



ALL SAINTS
ANGLICAN CHURCH

— *Bakersfield* —

Kern Deanery 2018 Lenten Devotions



February 14, 2018

Ash Wednesday

Mark 2:13-22

By Fr. Karl Dietze

And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:16-17

Table fellowship was of great importance in the ancient world. Who you ate with spoke volumes about who you were. The righteous would only share a meal with those who were righteous. So when Jesus ate with the unworthy and unrighteous, the religious leaders were both perplexed and disapproving. So they asked Jesus' disciples what He was doing. Why was He associating with *them*? What they didn't understand was that they, too, were part of *them*: unworthy and unrighteous.

Isn't that part of what being "religious" does to us? It blinds our eyes to the reality of who we truly are and what we really need. Religiousness leads us to believe that we are righteous in our own strength. Religiousness leads us to believe that we are acceptable to God, or at least more acceptable than *them*.

We can spend a great deal of time and energy trying to convince those around us that we have it all put together in life, that we are successful human beings – even in spiritual things. We work hard making sure that what people see of our lives looks good and respectable. We may even work so hard at it that we begin to believe it, too. But no matter how hard we work at it, we will never be able to cover up what is really going on inside us, in our hearts.

Those who believe that they are righteous in their own strength, that they are truly acceptable to God to the core of their being, are unable to hear Jesus' call. Jesus came to call sinners, to call those who are willing to admit that their hearts are sick with sin, and that when you strip away the external acts, they need help. Only those who recognize they are sick are willing to come to Jesus to be healed.

The season of Lent invites us to examine our sin-sick hearts and come to Jesus for healing. It is not a season to become more "religious" by taking on practices that only make us feel more self-righteous. Instead, it is a season to take on practices that show us just how much we need Jesus to make us whole.

The liturgy of Ash Wednesday is a powerful call to us sinners. As the service begins, we are invited to a season of repentance and self-examination which begins with the imposition of ashes, which reminds us that we are all mortal and will one day stand before Jesus to give an account for our lives. That isn't meant to cause fear, but it is a reminder that we cannot put off until tomorrow the readiness that we are called to today. With the Litany of Penitence, then, we begin the examination of our hearts.

The service ends, though, with the meal of Holy Communion. Even as we acknowledge our sinfulness, Jesus once again invites us to the table, to not only dine with Him, but to feast upon His healing and saving grace in the sacrament. And so as we come to the table, we pray we "do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in you abundant and great mercies...that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood..."

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

February 15, 2018

Genesis 35:1-29

By Fr. Randy Messick

Though our reading today from Genesis starts at the beginning of Chapter 35, it helps if you go back and read from the beginning of Chapter 28 to understand why God is commanding Jacob to return to Bethel, and once there, to build an altar so that he and his entire family may worship the Lord in that place.

In Chapter 28, God spoke directly to Jacob at Bethel and promised him amazing things: prosperity, safety, and blessings. Jacob, though very impressed with the experience, decided he wouldn't own the Lord for his own God until God had proven Himself true, and then, when God had proven Himself true, Jacob would return to Bethel and worship the Lord as he promised God he would. And yet, here we find the Lord needing to prompt Jacob to fulfill his promise. Not only that, but even after Jacob had had such a wonderful and direct contact with God Almighty, we find that those around him continued to worship false gods and idols. Why did Jacob allow this? Had he not mentioned the personal experiences he'd had with the Lord to others? Especially to those he lived with on a daily basis?

I can sometimes be like Jacob in my reluctance to believe in, and *trust* that the Lord is my very own God, even after all of the miraculous ways He has made Himself known to me. As a result, I can be slow to worship Him as my one and only God. Of course, this can prove a real hindrance to my happiness, and in my ability to be useful to God in carrying out the work He has for me to do.

I also find that whenever my trust in God weakens, I automatically begin to turn to idols, every time, and those idols can really keep me from genuinely worshipping the one true God. I need to remind myself often of my baptismal vows, that is, the promises I've made to God, and to take them seriously. I need to share my knowledge of God with those that I'm around, and especially with those of my household, so that, hopefully they will not worship idols either. When I bury these idols out of sight, as Jacob did with those of his people, and turn to worship God, then I can be about His work.

It was soon after Jacob returned to Bethel that God gave him a new name and made him the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thank God that He keeps after us, in spite of our resistance, that He reminds us of our covenant with Him, so that we may keep our promises for our great good, and His greater glory.

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican Church

February 16, 2018

by Dcn. John LaMar

Read Matthew 25:1-30

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them." Matthew 25:19

I am sure that you would agree that the three parables found in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew paint three very sobering pictures. But we find the second parable, *The Parable of the Talents* of particular note because of its paucity of characters. It is like a play being conducted on a very small stage with only a handful of actors and the dialogue is very brief and to the point. Can you picture what the words emblazoned across the marquee would be of such a play? How about, ***The Final Settling of Accounts?*** The four key elements of this parable are very clear. They are: *The Passing of Time, the Return of the Master, the Servants and the Settling of Accounts*. We read in the passage that "***After a long time the master of those servants returned.***" Christian men and women understand all too clearly that at the "end of the age" the Lord Jesus will return in glory accompanied by the angels of heaven, and he will

render to each according to their deeds. The fate of the unsaved, the unregenerate, the unrepentant - those who are still living in rebellion against the lordship of Jesus Christ - will find themselves utterly and eternally separated from the love and presence of God.

But what about the *believer* - those of us who acknowledge the lordship of Jesus in our life? Readily affirming that all that we have and all that we are belong to Him and that we are but stewards of his great bounty. I am sure that we would be even more diligent in the stewardship of our lives and our possessions if we absolutely took to heart the words of the *Offertory* that we recite each Sunday, "*All things come of Thee O Lord and of thine own have we given Thee*".

The great truth is that we too, just like the three servants in this parable, will be required to give a complete and final *accounting* of our *stewardship* at the Lord's return. Were we miserly with our time, our treasures and our talents that God has so wonderfully entrusted into our care? Or were we wise and generous and faithful in our investment of them for the sake of the *Kingdom*, boldly expecting a return of 10 fold, 20 fold, or even a 100 fold!

Our Master delays in his return for *our* sake so that we may accomplish all that He intends. For as the Scriptures teach us, "*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. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*" (II Peter 3:8-9). Yes, even the Lord's servants are in need of repentance so they that will not be ashamed at his coming and *the final settling of Accounts*.

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

February 17, 2018

Matthew 25:31-end

by Fr. Mark Hall

"And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" Matthew 25:40

I have never met anyone who enjoys being judged, and found to have come up short. It's just not a pleasant experience. In our culture there's a revulsion against being judged, so much so that to be called judgmental is a four letter word. And yet if we're honest with ourselves, though we don't like being judged, we're doing it all the time. In Jesus' parable today we see that judgement is rooted into the fabric of existence, for King Jesus shall indeed judge everyone.

Can we conclude that by being judgmental towards others we are reflecting God? Not quite, though I fear we sometimes hide under such faulty thinking as we assassinate people's characters (*spoken or unspoken*), based upon things of no real importance within God's Kingdom, - *politics, race, social class, education, profession, citizenship, etc.* Rather, the picture Jesus gives us here of judgement is intimately connected with the notion of carrying on a family resemblance.

We see a separation taking place that, at first glance, seems completely based upon good works. We're to provide for those in need, even when they don't meet our standards of acceptable behavior—those on the bottom, pushed to the margins, and locked away. The real criteria for judgment though, seems to be based upon vision. Do we see the world and its people from a self-centered bent, or is our vision illuminated by the Holy Spirit?

A view of the world and its inhabitants (centered on self) looks for dividing lines in order to create a false sense of security, control, and superiority. Whereas the Spirit within us sees all people as the marred or restored image bearers of God. Thus *all* are of eternal worth and dignity. So much so that Christ died for

them in order to bring them home. It follows then that the vision we have of people determines how we treat them.

At the beginning of the parable Jesus declares that the supreme blessing is to inherit and enter into God's Kingdom - the fullness of his presence. An inheritance is a gift to be received, never earned, and is usually given to family. Jesus' willingness to be homeless and separated from his Father, on the cross, opened to us the way home. Through childlike trust and dependence upon Jesus, we've been adopted into God's family and filled with his love through the Holy Spirit.

Lent is often a time when we let go of things in order to make more space for God. So are we making space to cultivate God's family vision and walk into the family ways? Are we taking time to listen for our Good Shepherd's voice, and praying for the willingness to follow him out to the least and lost of our brothers?

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints' Anglican Church

February 19, 2018

Matthew 26:1-30

By Dcn. Ron Christolear

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." Matthew 26:6-13

Recently, I have found myself waking up in the morning with my first thoughts centered around the tasks I have ahead of me, and what I will need to do to carry out those tasks. Sadly, the last thing on my mind is waking up to greet the Lord and thank him for a new day and a new opportunity to serve him. The struggle I face, and I'm sure most of you do from time-to-time, is the fight over the physical vs. the spiritual. This seems to be the issue at hand in our reading for today.

In our passage, we see Jesus and the Disciples enjoying time together at the house of Simon the leper. In the midst of this time, a woman comes to Jesus and pours a jar of expensive oil on his head. Whether she knew it or not, Jesus explains that she had her priorities in the right order. The Disciples were thinking about earthly things while this woman was thinking about heavenly things.

Another story concerning priorities is found in Luke 10:38-42. Luke recounts the story of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at the Lord's feet while Martha was busy in the kitchen. Martha complained to Jesus and he responded by telling Martha that Mary was doing what was most important, sitting at his feet and listening to what he had to say.

In both stories, it was the one spending time with Jesus who had their priorities in the right order. That's not to say that those other tasks were not important, but they were not the most important at that moment.

I believe we can learn at least two important lessons from today's readings. From the woman with the jar of ointment we learn to pour out our lives and our devotion to serve to the Father. From Mary, we learn the importance of daily sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to his words so that we may become more like him. Through this devotion and learning, we become sensitive to the moving and leadership of the Holy Spirit as we serve him in the physical world.

Lent is a season when we set aside the cares of the world, and with intent focus our hearts, minds, and efforts on drawing near to Jesus. During Lent we fast, but the goal of fasting is not to make us as miserable as possible or to even say to God, "See what I gave up for you?" It is to say, "Jesus, you are more important to me than anything I have or do." The purpose of Lent is to draw our hearts away from the things of earth and toward the things of God's kingdom. By doing this, we come to the realization that these acts of devotion and obedience should be a part of our daily lives throughout the entire year, not just during Lent.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

February 20, 2018

Matt: 26:31-56

By Fr. Jack Estes

"And going on a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'" Matthew 26:39

The suffering of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has begun here in the garden of Gethsemane. In great anguish of soul, he faces his own death by brutal crucifixion on the cross. This is why he came. This is his mission, but the suffering remains real.

