

February 26, 2020

Read Matthew 10

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 10:28-30)

What words do you think of when you think of Lent?

My hunch is that *rest* isn't one of the first words you think of. I would like to suggest, though, that *rest* is a wonderful lens for the season of Lent, and that when we keep a holy Lent, we will find that it is deeply marked by restfulness. Many of us, though, don't experience Lent that way. We experience it as hard work, deprivation, and, at times, as an unpleasant burden. But it isn't meant to be that way in Lent. In fact, it is never meant to be that way. The way of Jesus is always meant to be one of a light and easy yoke, a way of rest.

The invitation of Jesus is to leave behind trying to earn God's love and favor by what we do, and instead to find rest in God's love. It isn't that what we do doesn't matter, but it is meant to spring from a different source. We don't earn God's love by what we do, but rather, we respond to God's love with what we do. When we live this way, responding to God's gracious love with our own loving obedience, we find that following Jesus is not a burden, but a light and easy yoke.

I think this rest goes deeper yet. Our lives are really meant to be marked by rest in every way. To the Hebrew mind, rest (Sabbath) and peace (shalom) go hand in hand, they come together. They describe not only a state of affairs, but a state of being. As followers of Jesus, our lives are meant to be marked by rest.

So how do we find that kind of rest? The simple, but not simplistic answer is this: Jesus. Rest is not found when we finish the work at hand or take time off or a vacation. Rest, true rest, is found in Jesus. The problem for most of us is that we are trying to find rest in the wrong places. Spiritually, we often try to find it in piety that becomes a burden, not a source of rest. Physically, we try to find it through vacations and escapism. It isn't that these things are bad in themselves, but they can't provide true rest. Only Jesus can.

That's where Lent provides such a rich opportunity. Lent is meant to bring us back to Jesus, and as we abide in Him, it will always be a place of rest.

As this Lent begins, commit yourself not to a burdensome season of works meant to somehow make you look better in your own, or God's eyes. Rather, commit yourself to not seeking rest where it cannot be found. Commit yourself to getting rid of anything and everything that is keeping you from abiding in the One who is your rest: Jesus.

Fr. Karl E. Dietze
Trinity Anglican Church

February 27, 2020

Read Romans 10

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4)

Paul tells us he is not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation and contains the righteousness of God (*Rom. 1:16-17*). Why would Paul say this unless others were not thinking that there was something shameful about the gospel?

I once heard, though I do not recall where, of a woman who was plagued by her appearance. There wasn't any visible defect, nor was she unattractive. Rather, she was ashamed of the fact that she didn't fit the image she had for herself. Every time she looked into the mirror, she was crushed by her inability to match the ideal silhouette. Paul tells us this is true of us as well, when it comes to God's law. The law is an expression of God's grace, but it has its limits. It is gracious because it shows us the way to travel, it gives us the perspective that we may be heading in the wrong direction, and it reveals what the hazards are along the way. In this sense, it is a map. Paul doesn't say that Christ puts an end to the law, rather he says that what the law pointed towards, God's righteousness, has now arrived in Jesus. This means the law has a proper purpose, to point the way and to reveal when we're lost, but it is not the vehicle to get us to the destination.

When we look into the mirror of God's law, we often have a similar experience as the woman distraught by her appearance. The law reveals our imperfection and inclination to go our own way apart from God; it reveals the distorted image of our sin. Yet its purpose is not to bring despair, but delight. The question is how? The gospel declares that through a simple, child-like trust in the saving work of Jesus, we're brought into the fellowship of love that exists at the heart of reality (*5-17*). Salvation is an eternal relationship with the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit that we're privileged to live into every moment of every day. When God looks upon you, he does not see a distorted image that fails to fill in the outline of a beloved child. He sees you clothed in Jesus' perfect righteousness. He delights as he looks upon you right now. This is what people find shameful about the gospel — receiving righteousness as a gift of grace and not a product of self-effort. The law is the map, faith is the vehicle, and the destination is a relationship with Jesus through the Spirit.

Lent as a season is a response to the gospel. Because we're so deeply loved, we seek to make more room in our lives to welcome God's grace. Our Lenten disciplines are meant to serve as maps that point us towards deeper union with Christ. They create an awareness, a thirst and hunger for Jesus. Only the grace, love, and mercy of God in Christ can satisfy them.

How can seeing yourself as God truly sees you in Jesus, set you free to love God and others well?

