, what you seek is Jesus or more of Jesus. Allow your curiosity to draw you closer to Him.

— *Ann Tefft, Fox Chapel, Assistant Rector*  
*Ps. 31, Deut. 7:12–16, Titus 2:1–15, John 1:35–42*

**March 12, 2011**  
**Saturday**  
**Psalm 42**

As the deer longs for the water brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God. <sup>2</sup>My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God; when shall I come to appear before the presence of God? <sup>3</sup>My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long they say to me, "Where now is your God?" <sup>4</sup>I pour out my soul when I think on these things: how I went with the multitude and led them into the house of God, <sup>5</sup>With the voice of praise and thanksgiving, among those who keep holy day. <sup>6</sup>Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? and why are you so disquieted within me? <sup>7</sup>Put your trust in God; for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God. <sup>8</sup>My soul is heavy within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan, and from the peak of Mizar among the heights of Hermon. <sup>9</sup>One deep calls to another in the noise of your cataracts; all your rapids and floods have gone over me. <sup>10</sup>The LORD grants his loving kindness in the daytime; in the night season his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. <sup>11</sup>I will say to the God of my strength, "Why have you forgotten me? and why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?" <sup>12</sup>While my bones are being broken, my enemies mock me to my face; <sup>13</sup>All day long they mock me and say to me, "Where now is your God?" <sup>15</sup>Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? and why are you so disquieted within me? <sup>15</sup> Put your trust in God; for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

I have very few friends who feel that they are "under the protection of the Mighty One" more often than not. And with evil and chaos pervading everything, it really is hard to blame them. We inhabit an age of scientific naturalism that leaves no room in its ultimate explanatory structure for anything like the protection of a Mighty One.

When someone asks "Why are you so happy today?" the answer "because I'm under the protection of the Mighty One" is far from acceptable. But this is precisely the response I desire. I want more than anything, from the depths of my being, the comfort of the Mighty One's presence. Multiple dimensions of my life are quickly filled with anxiety, whether regarding my future career, family problems, political turmoil, off-kilter friendships, physical fitness, or tomorrow's homework. In all honesty, I do not feel the Mighty One's protection in any of these dimensions much of the time. For a believer, this is not encouraging, but the mystery of faith lives on within me. For I cannot forget the endless occasions where my life and the Mighty One have danced together on the heights of Love and my soul was healed from the cynicism that anxiety yields and the vices of my own nature. The healing dance with the Mighty One that proves his protection is not a hypothesis to be confirmed by experiment, but a silent relationship that manifests itself in all dimensions of life and heals by changing the lighting from one where everything is chance to one where everything is a miracle.

I urge my soul, put your hope in God and make room for his foot, for we will yet dance and I will yet praise him. My answer will yet be, "because I'm under the protection of the Mighty One".

— *Ethan Galebach, Lancaster PA, Student,*  
*University of Pittsburgh*  
*Psalm 42, Deuteronomy 7:17–26, Titus 3:1–15, John 1:43–51*

**March 14, 2011**  
**Monday**  
**Psalms 41**

Happy are they who consider the poor and needy! the LORD will deliver them in the time of trouble.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD preserves them and keeps them alive, so that they may be happy in the land; he does not hand them over to the will of their enemies.

<sup>3</sup> The LORD sustains them on their sickbed and ministers to them in their illness.

<sup>4</sup> I said, "LORD, be merciful to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you."

<sup>5</sup> My enemies are saying wicked things about me: "When will he die, and his name perish?"

<sup>6</sup> Even if they come to see me, they speak empty words; their heart collects false rumors; they go outside and spread them.

<sup>7</sup> All my enemies whisper together about me and devise evil against me.

<sup>8</sup> "A deadly thing," they say, "has fastened on him; he has taken to his bed and will never get up again."

<sup>9</sup> Even my best friend, whom I trusted, who broke bread with me, has lifted up his heel and turned against me.

<sup>10</sup> But you, O LORD, be merciful to me and raise me up, and I shall repay them.

<sup>11</sup> By this I know you are pleased with me, that my enemy does not triumph over me.

<sup>12</sup> In my integrity you hold me fast, and shall set me before your face for ever.

<sup>13</sup> Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, from age to age. Amen. Amen.

Happy are those who consider the poor (or weak...or sick), the LORD delivers them in the day of trouble. The LORD protects them and keeps them alive; they are called happy in the land. You do not give them up to the will of their enemies. The Lord sustains them on their sickbed; in their illness you heal all their infirmities. Psalm 41:1-3, NRSV

The language of these verses is a little ambiguous here. When I first read this passage, I read it as though the 'them' referred to the poor/weak/sick. While God values the poor very much (!), a little study shows that the 'them' here actually refers to "those who consider the poor". Because these observant folks notice the situations of their fellow humankind, God delivers them, He protects them, He keeps them alive...And, when they are sick or close to death, God comforts them and heals them. We all know that caregivers, either by calling or by nature, are not notorious for taking good care of themselves. But God values those who respond to the needs of the marginal, the forgotten, the constantly ill, the people no one else wants to be around.

So what does this have to do with Lent? Lent is a season of preparation that typically consists of prayer, penitence, almsgiving and self-denial. For this Lenten season, perhaps God is calling us, as part of our almsgiving, to notice the sick, the weak, the poor, someone who rubs us the wrong way. Perhaps He is calling us to step into their shoes a little bit each day, either by setting aside time to pray specifically for the people who 'fit this description', or by intentionally seeking them out and getting to know them. Strangely enough, it seems this kind of observant lifestyle fosters happiness. Do we dare try it and see? Who knows, we who are happy and content might miraculously become even happier, and we who seek happiness just might find it. As for the poor, the weak, and the sick, well, I have a feeling that "category" just might fade with a little exposure.

— *Becky Kennedy, Ben Avon, Nurse*

*Psalm 41, Deuteronomy 8:11-18, Hebrews 2:11-18, Jn 2:1-12*

**March 15, 2011**  
**Tuesday**  
**John 2:13–22**

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>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.

Animated kids Bart and Lisa run up to their dad and ask what he is doing. Homer, the father, holds up a Bible and tells the kids that people were just giving them away. Then he goes on to exclaim "And talk about a Preachy book! And EVERYONE is a sinner...except THIS GUY!" Let's take a look at one scene from that book.

In John 2 Jesus loses his cool for the first recorded time, and it was a doozie! Jesus, seeing the Temple disgraced by merchants, drives them out with a whip. In all of this commotion, the disciples remember the verse "Zeal for you house has eaten me up", which is from Psalm 69. The reference to that psalm ate at me, so I reviewed it further. What I came to realize is that the disciples did not remember the second half of Psalm 69:9 which reads "...and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me." Verse 4 reads "Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head. They are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully. Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it." In the story in John 2, the Jews at the Temple asked Jesus for a sign of proof that Jesus was who he says he was, and Jesus tells them that he will "destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days". We know that Jesus' restoration of the temple - God's connection to his children - would not be brought about by his rage or by some miracle, but by his mercy shown on the cross.

It is hard for us to fathom how Jesus achieved all that he wanted for us by this path. We hold memories of wrong doing, jealousies, and grudges for months, years and even lifetimes. Jesus was loved by only a few on the day he died, yet His mercy was so great that he could forgive all the wrong done then, now and to come, and save the children that he so very loved. So yes, Homer, all of us are sinners.....except THIS GUY; and that made all of the difference in the world.

— *Brandon Walker, Shaler Township, Civil Engineer, Husband and Father of 3 (soon to be 4) little women*  
*Psalm 45, Deuteronomy 9:4–12, Hebrews 3:1–11, John 2:13–22*

**March 16, 2011**  
**Wednesday**  
**Hebrews 3:12–19**

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup>As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” <sup>16</sup>Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? <sup>17</sup>But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup>And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup>So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

It used to be when the morning alarm sounded, I had nothing in me to graciously send my family off to school and work. I continue to learn and practice the things that equip me to encourage my family and those I come in contact with. Cuddling, resting, talking, praising, listening and waiting with Jesus strengthen my relationships with family, friends, and neighbors. Time spent with Jesus deepens my understanding of His love for me, which strengthens me to forgive, change direction, and practice living in truth. Jesus forgives, heals, redeems, crowns and satisfies us with good things. Psalm 103 says:

Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—  
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,  
who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Jesus lives in us, here, at this moment, doing all these things. Jesus’ space in us empowers us to do the impossible. Encouraging others is an outward expression of our relationship with Jesus. When He encourages us, our hearts soften and overflow with Jesus’ love and we can’t help but bless and encourage the people around us. “So encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Hebrews 3:13) We are not perfect but Jesus in us is! We must let him penetrate through us to others.

My family, especially my husband, love it when I retreat for prayer and quiet time or go to prayer ministry meetings. Most often, I return with such a love and encouraging spirit that their relationship with Jesus is strengthened. As this happens, I find myself desperately craving more and more time with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior!

Now when the alarm sounds and I remember to wait for His love to infuse my heart, I witness the encouragement flowing towards my husband and children. Blessed is the name of Jesus!

— *Tiziana Rankin, Greenfield, Homemaker*  
*Psalm 49, Deut. 9:13-21, Hebrews 3:12-19, John 2:23-3:15*

**March 17, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**John 3:16–21**

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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup>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.