As he suffers in the garden, Jesus cries out to the Father in heaven. He is seeking an answer, but not the one we might expect. He is not asking for twelve legions of angels to fight for him, although he could have. He is not asking why this suffering has come upon him. What he really wants to know is something different. What is the will of the Father? What does he want to accomplish through this situation? Once he has the answer, he surrenders completely and is ready go through the cross and to the resurrection beyond.

The way to eternal life lies through the path of suffering and surrender. This is a vital element of the Gospel we proclaim through our lives. One that we are often uncomfortable with personally. We don't like to hear that suffering is part of the Gospel, or that surrender of our own wills is necessary to find eternal life. Theologically we are ready to recognize that Jesus suffered for us, but often our Americanized version of the Gospel is one of "good and plenty." When suffering comes, the temptation is to avoid it at all costs. We try embracing the values of the world, or buying our way out, or anesthetizing the flesh with available substances. We use denial, "This can't be happening to me!" Then we blame God, and accuse Him of being the author of our dilemma. "Why are you doing this to me?"

What we're really doing by responding like this is asserting our own will, rather than surrendering to God's will. Only with surrender comes peace and the assurance of God's presence with us, no matter what. His grace is sufficient in the sacrament of the present moment – whether in moments of joy and contentment, or moments of suffering and trial.

The world by virtue of its sinful broken nature produces suffering. As followers of Jesus, when we stand with him and against the world we will at times experience anguish of soul and suffering as a result. Lent calls us to surrender, as Jesus surrendered, to the will of God. In suffering for the Gospel we are perfected, in surrender to the Father we find eternal life.

Lord, in this world there is suffering, which at times can seem more than I can bear. Grant me grace to surrender my will to yours in all things. So that I may know your presence in every moment on this journey here and beyond to eternal life. Amen.

Fr. Jack ministers at St. Luke's Anglican Church

February 21, 2018

Genesis 45:16—46:7

by Fr. Joe Lawrence

“I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.” Genesis 46:4

Jacob must have been hesitating to go down into Egypt. We know this because God appeared to him in a vision telling him, “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.” At this point in the story, Jacob and his sons have discovered that the once-dead Joseph (or so they thought), is now alive and lord over all Egypt, and he’s extending a saving hand to his dying family. Joseph has invited them to come into Egypt to survive the devastations of the famine that had swept through the whole known world. But Jacob hesitates to go down there. I think I can understand why. Even though he was something of a nomad, as were his father, Isaac, and his father’s father, Abraham, nevertheless, he had put down roots there in that land which would be known as “Israel” one day. There is more, however, to Jacob’s hesitation than worry about uprooting his life and his family from the familiar. He would be leaving the Land of Promise—the land God had promised to his people, the land where a tribe of nomads would become a great nation called into existence by the living God—and he’d be heading into Egypt, which we later discover is the land of slavery, the house of bondage.

Without the Land the dream dies. The Land was central to all the promises God had made to his people. And if this is the case, wouldn’t going down into Egypt seem to threaten the promises of God? Why does God ask Jacob to put himself and the promises of God in such a vulnerable, dangerous position? Why does God lead Jacob into Egypt?

For that matter, why did God give Joseph a great dream but then allow him to be sold into slavery by his own brothers? Why would God anoint David to be king and then have Saul chase him down with murderous threats? Why would God put his love on the people of Israel and then have them hauled off into exile? Why would the Shepherd of Psalm 23 send his flock on a walk through the valley of the shadow of death? Why would God lead his faithful to the martyr’s stake? Why would God not preserve us from anxiety or depression or grief or suffering, but allow us to walk right through them? Why would God promise us life (John 11:25-26) and then allow each and every one of us, and each of those we love, to die? Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?

We’re not given a perfectly satisfying answer to this (and, yes, it is a single) question in either this passage or anywhere in the Bible. But here is what this passage does say: “I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.” Jacob and the people of God are being beckoned to danger and to suffering, but God will be with them; and their suffering will not be the final word, for God will bring them up again. This may not be completely satisfying, but it’s the (yes, single) answer that is given.

We too are beckoned to suffering in some form or another, and we are beckoned likewise to our death. But God will be with us, and our suffering and death will not be the final word. God will raise us up again. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.

Isn’t it obvious? Doesn’t this verse scream out the name of Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One? Isn’t Jesus the One who has gone down with us into the suffering of death? And isn’t he the One who has taken up life again so that he can bring us up again? Isn’t this verse really, after all, about Jesus, his Cross and his Resurrection?

Indeed, this is God’s answer to that single, all-important question, “Why, God...?”

Well, on second thought, I suppose there is something satisfying about that.

Fr. Joe ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

February 22, 2018

Matthew 27:1-26

by Dcn. Greg Statezni

“Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.” Matthew 27:20

The crowd had to decide who to release: Barnabas or Jesus. The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude. They did not persuade by loudly forcing the crowd or making a public oration to follow their decision, but by sending their servants and leaders among the crowd, telling them that Jesus had been examined before the Sanhedrim that morning and they found Jesus to be a blasphemer, that the whole court had unanimously condemned him to death. Should this man be set free? What might this suggest to the community since it had been given out that Jesus was possibly be the Messiah? Would the Romans be jealous of this Jesus the Messiah, that would He take away both their place of authority the nation, and deprive them of their remaining privileges?

Pilate put this strange duo before the Jews as some kind of a ruse – an attempt to rid himself of this bad case. He was afraid of Jesus with His strange majesty. He was sure that Jesus was innocent and that he would not need to proclaim Him guilty. So he put Him in a duo with Barabbas – a despicable murderer and rebel. Pilate thought they would of course choose for Jesus and rid him of this unsavory case.

The people appeared to have wavered in their choice, while for a moment Pilate had hopes that his stratagem was working. But the Sanhedrin was at hand with their insidious suggestions and easily swayed the fickle crowd by directing popular favor to Barabbas. The expression in the Greek implies that they used their persuasive powers in order that the people should demand the release of Barabbas and compass the death of Jesus.

We know that Pilate allowed Jesus to be crucified, for he was a man without any moral resolve and conviction. He knew Jesus was innocent. Rather than acquit Jesus, he instead allowed the Jews to kill Jesus and then tried to act as if he was not guilty of any wrong in this decision by saying that he had washed his hands of the matter. Pilate followed political expediency rather than justice in having Jesus put to death.

How do you respond when you see someone being wronged? Do you follow the politically expedient way?

Would you say, "Crucify, crucify, crucify him!"?

Dcn. Greg ministers with Trinity Anglican Church

February 23, 2018

Matthew 27:32-34

by Dcn. Skip Hill

“As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.” Matthew 27:32-34

I heard about a man who recently brought his daughters to Washington, D.C., to help them experience our nation’s capital. As they got off their bus they found themselves in the midst of an experience he had not planned for! Their hope for a leisurely walk through the historical city happened to be the day that was set aside for the Annual Women’s March. He had not planned on being involved with this event, but

found that he and his daughters were 'swept up' in the huge crowd, and without making a conscious decision to do so, found themselves in the middle of the march.

As a result, those who saw him and his girls that day assumed he had chosen to 'support them' as young women, and assumed that he had voluntarily joined in the 'march'. He shared that although he loves his daughters and has no negative feelings about women in general, he realized while with the march that those around him were very passionate about their promotion of women, in some ways he did not agree. As a result, he and his girls found their way out of the crowd as soon as they could, and then continued on their quest to pursue the original reason for the day trip.

As I meditated on today's Lenten Scriptures, I wondered if this family in Washington experienced emotions that could be similar to those of Simon on that day in Jerusalem long ago. Simon just 'happened' to be in the crowd as Jesus passed by on His way to Golgotha. He was not even from Jerusalem, but from the region of Cyrene. He just happened to be in a convenient place to be 'drafted' into service by the Roman guards who were escorting Jesus to His death. Not much is known about Simon, except through what is known via tradition, and, it is assumed that once he completed the assignment, I assume that he was then set 'free' to go on his way.

That morning, as he prepared for the day, Simon most likely had no idea that he would become part of one of the most significant events in history. He was just walking along as he got caught up in a crowd. After arriving at Golgotha, he not only encountered Jesus on the road, he was forced to become part of the execution of the Son of God. Though he had not planned to become part of history, and although he did not volunteer for this job, he experienced a life changing event that day.

What would it have been like to have been there and, not just see this happen, but, to watch your friend or loved one (Simon) as he was pressed into service. What would have gone through your mind, as you saw him carrying the cross, accompanying Jesus that day? What was he walking into? Would he be crucified along with Jesus? Would he be pressed into continued service for the Romans?

Life took a turn that day for him. A change he was not prepared for, a change that forced him to come to grips with the reality of what was happening to a person considered innocent by a great number of those present.

His first "Lenten experience" was one that must have prompted a great deal of self-examination. Though he was not a willing participant, did he share in some of the feelings of the Savior that day? Was his first Lent filled with grief, sorrow, prayer, doing penance, mortifying the flesh, repentance of sins, almsgiving, and self-denial?

As we meditate upon our gospel selection for today, take some time to consider your own feelings about the happenings that are described in the Bible, and, put yourself in Simon's shoes. Although he was an unwilling participant in the day's events, his life most certainly would never be the same. How about you.....me?

Take time today to consider what life would be like if you had not encountered Jesus personally. Surrender all to Him, and help Simon carry the cross of Jesus today.

Dcn. Skip ministers at St. Luke's Anglican Church

Saturday, February 24, 2018

Colossians 1:21-2:7

by Fr. Stephen Veselsky

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him”

Colossians 1:21-22

(ESV)

In what ways is this reconciliation experienced? There seem to be two ways in experiencing the change, this reconciliation with God through death of Christ. The first experience is more familiar to those who had no connection with the Church, and the second one to those who grew up in the Church.

Perhaps one can make an analogy to each type of experience to the crossing of the border during the Cold War from the territory of oppression to the territory of freedom. The first experience could be compared to crossing the heavily guarded border region with high voltage fences, minefields between fences, signal walls, hidden shelters for dogs trained to kill who are released automatically by a wire, and watch towers occupied with heavily armed border guards. Surely, one who managed to cross a border like that will have a strong experience that is remembered for the rest of one's life. Recalling the silence filled with pounding heart, high stress, distant barking of dogs, shadows of watchtowers from which the border guards scan the region, and perhaps, as a proof of the experience, acquiring gray hair in a young age.

