

Year B

(2012, 2015, 2018, ...)

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm 51:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Lent is a journey. It is a journey of penitence, preparation, devotion, and discipline. It is a journey we trek with Jesus. He treks to Jerusalem, to Golgotha, and to the Cross. We follow Him to the Cross. Lent is the journey to the Cross – for all of us. Unlike His companions at the time, however, we know “the rest of the story.” We know about Easter. That’s where we’re going, but we cannot get there without going through Lent. Any journey requires at least two things: we need to know where we are, and we need to know where we want to go. We know where we want to go: call it The Cross, call it Easter, call it heaven or life with God; it doesn’t matter. But where are we? Just as the proverbial journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step, so our Lenten journey must begin by knowing where we are. Let’s start by reading Psalm 51. Then we’ll know where we are. Then we can begin our trek to the Cross – and beyond.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Psalm 25:1-10

Daniel 9:1-14

1 John 1:3-10

Lent is a time to recognize our sinfulness and to repent. How well, though, do we really recognize our sin? Nearly every Sunday we confess our sins using the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness; we confess by rote using the well-known words drummed into our heads by endless repetition. Perhaps now at the beginning of Lent is the time to be more exacting in our recognition and confession of our sins. There are only two who know the depths to which I have sunk: I know it, and God knows it. I cannot be honest with God until I am honest with myself. Let us take a fresh look at old sins, confess them, and repent. This is a challenge to all of us: to really repent, to change our thoughts and ways instead of simply saying so and continuing on in our same old ways. Read Daniel 9:4b-10 and 1 John 1:5-10. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Psalm 25:1-10

Daniel 9:15-25a

2 Timothy 4:1-15

Timothy is urged to “be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable” (2 Tim 4:2). So are we. Being a Christian requires persistence. Lent requires more. We cannot allow ourselves to be blown this way and that by the wavering winds of contemporary morality which seem to change on an almost daily basis. The Christian’s journey in general, and especially the journey of Lent, is a long trudge down the lonesome road of life. We struggle with our Christianity because most of the world ignores it. Jesus too

seemingly walked alone. But He was not alone; neither are we. Somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind is a song I heard as a youngster. I don't remember the words but seem to think they contained the phrase "Walk down, walk down that lonesome road, and you'll never walk alone." Maybe I'm cobbling together several songs, but the end result somehow rings true. We are together, you and I, Christians in Lent; and more importantly, God is with us. We can be persistent; we are not alone.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Psalm 25:1-10
Psalm 32
Matthew 9:2-13

Jesus is often found telling people to get up or stand up. The lame and crippled are told to get up and go home or to go and tell what God had done for them. Sinners and tax collectors are told to get up and follow. We too are told to get up and follow. "Stand up, stand up for Jesus" we are told in Hymn 389 of the Lutheran Book of Worship. Jesus calls us to action. We cannot "do" God's will sitting on the couch. James tells us that "faith ... if it has no works, is dead" (Jas 2:17). Four hymns in Evangelical Lutheran Worship start with "Go." "Go, make disciples" (540), "Go, my children, with my blessing" (543), "Go tell it on the mountain" (290), and "Go to dark Gethsemane" (347) all tell us to go and do something. It's Lent; now is no time to sit around moping in the traditional gloom of the season. Let us get up and go and do. "Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling ... Come home, come home ..." (ELW 608).

First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 25:1-10
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

Rainbows are wonderful. No two people ever see the same rainbow. Each one is unique to the viewer. This is because of the geometry of the reflecting and refracting of light in each individual rain drop and the location of each individual observer. That means that every rainbow you have ever seen is a unique, one-of-a-kind gift given by God only to you. Even if I'm standing right there beside you, we each see our own individual, separate rainbow. That's kind of special, isn't it? A personal gift from God given only to you! In that same vein, each rainbow we see is a reaffirmation of God's covenant with us – individually! In the "real world" we usually see rainbows after the storm has past. In our private, spiritual world we usually find God's rainbows after some sort of personal struggle or emotional storm. Nonetheless, a rainbow is a rainbow, given by God, given only to you. Thanks be to God!

Monday of the Week of Lent 1

Psalm 77
Job 4:1-21
Ephesians 2:1-10

Grace is mercy undeserved. By grace we are saved (Eph 2:5). All too often during this season of Lent we allow ourselves to be led down the slippery slope of works. We seem to think we have to do something to get ready for Easter. But we don't have to do anything except get out of the way and let

God do the doing. As is our faith, our being saved by the grace of God is God's unconditional gift to us. If we choose to do something, it is in response to God's love for us: we do it because we love God, not because we want to put ourselves into God's good graces. If we have an unrelenting need to do something, let's simply do what God has told us to do: eat this bread, drink this wine, love one another, and go forth making disciples (Mt 28:19). That can be our work for Lent and our work for life.