We see it at football games and on billboards along the highway. For many Americans, John 3:16 is the only verse of the Bible they can recite from memory. We rarely, however, encounter this verse in context, as part of a dialogue between the fearful would-be disciple Nicodemus and the confounding rabbi Jesus. Nicodemus comes in darkness to stand before the light of the world. By this light, he is exposed.

When I was in middle school, two of my friends and I decided to lie to our parents and say that we were staying at one another's house. In reality, we were camping in the woods with a homeless man who had agreed to buy us beer and cigarettes. In the middle of the night, the three of us became very thirsty. We set off in the darkness to find water. I'll never forget what it felt like when the bright light enveloped me. Two police officers had spotted us crossing the road and were shining their search light on us. We were caught; I was completely ashamed. All of my deeds done in darkness were on display for the police and (more importantly) my family to see.

Lent is a little bit like my moment in the search light. It is an opportunity to come out of the deception we wrap around our lives and discover what in our lives "has been done in God." During Lent, we give God permission to shine His light on our lives, individually and corporately. This means that we spend time asking God and the people who know us best to show us where we need to repent. We confess our sins to one another. We prepare ourselves for that day when everything will be revealed by God's light. Like Nicodemus, we stand before the light of Jesus today so that "we may not perish but may have eternal life."

— *David Trautman, Ambridge, Diocesan Director of Communications and Seminarian (Trinity School for Ministry)*  
*Psalm 60, Deut. 9:23–10:5, Heb 4:1–10, John 3:16–21*

**March 18, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**Deuteronomy 10:12–22**

So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.<sup>14</sup> Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it,<sup>15</sup> yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.<sup>16</sup> Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer.<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe,<sup>18</sup> who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.<sup>19</sup> You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear.<sup>21</sup> He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.<sup>22</sup> Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

**“And now, Israel, what does the Lord require of you  
but to fear the Lord,  
to walk in all his ways,  
to love him,  
to serve the Lord your God  
with all your heart and with all your soul  
and to keep all the commandments  
and statutes of the Lord  
which I am commanding you today for  
your good?”**

Oh, is *that* all?

Was Moses cracking a joke?

(Do very holy people tell jokes? In Scripture?)

What?! *Circumcise the foreskin of your heart?!*

One of those body parts we’re not supposed to think about in church?!

(well, not too concretely anyway) but—

how does my heart have a foreskin?

and how on earth would I circumcise it if it did?

and what good would that do me anyway?

Am I allowed to write poems about the questions I really have about Scripture? especially

—questions involving body parts?

and how do I actually apply that when I

don’t even have a foreskin?

And why does Scripture have to be so earthy? Wouldn’t it be much more comfortable if all its metaphors didn’t

sting?

— *Joanne Martin, Oakland, counselor in private practice*  
*Psalm 40, Deuteronomy 10:12–22, Heb. 4:11–16, Jn. 3:22–36*

**March 19, 2011**  
**Saturday**  
**Psalm 139**

LORD, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. <sup>2</sup>You trace my journeys and my resting places and are acquainted with all my ways. ... <sup>4</sup>You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me. <sup>5</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it. <sup>6</sup>Where can I go then from your Spirit? where can I flee from your presence? <sup>7</sup>If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also. <sup>8</sup>If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>9</sup>Even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast. <sup>10</sup>If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night," <sup>11</sup>Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. <sup>12</sup>For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>13</sup>I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well. <sup>14</sup>My body was not hidden from you, while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth. ... <sup>16</sup>How deep I find your thoughts, O God! how great is the sum of them! <sup>17</sup>If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours. ... <sup>22</sup>Search me out, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts. <sup>23</sup>Look well whether there be any wickedness in me and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

The Joy of Being Known

Six months ago, Fr. Jonathan read this Psalm as my wife and I cradled the lifeless body of our infant son Lucas. Life's fragility and death's reality had never been so poignant and real. But as this psalm has sunk deeper into my soul, the Holy Spirit has led me to contemplate the mystery and joy of knowing God and being known by Him rather than questions of life and death.

The psalmist eloquently conveys the all-embracing knowledge of God. It is not contained by the darkness of night, the depths of the seas or the mystery of the grave. Even the very heart of God's creation — man and woman — is known to him in intricate detail. Finally, in an almost exasperated voice, the psalmist concedes that he would have to be like God to understand the intimate knowledge God has of our lives.

Although there is comfort in the psalmist's words, the most critical message of this psalm is transformational change. Such change only occurs when we, like the psalmist, invite God to "search me out, and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts." Is there a more terrifying, humbling or important prayer we can pray? When we allow God's knowledge to reach our darkest places of sorrow, fear, shame and guilt we are led by Him on "the way everlasting." This is the real joy of being known by God!

As I walk my journey and invite the Holy Spirit into my wounded soul, I find my love for, and dependence upon God deepens. But the real secret to living this out is not walking alone – my wife, daughter, family, small group, church all play a vital role in the journey.

Invite Him in. Invite others in. Then watch God transform your life.

— *Brian Wortham, Mt. Lebanon, Brand Manager*  
(*Heinz North America*)

*Psalm 139, Deuteronomy 11:18–28, Hebrews 5:1–10, John 4:1–26*

## March 21, 2011 Monday John 4:27–42

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?”<sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,<sup>29</sup> “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”<sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”<sup>32</sup> But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”<sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.<sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’<sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word.<sup>42</sup> 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.”

Jesus’ disciples return from buying lunch in the Samaritan village (4:8), an activity that must have been unpleasant since “Jews did not associate with Samaritans” (4:9). I wonder—did they try to conceal their identities in the village, or did they barter while maintaining their disdain? The villagers knew something strange was afoot, with this many Jews shopping in their marketplace. Jews usually walked around Samaria to avoid it. Having completed this unpleasant shopping trip, the disciples find Jesus talking to a Samaritan, who’s a woman and an outcast. Nobody went to the well alone in the heat of the day unless the other women didn’t want her around.

Contrast the woman’s behavior with that of the disciples: “Leaving her water jar” (that’s like leaving her groceries in the cart), she went home and told her neighbors to come and see “a man who told me everything I ever did.” Presumably, if anyone knows what she has done, it’s her neighbors. That’s why she avoids them. Yet, here she is, reminding people of what they judge her for, and with excitement—this is a good thing that she wants to share. The villagers already knew something was going on, because of the disciples’ presence.

Back at the well, the disciples want Jesus to eat. My guess is they want to put this unpleasantness behind them, forget about this woman, this village. Some have used Jesus’ reply to argue he doesn’t want people to focus on mundane matters like food. I think he’s rejecting their attempt to ignore what has happened. In fact, he is calling their attention to her and the village. I imagine the Samaritans coming all at once, on the road and through the fields. He may be gesturing toward them as he speaks: “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest!”

— Wendy Scott, *Aspinwall*, Social Services Coordinator (UPMC Passavant)

*Psalm 65, Jeremiah 1:11–19, Romans 1:1–15, John 4:27–42*

**March 22, 2011**  
**Tuesday**  
**Romans 1:16–25**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; <sup>21</sup>for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools; <sup>23</sup>and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

When do you stop reading a Bible passage? I wanted to stop reading this one after the first two verses, for after that the tone seemed harsh. When I read further, I ran right in to a passage that is held out as a biblical condemnation of homosexuality. But then in the next two chapters the tables appear turned, with a stern dressing-down for the self-righteous. Paul thunders, “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” What things? Homosexual acts? Or failure to have faith, to honor God? Failure to repent, with hard and impenitent hearts? Failure to recognize what creatures we serve instead of the Creator? God’s kindness is to lead us to repentance. God’s wrath is revealed when we fail to honor him with faith and thanks.

And faith does appear to be the heart of the message—even literally the heart of true life if in fact the righteous live by faith. In the gospel God’s righteousness is revealed through faith for faith. The good news is nonsense without faith but nothing less than the power of God for salvation to those with faith. If we’re ashamed of the good news, it must be shame before other creatures. For isn’t shame the result when we claim to be wise, or righteous, and are shown wanting before the world? Does shame even enter in to our relationship with the Creator? Indeed, doesn’t fear of shame prevent repentance?

A wise woman told me something about fear of shame some months ago: “Yes, and the answer to fear is love.” When angels speak in the Bible, they so often begin, “Do not be afraid.” Faith and love are decisions, acts of will that spring from repentance, each flowing out of and reinforcing the other. If I can love, it’s because I have faith, whether or not articulated beforehand. For faith and love I need God’s will to help my will. I know I will serve something. But with more faith I’ll more serve Him. And, of course, His service is perfect freedom.