The second experience could be compared to crossing the border in a mountainous wilderness region where there are no fences, no minefields, no killer dogs, and just a few border guards. The danger comes from the freezing cold, much snow and difficulties with a correct orientation. It takes much longer to travel through the mountain wilderness where the border line is not as sharply observable as in the first case. One is not sure whether the border marker is a real thing, it could be a false one, just to lure unsuspecting freedom travelers into a deadly trap.

Obviously, the first experience is much more intense than the second one. Both fulfill the glorious goal: freedom. The same for you, my friend. The way which you have traveled to the salvation of your soul, the particular way you were led to reconciliation through Jesus Christ our Lord, is not truly what matters. Whether through the intense fast experience, or through the longer and less intense one, or, perhaps, through some combination of both, all is achieved through the eternal wisdom of our Heavenly Father. However, it is appropriate to note that both described types of experiencing reconciliation with God continue, in this life on earth and in different ways, until we see Him again.

Let us all accept each other through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let us “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the Gospel that we heard.” We all have received the ultimate liberty in Christ.

Fr. Steve serves as a missionary in Czech Republic

February 26, 2018

Colossians 2:8 – 3:11

by Fr. Karl Dietze

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you... Colossians 3:5

One of the challenges in reading Paul is that we must be constantly mindful of where we are in his train of thought. Out of context, it would be easy to read this verse as an ethical imperative, something we are obligated to do. For Paul, though, what we do is rooted in our character. Get the character right and the behavior will naturally spring from it.

That's what Paul is getting at in 2:6-7 when he writes "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in your faith..." As Paul understands it, a relationship with Jesus is inherently transformational. As we walk in Christ and keep ourselves rooted in Him, we are actually united to Him and will become like Him. Paul goes on, though, to warn the Colossians not to fall prey to rule-keeping again. All those rules, he says, "have indeed an appearance of wisdom...but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." (Col. 2:23).

What a reminder for Lent! Harsh rule keeping is of no value in stopping the indulgence of the disordered appetites of our flesh. Why? Because external rules don't change our hearts.

But wait! Paul then goes on to say what we need to stop and start doing. So which is it?

The key is walking in Christ, being united to Him. We are to put to death our disordered earthly desires because we belong to Jesus and have been united to Him. To do anything else would be to deny the reality of being united to Christ. So we put to death our disordered desires in order to keep ourselves close to Jesus, and it is Jesus who changes our hearts so that we no longer want to satisfy those sinful desires. As we starve those appetites, we enable ourselves to feed more deeply on Jesus' gracious life and strength, and it is the feasting upon Jesus that works change within us. That's the key: we don't just resist temptation, we run to Jesus in the temptation for life and help. We starve the sin in order to feast on Jesus.

So what is it, then, that we need to starve in order to feast on Jesus?

Paul names two areas that continue to challenge us today: disordered sexuality and impure speech. We are to starve the indulgence of "sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness." It is no doubt that we live in an age of excessive sexualization. It is so pervasive that we are often numb to it. But God's people are to be marked by sexual purity that allows His good gift to be used for glory. We are likewise to starve the misuse of our tongues in "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk...do not lie to one another." How we communicate with others either builds up or tears down, and that communication can be face-to-face, behind-the-back, or even behind-the-keyboard in social media. God's people are to be marked by communication that imparts grace and builds up.

So how do we become the kind of person Jesus is making us to be? We don't just starve ourselves. Rather, we starve our disordered desires so that we can feast upon Jesus.

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

February 27, 2018

John 1:29-30

by Fr. Randy Messick

Something had to be done to satisfy the wrath of God against the ongoing sin of us humans. Try as hard as I might, I've discovered for myself that I cannot stop sinning, in either thought, word, or deed, in my own power. And even if I could stop sinning on my own, I could never satisfy the payment due to avoid the punishment for the sins I have already committed.

God has a great answer to my eternal problem, and it is the only answer. At first God established certain types of animal sacrifices that the Israelites were to perform to allow them to be His people. One of them was the daily and continual sacrifice of one lamb in the morning and one lamb at night. Through the blood of these lambs the Israelites would remain in a temporary covenant relationship with God, but God also taught His people that in time, through them, he would send a Savior who would be a permanent *and* continual sacrifice for the sins, not only that they commit, but for the sins of the whole world.

When John sees Jesus returning from the wilderness he declares that this man, Jesus, is the very Lamb of God whose sacrifice will indeed take away the sin of the whole world. It will atone for our past sins, and daily atone for any new sins we commit. Not only that, but through faith in Jesus we would receive the Spirit of truth who would begin the process of sanctification whereby we would be freed from the grip of sin itself!

This is the good news! It is very important that I continue to meditate upon and contemplate this great reality: God sent His Son to pay the penalty for my sin! God has sent His power to me to free me from the bondage of sin!

This is all a free gift, and yet so many people refuse to "*Behold*, the Lamb of God." John points Him out to us, but we need to look where he is pointing. And upon looking, we must do as many of John's disciples did, follow the Lamb of God. Praise God!

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican Church

February 28, 2018

John 2

by Dcn. John LaMar

"In the temple courts he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade.'" John 2:14-16

We all should be familiar with this incident from the Gospel, "*Jesus Clears the Temple*" or better still, "*Jesus Cleanses the Temple*." This was not an isolated incident but rather one of two times that the Lord violently drove out from the temple grounds what did not belong there. The first time was immediately after his first miracle at the wedding in Cana and the second time was immediately following his "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion. But have we ever considered why these two acts are relevant to us and to the Church?

In the second incident, as recorded in Luke 19, we find Jesus driving out the sellers and money-changers, as he quotes from the prophet Isaiah saying, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer (for all nations)*" and the prophet Jeremiah saying, "*Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to*

you?" Has the House of God become something that it should not? Are we becoming cavalier in our words and in our actions when we enter *our* house of worship on *the Lord's Day*?

Are we truly mindful that we are setting foot on *Holy Ground* and coming into the *presence of the "most high God?"* Wouldn't one think that the "world" and all that pertains to it should remain in the parking lot and not enter the double doors of our church when we arrive to worship and pray? Have we forgotten who we really are in the words of St. Peter, *"For you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* (I Peter 2:9-10)

There is no better time than this holy season of Lent to remember who we are and to act and think accordingly. If we cannot do it while "standing on holy ground" or in "His presence" then it likely won't happen outside the doors of our "temple" as well. Let us remember that the Lord does not make his appearance with the first *"The Lord be with you"* or depart at the end of the Benediction. But rather as Jesus said, *"Were two or three are gathered in my name, I am in the midst of them."* If we do this then we can truly say with the Psalmist, *"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go up to the house of the Lord!'"* (Psalm 122:1)

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 1, 2018

John 3:1-21

By Fr. Mark Hall

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." John 3:19

When you enter into a dark room and you desire light, do you simply try to turn off the darkness? Of course not! You search for the switch to turn on the light. Yet so often when it comes to our experience of emotional and spiritual darkness we try to turn it off, rather than turn to the light of Christ.

A therapist once shared with me that the majority of her clients end up in her office after they had experienced some degree of pain. Our culture views pain as unnecessary and something to be avoided at all costs. In fact we might even say that some would view it's presence as an expression of evil or darkness in the world.

The therapist went on to share that it wasn't actually the initial pain itself that leads to the visit. The majority try to leap frog over the pain, to ignore it by turning to something else, and it always made it worse. Then they would show up. Turns out trying to turn off the darkness only makes things darker.

Jesus declares to Nicodemus that there is a completely different way to live, one that draws us out of the shadows and into the brightness of the Spirit born life. Jesus came as the fullest expression of God's love with the mission to bring salvation rather than condemnation. The question is: *do we really want to live in the light?*

Lent is a season when we are invited to courageously take a fresh look at our priorities, and see what role Jesus is actually playing on the stage of our hearts. Light can be gloriously illuminating as well as painfully exposing. The therapist noted that it is fascinating that the place we all refuse to go, pain and suffering, is the very place Jesus came and embraced on the cross.

Because Jesus stood in our place on the cross, and we have placed our hope and trust in him, we no longer need to try to turn off the darkness. Rather through the Spirit we can experience his light bursting forth, even in our pain.

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints' Anglican Church

March 2, 2018

Exodus 1:1-20

by Dcn. Ron Christolear

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD." Exodus 10:1-2

When I was in college, I had to take a pottery class. I enjoyed working with the clay although most of the things I made were indiscernible as to what they were. After forming the clay into its intended item, the teacher would place the finished piece into a kiln. A kiln is a furnace which fires and hardens the clay so that it can be used for its' intended purpose. For the clay to be usable, it had to first be moldable. Once it was hardened, it was useful for only one thing and if it could not function as intended, it would be broken and thrown out.

Our reading begins with the eighth plague cast upon Egypt by God. In the first verse God instructs Moses to, "Go into Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them." This is only the second plague in which we see the condition of Pharaoh's heart, and it is not good. Throughout the entire passage, beginning in Exodus 7:14, we see two things happening. We see Pharaoh hardening his own heart as he continues to live in rebellion to God, and we see God hardening pharaoh's heart through the introduction of each plague. God is in control of events, but it is up to Pharaoh as to how he will react to these events.

Pharaoh was a clay vessel whose disobedience to God caused his own people to suffer the various plagues. Regardless of the growing severity of each plague Pharaoh hardens his heart to God to the point where it costs him the life of his first-born son. With this final plague Pharaoh allows Israel to go free but, with the hardness of his heart complete, he chases down Israel only to suffer the loss of his army at the Red Sea. Pharaoh's heart had become fired clay. It had become set against God and would not be changed.

It's easy to look back at Pharaoh and pass judgment on him. But if we were to look closely at our own spiritual condition, we would find that we are more like Pharaoh than we want to admit. It is easy to become involved in sin. When we do, the Holy Spirit speaks to us, convicting us of sin. Our responsibility, like Pharaoh, is to decide how we will respond. Will we allow God to mold us into his image or will we harden our hearts in rebellion until our hearts are fully hardened and it costs us everything.

God has made a promise to all who will turn to him in repentance. It can be found in Ezekiel 36:25-27: I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

The heart of stone is a heart that says, "God I know best how to run my life." While the heart of flesh says, "God you know what is best for me, I bow to your will."

