

***Christ Episcopal Church***

***1035 Lafayette Road, Portsmouth, NH 03801***

**LENTEN DEVOTIONAL MEDITATIONS – 2010- Vol. 2**



The stories in this devotional booklet are those of the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Portsmouth, NH. The meditations have been written by the members with some additional material added. The Bible passages are from New International Version .

**Christ Church Mission Statement**

The mission of Christ Church is to share the light of Christ in the world. As Progressive Christians we welcome all people into our sanctuary, regardless of race, economic circumstances, gender, sexual orientation or religious background. We gather to worship, sing, celebrate, acknowledge common needs, be fed at God's table and care, love and nurture one another. From here we go forth into the world to be **active servants** of the spirit of Jesus, ministering to those in need and taking God's grace and peace into the wider community

## Sunday, March 14, 2010 (5th Sunday in Lent)

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent...

*- from the Order of Service for  
Ash Wednesday, Book of Common Prayer*

Although this was written for Ash Wednesday, it is a good thing to ponder during other days of Lent as well.

How quickly we forget. Or maybe we're too preoccupied.

The opening words in the traditional Ash Wednesday service could reinforce our faith in God's limitless love and forgiveness... except that we immediately follow those words with: lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness. Not that we don't spend enough time rationalizing our sins and making excuses for our selfishness; we do. But still... Maybe it's the word wretchedness I object to. I'm told that a wretch didn't always mean scum of the earth, which is what I think of, but meant rascal, scalawag, scamp. But images of Spanky and Our Gang don't really cut it either. So this is the dilemma: remembering that God is all loving and all forgiving, and at the same time accepting accountability for the fact that we just don't get it.

*By Sister Claire Joy*

From the Ash Wednesday meditation written for Episcopal Relief & Development by Sister Claire Joy and the [Community of the Holy Spirit](#) who donated her time and talent writing and designing this year's Lenten devotional booklet and online meditations. © Copyright 2010 | Episcopal Relief & Development | 815 Second Avenue | New York, NY 10017

## Sunday, April 4, 2010 (Easter)

### John 20:11-16

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup>and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. <sup>13</sup>They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." <sup>14</sup>At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

I find that I am often like Mary, although thankfully I am not as much so as I used to be. When something happens to me that is bad or tragic or just disrupts my plans in a bad way, my first reaction is often that "all is lost" there is no way my life can go on the way I wanted it to. Sometimes this happens even if it is just that some nice plan I had will have to be changed or abandoned. I think Mary felt this way, and no wonder, everything she had been doing for the last few years had changed! Her life had been all tied up with Jesus and his followers and now he was dead. And not only that, she could not even fall back on her previous life of Jewish traditions, because Jesus' body was gone. She could not even carry out the traditional rituals for burying Jesus' body. She must have felt as I often used to, and even now still sometimes do briefly, that she had no choices. She did not know what to do with her life or if there was anything she could do except go back to her life before Jesus. As a woman she was nobody in the life of the Jewish community outside her own house. Whereas with Jesus she had been one of the inner circle who enabled the work that Jesus was doing and got to travel around being with him and the group and seeing some of the countryside. As a single woman she would now be pretty much confined to her house and the women's sphere of marketing and taking care of things having to do with the household.

But this was not what God had in mind for her, or for the rest of us. Jesus spoke to her saying "Mary," and she recognized him and must have had at least a little spark of knowing that her life indeed would not be the way it was when she was following Jesus when he was alive. It was certainly going to be different than just taking care of her household, or even traveling around as a follower of Jesus. And although she may have known it would be different, she probably could not even begin to imagine what it would look like.

So we too when all seems lost, or even when we are disappointed at where we are or over something that happened, need to look around, as Mary did in the garden. We need to look for a sign and recognize that Jesus is there in our lives. That with Jesus and the Holy Spirit nothing is impossible. And our lives will not be the same, but can be so much better if we look for and find where God is in our lives and what God wants us to be doing.