Father Mark Hall

All Saints Anglican Church

February 28, 2020

Read Exodus 7

“Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness” (Exodus 7:16b)

When I was about three years old, one of my favorite phrases to say to my mother was “I’m the boss!” I would often run up to her with a serious expression and say these words, making sure that she knew that I was the one who was actually in charge. This stubborn little three-year-old’s heart had much to learn in the practice of submission.

Up to this point in the book of Exodus, God has been getting ready to deliver His people from their slavery in Egypt. He told Moses at the burning bush, that He had heard the cries of His people over their afflictions as slaves (Ex. 3:9), and now His servants, Moses and Aaron, were ready to lead the people out of the land. But there was one problem. Pharaoh. The god-emperor of the land of Egypt was not likely to let his best laborers depart out of the land, possibly to never return again. His heart was fixed against losing such a great resource for his country and the Lord knew this to be the case.

In Exodus 7, we see the first of the ten plagues that would be sent as signs and disciplines against the land of Egypt and their king. The stubbornness of the Pharaoh ensured that the Egyptians and the Israelites alike, would know that the sons of Jacob would be delivered out of the land by the God’s hand alone.

The stubborn heart of Pharaoh had to be broken down ten times, through ten increasingly difficult plagues in order for him to submit to God’s will. Even this did not fully shape his heart into submission as he would go on to pursue the Israelites into the very depths of the Red Sea. Oftentimes, our own hearts can look an awful lot like Pharaoh’s, as we keep God’s people (namely ourselves) from entering into His service in the wilderness, the places in our lives that He is calling us to. It takes discipline, and sometimes even judgment, to break down our pride in order that we may learn to walk as God’s humble servants.

The practice of submission has been seen as one of the pillars of spiritual discipline. It helps to shape our hearts into that of Christ, that we may say as He did in the garden to His Father, “*not my will, but yours, be done* (Luke 22:42).” Today and in this season of Lent, how can you practice the submission of Christ? How can the stubbornness of the Pharaoh in your heart be cast into the Red Sea?

Deacon Steve Braun
Trinity Anglican Church

February 29, 2020

Read Second Peter 3

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2nd Peter 3:8).

St. Peter wrote his letters to the elect who were dispersed throughout Asia Minor. The Thompson Chain Concordance notes that this letter was not from the young Peter, rash and reckless. This Peter had endured suffering from the spiritual battle between God and His enemies, and had gained wisdom and courage from the Holy Spirit. The believers were waiting anxiously for the Lord to return, but were facing derision and mocking from those who did not believe. *“They will say, where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2nd Peter 3:4).* Yes, then as now life appears to go on as usual. The world does not appear in a hurry to turn away from selfishness and exploitation, greed and political control. As believers, how often do we wish for the Lord to return and put an end to the sin and chaos all around us? In this letter, Peter revealed that God has patience, which is beyond our feeble understanding. Patience that every person may have an opportunity to repent and turn to God before it is too late. As a thousand years are like a day to Him, Peter explained God’s great love for all His creation.

Throughout time, Mankind is continually making choices to push God away, denying His divine authority rather than accepting the redemption of a long-suffering and loving Father. Peter reminded the Church, that Jesus will return as a thief comes in the night as did St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, and that the Church must live consecrated to God and in the service of others, *“therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position” (2nd Peter 3:17).* During this Lent may we be given the grace to continue to fight the good fight and to wait patiently for our Lord to return, when we shall see Him face to face.

Deacon Leslie Arbegast
Ascension Anglican Church

March 1, 2020

Read Romans 13

¹¹ Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

About sixteen years ago, I was given the opportunity to live out a childhood dream. To become a clown. At first it seemed as though all I had to do was put on some make-up and a silly costume and shazam, I would be a clown. But the more I looked into the role, the more I realized just how seriously those who worked as professional clowns, took their role as a clown. I began to realize that being a clown is not merely putting on make-up and a silly costume. There are various skills that clowns are expected to perform. One of those skills is that of an actor. When a person puts on their clown face and costume, they become that character. The person they are the rest of the day no longer exists. But this character is only part-time.

As disciples of Jesus, we are commanded to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” This does not mean putting on a costume or a false face. This means putting on the very nature of Christ twenty-four-hours-a-day. Unlike my clown costume, Christ is not a costume I can take on and off. In fact, it is the only part of myself that I cannot leave behind when I am performing as a clown. It is the only part of myself that I cannot leave behind in anything I do.