— *Jonathan Sewall, Pittsburgh, Computer Programmer*  
*Psalm 61, Jeremiah 2:1–13, Rom. 1:16–25, John 4:43–54*

**March 23, 2011**  
**Wednesday**  
**Psalm 72**

Give the King your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the King's Son; <sup>2</sup>That he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice; <sup>3</sup>That the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the little hills bring righteousness. <sup>4</sup>He shall defend the needy among the people; he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor. <sup>5</sup>He shall live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another. <sup>6</sup>He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth. <sup>7</sup>In his time shall the righteous flourish; there shall be abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more. <sup>8</sup>He shall rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>9</sup>His foes shall bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust. <sup>10</sup>The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts. <sup>11</sup>All kings shall bow down before him, and all the nations do him service. <sup>12</sup>For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, and the oppressed who has no helper. <sup>13</sup>He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; he shall preserve the lives of the needy. <sup>14</sup>He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, and dear shall their blood be in his sight. <sup>15</sup>Long may he live! and may there be given to him gold from Arabia; may prayer be made for him always, and may they bless him all the day long. <sup>16</sup>May there be abundance of grain on the earth, growing thick even on the hilltops; may its fruit flourish like Lebanon, and its grain like grass upon the earth. <sup>17</sup>May his Name remain for ever and be established as long as the sun endures; may all the nations bless themselves in him and call him blessed. <sup>18</sup>Blessed be the Lord GOD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous deeds! <sup>19</sup>And blessed be his glorious Name for ever! and may all the earth be filled with his glory. Amen. Amen.

“He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth.”

Thank you, Lord, that you have held on to my mother for a hundred years so that, at the end of her life, you may shower her with your mercy and love. Thank you that you have seen my tears as I have longed for her to realize how precious she is to you. Thank you for your mercy in allowing me to be a part of the demonstration of your great love for her.

“For He will deliver the needy when he cries .... And will save the souls of the needy.”

It feels strange that my mother, who has been so proud and self-sufficient all her life, is now needy for me. Father, it is you for whom she is needy. Thank you for the strength and dignity you have given her as she has battled illness, a hospital stay and around the clock home health care. Dear Lord, I am so needy for you. How I love to bask in your presence! You are only too ready to anoint me with your love for my mother. Thank you for the opportunities you have given me to share with mom your healing love. Thank you that you always give me just the right words to say to her.

“and daily shall he be praised”

You are so worthy of my praise! Thank you for prompting my mother to share memories and confessions, even though some of her words have wounded me. Dearest Jesus, I am reminded of how I wound you each time I forget to look to you. Forgive me when I abandon you. Thank you that you never abandon me!

“Blessed be his glorious name forever.”

— Catherine Crotty Morgantown WV, Retired piano teacher  
*Psalm 72, Jeremiah 3:6–18, Romans 1:28–2:11, John 5:1–18*

**March 24, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**Psalm 70**

O LORD, make haste to help me.

<sup>2</sup>Let those who seek my life be  
ashamed and altogether dismayed;  
let those who take pleasure in  
my misfortune

draw back and be disgraced.

<sup>3</sup>Let those who say to me “Aha!” and  
gloat over me turn back,

because they are ashamed.

<sup>4</sup>Let all who seek you rejoice and be  
glad in you;

let those who love your salva-  
tion say for ever,

“Great is the LORD!”

<sup>5</sup>But as for me, I am poor and needy;  
come to me speedily, O God.

<sup>6</sup>You are my helper and my deliverer;  
O LORD, do not tarry.

I spend much of my life in a hurry. I rush to the bank to make a deposit before it closes; I hurriedly pack my lunch in the morning and drive too fast to work. When I read the opening words of Psalm 70, “hasten to save me”, I associate hastening with the rush of my own life. I much prefer to think of my spiritual life as one of solace and rest, a place I can get away from any sense of urgency, where God is not a superhero quickly coming to save the day. Yet my fragile spiritual reality demands that I cry out to God with urgency. To hasten is a reminder that God is more immediate than I can imagine and that my need to be rescued is more dire than I might fully understand. My problem is that I often don’t even realize that I need to be rescued. In fact, I often don’t possess the faith to know that for my every need, my God is intimately interested in hastening to me.

In verses 2- 4, the Psalmist describes a real threat. This isn’t just a bout of paranoia; it describes my spiritual reality. I am foolish when I believe that I live in a world where no one or nothing can do me harm. There is real danger and there are forces that desire my ruin, even to the point of ridiculing: Aha--where is your God now? When I acknowledge that I need help, God becomes strength to my feeble senses; when I long for the immediate and intimate chastening power of God’s saving presence, I find strength to meet a challenge. And as a result I find joy and thanksgiving, where there is no room for shame or doubt.

In the day to day events of my life, in the moments that I struggle to do what is pleasing to God, I often don’t have the words to pray. That is when I need God to hasten to my rescue. For me it helps to pray the ancient Jesus prayer: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” Lord, come quickly, for I can’t do this on my own.

— Gary Harger, *Regent Square, German teacher, Barack Obama Academy of International Studies*  
*Psalm 70, Jeremiah 4:9–10, 19–28, Romans 2:12–24,*  
*John 5:19–29*

**March 25, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**Psalm 69:31–36**

As for me, I am afflicted and in pain;  
your help, O God, will lift me up on  
high.

<sup>32</sup>I will praise the Name of God in  
song;

I will proclaim his greatness with  
thanksgiving.

<sup>33</sup>This will please the Lord more than  
an offering of oxen,  
more than bullocks with horns and  
hoofs.

<sup>34</sup>The afflicted shall see and be glad;  
you who seek God, your heart  
shall live.

<sup>35</sup>For the Lord listens to the needy,  
and his prisoners he does  
not despise.

<sup>36</sup>Let the heavens and the earth  
praise him,  
the seas and all that moves in them;

“But I am poor and sorrowful: let thy salvation, O God, set me up  
on high.”Psalm 69:31 KJ

For the past thirty years I have been a Christian. The last few  
years, I have been struck by the fact that our life circumstances  
do not seem to get easier as we mature in Christ. There is much  
sorrow and hardship in this world from which being a Christian  
does not exempt us. In fact, I have found that it can actually  
make things more difficult. The more sensitive we become to  
the Holy Spirit, the more deeply grieved we become by the  
darkness, pain and suffering in this world. I thought the yoke  
was supposed to be easy and the burden light!

In January, I attended a soaking prayer session. I was  
feeling deeply troubled by the intense pain of so many people I  
love. Then from the background CD I heard:

Come Home, Come Home

Ye who are weary come home.

I cried out to God from the depths of my being, “I am so  
weary!” He showed me that I was living from the wrong home.  
I was operating from earth where I would reach up to him in  
prayer from an earthly perspective. He was calling me to live  
with Him in the Kingdom and to reach down to earth in prayer  
from a Heavenly perspective.

Our home is with Him and if we live there, we will not  
be weary. Because of Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension,  
the gates of Heaven have been flung open. We can live in His  
presence by centering our lives on worship. There we will not  
be heavily burdened, for we will more and more greatly know  
Him to whom we pray and His magnificent power, creativity  
and wisdom.

As a church, worship transports us to the Throne of  
Grace with the saints and angels into the presence of Lord God  
Almighty, who was and is and is to come. In this place, our  
walls are not made of stone and mortar, but of worship past,  
present and throughout eternity.

— *Kathryn Barnard, Forest Hills, Artistic Director of Oakland  
Girls Choir*

*Psalm 69:31–36, Jeremiah 5:1–9, Romans 2:25–3:18,  
John 5:30–47*

**March 26, 2011**  
**Saturday**  
**John 7:1–13**

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. <sup>2</sup>Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. <sup>3</sup>So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; <sup>4</sup>for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” <sup>5</sup>(For not even his brothers believed in him.) <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. <sup>7</sup>The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. <sup>8</sup>Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” <sup>9</sup>After saying this, he remained in Galilee. <sup>10</sup>But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. <sup>11</sup>The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, “Where is he?” <sup>12</sup>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.” <sup>13</sup>Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

As a child, one of my favorite books was *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. I was captivated by Sir Percy, willing to be considered silly, vain and shallow so that he could rescue people from the French guillotine. So effective was Sir Percy’s disguise that even his wife Marguerite was deceived, though along with all England she was enchanted by the mysterious hero, the daring and dauntless Scarlet Pimpernel.

Sir Percy fascinated me because the people I knew—including myself and my family—did the opposite. We tried to appear better than we were, hiding away our struggles, sins, and insecurities. We wanted people to think well of us, and cultivated reputations at odds with the realities of our lives. Like Marguerite with Percy, people close to Jesus—even his own brothers—did not recognize Jesus for who he really was. Jesus pursued his own agenda (his Father’s agenda) without much concern for the speculation and gossiping of the crowds. He was motivated not by trying to make a good impression or maintain a good reputation, but by truth, passionate purpose, and genuine love. He knew who he was and what he was to be about; he didn’t need to win popularity points or political contests.

Later in John 7 (v. 24), Jesus says, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” We start, I think, by opening our lives to Jesus, not pretending to be what we are not. Right judgment begins there, grounded in love, clothed in humility, fragrant with mercy.

We’re not told how (wouldn’t you love to know?), but one of Jesus’ skeptical brothers later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. This James said, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” He spoke, I think, from experience.

— *Debra Kay Kornfield, Morningside, Missionary on assignment in Pittsburgh*  
*Psalm 75, Jeremiah 5:20–31, Romans 3:19–31, John 7:1–13*

**March 28, 2011**  
**Monday**  
**John 7:14–36**

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. <sup>15</sup>The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" <sup>16</sup>Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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 false in him. <sup>19</sup>"Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" <sup>20</sup>The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" <sup>21</sup>Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. <sup>22</sup>Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. <sup>23</sup>If 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? <sup>24</sup>Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." <sup>25</sup>Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? <sup>26</sup>And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? <sup>27</sup>Yet

we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." <sup>28</sup>Then 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. <sup>29</sup>I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." <sup>30</sup>Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup>Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?" <sup>32</sup>The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. <sup>33</sup>Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. <sup>34</sup>You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." <sup>35</sup>The 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? <sup>36</sup>What does he mean by saying, 'You will search for me and you will not find me' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

**April 22, 20101**

**Friday**

**Psalm 95**

Have you ever asked someone how they know something and had them respond “I just know”? This year I started working as a teacher’s aide in a preschool and “I just know” is something I hear daily. A 4-year-old raises her hand and tells me that the freezing temperature is 32. How does she know that? “I just do,” she says. Thankfully, in this passage, Jesus explains himself a little further.