*Betty Lane*

## Saturday, April 3, 2010 (Holy Saturday)

### Romans 6:8-11

<sup>8</sup>Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

<sup>11</sup>In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Twenty years ago today (April 3, 1990) I spent most of the wee small hours of that night, sitting up with my mother, who lived with me at the time. She was lying in bed in pain, and refused to go to the hospital, saying, "Oh, they will just give me more medicine, send me home, and I will still be in pain! No, I would rather be right here at home."

I sat with her and we talked about all sorts of things: illness, pain, sorrow, joy, and memories of long ago. Every once in a while, I'd remind her "We need you to go to the hospital, to see what can be done about the pain." It would be morning before she agreed to go with my brother, while I stayed home with the dogs." That was the morning of April 4<sup>th</sup> which this year is Easter Sunday.

Little had I known that last long conversation about all matter of things would be the last I would have with my mother. I'm now eternally grateful for that final talk, not merely as mother and daughter, but as equals, adults. We shared our thoughts on just about everything, including cremation, and DNR requests, decisions that had not previously been written down, although we had talked before on the subject. Finally, she asked me to help comb her hair, which I'd offered to do several times in the past. Mother would always say, "The day I have to have someone else comb my hair for me will be the day I die." I combed and brushed her hair, not thinking of that previous comment. I helped her dress and off she went to the hospital in Manchester.

After making arrangements with my work, I drove to the hospital. It was a matter of less than an hour before that dreaded buzzer in ICU went off, telling us that Mother had left this earth for her next journey with Christ. Her journey here on earth had been at times a difficult one, but also a beautiful and joyful one. She sought, and found, beauty in just about everyone she met; stood fast for justice, equality, and diversity (back in the day when one was called a "Bleeding Heart Liberal".)

Mother is one person about whom I can truthfully say that she lived with Christ, died with Christ, and IS with Christ. Tomorrow (Easter Sunday) I celebrate her life. I give thanks for my heritage, as well as the greatest gift of love in Christ resurrected!

*Jean Wadman*

## Monday, March 15, 2010

### Psalms 119:17-20, 24

<sup>17</sup> Do good to your servant, and I will live;  
I will obey your word.

<sup>18</sup> Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.

<sup>19</sup> I am a stranger on earth;  
do not hide your commands from me.

<sup>20</sup> My soul is consumed with longing

<sup>24</sup> Your statutes are my delight;  
they are my counselors.

Sometimes when times are rough, and I feel like I can't make sense of the world around me, I am reminded of a common phrase, 'everything happens for a reason'. For a long time I would become annoyed when someone would say that to me. But through my short time here on this earth, I have come to find comfort in that phrase.

Psalm 119: 17-24 evoked the same emotion in me as when I hear that phrase now, a sense of contentment and peace. It seems so often that we are unable to apply logic to a situation, but if only we open our eyes, may we see the wonders of Your law.

## March 16, 2010

In January 2009, Betty Lane and Mary Anne Totten began a project of paraphrasing the Psalms. The Psalms are pure poetry and we certainly do not presume that we can write more eloquently than the Psalmist. But by putting them into our own words, it helps us with the interpretation and brings them into our hearts. We share this with you in this meditation.

### Psalm 23

God protects me, God sees that my needs are taken care of,  
there is nothing else I need.

God gives me a place to rest, and gives me peace.

God renews my spirit each day.

When I am in distress, God re-establishes equilibrium.

I am guided to do the right thing because the Lord leads me.

I may walk through many trials and tribulations in my life,  
but the God of Peace is always with me.

I am always protected against adversity and distress.

The Lord comforts me.

God allows me to face my demons.

I am given peace and abundance from the Lord.

Because of God, I will always have love and goodness,  
and I will be in the Lord's house forever.

*Mary Anne Totten*

### Psalm 23

Yahweh is my mother; she gives me all I need.

She makes me lie upon my bed to rest  
and leads me to places of calm.

She renews my soul

and guides me to the path where I can do God's will.

Although I walk in a land that seems possessed by the devil,  
I will not be afraid of evil,

for she is with me and her love will bring me comfort.

Yahweh spreads abundance before me, even in these troubled times.

She has anointed me with her holy sign, and my heart is overjoyed.