Tuesday of the Week of Lent 1

Psalm 77

Job 5:8-27

1 Peter 3:8-18a

Lent is a two-way street. Christ suffered to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). We choose to seek God (Job 5:8). God has chosen and called us through the waters of Holy Baptism. Our sin and sorrow cause us to seek God, our only source of hope and help. Were we to seek on our own, we would not find God. But our Lenten journey is not a journey alone. We do it together with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we do it with God. Jesus leads us, the Spirit encourages and strengthens us, and the Father welcomes us. Our Lenten discipline keeps us from being blinded by the headlights of on-coming traffic which would otherwise lead us astray and turn us off the path of righteousness. In Lent as in life, one might say that if we keep to the right we won't go wrong.

Wednesday of the Week of Lent 1

Psalm 77

Proverbs 30:1-9

Matthew 4:1-11

Reading about the temptation of Christ always raises within me mixed emotions. On the one hand I can smugly smile and know that He can and will withstand the devil's efforts. On the other hand I feel very uncomfortable thinking about temptation since I know my weaknesses, my sinfulness, and my vulnerability to temptation. We pray that the Lord will "lead us not into temptation." Indeed, the Lord does not tempt us and we should instead pray "do not bring us to the time of trial" (Mt 6:13, Lk 11:4). But, weak and worried as we may be, we can take heart when faced with temptation for "we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Jesus can say to us, "Been there; done that." And, we can "approach the throne of grace with boldness ... and receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).

Thursday of the Week of Lent 1

Psalm 22:23-31

Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18

Romans 3:21-31

Promises made, and promises kept – that's in large part the essence of the story of God's people, our story. But, think for a moment about those promises. It is God who makes them, and God who keeps them. Just as the ancient Hebrews were a hard-hearted, stiff-necked, stubborn people; so are we. Just as they sought at almost every turn to get away from God and His will, so do we. But God has made promises and He will not break them. When absolutely necessary He forces his blessings upon us – what

a strange thing to do! This Lent let's try to make life easier for God; let's repent and gladly accept the blessings He gives to us. It just might make life easier for everyone.

Friday of the Week of Lent 1

Psalm 22:23-31
Genesis 16:1-6
Romans 4:1-12

Which came first: the chicken or the egg? A delightful question because without one you cannot have the other. But this is not quite so with God. In Romans Paul tells us that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness before circumcision became a sign of that righteousness, thereby indicating that faith in God and the righteousness thereof was not restricted to the Jews but was a gift to the Gentiles as well. Anselm prayed, "For I do not seek to understand in order to believe but I believe in order to understand." Something has to come first, and that is God. Science, in and of itself, will never bring a man to God. Faith in God, however, can lead a man to science. Just as we cannot do any good without God (Luther), and we cannot understand without belief (Anselm), we must put God first. Of course, He told us that – it's the First Commandment. That's a lesson for Lent; that's a lesson for life.

Saturday of the Week of Lent 1

Psalm 22:23-31
Genesis 16:7-15
Mark 8:27-30

It's hard to figure out Jesus: He does miraculous things and tells those he heals not to tell anyone about it; He takes his closest friends up the mountain and then tells them to say nothing of the experience; He confesses to his disciples that he is indeed the Christ and again tells them to keep quiet about it. Of course those whom He healed, those who had their sight restored, went and proclaimed it widely. Immediately after His death and resurrection the disciples could not be kept silent. Through Holy Scripture we are told to go forth and proclaim Christ. Do we? Really? How strange that those admonished to silence proclaimed and those told to proclaim keep silent. It's Lent; maybe we should change our ways.

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

We all have crosses to bear, and we bear them grudgingly. It seems that no matter the burden, "It's not my fault!" To admit guilt or transgression is the most difficult thing for an individual to do: We do not make mistakes; other people do. When we are given unpleasant news we want to change the situation. We don't want to face reality when reality is difficult or dangerous. We are very good at self-denial, at least when it comes to denying any responsibility for our own failures. We are not very good at self-denial when it comes to "deny[ing] [our]selves and tak[ing] up [our] cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Like Peter we want to change the subject: "Say it isn't so." Jesus tells us it as it is. Are we willing to

listen? Really listen? Let's try a Lenten discipline of listening. When reading Scripture as when praying, stop talking and start listening. Then do what Jesus says, pick up your cross and follow.

Monday of the Week of Lent 2

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

Genesis 21:1-7

Hebrews 1:8-12

We are a steadfast lot; we don't very much like change; permanence is good. But, what is permanence? Even the universe changes, and today's science tells us that the universe will expand so much that even atoms will become so huge that they no longer hold together. We formed in the "Big Bang;" we'll go out in a "Big Rip" albeit far less spectacular than the Big Bang. The Bible tells us of permanence too, in a parallel vein and not quite as we might expect. We are told in many places that God is forever, but His creation is not: "...the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain" (Heb 1:10-11); "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mt 24:35); "... not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Mt 5:18). Our journey through Lent seems a permanent one too, trudging through the darkness of sin. But change is coming. Soon the bright light of Easter will shine and the glory of salvation will destroy the gloom of sin and death. But this too seems permanent: we go through the same cycle every year. Now, what about when "all is accomplished"? John tells us, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven ..." (Rev 21:1-2). So, it will be "out with the old; in with the new." God will live with his people; no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death or mourning or crying (Rev 21:3-5). That's a change and that sounds permanent. That sounds good!