“My doctrine is not mine, but His who sent me.” He has the ultimate character reference: He is authorized by God the Father Himself. He’s giving us the greatest reason to trust what he’s saying. So Jesus may not have gone to Harvard or Stanford, but he comes from the highest power and the greatest teacher.

John, a 3-year-old in one of the classes I help with, is forever asking me “How do you know that? How do you know that’s red? How do you know that Jesus is God’s son? How do you know that Crosby is captain of the Penguins?” That’s in our nature, isn’t it? “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?” the people ask. And why shouldn’t they? If we go to hear a lecture don’t we want to know where the lecturer went to school, what teachers they studied under, and what other training they’ve had? We want credentials! We can hardly blame these people for questioning Jesus.

So what do I tell John? “I just know?” No. I tell him that someone taught me that a long time ago. I tell him God tells us in the Bible. And I tell him that I’ve seen the Penguins play a time or two. But most of all I ask him to trust me and those who put me there to teach him. And that’s a lot of what I hear Jesus saying in this passage.

— *Melissa Tickner, Bethel Park, Teacher’s Aide; Children’s Choir Director*

*Psalm 80, Jeremiah 7:1–15, Romans 4:1–12, John 7:14–36*

**March 29, 2011**  
**Tuesday**  
**John 7:37–52**

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, <sup>38</sup>and 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.’” <sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” <sup>41</sup>Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? <sup>42</sup>Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” <sup>43</sup>So there was a division in the crowd because of him. <sup>44</sup>Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. <sup>45</sup>Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” <sup>46</sup>The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” <sup>47</sup>Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? <sup>48</sup>Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? <sup>49</sup>But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.” <sup>50</sup>Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, <sup>51</sup>“Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” <sup>52</sup>They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

One of the wonderful things I find reading the Scriptures is how they speak to us about current situations we face. In the stand we are making for the Gospel that led us to leave the Episcopal Church we have encountered those who have laughed at us, judged us, and threatened us. Even now we face demands from the local Episcopal diocese for our buildings, investments, and other property – none of which is theirs. And I feel like Nicodemus, in our reading today, saying – “Wait a minute, that’s not right!”

I take comfort from Nicodemus’s example and willingness to stand up against his brother lawyers and priests – to question their bully-boy tactics in trying to have Jesus arrested. But I take even more comfort from the opening words of our reading – which is what got Jesus into trouble in the first place.

As always, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And our property is not the main thing. Jesus is. We live in a parched land surrounded not just by those who seek to harm us, but by many, many thirsty people who need Living Water. Well, there’s good news! We can turn to the source of that Living Water, drink deeply and be filled with the Holy Spirit – filled to overflowing so that God’s love flows out of us into a parched land. Most people couldn’t care less about church property disputes – why should they? Your friends and neighbors have enough to worry about with their health, finances, relationships, work, kids, parents, loneliness, or whatever else makes them feel so parched.

Take a moment now to come to the source of that Living Water. Ask Jesus to fill you up where you are parched. Then ask him to fill you to overflowing so that the Living Water of Jesus flowing from you will refresh those whom you come into contact with this week. Amen.

— *Jonathan Millard, Fox Chapel, Rector*  
*Psalm 78:1–39, Jeremiah 7:21–34, Romans 4:13–25,*  
*John 7:37–52*

**March 30, 2011**  
**Wednesday**  
**Romans 5:1–11**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. <sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup>But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Thank you God, that your Character, Your Love, never changes.  
Thank you that your intention toward me in every situation always begins and ends in Love.

Thank you that I can trust You to bring forth a work of Love, even as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Because - You ARE with me.

And You are FOR me. You are SO for me.

Thank you that Your kindness is towards me in my worst moments.

Thank you that You never change in this.

Thank you for giving me a hope that is based on Your Goodness, Your Mercy, Your Lovingkindness.

It is because You do not change in this, that my hope is sure.

It truly does not disappoint me because Your love HAS been poured out;

Even into my very heart;

by You.

— *Wendy Jane LeMarquand, Bell Acres, Prayer Ministry*  
*Psalm 81, Jeremiah 8:18–9:6, Romans 5:1–11, John 8:12–20*

**March 31, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**Jeremiah 10:11–24**

Thus shall you say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens. <sup>12</sup>It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. <sup>13</sup>When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain, and he brings out the wind from his storehouses. <sup>14</sup>Everyone is stupid and without knowledge; goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them. <sup>15</sup>They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish. <sup>16</sup>Not like these is the LORD, the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name. <sup>17</sup>Gather up your bundle from the ground, O you who live under siege! <sup>18</sup>For thus says the LORD: I am going to sling out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and I will bring distress on them, so that they shall feel it. <sup>19</sup>Woe is me because of my hurt! My wound is severe. But I said, "Truly this is my punishment, and I must bear it." <sup>20</sup>My tent is destroyed, and all my cords are broken; my children have gone from me, and they are no more; there is no one to spread my tent again, and to set up my curtains. <sup>21</sup>For the shepherds are stupid, and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered. <sup>22</sup>Hear, a noise! Listen, it is coming—a great commotion from the land of the north to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a lair of jackals. <sup>23</sup>I know, O LORD, that the way of human beings is not in their control, that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps. <sup>24</sup>Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure; not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

Verses 11-16 Only God, the Lord Almighty, is the maker of all things. False gods are worthless. Why do we need to be reminded of this? We must be prone to wander and put our trust in false gods. Lord, help us to not be distracted and only put our trust every day in you.

Verses 17-22 "I will hurl out...", "I will bring distress...", "I will make...", God is acting behind the scenes. How often do we hear reports in history or even today, where individuals or governments take independent action, or so it seems. They are not acting independently. As we have recently witnessed the news reports of unrest and rebellion to overthrow governments in the Middle East, we should consider what God might be doing behind the scenes.

Verses 23-24 Jeremiah's prayer – "A man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps." We are also reminded of this in Proverbs 16:9 "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." Not only is God working behind the scenes with nations, he is directing our individual steps. I want God to direct my steps, because his plans are good and trustworthy. I echo the words from Casting Crowns:

Who am I?  
That the Lord of all the earth,  
Would care to know my name,  
Would care to feel my hurt.  
Who am I?  
That the Bright and Morning Star,  
Would choose to light the way,  
For my every wandering heart.  
  
Not because of who I am,  
But because of what you've done.  
Not because of what I've done,  
But because of who you are.

— *Allen Burnett, Monroeville, Instructional Designer*  
*Psalm 43, Jeremiah 10:11–24, Romans 5:12–21, John 8:21–32*

**April 1, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**Romans 6:1–11**

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For whoever has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup>But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because any one who has died has been freed from sin.

Lent is a time when our attention is focused on the sin that remains in our lives, even as we walk with Christ. Appropriately so! Every last one of us needs this opportunity for review, reassessment, repentance, and renewal. There is no denying that, however essential, this is a very painful process. So dreary! So wearying! So discouraging to see how much we need to change and how far we have yet to travel! We arrive at April, 1, 2011, about half way through Lent, and this lesson from Romans 6 arrives with a message of hope and reassurance to inspire us on our way.

We know from other sections of Romans that Jesus died to pay the price for our sin. In this passage we are reminded that, before Jesus, we had no choice but to sin. As Christians, who have been crucified with Him, we now have the capacity to choose not to sin. Because of Jesus we are able to choose to obey, to “live a new life”, as Paul says in this text. This is good news! We are free. Let us be encouraged and let us choose well.

— *Mary Martha Truschel, Forest Hills, Attorney; Clerk*  
*(Secretary of the Vestry)*  
*Psalm 88, Jeremiah 11:1–8, 14–20, Romans 6:1–11,*  
*John 8:33–47*

## April 2, 2011

### Saturday

### Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another.<sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God. <sup>3</sup>You turn us back to the dust and say, "Go back, O child of earth."<sup>4</sup>For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night. <sup>5</sup>You sweep us away like a dream; we fade away suddenly like the grass. <sup>6</sup>In the morning it is green and flourishes; in the evening it is dried up and withered. <sup>7</sup>For we consume away in your displeasure; we are afraid because of your wrathful indignation. <sup>8</sup>Our iniquities you have set before you, and our secret sins in the light of your countenance. <sup>9</sup>When you are angry, all our days are gone; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. <sup>10</sup>The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength even eighty; yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow, for they pass away quickly and we are gone. <sup>11</sup>Who regards the power of your wrath? who rightly fears your indignation? <sup>12</sup>So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. <sup>13</sup>Return, O LORD; how long will you tarry? be gracious to your servants. <sup>14</sup>Satisfy us by your loving kindness in the morning; so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life. <sup>15</sup>Make us glad by the measure of the days that you afflicted us and the years in which we suffered adversity. <sup>16</sup>Show your servants your works and your splendor to their children. <sup>17</sup>May the graciousness of the LORD our God be upon us; prosper the work of our hands; prosper our handiwork.