Surely God's love and forgiveness will always be with me,  
and wherever I go I will be in God's house.

*Betty Lane*

## Friday, April 2, 2010 (Good Friday)

### *The Crucifixion*

#### Luke 23:33-34

<sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>[a]</sup> And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

"...they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left." Good Friday is not an easy day for us as followers of Jesus. It is very difficult to imagine and comprehend how Jesus, the incarnation of the love that is God, could be so cruelly treated and then executed as a criminal. What was his crime? Whom did he offend? Whom did he harm?

The answers to these questions are not as important as is the response of Jesus to those who would oppose him. Jesus stood firm in the face of opposition to his ministry. He did not yield to those who would attempt to change the course of his mission, or those who threatened to silence his message. And the ministry, mission and message were all about God's unconditional love that knows no limits no boundaries.

I find it comforting to know that God loves each one of us so much, no matter where we are in life. God loves us so much that God was willing to be treated as a criminal and put to death, and still stand firm and not yield from God's position of love for us. Truly, amidst the tragedy of this day, this day is good. Thank you God! Thank you Jesus!

*The Rev. Dan Bernier  
Vicar, Christ Episcopal Church Portsmouth, NH*

## Thursday, April 1, 2010 (Maundy Thursday)

### *Serventhood*

#### **John 13:12-15**

<sup>12</sup>When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup>"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

The foot washing service on Maundy Thursday is humbling and exciting. I love to have my feet rubbed, but to experience a fellow parishioner bend down, wash and dry my feet is humbling. This act is real service. To do likewise is exciting. To be able to genuinely care for someone else is exciting. When it is something I want to do, it does not seem like being a servant. But what about those things that need to be done for others that I do not want to do, or are difficult for me to do? Visiting someone who is ill, "I don't have time for that." Saying hello to a stranger, "I am shy and nervous about talking to someone I don't know." Offering a ride to someone without transportation, "That is out of my way. I am not going in that direction." These things may not be quite so exciting. So, this passage looks at giving and receiving. It may be difficult to accept someone else's gift to me, that of washing my feet. And it may be even more difficult to be a servant to another person when it is not convenient for me. Jesus is calling us to do both.

*Mary Anne Totten*

## Wednesday, March 17, 2010

### *Giving to the Needy*

#### **Matthew 6: 1-4**

<sup>1</sup>"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup>"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

I really like this reading, and the more I read it, the more layers it takes on for me. This passage is part of Jesus' sermon on the mountain. This passage says to me that both our worship of God and our charity towards others should be kept between us and God. Furthermore, Jesus is saying, no reward will come from public displays of piety or charity. Other people cannot reward us for following God, only God can do that.

I started to think about whether I personally have difficulty doing as Jesus asks in these passages. I don't worship God to impress others, so the first admonition Jesus gives the crowd is really quite easy for me to follow. I find the second one a bit harder. We all want to be loved, and told that we are good people, and sometimes when I help others, I realize that I want someone here on earth to acknowledge my actions, my goodness. Jesus is telling us that the reward for helping others and following God, is not public recognition, but God's grace and love. God "who sees in secret" knows when we practice love towards others, and in return bestows his love upon us. Doing good, helping others, showing love - silently - and trusting that God sees this. Simple in concept, much harder in practice, at least for me.

*Barbara Allen*

## Thursday, March 18, 2010

### Ezekiel 34:12. 14-16

*<sup>12</sup> As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. <sup>14</sup> I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup> I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.*

All throughout the Old Testament, God creates, God teaches, God commands, God demands, God promises, and gives humankind rules to follow, in order to live as God's people, fulfilling God's plan for the world. Along with the commands and rules, are lessons: what will happen if we do not follow God's wishes. These are the sometimes simplistic, such as lessons we learn as children via the Bible stories. What we do not hear is what goes on between the lines. Much of it is too violent and even brutal for tender ears, nor do we hear much read from the lectern on Sunday mornings. Some of what we do read is stories, legends, maybe some history, partially true, and/or perhaps even just one individual's interpretation of what happened in the past, but in the end, God's intent for us is repeated throughout the Bible.