Tuesday of the Week of Lent 2

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

Genesis 22:1-19

Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

Faith is a wonderful thing. That's easy for us as "people of faith" to say, but think about it for a moment. Faith is not knowledge but hope. It is not certainty but trust. Faith requires circular logic: I believe in God because God has given me the faith to believe in Him. This does not bother me, though as a scientist I like certainty. Yet when I look at science there is so much uncertainty. Science is good at telling us "what" and "how." It leaves unanswered "why" and cannot in any way address "who." Statistics, inference, and logic can try to fill some of these gaps in our "knowledge" but uncertainty remains. Faith helps to fill in some of the pot holes and smooths the way to a fuller understanding and picture. It sort of boils down to "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk 24). This Lent, keep the faith.

Wednesday of the Week of Lent 2

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

Jeremiah 30:12-22

John 12:36-43

Lent can be a frustrating time for us. We are impatient; we know that Easter awaits; we want the exhilaration of the mountain top without the exertion of the climb. Jesus too faced frustration. He performed signs, and no one believed. Those who came to believe did not admit it lest they be put out of the temple. What about us? We claim to believe (or I doubt that you would be reading this). Do we show it; do we admit it? Of all the seasons of the Church Year, Lent is perhaps the most purposeful. Lent is focused. Its history is that of preparation: training of the catechumens, preparation for Baptism – initiation into the Church of Christ. For us it is a time for renewal and for review. It's rather like when in school we knew our subject matter, or at least thought we did. But, just before the final exam we likely reread the text book and all our notes only to find new insights and new knowledge within them. It's Lent. Let us review and renew. The mountain top of Easter is near. Let us enjoy the climb.

Thursday of the Week of Lent 2

Psalm 19

Exodus 19:1-19a

1 Peter 2:4-10

How does God appear to you? To Moses He appeared as a burning bush. To the exiting Israelites he appeared as a pillar of smoke in the day and a pillar of light at night. Elsewhere in the Bible the theophany (the divine appearance) is depicted as earthquake, wind, and fire, as thunder and lightning, as raging seas and storms. Yet, read 1 Kings 19:11-13. To Elijah the Lord appeared as none of these violent phenomena. He appeared as “a sound of sheer silence.” Perhaps Psalm 46:10 says it best, “Be still, and know that I am God!” Whether in reading Scripture or in prayer, we need to take the time to be still, to listen. God is with us. And, while Martin Luther's great theophany was a thunderstorm and lightning, for most of us I suspect that, like Elijah, our theophanies are of stillness and silence. Listen; it's Lent.

Friday of the Week of Lent 2

Psalm 19

Exodus 19:9b-15

Acts 7:30-40

How do we appear before God? Do we show Him adequate respect? Do we try to “put our best foot forward” even though we know that God knows all about us? Are we honest in confessing our sins, at least to God? What ever happened to “putting on our Sunday best” before going to church? We read in the Bible that a potter can make, from the same lump of clay, vessels for ordinary use and vessels for special use. We are but a single vessel and sometimes we do ordinary things, sometimes special things. When we do ordinary things do we not wear our work clothes or a house dress or something simple? Yet, when we do special things we dress the part. Lent is not “ordinary” time. Its color is purple not green. This is a special time of the year. As we prepare for Easter in this special time, let us also present ourselves to God in a special way. Let's put on our Lenten best and go before God with true and contrite hearts. Lent is a time for building: let us build a better way to God both individually and collectively.

Saturday of the Week of Lent 2

Psalm 19
Exodus 19:16-25
Mark 9:2-8

What makes a character in the Bible great? Certainly we see in the Bible characters that are great as well as lesser characters and even minor ones. There are those that do good; there are those who do evil. But, what makes a character great? Think of those who we would call great. Let's name a few and see what they have in common: Moses, David, Solomon, John, Paul, Jesus. A small handful to be sure, but enough. One characteristic shared by all is that they obeyed God; maybe not always, but they obeyed God. Only Jesus obeyed all the time; the rest stumbled every so often, just as we stumble. But, think of how powerful the words are when we read "... he obeyed God" or words to that effect. When I read such words I immediately ask, "Why don't I obey God?" Is it really that hard? I want to; why don't I. The answer, of course, is sin. "We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves." But, with a true and contrite heart, we can turn to God and be forgiven – by His grace. Maybe, just maybe, that makes us great too.

Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
John 2:13-22

I often think that we do not pay enough attention to the Old Testament. Oh, of course we recognize that it forms the foundation for all we read in the New Testament. But, we tend to treat the Old Testament as a history of the Jewish people and the background on which Christianity is built. Jesus came to fulfill Scripture (Mt 5:17) but he also taught us to obey its true meaning (Lk 11:42). We cannot obey if we do not read and understand. God did not give Moses the "Ten Really Good Ideas" or the "Ten Great Suggestions." How often do you read (or recite) the Ten Commandments and then meditate on how well you've kept them? Most of us are very good at obeying the letter of the Law, but what about all its subtleties: if you lust, you commit adultery; if you hate, you murder; and what about putting yourself – your power, your wealth – before God? The Old Testament is the more difficult "half" of the Bible. It demands more from us; it tells us what to do and what not to do; it threatens punishment. The New Testament, on the other hand, is mostly love, comfort, and forgiveness. Both, however, are part of the Bible, of Holy Scripture; part of the Word of God. We need both, and maybe during this time of Lent a little "tough love" (i.e., the Old Testament) is good for us.