A student once wrote on my course evaluation, "You teach us the human condition." It's true. That is what I do. It can be hard work, for I spend my days telling the young—and reminding myself—that the situation is not good. Indeed it is desperate. Psalm 90 highlights three aspects of our condition that make us wretched: our sin, our circumstances, our mortality. As a result of this condition, we face wrath and death. We are withered and consumed.

This psalm shows us, however, that even in this condition we may pray, and it shows us what to pray for. First, we must count each day, even in its deep sadness, so that we will learn the wisdom of humility. That is a hard opening, but what follows is nothing short of astounding. The psalmist is so bold as to pray that he will be satisfied. Satisfied? That he might be so satisfied that he breaks out in spontaneous singing! That he might see the justice of it all—and the mercy. He asks for favor. Based on what? Well, certainly not on the images of dry and withered grass we read about. No hope there. Hope resides in the opening image, the image that makes speaking the psalm possible. It is the image of God as our dwelling place, our refuge. The psalmist is speaking to the covenant God, the God whose mercies are new every morning, so great is his faithfulness.

Because God is eternal, faithful, unchanging, and true, we have hope. So much hope that we can make one final, very bold prayer: that God would make our work mean something good—forever! No, really. Forever. Let's pray.

— Shirley Kilpatrick, *Beaver Falls, Professor at Geneva College Psalm 90, Jeremiah 13:1–11, Romans 6:12–23, John 8:47–59*

**April 4, 2011**  
**Monday**  
**John 6:1–15**

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup>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?” <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup>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.” <sup>15</sup>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.

Sometimes, I feel like God’s plan is ridiculous. (Can the Youth Director say that?) I have a compassion for the disciples in this passage because they are concerned about the details of feeding this massive crowd (Budget concerns! Stealing from children! What if there’s a gluten allergy?). And Jesus, per usual, is concerned with the Kingdom. And that concern is rarely convenient for me. And frequently a logistical nightmare.

It is hard for me to remember that God is in loving control of all of this. The big and the small. The crowd and the boy. Hard to remember that God is less concerned with efficiency and more concerned with transformation. That’s sometimes annoying to me. Because it’s not really measurable. And it can’t be plotted on a timeline or a graph.

Moving to Pittsburgh was not in my plan. (I mean, really, Black and Yellow? Are we bees?) And no one was more uncertain than I was, as I was packing up my house in Colorado, that this was, indeed, part of the plan. And yet the richness of his surprising love has completely transformed what I thought life could be. It’s a happy thing that I love Pittsburgh as much as I do. But God would still be in control even if I hated it.

God’s plan for us, in the story of rescue and redemption in which we exist, is always bigger and scarier and grander and messier than we would like. It’s not really plot-able (except maybe in hindsight). It’s not remotely efficient. And it’s the only thing that fills bellies. And mends bones. And heals hearts. Thanks be to God for his logistical nightmares.

— Sarah Larabee, *Highland Park*,  
*Director of Student Ministries, Church of the Ascension*  
*Psalm 89:1–18, Jeremiah 16:10–21, Romans 7:1–12,*  
*John 6:1–15*

**April 5, 2011**  
**Tuesday**  
**Psalm 100**

Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands;  
serve the LORD with gladness  
and come before his presence with a  
song.

<sup>2</sup>Know this: The LORD himself is God;  
he himself has made us, and we are  
his;

we are his people and the sheep of  
his pasture.

<sup>3</sup>Enter his gates with thanksgiving;  
go into his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and call upon his  
Name.

<sup>4</sup>For the LORD is good;  
his mercy is everlasting;  
and his faithfulness endures from  
age to age.

I admit that my prayer discipline is some times lacking. I have good intentions and plan on setting time aside for a morning devotional each day. And for days, sometimes weeks in a row I will. And then things happen...Early morning meetings, workmen arriving, 2-hour delays, snow days ...

But there is one prayer that I always pray every day without fail. Every night before going to sleep I “enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; give thanks to him.” Every night I thank God for the day that is done, for allowing me to partake of it. I make no requests, no petitions – this moment is simply to pause and reflect upon the ways God has blessed me this day, to be “joyful in the Lord.”

There is always a reason to give thanks. Some days it is for big things: landing an important gig, a performance that went well, my wife arriving safely home in bad weather, a friend’s surgery that went well. Sometimes it is for simple things: time spent hanging out with my daughter, the beautiful sunset. Some days it is easy to find things to be thankful for. Some days it is not. But even on the worst of days, when it feels like nothing has gone right, once I stop and consider, there is always much to thank God for. If I have been home all day, feeling sick and rotten, I thank God that I was not so ill that I had to go to the hospital. If the day brought more news of economic woes – a lost job, declining income – I thank God that we still have resources to fall back on. If the day was filled with fierce weather, I thank God that we have a house to shelter us from the storm. If nothing else, I can thank God simply that I was here for one more day.

Though I may forget my petitions and supplications, every night I remember that “the Lord is good,” that “his faithfulness endures,” and I give thanks for that.

— Alan Irvine, *Squirrel Hill, Spoken Word Artist*  
*Psalm 100, Jeremiah 17:19–27, Romans 7:13–25,*  
*John 6:16–27*

**April 6, 2011**  
**Wednesday**  
**Jeremiah 18:1–11**

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. <sup>5</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup>Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup>but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. <sup>9</sup>And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, <sup>10</sup>but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. <sup>11</sup>Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

“Are the gods not just?”

“Oh no, child. What would become of us if they were?”

- CS Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

Have you ever felt God to be unjust? I certainly have. I’ve complained, groaned, and bemoaned my fate. “WHY?” If God could tire, he surely would have tired of hearing that word from my lips. That is probably why this passage speaks so deeply to me. When I read verses 4-10, I hear him saying, “Have I not the right to make you and remake you until you are just right, no matter the pain or cost? In fact, in the end, do you truly want it any other way?”

Ultimately, according to any biblically-based system of logic, God has the right to do with us as He will – He created us and we are His. However, God does not generally approach us as an owner. Instead, he comes as a suitor, eager to draw us into deeper knowledge of His love, issuing a never-ending invitation, and just as consistently allowing us the option of refusing it.

The book *Till We Have Faces*, quoted above, concludes with the following thought from its erstwhile complainer: “... I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words.”

Many biblical heroes have seemed to reach the same conclusion: Job (“My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I... repent in dust and ashes,” Job 42:5-6), Phillip (John 14:8), Paul (2 Cor. 12:2-10). May I have this same grace, next time I am tempted to fuss: to eagerly seek His face instead of merely complaining about what He allows.

— Rachel Kornfield, *Morningside, Church Receptionist*  
*Psalm 101, Jeremiah 18:1–11, Romans 8:1–11, John 6:27–40*

**April 7, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**Psalm 69**

Save me, O God, for the waters have risen up to my neck. <sup>2</sup>I am sinking in deep mire, and there is no firm ground for my feet. <sup>3</sup>I have come into deep waters, and the torrent washes over me. <sup>4</sup>I have grown weary with my crying; my throat is inflamed; my eyes have failed from looking for my God. <sup>5</sup>Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; my lying foes who would destroy me are mighty. Must I then give back what I never stole? <sup>6</sup>O God, you know my foolishness, and my faults are not hidden from you. <sup>7</sup>Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek you be disgraced because of me, O God of Israel. <sup>8</sup>Surely, for your sake have I suffered reproach, and shame has covered my face. <sup>9</sup>I have become a stranger to my own kindred, an alien to my mother's children. <sup>10</sup>Zeal for your house has eaten me up; the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me. <sup>11</sup>I humbled myself with fasting, but that was turned to my reproach. <sup>12</sup>I put on sack cloth also, and became a byword among them. <sup>13</sup>Those who sit at the gate

murmur against me, and the drunkards make songs about me. <sup>14</sup>But as for me, this is my prayer to you, at the time you have set, O LORD: <sup>15</sup>"In your great mercy, O God, answer me with your unfailing help. <sup>16</sup>Save me from the mire; do not let me sink; let me be rescued from those who hate me and out of the deep waters. <sup>17</sup>Let not the torrent of waters wash over me, neither let the deep swallow me up; do not let the Pit shut its mouth upon me. <sup>18</sup>Answer me, O LORD, for your love is kind; in your great compassion, turn to me." <sup>19</sup>"Hide not your face from your servant; be swift and answer me, for I am in distress. <sup>20</sup>Draw near to me and redeem me; because of my enemies deliver me. <sup>21</sup>You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all in your sight." <sup>22</sup>Reproach has broken my heart, and it cannot be healed; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I could find no one. <sup>23</sup>They gave me gall to eat, and when I was thirsty, they gave me vinegar to drink. <sup>24</sup>Let the table before them be a trap and their sacred feasts a snare. <sup>25</sup>Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and give them continual trembling in their loins. <sup>26</sup>Pour out your indignation upon them, and let the fierceness of your anger overtake them.