The lessons learned by God's people all throughout the Bible are that God loves us even when we turn away, when we break the rules, when we weaken, and take the easy way out of a situation, when we falter in standing up for what we know is right, and yes, finally, when we silently just look the other way to avoid involvement, harassment or controversy.

We haven't changed a whole lot over the centuries on this earth: we still are human beings, created by God, watched over and loved by God. With the eternal promise that even when we are lost, we will be searched out, brought home to rest, to be fed, and to be loved unconditionally.

*Jean Wadman*

## Wednesday, March 31, 2010

It has been a year since President Obama took office. These are turbulent times. Let us reflect upon this prayer that Bishop Gene Robinson gave at the opening ceremonies of the inauguration of President Obama.

### January 18, 2009.

O God of our many understandings, we pray that you will:

Bless us with tears—tears for a world in which over a billion people exist on less than a dollar a day, where young women in many lands are beaten and raped for wanting an education, and thousands die daily from malnutrition, malaria, and AIDS. Bless this nation with anger—anger at discrimination, at home and abroad, against refugees and immigrants, women, people of color, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Bless us with discomfort at the easy, simplistic answers we've preferred to hear from our politicians, instead of the truth about ourselves and our world, which we need to face if we are going to rise to the challenges of the future.

Bless us with patience and the knowledge that none of what ails us will be fixed anytime soon, and the understanding that our new president is a human being, not a messiah.

Bless us with humility, open to understanding that our own needs as a nation must always be balanced with those of the world.

Bless us with freedom from mere tolerance, replacing it with a genuine respect and warm embrace of our differences.

Bless us with compassion and generosity, remembering that every religion's God judges us by the way we care for the most vulnerable.

And God, we give you thanks for your child, Barack, as he assumes the office of President of the United States.

Give him wisdom beyond his years, inspire him with President Lincoln's reconciling leadership style, President Kennedy's ability to enlist our best efforts, and Dr. King's dream of a nation for all people. Give him a quiet heart, for our ship of state needs a steady, calm captain. Give him stirring words; we will need to be inspired and motivated to make the personal and common sacrifices necessary to facing the challenges ahead. Make him color-blind, reminding him of his own words that under his leadership, there will be neither red nor blue states, but the United States. Help him remember his own oppression as a minority, drawing on that experience of discrimination that he might seek to change the lives of those who are still its victims. Give him strength to find family time and privacy, and help him remember that even though he is president, a father only gets one shot at his daughters' childhoods. And please, God, keep him safe. We know we ask too much of our presidents, and we're asking far too much of this one. We implore you, O good and great God, to keep him safe. Hold him in the palm of your hand, that he might do the work we have called him to do, that he might find joy in this impossible calling, and that in the end, he might lead us as a nation to a place of integrity, prosperity, and peace. Amen.

*By Bishop V. Gene Robinson, Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire*

**Tuesday, March 30, 2010**

**Jeremiah 15: 19-21**

<sup>19</sup> *Therefore this is what the LORD says:  
"If you repent, I will restore you  
that you may serve me;  
if you utter worthy, not worthless, words,  
you will be my spokesman.  
Let this people turn to you,  
but you must not turn to them.*

<sup>20</sup> *I will make you a wall to this people,  
a fortified wall of bronze;  
they will fight against you  
but will not overcome you,  
for I am with you  
to rescue and save you,"  
declares the LORD.*

<sup>21</sup> *"I will save you from the hands of the wicked  
and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel."*

Prayer

Lord God, we have written many words in this Lenten Booklet. May we reflect upon the

words that you have given to us, and take into our hearts the words you have spoken to us

through the scriptures. May our words be worthy in your sight. And may the meditations

of our hearts be acceptable to you, Oh God, Our Rock and Our Redeemer.

Amen

**March 19, 2010**

**John 13:1**

<sup>1</sup>*It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*

Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;  
Teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.  
Be present, Lord, among us, and bring us to believe  
We are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.

Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily life  
We struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.  
Teach us to care for people, for all, not just for some,  
To love them as we find them, or as they may become.