This Season of Lent, I pray that each of us will examine ourselves in the light of Scripture and find if there be any hardness of heart in us and allow God to soften our hearts to be obedient to his will.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 3, 2018

John 4:1-26

by Fr. Jack Estes

“Whoever drinks of this well will thirst again, But whoever drinks of the water that I give will never be thirsty forever. The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty...” John 4:13-14

The story of the woman at the well is one which most of us are quite familiar with. As in many of the stories of the Bible, the natural elements appear as metaphors which open the way for a deeper spiritual significance.

The woman in the story is thirsty. The hot climate has produced in her a need for water, a physical thirst, but her real thirst resides much deeper inside. Within her soul she is parched, dried out, longing for someone or something to bring refreshment and restoration to her life. She is thirsty to be acknowledged and loved, dried out trying to find significance from the wells that the world has offered her, and wanting to find her true identity.

What is the nature of her thirst? How did she come to be in this condition? The environment is partly to blame. It is telling that she comes to the well alone – at noon in the heat of the day. She’s ostracized by the other women, and taken advantage of by men. She feels isolated and alone, empty with no one to share her heart. This is a thirst more powerful than parched lips on a hot day!

Adding to the heat and dust from the world about her comes her own actions. The guilt and regret that she carries inside from her own sinful participation and wrong choices. She probably felt unworthy of God’s attention and love – not knowing how to find her way back into his favor. This is a powerful thirst indeed!

What she does not realize, and what we also do not realize at times, is that God’s favor never left her. Jesus knows the depths of her thirst. He knows the sources and conditions of how that thirst developed within her to begin with. Jesus is ready with an offer of love and compassion. He brings living water to restore her soul: a fountain of the Holy Spirit, welling up again and again, and never running dry.

How thirsty are you? Are you parched from the heat that surrounds you? Unable to quench your thirst from the wells of the world? Or feeling isolated and unworthy of God’s attention due to your own sinful choices and actions.

Like the woman at the well, Jesus brings an offer of love and compassion. To her and to us Jesus offers the crystal-clear water of life that is flowing from the throne of God. Spiritual water that quenches our thirst and restores our souls. Drink deep!

I am dry and thirsty Lord to the very depths of my soul.
Today I hear your offer of love and compassion
To drink of the living water from your throne.
Lord evermore give me this water to drink, so that I thirst no more. Amen.

Fr. Jack ministers at St. Luke’s Anglican Church

March 5, 2018

John 4:27—end

by Fr. Joe Lawrence

The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. John 4:53

Jesus loves to see in us a great and mighty faith, a faith that confidently overcomes every challenge and assault, a faith unmixed with doubt. Biblical examples abound. When the Gentile centurion told Jesus, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed,” Jesus was astonished (better translated, ‘shocked and amazed’) at his faith (Matthew 8:5-13). Nowhere in all of Israel had he found such faith. When the woman with the flow of blood crept up to Jesus thinking to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed,” Jesus extolled her mighty faith. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you” (Matthew 9:18-26). When the cheeky Canaanite woman told Jesus that even the dogs eat the crumbs under the master’s table, Jesus, again astonished, answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted” (Matthew 15:21-28).

Jesus loves to see in us a great and mighty faith, but *he’s more than willing to work with a weak and trembling faith*. Isaiah was speaking of Jesus when he said, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isaiah 42:3). In other words, Jesus doesn’t trample on the weak and hurting, telling them that if they had more faith, they wouldn’t be suffering. He doesn’t snuff out a flickering faith; he fans it into a flame. When we come to him saying, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24), he takes the little faith we can muster, and he blesses and multiplies it. Jesus meant it, therefore, when he said that faith like the grain of a mustard seed could move mountains (Matthew 17:20).

The royal official comes to Jesus with faith—but a weak faith. This is understandable: his son is ill, close to the point of death. Jesus uses the opportunity to chastise the crowds about a faithless desire for a show: “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.” The official undeterred by this speaks simply as a father with a struggling faith, “Lord, come down before my child dies.” Jesus tells him to go; the deed is done.

At this moment, the man’s faith springs into action. He takes Jesus at his word and departs. We have to stop and imagine how difficult it would be to depart. If my son were sick, nearly to the point of death, I would want some sort of sign or verification to confirm the word of Jesus. I’d want Jesus himself to come and do the healing so that I’d *know* that it was done right. Trust, but verify. The man simply trusts.

On his way home he gets word that his son was healed. On a hunch he asks, “When did it happen?” “Oh, the fever left him at 1 in the afternoon,” comes the reply. “The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ And he himself believed, and all his household” (John 4:53).

Do you see how Jesus takes this desperate father’s flickering faith and fans it into a flame? Yes, Jesus loves to see in us a great and mighty faith, but he’s more than willing to work with a weak and trembling faith.

Fr. Joe ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 6, 2018

Ephesians 4: 1-16

by Dcn. Greg Statezni

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

When we really understand how much God did for us, we will naturally want to serve and obey Him out of gratitude. We will endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and this humble, forgiving attitude towards each other naturally fulfills this gift of the unity of the Spirit. We are not able to create unity – only His Spirit can truly create it. Our duty is to recognize it and keep it. This spiritual unity is not necessarily a structural or denominational unity. For the fellowship in which the Gentile and Jewish believers were united was no mere enrollment on a register of membership. It involved their union with Christ by faith as fellow-members of His body. We must be confident that this unity is found in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We must seek after and live near Jesus, for this is the best way of creating this necessary unity.

Divisions within Churches should not begin with those who truly love Jesus. Just before Jesus went to the cross, He prayed for all who knew Him to be one. It was through the cross that Christ broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and brought them together in the one new man. Jesus Christ died to create this one new man, His church. Preserving this unity is thus crucial to the advancement of His Kingdom.

It is significant that Jesus included both humility and gentleness to describe Himself. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jesus was tender with the bruised and broken souls, but strong and forceful with the proud, self-righteous Pharisees. It is essential that we have a humble gentle attitude to foster this unity within our churches.

To preserve unity, we must be patient with one another. We need to put on “forbearance” and “tolerance.” This means bearing with someone’s shortcomings or quirks giving the other person room to be different in non-moral areas. Pride makes us think “anyone with half a brain could see that my way is the best way to do this.” This is the “community of self” and the antithesis of Christian community.

We need to follow the virtues found in this passage of Scripture to find unity within our lives and among believers. For community to start and grow, we need to learn to totally love God and our neighbor with all who we are community will never start or grow.

Dcn. Greg ministers with Trinity Anglican Church

March 7, 2018

Ephesians 4:22-24

by Dcn. Skip Hill

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24

When I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior at the age of 15, for some reason I believed that life was going to be just fine from then on. Wow, was I in for a surprise. God had just convicted me of living an inconsistent life, and I was very aware that I did not always ‘practice what I preached’; that I had a habit of saying one thing and doing another. As a new Christian, I expected that all had changed when I sincerely confessed my sins, surrendered to Christ, and committed myself to serve God with my life.

I expected that by my decision I would somehow change overnight, and that God would miraculously “renew me in the spirit of my mind, and clothe me with my new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,” as Paul had written. However, my former ways were not that quick to change. Now, when I acted like I had (before my conversion), I felt horribly guilty (I didn’t feel that way before!), I found that, even as a new born Christian, I still exaggerated when I spoke with others (thinking I could somehow impress them). I found that I still laughed at off color jokes, and still became angry at the drop of a hat. It seemed that this ‘new creation’ that I had been created into just wasn’t working for me. The only difference was that I now felt horrible when I acted like I used to before I was ‘changed’.

After about 2 weeks as a “new creation,” I felt horrible. I was concerned that I had lost my salvation; that I somehow just couldn’t make it “work!” So, before long, I found myself heading down the church aisle again, feeling like a failure, and intending to really “surrender” to Jesus “this time.” I confessed my sin at the altar, told God I was sorry that I was a sinner, and cried with deep sorrow and conviction. The pastor tried to assure me that God heard me the first time I “surrendered” to Him, and that I had to realize that, though I had at that time become a “new creation” it would take time and “maturity” to put away my former self, and fully begin to see changes in my behavior.

I was not convinced! I was sure that I must be a worse sinner than everyone else, and I was sure that I would have to just continue to continue to get saved as often as needed, until somehow, it took. I began to study my Bible, hang out with Christian friends and I was in church every chance I could. However, it was as if my former life was attached to me with Velcro; it just would not let go. I began to realize that I was a hypocrite who acted one way with my Christian friends, and a totally different way around other people.

I became very confused. I became a “people pleaser,” and always tried to get along with everyone. Inconsistency became my own personal secret (as if no one else noticed). My efforts to make everyone happy did not work out well, because, by doing so, I could not make myself happy.

Over time I found that as I read my Bible, prayed and associated with my Christian friends, I could see that I was changing...inside! I was more and more aware of inconsistent behavior, and my desire to live a Godly life grew with each passing week, even though it was slow, and was accompanied by many ups and downs.

What changed? Something inside me had changed! The things that had formerly motivated me gradually began to hold less influence over me. My desire to win others to Jesus seemed to become stronger, in spite of my struggles, and my desire to please God rather than people became stronger each day.

I still struggle (after all these years) with inconsistency. I have learned that what Paul referred to in Ephesians was that, when I made my decision to follow Christ, Jesus began a process within me and began to change and strengthen me little by little. I realized that I could not change myself overnight; all I could do was make the decision that I needed to want to change enough to ask God to begin the process within me.

I am now a very different creature that I was at 15! I am much stronger in my faith, have gained the ability (from the inside out) to experience changes in my actions and thinking, which were generated not by my willpower alone, but, through the work of God’s Holy Spirit who came to live within me on that day when I said Yes to His call.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul encouraged the believers to live God’s way, by God’s power. He knew that, in order to live as God wants, it required sacrifice. Lent is a time which calls us to stop, examine our lives, and to seek God’s power to live as a new creation.

When I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, I became very aware of the fact that I had not been very successful in my efforts to live consistently as a ‘good’ person. As a new believer, I also continued to have a hard time living the Christian life, and found that I continued to be concerned about the opinions

of the people around me. I found God to be much more patient with me than I was with myself! As we ask God to bring about a deeper experience of Him this Lent, let us remember that the changes in us are His responsibility. We simply need to cooperate by continuing to admit to Him when we do fall short; Yes we need to “try” to be more like Him, but, we need to realize that only God can create us into new creatures!

May God bring His truth into our lives in ever increasing ways as we seek Him and His power to live as He desires us to live.