<sup>27</sup>Let their camp be desolate, and let there be none to dwell in their tents.  
<sup>28</sup>For they persecute him whom you have stricken and add to the pain of those whom you have pierced.<sup>29</sup> Lay to their charge guilt upon guilt, and let them not receive your vindication.  
<sup>30</sup>Let them be wiped out of the book of the living and not be written among the righteous. <sup>31</sup> As for me, I am afflicted and in pain; your help, O God, will lift me up on high.<sup>32</sup>I will praise the Name of God in song; I will proclaim his greatness with thanksgiving. <sup>33</sup>This will please the LORD more than an offering of oxen, more than bullocks with horns and hoofs. <sup>34</sup>The afflicted shall see and be glad; you who seek God, your heart shall live. <sup>35</sup>For the LORD listens to the needy, and his prisoners he does not despise. <sup>36</sup> Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the seas and all that moves in them; <sup>37</sup>For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah; they shall live there and have it in possession. <sup>38</sup>The children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his Name will dwell therein.

Timing, sometimes, can be everything. Getting where you need to go, mailing what needs to be mailed, saying what needs to be said. And the results vary between being too early and being too late. The NRSV translation says, v14 “at an acceptable time... answer me.” This is not a demand to know ‘right now this minute’. An acceptable time. Godtime. I have little to no perspective right now, but I trust that You know what You’re doing, and ... I’ll know when I need to. Total submission to the sovereignty of God. Were it so simple, right? We’re constantly connected thanks to modern technology. No, let me check Facebook right now. Wait for that incoming text message...

Toe-to-toe with my mortal enemy Self-Doubt, I have some difficulty asking where God is, and more difficulty asking of God what He’s doing, with the number of exclamation points and question marks afterward varying given the circumstances. Water is a culturally universal symbol of chaos; little wonder then that we refer to strong emotions as flooding, or letting off steam? The deeper the proverbial water gets, the more I severely I doubt myself. This isn’t the crystal waters of the Caribbean, where you can see the seafloor. It’s pond scum and quicksand. Getting into quick sand is remarkably easy. It’s much harder to get out, and it’s slow going.

On first read, I was astonished that the psalm doesn’t end in a state of misery and grief. “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving”. Wait, what? That’s a turnaround I didn’t see coming. That and the addition of every thing under heaven, the land, the sea - and all the stuff in the sea - all praise God. I totally missed the deeper current of faith going on here. 1 Peter 1:7 talks about faith [tried by fire], faith that brings praise, honor and glory to God when Christ is revealed. Day by day, Christ is being revealed in some new way, to all of us. It’s not instantaneous, all at once, information overload. It’s at its own acceptable time.

— Zara Ostrander, *Edgewood, Renaissance Woman*  
*Psalm 69, Jeremiah 22:13–23, Romans 8:12–27, John 6:41–51*

**April 8, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**Romans 8:28–39**

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

<sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

<sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup>What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Two of my biggest personal struggles are seeing myself as designed for God in a universe vaster than the imagination and seeing the debilitating ways in which the desires of the flesh have perverted and destroyed the plan that God has created throughout it all. I deeply feel the struggle of the will of my flesh against the will of the Spirit. And yet, here we are absolutely assured, in no uncertain terms, that those of us who strive to live our lives in accordance with the will of the Spirit will someday be glorified and are today glorified. This passage, indeed this entire chapter (and if you haven't read the preceding verses in this chapter, I do strongly commend them to you) is chock full of hope and faith in this glorification that we will undergo. Yet this hope isn't entirely without opposition.

In Ephesians chapter six, Paul talks about the armor of God and the enemy we struggle against. He names our enemy as "the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". Personally, when you add in your Agnostic, Atheist, Islamic, Jewish, pro-tolerance, and P.C. neighbors into that mix, and our own struggles with ourselves, then Paul's final challenge, "who can be against us?" seems to hit up against a pretty solid wall with a nasty crunch.

Brothers and Sisters, this is the depth of the hope we have in our salvation! Our living in the Spirit allows us to boldly challenge these oppositions in the knowledge that we are and will be children and heirs of an Almighty God against whom all of these powers dwindle into nothing. So complete is our unity with God as heirs through His love that calling us the conquerors is inadequate.

— *Lex Kohn, Oakland and Towson MD, Student*  
*Psalms 107:1–32, Jeremiah 23:1–8, Romans 8:28–39,*  
*John 6:52–59*

**April 9, 2011**  
**Saturday**  
**John 6:60–71**

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" <sup>61</sup>But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?" <sup>62</sup>Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup>And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." <sup>66</sup>Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." <sup>70</sup>Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." <sup>71</sup>He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

The opening words of this passage point us to the "it" that the disciples had just heard. Jesus had just been telling the Pharisees that their ancestors had eaten manna in the desert and had died, but He, Jesus, is the bread of life and unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood they will have no life in them.

In true fashion and like us, the disciples were complaining about His teaching, Jesus asks, "Does this offend you?" And of course I ask myself does this offend me? What does it mean to me that I am to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus? Could it mean that I am not my own, that I am not the master of my existence, my well being, my lack of well being, by hopes, my disappointments, my dreams, and my desolations? The message sufficiently offended the Jews that they afterwards sought to kill Jesus.

Many disciples stopped following Jesus at these words. Perhaps they understood the words but rejected the mandate that the words implied. Surrendering all of life to Jesus is the only way to have true life and the price was too high. In March of 2007, when I experienced more grief than I had ever known in my entire life, I was grateful that the Spirit over and over assured me, that like Peter, I could say, "To whom shall I go Lord, for you have the words of eternal life?" My life, like those followers of Jesus, is enfolded in His life. Our lives are often not free from disease, accidents, betrayals and disappointments for we live in a fallen world. It is in Jesus, in the partaking of His body and His blood, that we have life and the "trials" of this life become opportunities for the Spirit to nourish, to fill and to give life.

"I have decided to follow Jesus, No turning back, No turning back"

— *Barbara Carver Franzen, Oakland, Lay Leader*  
*Psalm 102, Jeremiah 23:9–15, Romans 9:1–18, John 6:60–71*

## April 11, 2011 Monday John 9:1–17

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup>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, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>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?” <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” <sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>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.” <sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. <sup>17</sup>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.”

This very famous gospel story about the healing of the blind man starts with the disciples feeding back the interpretation of the reason for the blind man’s condition that they had been taught. Jesus uses the opportunity to show that the Messiah has come so the blind can see. The story goes on to verse 41 where the blind man declares he sees that Jesus is the Messiah. By this point the Pharisees have chosen to remain willfully “blind” and the blind man’s parents have shrunk in fear from supporting their son’s witness. There is even farce at the point where the learned Pharisees ask the lowly beggar who he thinks Jesus is since they have fallen into disputation.

I have played all parts in this story at various times. I have been guilty of the disciples’ false learned presumptions gained from the wisdom of the current era. I have not recognized plainly presented genuine miracles. I have shrunk from witness because of fear of losing position. And yes, I have seen Jesus heal through my imperfect prayers.

In the end, I am more thankful every day for all those in my life who could see Jesus as Lord. At this point the list has grown quite long. It includes my parents and my wife Martha as well as Mary McLaughlin, Bill Breckbill, Bill Bradbury, Ormsby Phillips and most recently Minnie Smith to name but a few. They have all cast Jesus’ light on my road while it was still day so I could see. My prayer is that I will follow their good witness.

— Alan Leonard Komm, Mount Washington, Retired  
*Psalm 35, Jeremiah 24:1–10, Romans 9:19–33, John 9:1–17*

**April 12, 2011**  
**Tuesday**  
**John 9:18–41**

<sup>18</sup>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 <sup>19</sup>and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup>but 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.” ... <sup>24</sup>So 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.” <sup>25</sup>He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” <sup>26</sup>They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” <sup>27</sup>He 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?” <sup>28</sup>Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup>We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” <sup>30</sup>The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup>We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup>Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. <sup>33</sup>If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” <sup>34</sup>They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. <sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” <sup>36</sup>He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” <sup>38</sup>He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

As well as revealing Jesus’ awesome power and His identity as Lord, this passage spotlights our need to come before the Savior, acknowledging the blindness throughout our lives, and worship Him.

God has been teaching me much recently about surrender, what it really means and how to live it daily. Surrender, I am discovering, is a sweet gift that flows from a totally honest relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus, the lover of our souls.

The blind man is not ashamed of his blindness; rather, he opens himself, makes himself completely vulnerable to Jesus, and is healed. Jesus tells us that his “yoke is easy and his burden light” (Matt 11:30). But how do we go about taking His yoke and giving our burdens?

To truly surrender, I am learning, requires a ruthless self-honesty and vulnerability before the Lord so that we can pour out our hearts to Him and genuinely lay our burdens – the full burdens – before Him.

When I repress my feelings and deceive myself, I bury my sin and separation deep in my heart and deny Jesus the opportunity to heal me, restore my sight, and use me to shine forth His glory.

Through surrender, Jesus can truly increase while we decrease.

I have struggled with understanding what it might mean to deny myself and am thankful to God for working in my heart to replace my desires with desire for Him alone. He is opening my eyes to daily surrender and its essential role in denying myself, taking up the cross, and following Him.

When we open our hearts and minds to Christ to be made new and transformed, He will answer and complete His work in us I am sure.

And what a double blessing – our burdens can be lifted and our knots worked out, all the while witnessing Jesus’ power and seeing where He comes from, so that each and every one of us may bow before Him proclaiming in joy and worship, “Lord I believe!”.