Monday of the Week of Lent 3

Psalm 84
1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22
1 Corinthians 3:10-23

I am a woodworker. I enjoy building things: bookcases, tables, and now especially toys for grandchildren. We all build things. We build relationships; we build wealth; we build our lives. As we make our way through this Lenten season, we might pause to reflect on what it is that we are building; on what are we building (who's foundation; who's original idea); how we are building; and, perhaps most

important, why we are building. Paul warns us that our building will become visible and will be tested with fire. While fire may be frightening to us, the fire implied is that of refining, of purifying. Thus, if what we build is not worthy, it will be destroyed; if it is good and worthy it will be made still better. It's fun to build things, but let's always remember to ask "What?", "For whom?", and "Why?" that our building may withstand the fire and be found worthy.

Tuesday of the Week of Lent 3

Psalm 84

2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

Hebrews 9:23-28

How eagerly do we await Jesus? Only a few months ago we went through a season of preparation and awaiting as we observed Advent. While Lent too is a season of preparation, we prepare differently. Lent prepares us for Easter. It also prepares us for the dreadful shock of Good Friday, but primarily it prepares us for Easter. But, back to the question: do we await the coming of our good and faithful friend and companion – a joyous awaiting, or do we “prepare to meet our maker” – a far more frightful eventuality. Death to us is an inevitable unknown. We have never done it before. We know nothing about it except that it happens. We have been told nothing about it. We don't like unknowns. Perhaps Lent is a good time to reflect on these things, but especially to reflect on the final outcome: while judgment, conviction, and punishment may await us, when Jesus comes we will be forgiven. That's it: forgiven! So we can eagerly await Jesus.

Wednesday of the Week of Lent 3

Psalm 84

Ezra 6:1-16

Mark 11:15-19

The temple was and is the center of Jerusalem. Ever since Solomon built the first temple it has been central to Jews and Judaism. Thus it was fitting that there should be much joy and excitement in the rebuilding of the temple under King Cyrus. Today, our houses of worship are much like the temple of old. They are central to our religious life both as places and as environments; they are special (i.e., “holy”). Today when we build or expand our church building there is once more much joy and excitement. But, while brick and mortar are wonderful, let us also remember that “not one stone will be left upon another” (Mt 24:2). There is though one more temple in which the Spirit of God dwells: your body (1 Cor 3:16). During this discipline of Lent, let us cleanse our temples of the merchants and money changers of our hearts. Let the “zeal for your house” (Ps 69:9, Jn 2:17) not be our downfall or undoing but rather our uplifting. Let us be zealous in prayer and worship and open the doors of our temples to all who would enter. This Lent, love one another.

Thursday of the Week of Lent 3

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Genesis 9:8-17

Ephesians 1:7-14

Signs, promises, hope: the Bible is full of these; our religion is based on these. Today we talk in various ways about “the sign(s) of the time(s).” We don’t see signs today as our forefathers did in Biblical times or even as the Pilgrim Fathers saw them. Of the various signs we see in our religion today, probably the most common is “the sign of the Cross.” This simple sign has several meanings. It might be a way of saying, “I am a Christian.” It may be a way of offering a blessing. It may be a way of banishing the devil or a vampire from our midst. Some of us make it; some don’t – and as C.S. Lewis once wrote, if you notice whether or not the person in the pew next to you makes the sign of the Cross, you’re not focusing on what you should be in church. The cross was not among the earliest signs or symbols of Christianity. Among the earliest signs were a fish, a loaf of bread, a bunch of grapes (a vine), and an anchor. This is not, I suggest, surprising, for if Christ’s ministry were a 20th century event instead of 1st century, would we today use a hangman’s noose or an electric chair as a symbol of our Savior and religion? I think not. The habits of humans are curious, especially when we try to relate to the Divine. Lent is a good time to let private prayer be a sign of devotion, made by us to God. Nothing fancy; just a true and contrite heart and steadfast love.

Friday of the Week of Lent 3

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Daniel 12:5-13

Ephesians 1:7-14

We like specifics. We like certainty. Birth and death are the bookends of our lives. The Bible starts with “In the beginning God created” and ends with “Amen, come Lord Jesus”: a certain beginning and a certain end. Science tells us of a certain beginning, the Big Bang, but is moot about the end, whether it will be a Big Crunch (a collapse of all things to a Big Bang like singularity) or a Big Rip (the endless expansion of everything including even subatomic particles). Lent too is a time of beginning and ending. It begins with our recognition of our mortality (Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return) and ends with our immortality in the risen Christ. Meanwhile, between the ends, be they of life or of the Bible, we struggle with sin. We are slaves to it; we are in bondage to it. We know our own iniquities and are ashamed; Moses killed the Egyptian; David committed adultery. We find comfort in that we have been washed free of sin in our Baptism, but as Martin Luther noted that process is not completed until our death. Lent is a good time to ponder thoughts such as these, to try to see where we’re going, and to try to figure out the right way to get there.

