

Ash Wednesday - February 22, 2012

Notes

You will note that there are 40 scriptures and reflections for the 40 days in Lent. Sundays during Lent are not considered a part of the 40 days. They were often viewed as “little Easters”, times in each week to give praise and thanks to God in the midst of a time of penance and preparation.

Many thanks to all who provided reflections for this special devotional.

Prepared by the Family Ministries of

Fallston United Methodist Church

1509 Fallston Rd.

Fallston, MD 21047

www.fallstonumc.org

Luke 22:7-13

Common English Bible (CEB)

Disciples prepare for the Passover

⁷ The Day of Unleavened Bread arrived, when the Passover had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John with this task: “Go and prepare for us to eat the Passover meal.”

⁹ They said to him, “Where do you want us to prepare it?”

¹⁰ Jesus replied, “When you go into the city, a man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters. ¹¹ Say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher says to you, “Where is the guestroom where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?’” ¹² He will show you a large upstairs room, already furnished. Make preparations there.” ¹³ They went and found everything just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

Reflections- Annabel Lusardi

On first reading this passage my immediate thought was: Boy, being the son of God sure made planning for the holidays easier. No worrying about menu selection, grocery shopping, guest lists, table decorating – just send your disciples ahead to find the dining room reserved and everything ready for Passover. I’d like to take that approach for Easter this year...

Seriously, though, what *does* this passage about Jesus and his disciples getting ready for this Passover meal say to us today? On meditating on these verses, the word that jumps out to me is “preparation”. The disciples were required to “prepare” the Passover meal, and as we know from the later story of the Last Supper, Jesus tried to “prepare” his friends for his upcoming betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples weren’t “prepared” to hear his message, but in retrospect they were able to look back at that time and ultimately draw comfort from the images of that night.

As we begin the season of Lent, we should think about how we can “prepare” for God to work in our own lives. Maybe taking some time in his Word each day should be a central part of that preparation. Reading this devotional is a good start...

Thursday, February 23, 2012

Luke 22:14-20

Common English Bible (CEB)

The Passover meal

¹⁴ When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. ¹⁵ He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ I tell you, I won't eat it until it is fulfilled in God's kingdom." ¹⁷ After taking a cup and giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. ¹⁸ I tell you that from now on I won't drink from the fruit of the vine until God's kingdom has come." ¹⁹ After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and said, "This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you.

Reflections – Janine Meadows

In today's bible lesson, we find ourselves at the Lord's table. Jesus has been longing for quite a while to eat with all the apostles with this Passover meal and to do so before he dies. He stands up and broke the bread. "This is my body I give to you to remember me". Jesus then hands them a cup after supper; "This is God's covenant which is sealed with my blood and poured for you."

Friday, February 24

Luke 22:24-26

Common English Bible (CEB)

The disciples debate greatness

²⁴ An argument broke out among the disciples over which one of them should be regarded as the greatest.

²⁵ But Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called 'friends of the people.' ²⁶ But that's not the way it will be with you. Instead, the greatest among you must become like a person of lower status and the leader like a servant.

Reflections – Joella Anzelc

Wow. There it is. You now how you believe things....you just have them in your head and in your heart? When confronted with the opposite of your beliefs, you start thinking, well, where did I get my ideas and beliefs. Well...seems...I've just always had them. Then you are asked to read a specific passage in the Bible and there it is. And you realize. Those of us who grew up in families that went to church, studied the Bible, sang the songs, heard the Word among the words often find that is the root of our inner most core beliefs originates there, in the Bible. This passage about who is "great" sums up what is so glaringly opposed to what happens during the political seasons of our nation. It is painful to watch and hear those who want to lead our nation tear each other down to boost themselves up. I want to always keep this passage in mind. When I am leading, I am actually serving. Being in a position of leadership does NOT make one better than others. I think it actually makes one more responsible for others, which demands empathy, understanding, and humility. And really, when it comes to importance, who will be missed more in my neighborhood. Me or my garbage collector? So who really IS more "important"?

Saturday, February 25, 2012

Mark 14:18

Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁸ During the meal, Jesus said, “I assure you that one of you will betray me—someone eating with me.”

Reflections – Jim Crane

Imagine the discomfort – Jesus’ twelve disciples were sharing a momentous Passover meal with him after an emotional journey to Jerusalem, at the start of which Jesus had predicted his arrest and death. With the exception of Judas, none of the disciples could see themselves betraying Jesus, or any other of their fellow disciples doing so either, for that matter. It must have been a bittersweet meal.