Let your acceptance, change us, so that we may be moved  
In living situations to do the truth in love;  
To practice your acceptance, until we know by heart  
The table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art.

Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need,  
Who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,  
We need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on;  
Renew us with your Spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!

***Fred Kaan, 1994***

**Saturday, March 20, 2010**

***Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection***

**Matthew 20:17-19**

*<sup>17</sup>Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, <sup>18</sup>"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup>and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"*

Sometimes you will read a book or watch a movie and toward the very end a sudden twist in the story catches you off guard. That is not the case in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew does not want us to be surprised by the ending of his gospel. This is the third time Jesus predicts his own death and it is planted squarely in the middle of a parable, a teaching, and a healing.

There is a matter-of-factness in Jesus' prediction of what is to come. I can find no emotional reflection in these verses. Rather there is a cool, distant tone as we are told along with the disciples that we are drawing near to what we all know is about to happen to Jesus. There will be no surprise endings: the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection will proceed as expected.

I notice that my own heart sinks as Jesus, like a parent warning his children, tells us that this journey is coming to a close. I am not ready for the end! I want more parables, more teachings, more healings! I want Jesus to live to a ripe old age. Part of me shrinks back; the most painful part of the story is just around the corner.

I choose to press on, determined to see this story through to the end. I know there is something powerful about this Lenten story. All the injustice in the entire world is bundled up in the injustice of Jesus' death. If I can stay with the story and allow myself to feel the sadness, pain, and anger surrounding Jesus' death, then I will be more open to the full meaning of Easter and to the hope which emerges from so much pain. There is no way to Easter except through this story.

***Nancy Morrison***

**Monday, March 29, 2010**

***Love One Another***

**John 15:12-15**

*<sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

The crux of the whole Christian message, said in so many different ways throughout the Bible, and the final and most utterly devastating demonstration is that of God's giving us Jesus, to show how deep and broad and unfailing God's love for us is.

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

Jesus, the man who walked this earth and shared His love with us, giving us parables and lessons to guide us, and those now famous words: “Greater Love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends.”

The words are frequently used during memorial services, for those who have died on the battlefield, or firefighters, police officers, early responders--people who are constantly in harm's way in their professions. We are ever grateful for those people in our lives. However, I'd like to think that we are all asked to lay down our lives, each and every day, in very small ways, perhaps not quite as dramatically as the above, not necessarily by the deaths of our earthly bodies, but by living the words of Jesus.

Each day that we do for another, we are giving up, or laying down, a tiny piece of our lives as well, in the interest and love for our fellow human beings, no matter who they are, wherever they are, whatever their backgrounds, or ethnicities. Every small bit of caring, helping your neighbor grocery shop, calling or visiting a shut-in friend, even just a smile to a stranger who may look downcast is a form of giving our lives for others. As the trite saying goes “every little bit helps.”

***Jean Wadman***

## Sunday, March 28, 2010 (6th Sunday in Lent)

### Luke 19:37-40

<sup>37</sup>When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

<sup>38</sup>"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

<sup>40</sup>"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

When I read this, I think Jesus is like the perfect parent.

I love hearing children in church. I love their untempered voices, I love their excitement, I love their complete ambivalence to what the surrounding adults may think of their exuberance. I am finding, however, that I love these things much less in my own child.

Why is that? Why is it that I am overjoyed to hear children talking to their fairies or discussing their artwork from the back corner while Charlotte's "commentary" on the sermon or her excitement in finding her reflection grinning back from the piano? Why are the Pharisees so upset by the disciples and their joyful praise for God?

My daughter loves to come to church. There is much to see and hear and explore. It is full of people who love her and who she loves in return. And, much like the disciples, she praises God the best she can--with a loud and joyful noise, amazed by the deeds she has witnessed. We should all be more like Jesus and know that if these voices were silent, the stones would cry out.