Putting on Christ is not simply imitating Christ, but abiding in a relationship with Christ. It is transforming. It is life changing. This is because when we put on Christ, he changes us both without and within. He changes how we see ourselves, God, and others. We see ourselves as sinners in need of a Savior. We see God as Creator of all things, and Christ as our only source for life and salvation, and we see others as those whom we are commanded to love, for they are those for whom Christ died on the cross.

It is my solemn prayer that each of us will seek to “put on Christ” and yield to his changing power in our lives both without and within.

Amen.

Deacon Ron Christolear
Trinity Anglican Church

March 2, 2020

Read Romans 14: 5-6

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also, those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. (Romans 14: 5-6)

As we continue our time of honoring this Lenten season, it is critical that we meditate more on coming closer to God than on what we are ‘giving up’ or what we decide to do without for Lent this year. Some may already be in a mind-set of a specific sacrifice, such as giving up chocolate, or television, or even fasting for the entire 40 day period. Remember, the importance of this observance is that it be a time of holy communication and focus on what God in Christ Jesus is preparing to do, at the end of the Lenten season.

We go without food, or games, or whatever, for the purpose of considering what Jesus gave up during the 40 days prior to that first Easter. He not only went without food and drink for 40 days, but, it was for the purpose of strengthening his ability to pay more attention to the Father. To let nothing distract Him from his purpose; the purpose that he knew awaited him as He completed His fast.

As our scripture states, *“Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also, those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.”*

A Lenten fast is a very personal thing, and during this time we need to spend as much time and effort as possible in meditation. What was going through Jesus’ mind during these days? As He focused on having a clear mind to communicate with the Father and be at One with Him, His whole energy needed to be reserved to his task at hand. He could not submit to any temptation, as He was facing the ultimate temptation; to avoid the Cross; avoid dying for our sins. This was the most difficult experience anyone could ever experience. As God’s sinless Lamb, He could not weaken, even if He lost physical strength. He had to be of one mind with His Father.

I pray that this Lent be not only a time of surrendering something important, but, also, that it may become a turning point in each life, as we enter a Lenten Season to remember and honor the sacrifice of our Savior.

Deacon Skip Hill
Ascension Anglican Church

March 3, 2020

Read Isaiah 55:6-11

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
Isaiah 51:8*

In the case of these exiles, we can only imagine their thoughts. Subjected people tend to focus on how to get along - how to avoid punishment - how to gain advantage - how to get a bit more bread or a better job. Captives resent, perhaps even hate their captors, but nevertheless curry their favor. These exiles must resent God for placing them in such unhappy circumstances - and who can blame them? They might hope to escape, but fear the consequences of their failure. Many of them will prefer their current circumstances then to returning home to a desolate city. Many of them tried to discourage their neighbors from leaving. But God isn't limited by such myopic thinking. God can think of a grand strategy to free the exiles, a strategy that will involve raising up a Persian king, who will let His people go. It is a far-fetched scenario - one that a publisher would probably reject as improbable, but God thinks such thoughts and then turns them into reality.

God's power of understanding is infinite and yours is finite. God speaks a word and creates a universe so wonderfully complex, that when you peel back wonder after wonder only to discover that there is always another layer of wonder left to explore, and God does all this while you are struggling as if you were in kindergarten cramming for college. This holds true, of course, on the spiritual level. Your understanding of spiritual matters merely scratches the surface. To understand God's thoughts and actions, you would have to multiply your spiritual understanding by infinity (an impossible operation mathematically). But God has revealed a great deal to you through the scriptures and Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit has revealed all that you really need to know through the atoning work of Christ, when the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus is the major portion of your life. You shall be one with the Father because the Holy Spirit has brought you there. No one can receive the Holy Spirit unless he is convinced of his poverty. When you receive the Holy Spirit, He imparts the risen life of Jesus in a place where there is no distance in the case of the Father and His Son. When the point of total reliance on the resurrection of Jesus is reached, you are brought into perfect contact and union with the purpose of God, and all your questions are gone.