Dcn. Skip ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

Thursday, March 8

Ephesians 4:31-5:21

by Fr. Stephen Veselsky

*And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:2 (ESV)*

In this passage (Ephesians 4:31-5:21), Paul continues in the admonition and instruction of Christians. This includes many “dos” and “do not’s” that all sound like another form of command. Here are several examples from the considered text: be kind (4:32), be imitators (5:1), walk in love (5:2), no sexual immorality (5:3), no filthiness (5:4), do not be deceived (5:5-6), be not partners with the sons of disobedience (5:7), walk as children of light (5:8), try to discern (5:10), take no part in darkness (5:11), look carefully (5:15), do not be foolish (5:17), do not get drunk, and be filled (5:18).

We can clearly see in the above examples that there is a line of commandments like instruction from the Apostle Paul. However, we know from our own experience and reason that Jesus Christ came to us to show us that, ultimately, we are unable to obey commandments. There is, thought, a way to deal with this situation.

Often, some Christians try to obey their own power, but that works only for a limited time and for some of the situations in their life. There is a need to make a distinction between obedience in the Old Testament sense and obedience in the New Testament sense. New Testament obedience is “revolutionary” because it acknowledges our limited capacities. New Testament obedience is through the daily power of the Cross of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

This new type of obedience through the power of the Cross can be applied in the practical life by daily acknowledgment of Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. The practice of silence and solitude are some tools that are helpful here.

For example, the aforementioned mentioned “walk in love” takes on a different dimension by practicing various spiritual disciplines in silence and solitude, depending on where the individual finds himself or herself on the path of their Christian life. A qualified spiritual director can be of a great help in this as well.

Many commandments like pronouncements in the New Testament are addressed by turning to the Cross of Christ through faith in His ultimate sacrifice. At a certain point in growth, one does not even need to consciously address being obedient because the Holy Spirit produces obedience in us as He has already directed the parts of one’s identity towards the Christ through the Cross. He knows you better than you know yourself, and He expresses His love to you daily. May you experience His guidance in a new way.

Fr. Steve serves as a missionary in the Czech Republic

March 9, 2018

John 6:22-40

by Fr. Karl Dietze

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

Have you ever noticed that when you have a craving for a particular food, nothing else will do? I don't think I'm alone in admitting that when I want chocolate, I can eat countless other delicious things, but still feel no satisfaction – I want chocolate!

That's the funny thing about appetites – they are very specific in what they want and in what will satisfy them. And when we crave something and can't get it, it often leaves us restless and anxious. It is true of our physical appetites. It is true of our emotional appetites. It is true of our spiritual appetites.

When Jesus said that He is the bread of life, He is offering to meet the deepest desires of our hearts. He is offering us Life: the deep rest, peace, and satisfaction for which we long. The problem for most of us, though, is that we seek Life in all sorts of other places. Money and possessions, sex and relationships, fame and admiration, comforts and leisure, power and influence, physical appearance and health, knowledge and learning, food and drink, vacations, online followers, media distractions, and on and on. It isn't that all of these things are bad, although some of them can be, but that none of these things can truly satisfy us and give rest to our longing hearts.

Only Jesus can take away the deep hunger and thirst in our souls. As St. Augustine of Hippo so beautifully put it, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Lent is an opportunity to look at our Life-diets. Where do we seek Life apart from Jesus? Where do we seek peace, rest and satisfaction outside of Christ? Where do we eat countless other delicious things that only leave us restless, bored, anxious and unsatisfied? Lent bids us to look closely at where we seek Life apart from Jesus.

For many of us, though, the question is why, even after knowing this, we continue to feed upon food that cannot fill us? I think it is because, underneath it all, we really don't trust God to satisfy us. We are afraid that if we give ourselves to Him, we will be let down, we will be disappointed. So we either seek life in things we already know, or we try to seek life in Jesus AND other things in an effort to hedge our bets. We are like little children refusing to eat new foods we have never tried because we already know we won't like them.

To feast upon Jesus, to find our rest in Him, is to surrender ourselves to Him in loving, trusting obedience. It is to allow ourselves to be loved by the Creator of our souls. It is to cast ourselves upon Jesus trusting in His love and care for us. Surrender and trust are always uncomfortable, but they are the way to peace, rest, and joy.

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 10, 2018

Ephesians 6:10

by Fr. Randy Messick

"Finally brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

It's strange for me to think that I have no power of my own. It seems I should be able to do something good on my own, and yet the awareness and acceptance of my powerlessness is the starting point for me in my journey of faith. The idea that I can manage my life, that I can wrest satisfaction and happiness from this world if I only manage well, has to be tossed out.

I absolutely have no sufficient power of my own. It's only when I admit my complete lack of power, my complete weakness, that I can be strong in the Lord. That blows me away! The strength of the Almighty God becomes my strength! I become strong for His cause - the renunciation of evil and the evil one.

I go from a life of complete weakness, into a life infused by the power of the almighty God! A power that not only effects a process of sanctification within me, whereby repentance becomes a way of life, but a power that protects me also from the attacks of Satan, and all of the devils that are bent on destroying me!

I have no problem being aware that there are plenty of people, places, and things in this world that seem bent on causing me problems, but what am I to do? It is in the power of God that I find the solution to these problems, and interestingly it has nothing to do with changing the people, places, and things in my life, but about allowing the Lord to change me.

Even though I'm very good at identifying the ways in which the world is out to get me, such as noticing that whatever line I get in it always turns out to be the slowest, I don't often think about the dangers that confront me in the spirit. Yet I see in this reading from Ephesians that the problems I encounter in the world are nothing compared to the problems that confront me in the spiritual realm.

If I need the power of God to deal with the problems I have in this world, how much more do I need God's help and protection in dealing with Satan, and his devils, that attack my spirit? Therefore, it is imperative that I follow Paul's advice to take upon me the whole armor of God. First thing in the morning seems a good time for me to pray to God for his protection from the evil one, since my mind seems vulnerable from the moment I awake! Meditation on the instructions Paul gives us in this passage is a great way to start the day.

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican Church

March 12, 2018

I Timothy 1:1-17

by Dcn. John LaMar

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the worst of sinners;" I Timothy 1:15

Don't you just stand in awe when you hear Christians tell their stories of conversion, particularly when they share a testimony of how Christ rescued them from a life of crime, depravity, drug addiction; a life on the brink of suicide or from the very pit of hopelessness itself. Sometimes we can feel so inadequate in our deliverance story that one might be tempted to wonder if we were really "lost" when compared to such accounts as these aforementioned. But the apostle Paul assures us that we are like all men who have come before us and those who will come after us in that, *"As it is written, 'There is none righteous, no, not one'"* and *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:10 and 23a)

The words of the apostle are true when saying that we should “not think too highly of ourselves” but rather see ourselves through the eyes of God himself if we would have the correct measure of ourselves. With this in mind we should stand “shoulder to shoulder” with Paul, beating our breast and declaring that we too are the worst of sinners. And it is that truth, my brothers and sisters, which makes the grace of God so truly wonderful - to know for a certainty that I, even I, can be saved.

With this great truth in mind, every Christian should discover themselves under the *call* of God to take the wonderful news of salvation through Christ Jesus by word and deed to the world. Paul’s charge to young Timothy is indeed given to us as well, lest our *silence* be counted against us as we see both men and women, some whom we have known, being condemned to a Christ-less eternity because we spoke not a word. As Paul said, *“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.”* (II Tim. 4:1-2) Paul warned Timothy, and we see it ever so much in our own day that *“the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings.”* (4:3). Now more than ever we live in a world that desires not the truth but rather to hear only what affirms or pleases them.

And so, during these forty days of Lent, let us agree to stir up our hearts that we may begin to speak to at least one person a day, or at least a week, about the great love of Jesus Christ and his offer of salvation. And let us remember the sure truth of Ash Wednesday, that *ashes* without Jesus are just ashes.

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 13, 2018

John 7:25-end

by Fr. Mark Hall

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”
John 7:38

I love the idea of being organized; of knowing where everything is and easily being able to access it at a moment’s notice. The notion of a clutter free life is so appealing, and yet always seems to be out of reach. It seems such a desire has been rooted in the human heart for centuries. Yet, even a seemingly innocent and apparently good desire can be twisted into a counterfeit that diminishes life.

You may be asking yourself, how can this be? Could *Real Simple* magazine actually be a bad thing? Honestly I believe it’s neutral, the issue is: What Does It Do To Our Hearts? God reveals the worst route such a desire can take within us:

“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)

The issue is about control. Who actually has it, and whether we’re willing to accept the answer? Instead of waiting upon the pure, though unpredictable water source of a live spring, the Israelites tried to create storage containers for water. This way they could see what they had and feel secure. The problem was that the water stagnated and leaked into the ground. So they were left with a fleeting illusion of security, because they had abandoned their trust in God.

I’m not saying being organized is wrong, nor that being disorganized, is saintly. The bigger question is how do we respond internally (*feelings*) and externally (*relationally*) when things are out of their proper

place? Or why might the organizationally challenged obsess over Ikea catalogues? What are we really thirsting after?

Jesus, in the midst of tremendous opposition, stood up and declared that he alone can quench our deepest thirst. He can cleanse our desires and make them good again. All that is required is that we let go of whatever we're clinging to for a deep sense of security and peace. John tells us that "*the fountain of living waters*" which represent God's dynamic presence and power can flow out of the core of our being. This good news has nothing to do with being organized or disorganized, but it does mean letting go of the illusion of control, and trusting in God's competent care of our lives and the universe as a whole.

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints' Anglican Church

March 14, 2018

Exodus 31

by Dcn. Ron Christolear

"You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death." Exodus 31:14-15 (ESV)

The Sabbath. Some see it as a great day to go golfing, watch sports, or spend time with the family. And while all these activities have value in their proper place, they can never be allowed to supplant the time and relationship we are to cultivate with the Triune God. For the Israelite, the Sabbath was a day of rest from all physical labor. The Jewish believer would spend six days working to gain God's favor and approval. The idea of a Sabbath or day of rest was to give God's people the opportunity to cease their work and to rest in Yahweh. It should be understood that faith, not works, has always been the key word in one's relationship to God.

For the disciple of Jesus, the idea of Sabbath has both a physical and spiritual meaning. God still desires us to take a day of rest, but this day of rest is not intended to be merely a chance to catch up on missed sleep or watching T.V. For the Christian, this day is intended to be an opportunity for both communal and private devotion to God. That includes Bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship, and outreach. For the disciple of Jesus, however, Sabbath means more than just a specific day each week. It is a way of life. Jesus tells us that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. Both Matthew and Mark recount the confrontation Jesus had with the Pharisees when he picked heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath. When questioned about his actions, Jesus replies, "For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:8 and Mark 2:27,28)

The writer of Hebrews tells us the good news of a future rest in Hebrews 4, that Jesus is not only the giver of rest, but he *is* our Sabbath rest. While the writer of Hebrews had in mind a future rest brought about by the return of Christ, we have confidence that we can, even now, share in that rest in the present life.