*Jessica McClain*

## Sunday, March 21, 2010 (6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent)

### Fasting

### Matthew 6: 16-18

<sup>16</sup>"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

To me, this passage is all about the pureness of our relationship with God, who always knows our true heart. It asks us to focus our intents during Lent on that relationship and about truly opening our hearts and souls in a way that cleanses and refreshes us. It exhorts us that the purpose of our actions during Lent is not merely to *appear* pious to others around us, to somehow impress them, but to *be* pious in a way that allows us to reconnect with God and the knowledge that we always have the opportunity for renewal and rebirth through Him.

It is also a reminder that there will always be hypocrites that make a grand show of acting "religious" or being "Christian," and that their rewards will be limited. The passage indicates God's greatest rewards are reserved for those who live and worship in humility. With faith we understand that God always knows the intent of each of our actions.

*Craig Davis*

**Monday, March 22, 2010**

*Perseverance, Character, and Hope*

**Romans 5:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we <sup>3</sup>rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

This a challenging passage for today's world. "Hope does not disappoint us." I cannot help but think of the euphoria of Barack Obama's election and inauguration a year ago. Many in our country were swept up in a wave of hope. It's easy now to become discouraged by the state of our country and the world, and by the many difficulties our president and other leaders face. Where is our hope? In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us to find hope in a more enduring relationship with God.

Paul's use of the words "perseverance" and "character" seems almost quaint in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Character is not a concept that means much in a culture where money and celebrity are valued above all else. But Paul is right that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character. I like to think that though character may not be fashionable right now, this does not change the fact that character matters. Being true to yourself and honest with others, facing what is hard, being a solace or inspiration for others – these are the traits that go into "character." It remains a significant value to which we should aspire.

This passage asks us to think about what shapes us as people. If we remain focused on what is truly important, we will find hope.

*Katie Towler*

**Saturday, March 27, 2010**

**Matthew 24:32-35**

<sup>32</sup>"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>33</sup>Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it's near, right at the door. <sup>34</sup>I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>35</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

How many times do we see things in nature and we just "know" what will happen next? Why are we always able to put our faith in the cycle of life and not ever doubt the outcome? We know that spring always follows winter. We know that the shoots of flowers will always push their tiny heads through the warming earth, grow tall and blossom! Although some years it seems that this process is delayed by a long and harsh winter, we know that it will happen. Summer follows spring and the leaves and grass grow lush and green. And then we know that autumn will be next, with its wondrous harvest and its glorious and majestic colors. Winter will follow – we may not like winter, but we know that it cannot be avoided. It may seem harsh, but it is a time for nature to sleep and ready herself for the next cycle of spring and new life.

Why then, can't we be as sure about God and His love for us? Why are we sometimes so skeptical or unwilling to accept God into our lives? His love for us is as certain as the cycle of life, as the spring that always follows winter. And yet, we shield ourselves from His love and mercy, reluctant to believe, perhaps thinking that we are unworthy of His love, or that His love is only for the righteous. We need to learn to open our hearts, to trust in the signs of God's love, to *know* as we know so many other things. Only when we turn away do we lose the opportunity to experience God's love. Let us open our hearts, throw all fear and skepticism away, and truly feel God's unending and merciful love.

*Kris Ebbeson*

**Friday, March 26, 2010**

**Matthew 16: 25-26**

<sup>25</sup>*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*

<sup>26</sup>*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

**An Affirmation for Those Who Have Lost**

I believe there is no denying it: it hurts to lose.  
It hurts to lose a cherished relationship with another,  
or a significant part of one's own self.  
It can hurt to lose that which has united one with the past,  
or that which has beckoned one into the future.  
It is painful to feel diminished or abandoned,  
to be left behind or left alone.  
Yet I believe there is more to losing than just the hurt and the pain.  
I believe that courage often appears,  
however quietly it is expressed,  
however easily it goes unnoticed by others:  
the courage to be strong enough to surrender,  
the fortitude to be firm enough to be flexible,  
the bravery to go where one has not gone before.  
I believe a time of loss can be a time of learning unlike any other,  
and that it can teach some of life's most valuable lessons:  
In the act of losing, there is something to be found.  
In the act of letting go, there is something to be grasped.  
In the act of saying "goodbye" there is a "hello" to be heard.  
For I believe living with loss is about beginnings as well as endings.  
And grieving is a matter of life more than of death.  
And growing is a matter of mind and heart and soul more than of body.  
And loving is a matter of eternity more than of time.  
Finally, I believe in the promising paradoxes of loss:  
In the midst of darkness, there can come a great Light.  
At the bottom of despair, there can appear a great Hope.  
And deep within loneliness, there can dwell a great Love.  
I believe these things because others have shown the way—  
others who have lost and then have grown through their losing,  
others who have suffered and then found new meaning.  
So I know I am not alone:  
I am accompanied, day after night, night after day.