The reason anything is a mystery or anything coming between you and God, is in your disposition not your intellect. For the disposition must be willingly submitted to the life of Jesus, then your understanding will become perfectly clear. He has revealed Himself to you, but only in part. When you think of God, you should remember that His *"thoughts are not [your] thoughts"*, and *"neither are [your] ways [His] ways"*. There should be a humility within you, when you think or speak of God with a deep reverence that knows He is beyond you in every way. This respect, if held rightly, won't lead you further away from God, but closer. You will do so because you will ask like the Psalmist did, *"What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?"* (Psalm 8:4)

There is nothing God needs from you and He can't get better from Himself, yet He still loves and pursues you. God is definitely love, and this will draw you to know and be amazed by Him. If you let Him bring an end of your self-sufficiency, He will then choose you to go with Him to Jerusalem, and this means the fulfillment of His purposes. You will then go on with Him and finally wind-up with the glory of God being manifested before your eyes. You are able to trust in the wisdom of God and not your own. You now wake up to the knowledge that you have the privilege of giving yourself over to His will, and realize that you are created for God Himself, not for your service for God. This explains the need for submission to Him.

Deacon Gregory Statezni
Trinity Anglican Church

March 4, 2020

Read *Proverbs 3:1-27*

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments,” (Proverbs 3:1)

Surely we do remember many of His teachings, and if we are not sure, we can go to the biblical texts and read them, and refresh our memory and awareness. Now the question is to what degree we are able to keep His commandments? Well, the answer in my experience is simple - it is not possible to keep His commandments by human power. If we can do that, if we can keep His commandments, if we can obey His law, by our own power, then we do not need His Son.

But personally, I KNOW that I need His Son, I do not believe I need His Son, I KNOW that. I know from my life experience, besides other reasons, that I need His Son, because I know there is no way I can keep His commandments; obey His Law in my own power.

What is, then, the way to keep His teachings, His commandments, His Law in these times? Well, in the gospel of John we will read this Sunday, *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (ESV)* It sounds incomprehensible, yet that is how it works. The Son of God through the Holy Spirit keeps God’s commandments for us and our role is to accept that on daily basis.

This acceptance is different at various parts of our journey on the path to the Kingdom of God, where we are “already, but not yet.” At the start of the journey, we are more *active* using our own power to keep His commandments, and as the journey progresses, we are more *contemplative*, and more aware of our inability to use our own power for that purpose. We start to rely more and more on the Holy Spirit who is blowing where He wishes; towards the Kingdom of God. Glory to Him for ever and ever, He walks with us every second, not only now, but for all Eternity.

Fr. Steve Veselsky
Trinity Anglican Church
Missionary to Czech Republic

March 5, 2020

Read Matthew 15:1-28

“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person...for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.” (Matthew 15:11, 19-20)

When I was a boy, I remember one particularly frustrating summer. The weather was beautiful and my sister and all our friends were outside in the pool, watching television and eating fun summer foods every day. Me? My throat hurt so badly I could barely swallow. I had been to the doctor and he diagnosed tonsillitis and gave me some medicine. After what seems like forever, it was clear that I wasn't getting better. Another trip to the doctor, and I was diagnosed with strep throat and given penicillin. Within a dose, I could swallow again. Within days I was outside enjoying the thrills of summer.

If we don't get the diagnosis correct, we won't get better.

Jesus was talking to people who believed that if they could control what they did on the outside - it would clean up the inside. That diagnosis, Jesus says, is wrong. You can't clean up your life by simply controlling what you do on the outside. Why? Because the real problem is on the inside. Jesus is diagnosing the “heart” of the problem here. We have sin-sick hearts.

We were created to find true life as we respond to God's perfect love for us with trust and loving obedience. Instead, though, our hearts are given to countless other idols, and until our hearts are given over to God in love, we will find wrong actions coming out of them. When our love is rightly ordered, it will produce right living.

That has at least two consequences for us.

First, you can't heal the heart by focusing on the outer life. You can't heal strep throat with pain killers. All too often, we try to heal our hearts by managing what we do. We try to control “evil thoughts, murder, sexual immorality, theft, false witness and slander” by trying as hard as we can to control them. This is what Dallas Willard called “sin management.” The problem with it, just like most “weight management” diets, is that our will power can prevail for a time but eventually it will give way to the overwhelming desire of our hearts.

When we find ourselves doing what we should not do, it is an opportunity to prayerfully explore what is going on in our hearts and as God to reveal to us where our love is disordered. This is the diagnosis.

Second, we need the proper treatment, the proper medication: Jesus. As we draw near to Him through our disciplines of prayer, study, devotion and piety, He will heal our hearts. The cure for a sin-sick heart is to fall more and more in love with Jesus.