Whereas the Sabbath day of rest comes only once a week, the rest Jesus gives us is seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. It is a rest that never ends. It is a rest that reminds us that we need not work ourselves to the bone trying to earn God's favor and love. In Christ, we are loved as much now as we will ever be.

So how do we enter into Christ's rest? We enter into this rest by recognizing the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross and Christ's completed work of redeeming us from sin. This season of Lent, let us rest fully knowing that God has completed this work in us.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 15, 2018

John 8:31-end

by Fr. Jack Estes

“Are you greater than our father Abraham who died? And the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be? John 8:53

As we read through the Gospel of John, one of the things that pops up again and again is the inability of the Jews to recognize who Jesus is. Jesus himself seems perplexed by this phenomenon. In chapter eight he engages in a long running discussion with them, attempting to break through to their understanding.

He calls them to abide in his word and become his disciples. Then they will know the truth and the truth will set them free. When they respond arrogantly that they are already free, he rightly points out that they are in bondage to sin. Indeed, they are blind to their own sinful nature. They refuse to accept his teachings, instead relying on Abraham for assurance of their position with God. Finally, Jesus in frustration declares, “Why can you not understand what I say?” Indeed, that is the question: why don’t they recognize him?

The Jews are unable to recognize Jesus for who he is even though they have seen him face to face. They heard his words. They saw miracles of healing and demonstrations of authority over both the natural and spiritual realms. He even opened the eyes of a man born blind. Even so they did not know him. Why? Because he is not who they expected. He is not what they wanted him to be. Perhaps most importantly, he is not what they were invested in.

The Jews that were in dispute with Jesus were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes: the religious leaders and rulers of society. As such, they were invested in politics and religion, wealth and status. If they had an expectation of a messiah, it was one of a conquering king, a king who would reward them handsomely for their support. Jesus offered no such promises. Jesus is not what they wanted personally. They were looking for affirmation of their positions. Someone who would certify their own agenda, rather than call them to repentance and surrender to the agenda of the kingdom of heaven.

We are quick to wag our heads at the Jews in the story for such unseemly behavior. It is hard to comprehend how they could miss the Son of God standing right in front of them. But wait! They are not the only ones. Even the disciples themselves were slow to understand the depths of who Jesus really was, for many of the same reasons. They had different expectations and agendas of their own which he did not fulfill. It was only after the resurrection that their eyes were finally opened.

What about you? What about me? Do we have our own expectations and hidden agendas that prevent us from recognizing and understanding who Jesus really is? In this season of Lent, let us ask for the assistance of the Holy Spirit in removing these obstacles from our hearts. Then we shall see clearly. Then we shall hear plainly. Then we shall know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

Lord I set aside my own expectations of who I think you should be.

I lay down my own personal agendas, so that I may recognize you more fully in my life.

Come Holy Spirit, guide and direct me so that I may know the truth. Amen.

Fr. Jack ministers at St. Luke’s Anglican Church

March 16, 2018

John 9

by Fr. Joe Lawrence

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2)

A whole book of the Bible, the book of Job, is devoted to undermining the simplistic notion that our circumstances are a reliable indicator of God’s attitude toward us. In other words, if we are healthy and wealthy, and flourishing in life, then it must be that God is pleased with us and is rewarding our good behavior. On the other hand, if we’re struggling or suffering, it must be that we’ve done something wrong, something to displease God. The book of Job says a resounding “No!” to his sort of thinking. While it’s true that we live in a fallen world and that as sinful members of that world we bear the consequences of sin’s legacy of brokenness, we can’t box God into a neat and tidy formula such as righteousness= blessing or sin=suffering. We can’t, in other words, look at our bank account for insight into God’s good pleasure with us (or lack thereof).

Though they had read the book of Job, Jesus’ disciples somehow forgot all this and slipped into the prevalent thinking of day. They asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The idea was that since sin=suffering, this man’s congenital blindness must be the result of his parents’ wrongdoing or his own. Regarding the latter possibility, it could be that he sinned in utero or maybe God foreknew his sin in later life and punished him in advance. The very absurdity of these suggestions indicates how powerfully rooted the neat and tidy formulas had become in the minds of many.

Jesus thinks differently. “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents,” Jesus said, “but that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Jesus refuses to identify the origin of suffering; he’s more concerned with the end of suffering. The man’s blindness is an occasion for the display of the glory of God that brings healing and restoration. This is what Jesus does, isn’t it? He takes the brokenness of our lives and turns it to his glory.

So, Jesus takes a bit of dirt, which reminds of the dirt from which God formed Adam. Could it be that this is a work of new creation? Well, Jesus takes the dirt and makes mud and puts it on the man’s eyes, and he tells him to go wash up in the Pool of Siloam, which reminds us, perhaps, of the renewing waters of baptism. And the man is healed. Years of suffering have met the transformative power of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus does.

There is no getting around the difficulty of suffering. The Bible never seeks to minimize it. The Bible doesn’t seek to explain away the mystery of suffering with a formula like sin=suffering : righteousness=blessing. What the Bible teaches us is that Jesus Christ, without minimizing the harsh reality of suffering, nevertheless overwhelms our suffering with the greater power of his glory.

This is our hope in life in this world, from which suffering cannot be separated. Suffering is a mode of life in this fallen world of ours. But suffering is also not the end of the story. It’s the occasion for the overpowering display of God’s glory. Paul puts suffering and glory in the balance and concludes, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). This, too, is our hope.

Fr. Joe ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 17, 2018

John 10:1-21

by Dcn. Greg Statezni

“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.” John 10:16-17

In this passage of John, Jesus takes us beyond Him being just our shepherd, but being our Lord. At times we must pause as His disciples did and reflect on who this Jesus is. Who is the One who claims our allegiance, and what is following Him all about? We sing His titles and proclaim His attributes, but do we allow His life and character to affect the daily routines of our lives? The people following Jesus during His earthly ministry had many reasons to follow Him. Some were after the show, some looked for the acceptance that Jesus offered, some sought miracles for themselves and or their friends, while some grasped for any excuse to validate their questions regarding the system of religious life in Israel.

Jesus continued to speak of the loving Father seeking after the lost sheep of Israel. He lived the expression of God’s grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness as He touched the lepers, the poor, the blind, the lame while encouraging the women and children to enter into fellowship as His disciples. He categorized His identity to John the Baptist by showering the outcasts of His society with the grace and love of God by the preaching the Good News of His Kingdom. His message was a sharp critique of the theologies of the Sadducees and Pharisees. His word was a word of discomfort for those whose lives were comfortable.

That is not where Jesus’ teaching ended, however. He went further in emphasizing the spiritual and eternal reality of life with God. He spoke of God’s reign as an active reality within every individual’s life. He categorized God’s reign as the only true spiritual reality while calling everyone to look beyond the material concerns of this world leaving the physical in its proper place by using its resources for the sake of God’s reign. Jesus exchanged the idea of “It’s all about me,” for “I am all about them.”

Jesus knew that His lifestyle and teachings were making the ruling parties uncomfortable, for their complicity in oppressing those who weren’t like them was becoming more apparent. Jesus prepared the disciples with the realization that these religious rulers would make Him the brunt of their anger, guilt, and desire to maintain their control. They would turn Jesus into what we understand a scapegoat to be. They would kill Jesus as though Jesus were to blame for all the unrest. This is not a good picture of what a scapegoat really was, but neither is our picture of Jesus’ personality always that clear. The scapegoat was featured in the Yom Kippur celebration—the Jewish Day of Atonement. The scapegoat was one of two goats used in approaching *Yahweh*, for purification and renewal. One goat was sacrificed to cleanse the sanctuary with its holiest items. The scapegoat, however, was not to be killed. The people’s guilt would be laid on its head, and this scapegoat would be taken out into the wilderness, bearing the nation’s guilt far away from the holy Temple.

Jesus made no attempt to escape any persecution. He brought the demands of the Gospel directly to them. He called them to show their hand by revealing their true allegiance. Would they follow a “What’s in it for me?” way of thinking, or would they live according to “It’s all about them.” Were they willing to lay down everything by living a faithful life of service in surrendering their lives and resources to serve God, or would they continue to serve themselves at the expense of others?

As we continue in this season of Lent, we need to ask ourselves some of these same questions. When was the last time we denied ourselves in order to serve God? When did we sacrifice our own comfort in order to live out the demands of the Gospel? When was the last time we took Jesus’ words about self-denial seriously? How long has it been since we spent more of our time and resources ministering God’s grace to people outside our walls instead of for our own enjoyment?

Dcn. Greg ministers with Trinity Anglican Church

March 19, 2018

John 10:37-42

by Dcn. Skip Hill

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.' And many believed in him there. John 10:37-42

What were the Jews of Jesus' day looking for in a Messiah? I would think that they would look for a person who lived a godly life, could do wonderful works, and who had no fault in Him. They were looking for someone who lived a consistent godly life; who was bold, sure of Himself, and who could speak to them of God! Why then did they try to arrest him when He demonstrated the very characteristics that they were looking for?

It appears as if they had faith in a Messiah who would be ideal, while simultaneously believing that anyone who 'acted' in ways that they anticipated the Messiah to behave would by 'nature' be a blasphemer! So...they had an image of the ideal in their minds, while never expecting that this ideal could become a reality.

What wrong did Jesus do that deserved the reactions that he got from the Jewish leaders? They did not challenge Him when He suggested "*If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me.*" Their reaction against Him came after He said, "*But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*"

The Jews did not take exception with either of Jesus' statements! They did not have any answer; all they had was a reaction! In fact, it was the very 'good things' that Jesus was doing among them that caused them the difficulty! It is strange that while going about doing good, Jesus was accused of being bad!

Do we expect to experience any other reaction from others as we live to bring Christ to the world? Good is considered bad! Godly living is considered 'prudish' and odd by those rejecting Christ. When a Christian lets his or her light 'shine' all around, the believer is shown for what he or she is. A person hiding in the dark does not want the light shined upon them.....they want to remain as they are.....unseen and hidden.

When Jesus 'went about doing good,' those around Him were able to see the contrast of His life with theirs, and did not appreciate seeing the truth. There is no darkness in light...none at all. The light changes the nature of the dark. The Goodness of God by its nature demonstrates the badness that is around.