Saturday of the Week of Lent 3

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Numbers 20:22-29

John 3:1-13

It is often said that “we speak of what we know;” but I wonder how often we end up speaking of things which we know not. Even Pilate asked, “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38). In today’s world, dominated as it is by material lusts, greed, and advertising, that’s a very good question. Is product A really better than product B or are they just different? In science and math, a given problem often will have but one correct answer, at least in school. But in life, things are not always so cast in concrete. Oft times we err out of ignorance, but sometimes we speak falsely out of deceit (Ex 20:16). Our aim is to come out on top, in first place, no matter the cost to ourselves or to others. Lent is a good time to seek the truth in Scripture and let that truth seep into our lives – a good time to listen to that “still small voice of calm;” to “be still and know” (Ps 46:10).

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Numbers 21:4-9
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
Ephesians 2:1-10
John 3:14-21

We seek to walk in the light of the truth. We pat ourselves on the back and put on self-righteous airs. We boldly carry a cross before us, but in the bright light of truth that cross is suddenly revealed to be not the Cross of Christ, but, perhaps, “A cross of gold” or other self interest. The harsh light of truth often shows far more than we want and blinds us in the glare of our sinfulness. That is why we now “see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12). The bright light of God’s love for us cannot be fully revealed to us until we are in His kingdom. Think, if you will, of lasers or of the sun: very bright, very powerful, very useful; but of immense danger if viewed directly. We can be blinded. No wonder we tend to “prefer darkness rather than light” (Jn 3:19). Lent is a time to use the light of God to illuminate our sinful ways, to confess them, and to start to try to overcome them. Christ has led the way for us; He calls us. Will we follow?

Monday of the Week of Lent 4

Psalm 107:1-16
Exodus 15:22-27
Hebrews 3:1-6

Have you ever thought about how much the Bible is a book about the outdoors? Almost every story seems to involve crossing a river, climbing a mountain, journeying through the wilderness or experiencing some sort of weather event. Jesus and Moses were mountain climbers; think of how often they were up on a mountain. Noah sailed the ark; Jonah was in the belly of a great fish; Jesus walked on the sea and calmed the storm; Paul nearly drowned in a ship wreck. All of these are outdoor events. Many of Jesus’ healings took place outside along a road or by a pool. Many parables relate to farming or harvest or to traveling; again, all outdoor events. In our lives Lent takes place in spring, and in spring we venture outdoors once more both for yard work and for recreation. Let us also venture out spiritually: let’s expand our spiritual horizons through reading Scripture, through Lenten devotions, and by reading or otherwise learning about our religion: its history and its customs. And, let us also reach out – to one another, to strangers, to all in need – to share the love that God has given us, and the peace that is ours in prayer.

Tuesday of the Week of Lent 4

Psalm 107:1-16
Numbers 20:1-13
1 Corinthians 10:6-13

Actions have consequences. We see this in the Bible; we know this from first-hand experience. Run a red light and you get in an accident; argue with God and be denied (at least temporarily) his blessing. The Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness because they did not trust God. They never saw the Promised Land; their children did. Moses only saw it from a distance; he was not allowed to enter. But the consequences of actions are not always negative. Invest wisely and you can retire comfortably. Eat

right and you live a healthy life. Marry the right spouse and happiness is yours. Read Scripture and strengthen your bonds with God. Celebrate the Eucharist and be “fed with the bread of life.” Pray diligently and know the companionship of God. Observe the discipline of Lent and experience the joy of Easter. Lent: a time for action.

Wednesday of the Week of Lent 4

Psalm 107:1-16

Isaiah 60:15-22

John 8:12-20

We all do it. We ask the questions whose answers we do not want to hear; or when we are given the answer we either don't believe it or we don't want to believe it. Ancient kings of the Old Testament, having been defeated by the Hebrews confessed, “There is no god but God.” Yet, they did not turn to worship the one true God. The people (commoners, Jewish leaders, and even Roman officials) asked Jesus who he was, and then did not accept his answer. (Admittedly Jesus often did not answer the question directly, but even when he did they did not believe him.) And, what about us today? Do we not read Scripture to find the answers we want rather than the answers God gives us? Lent is a good time to ask questions – of God and of ourselves. It grew, after all, from the period of teaching and preparation of catechumens for their Baptism at the Vigil of Easter and their joining the church. So let's ask; but, then let's listen.