— *Hannah Foster, Point Breeze, Student (Princeton University)*  
*Psalms 121, Jeremiah 25:8–17, Romans 10:1–13, John 9:18–41*

**April 13, 2011**  
**Wednesday**  
**John 10:1–18**

“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. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup>“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes 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.”

36

Well it was two years ago when I wrote my last Lenten devotional. I talked about how I came to be at Ascension and why I stayed. My verse then was Galatians 5:13-14. Here are a few lines from the last devotional: “I believe God’s plan for my life was to be ‘planted’ here at Ascension to grow in the love of Christ and to be one of His ‘gardeners’ to keep the soil tilled.”

The times they are a changing. Are they? Jesus is the good shepherd in this passage. Jesus is the good shepherd in Psalm 23. Jesus is still the good shepherd. Jesus has called us to follow Him. No matter what your daytime job is, according to God’s word we all have agrarian jobs also! Some are fishermen and vinedressers. A couple years ago I reflected on myself as a gardener. I think all of us are called to ‘shepherd’ in some way.

If we are made in the image of God and are called to follow Him, then we must learn to recognize His voice. How does this happen? My grandson Judah will only learn to recognize my voice if I talk with him, read to him, sing him songs, hang out with him and develop a relationship with him. So shepherds, let’s continue the relationship with the Good Shepherd so we are able to help all sheep, even the ones not in the pen as of yet, to know His voice.

I have a particular burden for the youth in our church. I encourage you to help our young sheep attend youth group and corporate worship as often as possible and to support the program in all ways. Please take time to meet with and talk with Sarah Larabee, our Director of Youth Ministries, and all of our other volunteer youth leaders. Let’s make sure our young sheep know the Good Shepherd’s voice!

—*Thomas Hillman, Monroeville, Happening Director, Youth leader and Vestryman*

*Psalm 128, Jeremiah 25:30–38, Romans 10:14–21,  
John 10:1–18*

**April 14, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**Psalm 131**

O LORD, I am not proud;  
I have no haughty looks.

<sup>2</sup>I do not occupy myself with great matters, or with things that are too hard for me.

<sup>3</sup>But I still my soul and make it quiet, like a child upon its mother's breast; my soul is quieted within me.

<sup>4</sup>O Israel, wait upon the LORD, from this time forth for evermore.

The study notes in my NIV Bible say that a weaned child is a 4-to-5-year-old “who walks trustingly beside his mother.” I have known many children this age; they can be head-strong, too energetic, growing independent wings by the second, and wanting to experience the great wonders of their world. In Psalm 130 David has come before the Lord in penitence and in Psalm 131 he is resting in God's presence much like the young child who has returned to the safe security of his mother's side after venturing too far out into the big and scary world. In our hectic over-scheduled world, how often do we just sit still and quiet our souls and be fully present with God? No agenda, no list but a quiet mind and unhurried body. In my work as a therapist, I teach skills to people to help them better manage their emotions and daily stressors. One of the core skills is mindfulness which is learning to control the attention of your mind so that you can more successfully use the other skills. In Anthony de Mello's book *Praying Body and Soul*, he gives instructions on how to focus our breathing, quiet our thoughts, and calm our bodies in preparation to find a serenity, an inner silence to meet with God in prayer, to pray “soul and body” like Jesus in the Garden when he prayed “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” (Mt. 26:39) Not everyone may find de Mello appealing but his works have been helpful to me in learning to focus my own attentions when they drift whether in prayer or in study, and I have been able to incorporate some of the exercises into my work with others.

— Jackie McKee, Butler, PA, Child and Family Therapist  
*Psalm 131, Jeremiah 26:1–16, Romans 11:1–12, Jn. 10:19–42*

**April 15, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**Jeremiah 29:1, 4–13**

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. <sup>4</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. <sup>8</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, <sup>9</sup>for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD. <sup>10</sup>For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. <sup>12</sup>Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.

As I read through these verses, there was a lot that came to mind. Verses 11-13 are completely familiar and have been etched in my mind and heart for years. These verses are such a comfort when I am unsure of my plans or when my direction is lost. They calm my fears and reassure me that my God is good. He will answer when I seek him.

However, I found the beginning of the letter (vs. 4-10) incredibly powerful and informative about the God we worship. Our God is sovereign. He writes that it is his doing that the Israelites were moved into exile (“to all those I carried into exile...”). He pleads for those in exile to realize they will be there for a long time and that they can live for God and honor him, even in Babylon. He even goes to the extent of saying that they are to bring blessing (peace and prosperity) on the city.

It seems a little outlandish that God calls his people to settle down, build families, and live lives of both normalcy and intention with their captors. God also asked the Israelites, now foreigners in a strange land, to pray for the city and its prosperity. More than that, He called them to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.” He wants them to be a powerful part of the culture in prayer and action. I believe that our God also calls us to do and be the same today.

To what, to whom, and to which people (parts of which may or may not feel like exile) has our Lord and Savior called us to in order that we would pray for and truly seek peace and prosperity? May our God continue to put people and places on our hearts in order that His Kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven!

— *Jonny Cagwin, East Liberty, Director of Campus Ministries, Church of the Ascension*

*Psalm 22, Jeremiah 29:1, 4–13, Romans 11:13–24,*

*John 11:1–7*

**April 16, 2011**  
**Saturday**  
**Romans 11:25–36**

<sup>1</sup>By the waters of Babylon we sat  
down and wept,  
when we remembered you, O Zion.  
<sup>2</sup>As for our harps, we hung them up  
on the trees in the midst of that land.  
<sup>3</sup>For those who led us away captive  
asked us for a song,  
and our oppressors called for mirth:  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”  
<sup>4</sup>How shall we sing the LORD’S song  
upon an alien soil?  
<sup>5</sup>If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand forget its skill.  
<sup>6</sup>Let my tongue cleave to the roof of  
my mouth  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my  
highest joy.  
<sup>7</sup>Remember the day of Jerusalem, O  
LORD, against the people of Edom,  
who said, “Down with it! down with  
it! even to the ground!”  
<sup>8</sup>O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to  
destruction,  
happy the one who pays you back  
for what you have done to us!  
<sup>9</sup>Happy shall he be who takes your  
little ones, and dashes them against  
the rock!

I’ll be honest. At first glance, this devotional seemed impossible to write. I looked at this Psalm and had no idea what it was saying.

But when I looked deeper, I found that it is talking about being in a dark place, a painful place and still remembering God is there and in control. This year, a boy I had dated for almost three years broke up with me. I was devastated. I thought things were fine but they weren’t. Everyday was a challenge, waking up, going to school, seeing him. I must have cried every day at school for a month.

I knew God was there and I knew he had a plan for me, but sometimes it was hard to see it and trust him. When despair takes over, it’s hard to imagine what could ever make you happy again. Thankfully, in time, God helped me to realize his unconditional love and mercy. I have grown to not only accept the reality of the situation but also accept this boy through God’s love. Despair, heartache and pain can seem impossible to overcome, but God is always there, working in our lives, even if we don’t see it. As Chris Tomlin puts it in song, “and he will wipe away your tears, and return your wasted years, this is our God”

— *Anneke Harger, Regent Square, Trinity Christian School*  
*Psalm 137, Jeremiah 31:27–34, Romans 11:25–36,*  
*John 11:28–44*

**April 18, 2011**  
**Monday**  
**John 12:9–19**

When 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. <sup>10</sup>So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup>since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. <sup>12</sup>The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>So 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!” <sup>14</sup>Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: <sup>15</sup>“Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” <sup>16</sup>His 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. <sup>17</sup>So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. <sup>18</sup>It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. <sup>19</sup>The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

I’m not sure what to do with Jesus. I’m not sure what to do with a would-be messiah who rides into town on a donkey. But I think my confusion puts me shoulder-to-shoulder with the crowd who welcomes him to Jerusalem. Soon their ideas of what a messiah is and what he should be, will be shaken up like mine.

But in the moment I’m caught up with them in worshiping. I’m whistling and cheering and wearing my “GO JESUS!” jersey. Yet for all my enthusiasm, I’m also questioning.

Isn’t this the same guy who said “Blessed are the poor, the meek, and the merciful?” In the midst of poverty, church schisms, and oppression, can’t Jesus roll into town more like the vision of the apocalypse, like the rider on the white horse (eyes like blazing fire, robe dipped in blood, etc.)? Can’t he be a little more, um, powerful?

After all, where’s the blessing in mourning, in persecution? What does it accomplish when loved ones are torn away or take each other to court? Why all the pain, Jesus?

But behind the man on a donkey is the presence of a God who comes dying from love. It’s a love which doesn’t come naturally to me. I don’t like self-abandonment.

Still, it’s with this love that Jesus leaves behind his war-horse and comes preaching of a different, more-lasting kingdom. A kingdom where those who love through the loss; who proclaim peace and righteousness instead of themselves; who declare forgiveness in the place of retribution; where these find wholeness and peace which is beyond the reach of sickness and tyranny.

Jesus, I think I see what you’re getting at. But it’s hard to remember. Help me to understand you riding a donkey, establishing a kingdom of love and forgiveness.