So, Jesus left those behind who rejected Him, and brought His good news to people who received Him; who wanted what He had to share. We cannot avoid everyone who disagrees with us! Jesus didn't either. But, he demonstrated to us that, just as He did, we need to separate ourselves from those who would want to not only reject the good news we bring, but who would want to prevent us from sharing it with anyone else. He left them and went to where He knew there would be people who were sincerely seeking God; at the place where John was baptizing people who were confessing their sins. If Jesus was rejected while doing good, we can expect the same as we live to emulate him. Let us examine ourselves and choose to do good, even if it brings about rejection from others. Let us live unto Christ.

Dcn. Skip ministers at St. Luke's Anglican Church

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

John 11:1-44

by Fr. Stephen Veselsky

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

John 11:5-7 (ESV)

You think you know God. One could mean that in two different senses. The first one is to know that God exists, that He simply *is*, and the second sense is to know His *actions*, how God acts. Here, we are dealing with the second sense. We think *know* God, so we expect God to behave in particular ways. So how do we respond when God doesn't act like we *know* He should? Often, with our limited human understanding, we question God's actions.

Here is somebody who loves someone who is like family, and when one of his family is really ill, the one who is supposedly loving does nothing - no action, no explanation. It appears that Jesus does not care. How is it possible to read that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" while there is no evidence of anything that would point to love. Imagine, being in the place of Martha and her sister. How would you feel? What would be your experienced emotion in this situation?

Perhaps confusion and frustration come to mind, connected with amazement at inaction displayed by Jesus. Anger would be a surprise, either.

Jesus knew what others did not and could not know. Otherwise, it is impossible to defend the claim that He is loving. From the start, He intended to raise Lazarus from dead and needed others to know for sure that Lazarus had died. By remaining for two more days at the same place, he made sure people knew Lazarus was dead. About this passage, Chrysostom says that Jesus delayed "to give time for his death and burial, that they might say, he stinks, and none doubt that it was death, and not in a trance, from which he was raised."

This passage is an excellent example that God cares about us, and that often it is beyond our limited human understanding to perceive that. In the face of death, the Resurrection awaits us. Glory to Him who came to us, sent by our Father.

Fr. Steve serves as a missionary in the Czech Republic

March 21, 2018

2 Timothy 1

by Fr. Karl Dietze

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well." 2 Timothy 1:5

Paul's second letter to Timothy reads like the testimony of a man who knows his days are numbered. Indeed, as Paul encourages Timothy to continue his faithful ministry, he also encourages Timothy to come see him soon (4:9). "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (4:6-7). Perhaps that is why Paul seems so reflective about Timothy. As he faces the end of his earthly ministry, Paul is writing to the young man who will carry on his spiritual legacy. "I am reminded of your sincere faith..."

There is something powerful that jumps out at me in this verse.

Here we see the power of a believing household. Paul commends Timothy for the sincere faith that “dwelt first” in his mother and grandmother. This doesn’t mean that Timothy didn’t have a faith of his own, but it seems to mean that his mother and grandmother raised him to know Jesus. This is one of the key missions of marriage and family. We hear it in our own liturgy for marriage. “The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind was ordained by God: for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord...”

It has become popular in recent years to let children choose their own faith. I would maintain that that misses the mark in at least two ways. First, as we hear in the marriage liturgy, Scripture teaches that one of the primary roles of families is to raise children in the knowledge and love of the Lord. It is God’s design. Second, we teach our children those things that we believe are of ultimate value. We teach them to take care of their bodies, we teach them to treat others well, we teach them the importance of education and knowledge. If we believe that “there is no other name under heaven among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12), then why wouldn’t we teach our children to know and love the Lord?

I am convinced, too, that Lois and Eunice taught the faith to Timothy. Like it or not, parents are the primary faith teachers for their children. Parents need to know the content of their faith if they are going to faithfully pass it on to their children. That means that parents need to be active in growing their own faith so that they can both model the life of faith and teach its content. But lest we narrow this down to only parents, can’t we say the same is true of the extended “family?” We don’t raise children alone. *We*, the Church, are meant to raise them together in the fellowship of the Church.

Recent studies have shown that the most likely contributing factor to young adults staying in the church in their twenties is having significant adult relationships with other disciples of Jesus. That means that grandparents and extended natural family, as well as close family relationships, all play a powerful role in shaping young lives in Christ. That means that raising children in the fellowship of the Church is vitally important. We not only need to involve our children in the life of the Church, we need to teach them why such involvement (even if it doesn’t excite them any more than brushing their teeth or school) is so important.

If you have children of your own, what are you doing to raise them in the knowledge and love of the Lord? If you have a relationship with the children of others, what are you doing to raise them in the knowledge and love of the Lord?

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 22, 2018

2 Timothy 2:23-25

By Fr. Randy Messick

When I read these verses it’s clear to me that there is an irreconcilable difference between my wish to serve God and my compulsion to serve my ego. Paul teaches me to avoid “ignorant controversies that breed quarrels” and yet, sometimes I find myself right in the middle of them believing that in some way I really am serving the Lord. Paul knows that when I participate in such quarrels I do so not out of a desire to serve the Lord, but out of an egotistical desire to be *right*. When I do this I drive a wedge between my will and God’s will and as a result I can drive a wedge between God and others.

Paul teaches me to be kind to *everyone*, to pursue love and peace, so that in doing so I may actually share with others knowledge and truth about God. When others sense that I’m quarreling with them so that I can prove I’m right and they’re wrong, they are likely to reject anything I have to say. But, when I approach people in true love, and peace, and gentleness, then I have a chance of sharing knowledge and truth about Jesus, whose gift of salvation is, after all, given out of His great love for us.

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican Church

March 23, 2018

John 20:20-end

by Dcn. John LaMar

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." John 12:24

Ask any farmer and he will tell you that it is all about the "yield." The planting of seed in the ground brings the harvest, the reaping of the bounty produced by the yield that each individual seed will give. Scientist work continually to engineer healthier, stronger plants and trees that produce ever greater yields against the investment of each seed or sapling. Jesus illustrated a great principle using the analogy of a grain of wheat. A grain of wheat planted in the ground dies, but in its dying it produces a blade, then an ear and finally the harvest.

Consider the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, his burial and his glorious resurrection after three days in the tomb. Jesus is the lone kernel of wheat that was put into the ground that would give life to all those who would follow him. That *proto* kernel of wheat produced an important yield made up of his apostles and the other disciples. These in turn would go out into the world and produce yields of their own by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the meritorious death of Christ.

These first century disciples, and all those who would follow them, had to "die to themselves" that they might live for Christ and his kingdom. It was the second century apologist, Tertullian who said, *"The blood of the martyrs is seed of Christians (the church)."* How true the saying is. We, as individual and corporate members of the body of Christ, are inheritors of the Church that was born under the frequent cycles of great Roman persecutions that saw many Christian men and women professing Christ openly and boldly that they might be martyred for the sake of Christ.

How sad it is to see that so many Christians becoming so caught up in the belief that it is to our benefit and well-being that we have modern conveniences to make our lives easier, that we be quick to access every form of medication available to ease our stress, anxieties and fears that come from living in such a fast-paced and often frightening world. We readily eschew the idea of having to "do without" in a culture that thrives on consumerism and instant gratification. However, now is the time, more than ever, that we begin our Lenten journey following the ancient path of regular self-examination, repentance and yes, when desired, partaking of the sacrament of reconciliation. During this season's Lenten journey let us commit ourselves to be the kernel of wheat that willingly and sacrificially falls to the ground that it may produce a mighty and blessed yield for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 24, 2018

John 13

by Fr. Mark Hall

"Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." John 13:8

Backpacking can really be a lot of fun if you enjoy roughing it. Carrying all your gear for several days on your back as you traverse beautiful geography has its appeal. However, for all the beauty you take in, the one thing that is priceless upon returning home is a hot shower. Few things can replace that feeling of knowing you're clean, especially after everyone who's come within a few feet of you knows you're dirty.

The beauty of nature is one way we can catch a glimpse of God's glory, yet it ultimately leaves us with more questions about God than answers. To get a clear view of God's glory, the Bible points us to Jesus,

and we get a technicolor portrait in today's reading. We see Jesus spending time with his friends on the evening he will be betrayed by one of them to his death. How does he respond? By taking it upon himself to get dirty.

I'm not sure if you've ever had the unfortunate experience of stepping in a dog's fresh droppings that stick to the soles of your shoes. It gets worse when you don't realize it until you're with others and everyone notices a foul smell coming from your direction. Well imagine walking several miles a day on dusty roads that are heavily traveled by animals who take the liberty to relieve themselves whenever and wherever - and you're wearing sandals. Most likely by the end of the day your feet would have a dark film coating them in unpleasantness.

This is where Jesus goes straight to the mess. It doesn't matter that the job of cleaning someone's feet is considered beneath a Jewish slave, he intimately enters into the stench we all want to avoid. Peter didn't know how to take it, so he came up with a plan that seemed more utilitarian: "Clean my head and hands too." But Jesus didn't come to take orders about what we think is best for us, he came to clean up the real mess in our lives.

How mind-blowing to think that the God who spoke the beauty of creation into existence, chose to reveal himself as one who kneels down to take the messiness of our lives into his hands and make us clean. In order for us to become clean, Jesus had to become dirty. The cross represents the dirt and stench of our sins being placed on Jesus. Yet it was God's love for the world, for us, rather than the nails that kept Jesus there with arms outstretched.

How glorious that even though we've all stepped in it, so to speak, Jesus did not declare that we have to clean up before he'll bring us home. Even now he is showering us with his grace to make us clean. Will we let his love lead us out towards others, or will we keep our distance due to their messiness?

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints' Anglican Church

March 26, 2018

Read: John 14:1-16

by Dcm. Ron Christolear

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." John 14:1-17

As our reading begins, Jesus is addressing his coming death on the cross. He no doubt senses the disciples' fear, and he tells them, "Let not your hearts be troubled." Jesus is telling his disciples to trust in God and to trust in him. This fear may be predicated on the fact that the typical Jewish believer, which most likely included the disciples, had expected the Messiah to be a King who would come into the world to free Israel from Roman oppression. As time went on, the disciples began to see that this was not Jesus' mission.