Thursday of the Week of Lent 4

Psalm 51:1-12

Isaiah 30:15-18

Hebrews 4:1-13

We don't often think of Lent as being a time of or for rest, but in many ways it is. Most of the year, we are busy multi-tasking on any number of activities, projects, and pursuits. During Lent we let go of some of these distractions and focus on God, our relationship with God, our sinfulness, and God's endless love for us. Here we find comfort among the chaos. Through our Lenten devotions we find the “peace of God which passes all understanding” (Phil 4:7) and we get to enter into God's rest. In our spiritual life as in our secular life we need to take a break from the ordinary, from the routine. Lent affords us that break. Now is a time for renewal and refreshment. Just as the snows melt, the trees leaf out, the grass greens, and the flowers grow, so too does spring stir our spirit. And, we need the rest: soon we will celebrate the 50 days of Easter, and what a celebration that will be. Rest up now, it's Lent.

Friday of the Week of Lent 4

Psalm 51:1-12

Exodus 30:1-10

Hebrews 4:14 – 5:4

Most of us can build something simple like a basic bookcase without instructions. But to craft a cabinet to store china or to make a dining table requires at least plans if not step-by-step instructions as well. So it is with our religion. We have books and bulletins to guide us through the Liturgy. Sure, we could worship free-style, but with our efforts somewhat constrained we worship more effectively and more

efficiently. Lent, originally a time of preparation and instruction for those joining the church, remains a time of instruction. Our daily devotions are guided by published lectionaries and meditations on those readings or on the season. We often want to think that we can do most things on our own. But, when we are told what to do and how to do it, we often find it easier and quicker. Lent is an especially good time to listen to God, to hear what He tells us to do and how we are to do it. It's Lent: listen.

Saturday of the Week of Lent 4

Psalm 51:1-12
Habakkuk 3:2-13
John 12:1-11

How do we use the resources God has given us? Not only that, but how well do we use them? One basic answer is that we use God's gifts to us to perform our daily jobs and to live comfortably and peaceably within our family. But let's broaden the picture: if you like to cook, do you support bake sales or attend pot-lucks, or otherwise cook to share meals with others outside your immediate circle of family and friends? If you sew or quilt or knit, do you make hats or mittens or blankets to give to those in need or to be used in shelters or nursing homes? If you are a photographer, do you donate your time and efforts to church, school, or scouts? If your neighbor is putting up a shed or fence, do you offer your help? We are rich far beyond our bank accounts (which is good because some of those accounts are not so big). You know some of the resources God has given you, and some you may only find when you reach out to help others.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 51:1-12
Hebrews 5:5-10
John 12:1-8

Why do we seek to follow Jesus – or even do we? Much of our religion is by rote, is routine. We can recite the Lord's Prayer without even thinking about it. We can go through the actions of our Sunday worship thinking not of God but of the weekend chores yet to do or that big project at work with a deadline on Wednesday. Certainly we follow Jesus because that's what we were taught; and, we follow because it seems the right thing to do and it feels good. But several questions remain: do we follow Jesus to get something or for personal gain? Do we follow Jesus to give of ourselves, our time and talents, for His sake and to help others? Do we follow Jesus because he told us to, "Come, follow me."? When we think about it, the answer is probably, "Yes." We follow Jesus for all the above reasons and for more. It's Lent and it's a good time to think about it.

Monday of the Week of Lent 5

Psalm 119:9-16
Isaiah 43:8-13
2 Corinthians 3:4-11

God will do that which He chooses and it doesn't matter what we think about it. We can hinder his progress, we can get in the way, but we can't stop Him. The question is, "Why do we get in the way?" It

comes, I suggest, from our violating the First Commandment and putting things (self-interest, power, prestige, money) before God. We don't mean to hinder God; we just do. How do we get around this and make matters right? Perhaps by paying attention to the things we do and to the things we don't do. We probably get in God's way more often by sins of omission than by sins of commission. He is calling us to Him; but do we come or say, "Just a moment while I do this first."? If we will listen to God three things can happen: first we will get out of the way; second, we will repent (change our ways); and third, we will follow. We daily pray, "Thy will be done." It will be, especially when *we* do it.

Tuesday of the Week of Lent 5

Psalm 119:9-16

Isaiah 44:1-8

Acts 2:14-24

What do you think of when you hear the word "prophet"? We often confuse prophesy with forecasting. A prophet may predict, but the fundamental role of a prophet is to be a special line of communication with God. Of the more famous and well known prophets, Moses was essentially the vehicle by whom God gave the Law; Isaiah and Jeremiah provided both predictions and commentary; Amos pointed out the wrongfulness and injustice of his time. We also tend to think of prophesy as an Old Testament thing. But, there is plenty of prophesy in the New Testament. Jesus was called "the Prophet;" John the Baptist was a prophet; read Paul's epistles and you find frequent mention of prophesy. What about today? We don't think about prophets in our midst and would probably doubt if told there were. But do not today's pastors, priests, and rabbis fulfill the role of prophet by interpreting Scripture to today's world? The same might even be said of many religious scholars. Prophets need not be old men with long hair and beards wearing flowing robes. They just might be among us today. Prophets and prophesy too may have changed with the times. It's something to think about.