*Author Unknown*

**Tuesday, March 23, 2010**

*Aloneness*

**John 16:32-33**

<sup>32</sup>*"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.*

<sup>33</sup>*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Divorce is a tricky thing. I never thought it would happen to me. The end came during a crushing, whirlwind time, when legal proceedings seemed thrown into the midst of my parents' deaths, my children's growing up and leaving the nest. When it was all over, the burials, the saying goodbye at the college dorms, the car door closing one last time, I returned to my little house in the woods and thought, "What just happened?" Suddenly, after all the harried years of being sandwiched between generations, I was alone and had no idea how I'd gotten to this point. Maybe it was all a dream and I'd wake up and have my old life back. My inner girl took over and cried for weeks on end. And then I realized I needed to solve this problem, not by jumping into another relationship but by first learning to value, maybe even enjoy, my own company. For so many years, the busyness of life had substituted for life itself and so the challenge now was to locate that still, quiet place, and let it reclaim--or claim for the first time--the center of me. Learning to be alone presents exhilarating possibilities but also doses of harshness. You know that, in the end, you'll be glad to have done it, but the day in, day out grind, is often painful. I've started where I often start: with meals. I try to prepare them lovingly, adding a sculpted orange peel or snipping of parsley to dinners, just because. And then, at the end of a long day of work, I sit down with my plate, light a candle, and thank God for His company and for my own.

*Susan Sinnott*

**Wednesday, March 24, 2010**

**Hebrews 4:12-13**

<sup>12</sup> *Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* <sup>13</sup> *And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.*

Who has a hold on you? Who has laid claim to your heart? That woman of Samaria claimed and was claimed by Jesus. His thirst evoked a response from her and her thirst got an answer from Jesus. But it didn't end in their noonday interchange. That mutual claim sent her back to her community with questions and a story. Her story and her questions moved hearts in that town of Sychar, and Jesus abided with them two days.

Who's got a hold on you? Whose story is claiming and softening your heart? What questions are rising? Those are God's mission invitations. It's an ancient pattern: when God hears the voices crying in the wilderness, God sends Moses and Aaron and Miriam, and eventually, you and me. When we hear the people cry, they lay a claim on us. That's where we meet Jesus, that's where we share God's love, and that's where we're meant to be.

Who's got a hold on you?

*From A Wing and A Prayer by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori*

**Thursday, March 25, 2010**

**Psalm 40:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> *Then I said, "Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll.*

<sup>8</sup> *I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."*

<sup>9</sup> *I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD.*

<sup>10</sup> *I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation.*

*I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.*

I feel that this passage does indeed speak directly to me. During these past two-plus years I have been through a multitude of rough times. MY rough times. And without being “cliché-ish” there is no question that we all have crosses to bear in this life. But, through it all I am so grateful to be alive. I am so joyous for these days and hours to be interacting with all of you, as I continue to learn, and to give back to others the blessings I have received. And I share the “glad news of deliverance” with many, daily, letting them know that I am grateful to God for this life. There is so much to be thankful for that I try (and sometimes don't even need to try) to skip over the dark moments, while saying my prayers and spreading the Good Word to others. It is God Who saw fit to give me life, and it is to God that I owe all, so I continue to speak of His “faithfulness and his salvation,” “his steadfast love” and His support.

Lent will give me the time to reflect on these blessings that I continue to receive, and, hopefully, to express to God my gratitude for all I have received. I have not given up in this life, though there have been some close calls. I simply am trying to “pick myself up and brush myself off and start all over again!” Peace and blessings to you all.

**Gary Dozier**