So it must have been both confusing and frightening to hear Jesus talking about death. Jesus, sensing their fear makes a promise, "I am going to prepare a place for you." Jesus is giving them the promise that they are not being abandoned. Jesus even tells them, "You know the way to where I am going." Thomas then exclaims, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus

answers Thomas' questions with a declaration that should calm the hearts of every person who has come to faith in him. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is making a bold statement of exclusivity. It is reminiscent of the *Shema* found in Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Just as God was declaring his exclusivity as God, Jesus is declaring his exclusivity as the only way to access to that same God. Peter declares of Jesus in Acts 4:12, "and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." When Jesus speaks the words "be not troubled," he is not only talking to the disciples standing before him, but to all who would call on his name over the centuries. We need not fear the future, in this life or the life to come.

Do you want to know the way to the Father? Look to Jesus. Do you want to know the truth of the Father? Look to Jesus. Do you want to have life, now and in the presence of Father? Look to Jesus.

As we come to the close of the season of Lent and prepare our hearts for Holy Week, and as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, we can know that Jesus *is The Way, and The Truth, and The life* not only because he tells us, which in itself is sufficient, but because he proves it through his death, burial, and resurrection.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 27, 2018

John 15:1-16

by Fr. Jack Estes

"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine neither can you, unless you abide in me." John 15:4

Every winter at our house is tree trimming time. We have several fruit trees that need pruning in order to be fruitful in the spring. In the back corner grows a massive fig tree, planted over fifty years ago by the first owner of the house. The trunk of the fig tree is about two feet around, and the roots go down and out deep into the soil. In fact, figs and grapes put down roots into the substrata far below the topsoil. This makes them ideal to grow in hot climates where topsoil is sparse – like Israel.

Last week I completed the task of trimming the fig tree. The branches are cut off and piled high near the base of the tree: no longer alive; no longer growing upward from the trunk; no longer connected to the roots. They will never again produce figs. Now they are just a disposal problem.

This image of the branches and the vine is one Jesus chooses to make a profound point to his disciples. Their life depends on remaining connected to him. In order to continue to grow upward and be fruitful they must abide with him. He is the solid trunk that holds them up. He is the root that supplies the life-giving water from deep within the heart of God. Once they cut themselves off from him the substance of their lives withers.

Abide is an interesting word that Jesus uses to depict this principle of spiritual life. This is not a word in common usage in our time. I don't often say, "I'm going to abide at my house on my day off." Or "Why not come over for dinner, and we can abide for a while." The fact that the word is unfamiliar gives us an opportunity to pause and reflect more deeply upon the meaning. Like the metaphor of the branches, abide carries a deeper meaning connected to a fruitful life.

Abiding in the Lord is something that takes time. We cannot have a five-minute abiding session and be nourished in the Lord. Abide has a living quality to its meaning, that is to say a sense of being at peace.

To abide is to be unhurried, content, sharing each moment as they come. Abiding with Jesus means to remain connected to him in the sacrament of the present moment.

It's not surprising that the word abide is no longer common in our contemporary world. Who has time to abide! Instead we are driven, running, striving to get everything done, so we can keep up with the next thing on the agenda. This Lent take a moment to get reconnected with the deep roots of God's love. Abide in the Lord, unhurried and unharried, until the life from the root revives you once again.

Lord teach me how to slow down and abide with you in every moment of the day
Like the branches on the vine, help me to remain connected to you,
So that my life will be fruitful in your kingdom. Amen.

Fr. Jack ministers at St. Luke's Anglican Church

March 28, 2018

Numbers 21:4-9

by Fr. Joe Lawrence

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Numbers 21:9, ESV)

Biblical "typology" is the practice of reading a passage of the Bible, often from the Old Testament, that is about one thing and realizing that it is also about something else. To take a clear example: Genesis 22 is about Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, on mountain named Moriah. But for Christians this passage is also about the God's willingness to give his only son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for us and our salvation on another mountain named Golgotha. The sacrifice of Isaac is a "type," a rough sketch, of the later and greater reality of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. I find that my heart never fails to grow strangely warm when I catch a glimpse of my Savior, Jesus Christ, playing on the words of the Old Testament.

I caught another sight of him in Numbers 21:4-9, an admittedly unusual passage of Holy Scripture.

As the story goes, Moses is leading the people in a roundabout way through the desert, and the people once again grow impatient and start grumbling. From their perspective, the chips are down, they're on the verge of dehydration and starvation, they've lost all confidence in Moses' ability to lead, and worst of all, God has let them down. So, they complain against Moses, and against God, saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." This kindles God's wrath, and he afflicts them with deadly, venomous snakes. Under the heavy hand of God's judgment the people repent: "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." Moses prays, and he is told to make a bronze snake and hoist it up on a pole so that anyone who was bitten can look upon it and live. As the people looked upon the very symbol of their affliction (i.e. a snake) they found healing. By looking at the curse, the curse was reversed. The many snakes killed with their venom, but the one snake that was lifted up took that venom away and gave life.

I'm not alone in seeing Jesus Christ in this passage. Jesus himself says it, too. He told Nicodemus one night, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The snake that Moses hoisted up for the people to look upon and be saved, this is a "type" of Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Jesus himself says this!

Here is what St. Augustine says: "What is the serpent lifted up? The Lord's death on the cross. For as a death came by the serpent, it was now figured by the image of the serpent. The serpent's bite was deadly,

the Lord's death is life-giving. A serpent is gazed on that the serpent may have no power. What is this? A death is gazed on, that death may have no power." A snake was lifted up to destroy the power of the snakes; Jesus was lifted up on the cross to die, and by his death he destroyed the power of death. By looking at the curse (the death of Christ), the curse is reversed.

This is precisely what we come to do in Holy Week. To gather and set our eyes upon the cross of Jesus Christ, by which he conquered the power of death. For "the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Once again, I've caught a glimpse of my Savior, and my heart is strangely warmed.

Fr. Joe ministers at Trinity Anglican Church

March 29, 2018

John 13:1-35

by Dcn. Greg Statezni

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13:14

If we want to fully understand this passage we need to know a little of the background. The Lord may have waited for one of the disciples to choose to rinse feet because He had just instructed them about being great in the Kingdom, but it seems the message didn't fall on any receptive soil. They were still arguing about who was or would be the greatest, with no one volunteering to rinse feet.

Usually the host or hostess of a supper would arrange for a hired servant to rinse everyone's feet. At that time people wore sandals and walked on dusty, dirty roads, and their feet needed a rinsing before eating. They normally reclined rather than sitting on an upright chair before having a meal. This reclining position might have further enhance the hygiene of clean feet. We may only imagine why the Lord didn't arrange for a hired servant. Did He know that none of the disciples would volunteer, because they continued to argue about who was greatest? This setting with Christ rinsing their feet serves as a great teaching tool for the disciples.

The Lord then laid aside His outer garment which was the symbol of fleshly pride. Humility can only occur when we lay aside our outer garment of pride and serve with humility in the rinsing of dirty feet. Here we have a prime example of Jesus serving with a true attitude of humility. The entire emphasis of rinsing of their feet was to call attention to humble service.

The need for refreshing and the cleansing of sin is likened to a foot washing. There is only a need for bathing the entire body, but there is the necessity of daily rinsing and cleansing of our feet and soul. We must have our spiritual feet cleansed every day and this takes humility to set aside our pride--and then confess and repent with the washing of our soul by the water and His cleansing blood. This is the same blood which He shed for each of us on the cross at Calvary to make us completely clean.

Are we willing to wash another's feet or have our feet washed?

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March 30, 2018

Good Friday

John 19:38-42

by Dcn. Skip Hill

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

John 19:38-42

What is so 'good' about Good Friday? At the time it seemed to be the darkest day in history to those who had been with Jesus to the end. It was a day of death; a day of sorrow. But, without it, we would not know the joy of Easter morning.

Why do you think that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus? Perhaps because both he and Nicodemus did not come to realize who Jesus was until they saw how He suffered and died. Both had been 'secret' disciples, Joseph a wealthy man and Nicodemus a Pharisee, who up to this point had lived a 'quiet faith.' The death of Jesus brought about the realization that they both had to come out of their 'spiritual hiding.' Honoring Jesus by taking His body down from the cross and providing a place of burial was the least they could do. Who else was going to do this? The followers of Jesus had run for their lives after His arrest. Those who were so close to Him did not stay around when they were concerned for their own lives. Jesus' mother, Mary, and the other women, could not have managed to take his body and bury it, even though they remained by His side to the end. No, those would have been afraid to make known their faith found the courage to declare it in the end. I am sure that Joseph and Nicodemus were cut to the core with their own grief and guilt, ashamed at how they had not stood up for Jesus until now! But, it was 'the least they could do!'

Perhaps they did not believe that He would conquer the grave! Perhaps they could only see the horribleness of His death, and their own betrayal. However, their act of courage must have been a catalyst that was needed to reignite the courage of the disciples! Though they had all run for their lives in the garden, and though Peter denied Him three times on that fateful night..after he was placed in the tomb, they were found to have gathered together again in one place....His disciples would have had no one else to help them in their grief than each other.

They may have 'denied' him by their actions that night, but, the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus must have had quite an impact upon them. Now, in the darkness that was that 'Good' Friday, we find, though the evil, good began to win! Those who had denied Him in life now claimed Him in death! Those who had run in fear were strengthened to come together for support by the bravery of these two Pharisees. And...as we look back via the lens of history, we look back in hope and faith. Up until this day, Death had always been the 'final answer'. However, on this Good Friday, the events that would come in three days would prove that Death was no longer the 'final answer', and the hope of life through Death's defeat would introduce the world to a new reality.

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March 31, 2018

Holy Saturday

Job 19:21-27

by Fr. Stephen Veselsky

Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! Oh, that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! Job 19:23-24 (ESV)

History teaches us about different types of writing. Starting with palm leaves, linen cloth, rock and metal engraving, tables from stone, wax, lead, animal skin, papyrus, and finally, printing on paper. Job's wish was fulfilled and his words were written, probably in all the mentioned forms.

However, there is another type of writing – a supernatural one. In Exodus 24:12, God instructed Moses "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." And also, we are reminded in the Book of Revelation 20:12, about the final supernatural writing, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done."

The time span between these two supernatural writings is immense, generations and generations of people were born, lived and departed. However, greater than the distance between these two writings in time is the distance made up of sin. The distance of sin cannot be crossed in any other way but over the bridge made from the Cross of Christ.

Perhaps, the next time when you write a post card to your friend, or type an e-mail on your computer, you may recall this passage. You may recall that Job had suffered so that you may learn from His suffering and accept your own. It is a mystery of the Cross that we suffer, but on the end of this narrow and winding path of suffering is our face to face meeting with Christ. And that meeting lasts for eternity.

Fr. Steve serves as a missionary in the Czech Republic