Wednesday of the Week of Lent 5

Psalm 119:9-16

Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23

John 12:34-50

We read every so often of Jesus hiding from the people, usually after one bold pronouncement or act or another. This seems a strange thing for one who was sent to teach and enlighten to do. It seems to make as much sense to us as Jesus healing a cripple and then telling him to say nothing about it. We read elsewhere or are taught that this was a matter of crowd control, that if the crowds were too great and pressed on him too tightly, he could not fulfill his mission. In some cases it was a matter of personal protection as when the crowds wanted to stone him, but more often we can (and do) question why. The danger of such thoughts on our part is that, once again, we are trying to understand the mind and reasoning of God. We cannot. It is a test of faith. We read that Jesus did it; we accept it as fact or as myth containing the truth; and we contemplate why. What we need to do is to contemplate the whole story and not just the one little detail. We need to see the bigger picture of God's love for us and not get bogged down in the minutia. And, maybe we should also ask ourselves, if Jesus hid from them is he hiding from us? If he is, what have we done, what can we do? Lenten self-examination and repentance can reveal a lot about ourselves and can lift the fog in which we have hidden Jesus without our even knowing it.

Thursday of the Week of Lent 5

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Deuteronomy 16:1-8

Philippians 2:1-11

I am often called a perpetual optimist; and, to that charge I must plead guilty. Each day I recognize and pray that “This is a day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” When someone remarks on this being a good day or a bad day, I usually respond, “Every day is a good day; some are just better than others.” We often think and speak of the dark days of Lent. I would suggest that they are not. They may be darker than the bright days ahead in the light, the Cross, at the end of the tunnel, but they are not that dark. The days of Lent are days of preparation; and, we know for what we are preparing. No doom and gloom there. The only real darkness in the days of Lent – or in any day, for that matter – is the darkness we see in our own sin. But the Light shines in the darkness, and you know the rest. “This is a day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Friday of the Week of Lent 5

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Jeremiah 33:1-9

Philippians 2:12-18

It is amazing how often we read in the Bible such phrases (actually commands!) as “Call on the Lord,” “Seek the Lord,” “Ask [and it shall be given you],” and the like. The question is, do we? And, if so, how sincerely do we call on or seek the Lord? We know that Christ is with us (even to the end of the age [Mt 28:19]). But if I sit next to you in the pew every Sunday, and pray for you every day, I still am not likely to specifically do something for you unless you ask it of me. How often do we ask something in faith? If you are like me, you’ll ask God for something, knowing full well that he can do it, but you doubt that he will so you add a final phrase to your prayer, “but Thy will be done.” We believe but we too cry, “Help my unbelief!” (Mk 9:24). This Lenten season is a good time to call, seek, and ask; to strengthen and deepen our faith; to help our unbelief. All these things are exercises in preparation, and that is the purpose of Lent.

Saturday of the Week of Lent 5

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Jeremiah 33:10-16

Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

It is curious to reflect on the fact that those who followed Jesus were both amazed and afraid (Mk 10:32). Amazement is understandable. Here is a miracle worker who makes the lame whole and who gives sight to the blind; a dynamic and inspiring preacher; a knowledgeable teacher; and more. What was there to fear? Was it the Jewish leadership in the temple, the Romans? More importantly, what about us today? Are we amazed as we follow Jesus? That’s an easy “Yes!” We too are amazed at his teaching, preaching, and healing. We are astounded at his resurrection. It’s all too good to be true; yet it is true. But, what about this afraid stuff? As followers of Jesus are we afraid? While we might offer a quick “No,” think about how boldly or not we proclaim our faith. It’s easy to “preach to the choir;” but what

about to others? Do we sometimes hide our Christianity because it's not quite politically correct or socially acceptable? Are we sometimes ashamed of Christ? We certainly are afraid to try to back up our beliefs with Scriptural quotes; we don't know Scripture that well. But we can always say, "It is written ..." without quoting chapter and verse. We can, like the writer of Hebrews, say, somewhat vaguely, "and in another place ..." The more we read and study, the less we are likely to fear proclaiming and confessing our faith outside of our congregation and family. Amazement comes easy. This Lent let's work on banishing the fear.

Sunday of the Passion

Mark 11:1-11
Isaiah 60:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:1 – 15:47

Think of how often and how quickly crowds change; and, we too. We welcome Jesus with shouts of praise, glad "Hosannas," and branches of palms. In a matter of days, we clamor for his death. That was us nearly 2000 years ago. What about us today? Even now we are changeable and easily misled. Never was there a politician who did not lie to us; yet, we believed, we elected, and then were disappointed, even deceived. Ads for cars, cable or satellite TV, and consumer products all entice us to buy. When we do, the product or service does not perform as we had anticipated. Sometimes we return it or cancel our subscription, but mostly we grumble. God's steadfast love endures forever. It is ours to be had. But, how steadfast are we? At the slightest sign of trouble or embarrassment do we not also turn and run or cloak our religion in a shroud of invisibility? We are sheep: easily led, easily deceived. This week we watch us deceive ourselves and find the truth is not in us. But, the Truth awaits and stands by us even to the end of time. When will we open our lives to it?

Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 36:5-11
Hebrews 9:11-15
John 12:1-11

We like to be in control; we want to know not only what's going on now, but what will happen next. Our ability to predict the future, to tell of things before they "spring forth," is next to nil. Short-term weather forecasts are usually spot on (over 95% accuracy for 1 to 3 days, say), but we only remember the ones that miss, when it rains on our parade. Forecasts of the economy or the stock market are no better than the roll of dice. The one certainty that we do have is the Word of God. The problem is, though, that as we read it we tend to hear the messages we want to hear rather than what God is really trying to tell us. As we journey through Holy Week, let us listen carefully to God's word and let us hold a mirror up close to ourselves to see the truth of what is in us and to use this last week of preparation and instruction to purge ourselves with hyssop and cleanse our hearts so we can hear and see God's Truth: the truth of today and the truth of tomorrow.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 71:1-14
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
John 12:20-36

When you call upon the Lord, does He listen? Perhaps more importantly, when the Lord calls upon you, do you listen? Calling and listening are part of communication, and communicating with God is called prayer. Prayer is not just asking God for what you want and telling Him what you need. He knows those things and will take care of them in His own way and in His own time. How much time do you spend in prayer listening? Don't await that loud, booming, thunderous theophany; it won't come. Concentrate on listening for that "still, small voice of calm." God doesn't shout; He whispers. In these final days of Lent, these days of Holy Week, let not the loud sounds of our self-flagellation and lamentation drown out the whisper of the Lord. During this week those many years ago, Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer, in conversation with God. Maybe we should follow His example.

Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 70
Hebrews 12:1-3
John 13:21-32

Witnesses are the essence of any mystery or crime show on TV. Without witnesses the innocent bystander would never be arrested and accused. From this we might come to judge witnesses as being unreliable. But we are "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses;" we are called upon to witness to Christ. Are we too unreliable? The old adage asks, "If you are accused of being a Christian, is there enough evidence to convict you?" We are now at that most dreaded part of our Lenten journey: betrayal, arrest, conviction, and execution. We don't like it because we see ourselves in so many of the roles portrayed. In one moment we are loyal trustworthy friends standing by Him; in the next we too shout, "Crucify him!" How do we witness to Christ? Are we reliable or unreliable? Do we follow or do we run? Do we support or do we deny? The answer, I'm afraid, is "Yes" to all of these.

The Triduum: Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

This day, Maundy Thursday, and the readings appointed for it, beautifully summarize our religion and our religious practices. Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin *mandatum* (to mandate or command), and the command we are given is to love one another (Jn 13:34). In Exodus we read how and why to observe the Passover. In 1 Corinthians we hear Jesus at his Passover meal explaining and implementing our Holy Eucharist. It all ties together into one wonderful story what we do and why we do it. The Bible

tells one complete story, the story of God's love for us, his people. It must be read as a whole. Pericopes (snippets or excerpts) are great, but too sharp a scissor can cut away the meaning too. Here we get the whole story, the big picture. All the loose ends are tied together and we are ready to face the grim realities of Good Friday, the dreadful loneliness and longing of Saturday, and the joyful renewal of light at the Easter Vigil, climaxing in the Resurrection of our Lord.

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

John 18:1 – 19:42

Well, here we are. This is the most dreaded day in the Church Year. Today, whether we want to or not, we remember and dwell on the crucifixion and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It's bad enough to simply think about how cruel mankind can be, but this is our best Friend (What a Friend We Have in Jesus) being nailed to the cross. This is he whom we swore never to forsake, hanging on a tree: bleeding, suffering unimaginable pain – silent. Who could do such a thing? "Ah, Holy Jesus ... I crucified thee!" We are lucky, however, since we know "the rest of the story." Deep within us burns the eternal flame of Easter; we have an ounce of comfort within our breast. The apostles, disciples, and His mother had none. He was alone on a tree, for you and for me. They cried unquenchable tears. We cringe at the thought and wait for tomorrow. They had no tomorrow; and, we simply cannot feel their pain.

Saturday of Holy Week (Vigil of Easter)

(Twelve Old Testament readings are appointed for the Vigil of Easter. Some may be omitted, but those marked with an asterisk are generally not omitted. This is especially so for the Easter Vigil service as opposed to one's personal daily devotions.)

*Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13

Genesis 22:1-18

*Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

*Isaiah 55:1-11

Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 or Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Jonah 1:1-2:1

Isaiah 61:1-4, 9-11

*Daniel 3:1-29

Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26

Romans 6:3-11

John 20:1-18

Death is inevitable. We encounter it from time to time in our lives when a loved one passes away; we lose a pet, or some famous leader dies. For the most part we sort of stay aloof from death. We don't want to get too close to it. It makes us uncomfortable. In the days when I lost my parents and grandparents I faced a spectrum of emotions. The worst and most penetrating was the absolute loneliness I knew when

my mother died. No more parents! As an only child, I had no siblings with whom to share the past of our family. The loneliness was penetrating. How much worse it must have been for the apostles and disciples: their friend, their leader, their hoped-for Messiah was dead. The world which had been filled with hope and promise, sunshine and warmth, was now cold, empty, and silent. The loving, happy days of yesterday were replaced by the cold, stark terror of today. While they prepare to anoint the body, we await the Resurrection. It's a vigil, a long wait. Savor it.