— *Tim Depp, Waxhaw NC, Medical Student, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine*

*Psalm 51, Jeremiah 12:1–16, Phil. 3:1–14, John 12:9–19*

**April 19, 2011**  
**Tuesday**  
**John 12:20–26**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

I believe that within every human heart there lies an innate desire to control one’s own destiny. With that desire there comes a dangerous assumption: the belief that we actually can.

In America, we are exceedingly blessed with abundant resources to make almost any dream a reality. We can, for lack of a better phrase, achieve the American Dream. We work hard, put in our time, and rise to the top. Each year we hope to achieve just a little bit more than the last, whether through wealth, academics, service or other channels. We set goals, devise plans, and pursue them.

Why?

Really. Why are you on the path that you are on? Have you become so concerned about building your own legacy that you’ve missed the fact that you are already a part of God’s? Take a moment to ask yourself, who are your goals really serving? If you are like me, you will have the uncomfortable realization that dying to oneself, as Jesus commands in this passage, does not fit very well with the achievement of your goals.

The truth of the matter is that you can glorify yourself in this world or you can glorify Christ eternally. Which one will it be? Recognize that you are a child of God. As such, your actions and attitudes should reflect the awe and fear that comes with that honor. As you pursue your goals and make decisions regarding career, school, friends, activities, etc. what is the outcome that you are traveling towards? Are you truly willing to die to yourself to show others how to truly live? Jesus was.

— *Matthew Swab, Ross Township, Account Manager (Global Experience Specialists)*

*Psalm 6, Jeremiah 15:10–21, Phil. 3:15–21, John 12:20–26*

**April 20, 2011**  
**Wednesday**  
**Philippians 4: 1–13**

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. <sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. <sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

We can easily become fickle and lose sight of God's greatness. Paul's letter to the Philippians is an encouragement to the people whom he loves and to us in today's world, to continue our pursuit of the Lord and to stand firm. Paul gives us a charge to agree with one another in the Lord; not just crush our differences or opinions, but to actually be of the same mind when it comes to the Lord our God.

Because the Lord's return is always coming closer, Paul reminds us to rejoice in the Lord our God, and always give Him the praise. Paul urges us to let our gentleness be seen by all, not just by those we love. He also says not to be anxious about anything, but to use the power of prayer and give all requests to God, because He is the One with the power and control over all. In such a corrupt world as this, it is almost impossible to be kind in all circumstances and not to worry or be anxious. God knows this because He made us. However, because He gave us free will, He can only help us if we seek His guidance in our lives.

The passage emphasizes how we must take what we've learned from the Lord and apply it to every part of our lives, and then we will feel the true peace of God. Imagine a life where everyone could see God in all of His great creation. How incredible would that be? Lastly, Paul reveals the secret as to why he is always content despite whatever condition he finds himself in: We can do all things through the Lord our God who gives us strength. Without God we are nothing, can do nothing, and can go nowhere.

—James Gilmer, *Highland Park, CAPA*  
*Psalms 55, Jeremiah 17:5–10, 14–17, Phil. 4:1–13,*  
*John 12:27–36*

## April 21, 2011

### Thursday

### John 17

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

<sup>6</sup>"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

<sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

<sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup>"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

<sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup>"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

**April 21, 2011**  
**Thursday**  
**John 17**

Do you want to be like Jesus? Then seek to pray John 17 – the Disciple’s Prayer!

Do you want to be like Jesus? Have you been a Christian for more than three years? Then you should be a discipler, helping others grow toward becoming more like Christ (cf Hb 5.11-14). When a King gives his subjects a Royal or Great Commission, he allows no disobedience. The heart of his commission is to make disciples. Are you doing that? And if not, how will you explain yourself to Jesus?

Do you really want to be like Jesus? Then ask God to clarify who are “those that you gave me” (v. 6). I believe God has given each of us some people to pour our lives into, to disciple. Through three days with Howard Hendricks when I was twenty, God convicted me and burned his Great Commission into my heart. I have been discipling ever since. Thirty-seven years. Investing in disciples to become disciple-makers... to do the same with others in a multiplying way.

Jesus has sent us into the world as he was sent (v. 18), with the same mission, the same commission: make disciples. Jesus had two works to complete on earth, one through his death, one through his life. He completed once for all the work of redemption through his death. We, however, are privileged to continue his life work: making disciples. Without Christ’s disciple-making, the church would never have gone forward in spite of his redemptive sacrifice. And today is no different. If we don’t make disciples, the church will cease to go forward.

You want to be like Jesus? Then join him in his mission, his life work: make disciples. “For them I sanctify myself” (v. 19). I devote myself; I consecrate myself; I separate myself. For whom do you sanctify or separate yourself? In whose favor are you living, for Jesus’ sake?

— *David Kornfield, Morningside, Ascension Missionary and OCI Missionary to Latin America*  
*Psalm 142, Jeremiah 20:7–11, I Cor. 10:14–17, 11:27–32,*  
*John 17*

**April 22, 2011**  
**Friday**  
**Psalm 95**

Come, let us sing to the LORD; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation. <sup>2</sup>Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to him with psalms. <sup>3</sup>For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup>In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also. <sup>5</sup>The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands have molded the dry land. <sup>6</sup>Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the LORD our Maker. <sup>7</sup>For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice! <sup>8</sup>Harden not your hearts, as your forebears did in the wilderness, at Meribah, and on that day at Massah, when they tempted me. <sup>9</sup>They put me to the test, though they had seen my works. <sup>10</sup>Forty years long I detested that generation and said, "This people are wayward in their hearts; they do not know my ways." <sup>11</sup>So I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter into my rest."

To say my senior year has been easy would be an outright lie. From college applications to auditions to hours of practicing, it has been easy for me to become overwhelmed. So often, I find myself wondering if all this effort is really worth it. I guess this is one of the reasons I felt so drawn to the last four verses of this passage. I understand the temptation to question God's calling for my life.

I recently experienced this after hearing a wonderful speech on missions. On some level, I have always felt a strange sense of guilt for not feeling called to become a missionary or a priest - as if my devotion to God were somehow to blame. But through discussions with others and through prayer, I have come to realize that this is not true. Obeying God needs to be my first priority. Just because I have not been called to serve in Asia or Africa does not make my call any less of a mission, nor does it mean that the people I will be in contact with are somehow less in God's eyes.

As I pursue a career in music, I am blessed with the opportunity to live out this Psalm literally—to shout praises and sing hymns "to the Rock of our Salvation... to the Lord our Maker." But this passage is not just for musicians. It is intended for everyone, regardless of age or vocation. If we live out the joy so beautifully described in this passage in our daily lives, who would be able to resist God's contagious love?

— *Christiana Barnard, Forest Hills, Homeschooled*  
*Psalm 95, Genesis 22:1–14, 1 Peter 1:10–20, John 13:36–38*

**April 23, 2011**  
**Saturday**  
**Psalms 27**

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid? <sup>2</sup>When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who stumbled and fell.<sup>3</sup>Though an army should encamp against me, yet my heart shall not be afraid; <sup>4</sup>And though war should rise up against me, yet will I put my trust in him. <sup>5</sup>One thing have I asked of the LORD; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life; <sup>6</sup>To behold the fair beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. <sup>7</sup>For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter; he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling and set me high upon a rock. <sup>8</sup>Even now he lifts up my head above my enemies round about me. <sup>9</sup>Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation with sounds of great gladness; I will sing and make music to the LORD. <sup>10</sup>Hearken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me. <sup>11</sup>You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." Your face, LORD, will I seek. <sup>12</sup>Hide not your face from me, nor turn away your servant in displeasure. <sup>13</sup>You have been my helper; cast me not away; do not forsake me, O God of my salvation. <sup>14</sup>Though my father and my mother forsake me, the LORD will sustain me. <sup>15</sup>Show me your way, O LORD; lead me on a level path, because of my enemies. <sup>16</sup>Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen up against me, and also those who speak malice. <sup>17</sup>What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! <sup>18</sup>O tarry and await the LORD'S pleasure; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; wait patiently for the LORD.

The last day of Lent. You made it and you're still reading these devotionals. Well done!

Tomorrow is Easter and the resurrection will be upon us. It's going to be a good day.

But unlike Easter, the other 'resurrections' in our lives are not as predictable. They are not marked on the calendar. There may be times when our lives seem like they are in the tomb – cut off and disconnected from life – waiting for God to bring his resurrection power to bear on them. And we wait . . . not knowing how long we will have to wait. Days, months, or years. It could be tomorrow or it could be the next decade. And that uncertainty, especially when it grinds on, weighs on us.

That's why it's so important to look at the light. That is David's instruction to us. The light that David describes is God himself, "The LORD is my light," (v.1). He does not say, "The LORD lights," or, "The LORD provides my light." He says, "The LORD is my light." The Character of God - his faithfulness and his fatherly care in even the most hopeless situations – is the light that David relies on to see reality rightly. This is what gives him the hope that he needs to keep going, knowing that the resurrection power of God is certain even though the timing is uncertain.

Tomorrow Lent will end. But there may be 'Lents' in your life that keep going. If that's the case – keep looking at the light that the LORD is. Keep meditating on his character until his resurrection light breaks through for all the world to see.

— *Josh Miller, Shadyside, Associate Rector*  
*Psalms 27, Job 19:21–27a, Hebrews 4:1–6*