That's what Lent is meant to be all about. Not "sin management" but falling in love with the only one who can heal our hearts and set us free to live the true and abundant life.

Fr. Karl E. Dietze
Trinity Anglican Church

March 6, 2020

Read Matthew 15:29—16:12

"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:11b)

In one of his many books, Bishop NT Wright shares an illustration given by a contemporary Rabbi. In describing the Israelite's wanderings in the wilderness, the Rabbi made the comparison to the voice activated GPS in cars. He noted we have access to a voice from outside ourselves to offer guidance, yet quite often we refuse to listen. This was true of the Israelites. The Rabbi also noted that when we feel lost and confused and fail to access a voice from outside, we have a tendency to become like ants. We simply get behind the person in front of us in the hope that he/she knows the way. The problem is that the person in front may have a different destination in mind, or they might be lost as well. In fact, on occasion when a large group of ants becomes disconnected from the colony it falls in line and literally just goes around in circles. It remains lost.

In our passage today, Jesus encourages us to listen to his voice so he can guide us in life. He tells us to avoid following the examples of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It's interesting that he lumps them together, since they were actually opposed on certain points of belief and practice. This lets us know that the corrupting influence we're warned about is an attitude of opposition towards Jesus. They demanded Jesus give them signs so they could be absolutely certain that he really was, or was not, God's Messiah (*Mt 16:1-3*). Jesus didn't take the bait. He knew it was their stubborn refusal to really look around and allow what he was doing and saying in their midst to sink in. If they could not interpret from his ministry that God's Kingdom was at hand, the only sign left for them was to accept the call to repent and believe (4).

During Lent, we embrace a posture of repentance. We're invited to slow down and step back from the frantic pace of the world around us by making more space for God. This can serve a twofold purpose. First it allows us to take a look at our lives and see if we happen to be going around in circles. For example, has the political climate or entertainment driven nature of our culture lulled us into just following the person in front of us? Are we living our lives without carefully paying attention to God's voice in Scripture, or refusing to follow the directions he's providing? Secondly, we're invited to respond to what the Spirit reveals during our times of self-examination. Then to repent and believe the gospel anew and afresh. For we have received the ultimate sign of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. His Spirit now fills us to serve as our GPS. This allows us to live at home with Christ now, right in the midst of creation as it groans for renewal (*Rom. 8:22-23*).

What signs in the culture are you tempted to follow that may be out of step with Jesus?

Father Mark Hall
All Saints Anglican Church

March 7, 2020

Read Exodus 14

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." (Exodus 14:13-14)

After ten horrific plagues had afflicted the land of Egypt, Pharaoh finally relented to the Israelites departure out of Egypt. No sooner had the pillar of cloud crossed through the land of Goshen, then did Pharaoh sent out scouts in pursuit of the people to see if there was a way for his armies to bring the Israelites back to the land. The Lord led the people to the edge of the Red Sea, a roundabout way out of Egypt, and Pharaoh now seized his chance. Sending out his hosts of chariots, he sought to take back the prize of his labor force and the symbol of His humiliating defeat, at the hand of the Lord.

Soon the Israelites too saw their plight and they cried out in terror as the low rumble of chariots could be heard in the distance. *"Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:11-12)."* The Israelites were sure of their doom. After all of the struggles that Moses and Aaron had faced in getting them out in the first place, it was too easy for them to simply walk out of the land without a fight. And they were right, but it was not their hands that would strike the Egyptians, but God's mighty hand.

Sometimes it can feel as if the weight of the whole world is upon our shoulders. Things are on the fritz between us and our boss, we had to take out another mortgage on the house. Our child is on the verge of flunking out of another class, in his second time around as a senior in high school. The list can go on and on. At times, it can feel as if we are stuck between the Red Sea and the hordes of Egypt. We are called into yet another battle and we feel overwhelmed, tired, and outnumbered.

What Moses says to the people in this moment has always left a profound impression on me: *"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today . . . The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. (Ex. 14:13-14)."* He calls the people to be silent, fixing their eyes upon the Lord to see His mighty hand deliver them from trouble. This is certainly not my first inclination when troubles come my way. Often, I seek to spring into action before even considering what the Lord may have to say, show, or do, in the midst of what I am seeking to confront. What would it look like for us in this season of Lent to be silent, waiting upon the Lord to speak and to act, before we jumped into action in the face of our struggles?

Deacon Steve Braun
Trinity Anglican Church