If Peter and his fellow disciples held an election, he probably would have been voted “least likely to fail”. After all, he was The Rock, the most passionate and outspoken of the disciples. How could he fail after being the man who was to establish the church? Yet, the next day, after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested, one of the maids of the high priest asked Peter if he was one of Jesus’ followers. Before he could gather his wits, in the emotion of the moment, he took the easy way out and denied Jesus.

But the story does not end here. In a sign of the resurrection of hope made manifest on Easter Sunday, Peter went on to serve as an apostle and missionary who served the Lord the remainder of his life.

At first I found this a difficult verse to write about. My family enjoyed a good discussion this evening around the dinner table about what this passage means and why it happened. They helped me understand it. I think the lesson from this scripture is one of hope and humility. A man as great as Peter, chosen by Jesus, could yet be weak enough to deny Him, yet still find forgiveness through him. That gives hope to us all, for we are all weak.

The story has a happy ending. Peter spent the rest of his life witnessing to Jesus’ divinity. After his failure, he experienced the joy of God’s forgiveness, and forever had a passion to spread the word and share the joy with all mankind. Jesus did not give up on Peter. He does not give up on us either.

Monday, February 27, 2012

Matthew 26:14-16

Common English Bible (CEB)

Judas betrays Jesus

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, “What will you give me if I turn Jesus over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ From that time on he was looking for an opportunity to turn him in.

Reflections – Deborah Hunsinger

I will never really understand Judas’ actions or his reasoning in deliberately choosing to betray Jesus. Judas had spent years in close proximity to the Messiah, witnessing the miracles and experiencing for himself Jesus’ unconditional love. Yet, like a heat-seeking missile, once he made that decision, he was “locked in” to his deadly objective: “looking for every opportunity to turn Him in”. One thing I do understand is that we need never be “locked in” to sin and its’ deadly consequences. We gave only to turn in repentance to Jesus and He is instantly there to pull us 180* around from wrong choices – whether it’s speaking in anger, living with addictions, broken relationships, etc. Let’s choose everyday to live in the freedom Jesus won for us on the cross. We can do it.

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

John 14:1-3

Common English Bible (CEB)

The way, the truth, and the life

¹ “Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. ² My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? ³ When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.

Refelctions – Lisa Greenlund

The disciples had just received disturbing news as Jesus talked with them of His impending death. They didn’t understand; didn’t want to believe what He was telling them, and were afraid. This passage beautifully lays out what is to come, where Jesus is going, and His promise to return.

John 14: 1-3 Jesus Comforts His Disciples by saying...

Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, **believe** also in me.

In my Father’s house are many **mansions: if it were not so**, I would have told you. **I go** to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again**, and **receive you** unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Let not your heart be troubled - Jesus knew that His followers would grieve after he went away. Here He speaks with loving concern. When we lose a loved one to death, we may take comfort in these words of our Lord.

Believe – The faithful ones had a strong confidence in the Father. Here and in the chapters to follow Jesus connects that to confidence in Him.

Mansions – Houses within houses; dwelling places - our permanent homes.

If it were not so – The disciples knew the Old Testament promises. The faithful were assured a place within the walls of the Lord’s house. That promise was still valid.

I go – The house of His Father, he was going away to it. In teaching the disciples to pray, he had said, “Our Father who is in heaven.” (Luke 11:2). Remember that the present promise was made after Jesus had left the temple desolate. He had called it His father’s house, but now it was theirs.

I will come again – A beautiful promise. Jesus comes in many ways, but the reference here is to His second advent.

Receive you – Jesus comes to get us. We are “caught up” to meet Him in the air, not in heaven and not on earth. He will come visibly and literally in a cloud just the way He left us.

This is a passage of love, hope, belief, but the most important to remember is “trust” in Him.

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

John 15:5, 8-13

Common English Bible (CEB)

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything.

⁸ My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.

Love each other

⁹ "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. ¹² This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends.

Reflections – Tyler Weyant

Words have a tendency to change their meaning over time. Instead of "amazing" or "awesome" being used rarely to describe something that would leave your mouth agape, we use these terms today for things as simple as chicken wings.

"Love" can also fall into the same category. Look through your day and think about how often you throw the word around. "I love these shoes!" "Ugh, don't you just love ice cream?"

But to truly think about love, as we are asked to do in John 15, is to think about a life and death proposition. That's what love was to Jesus on the cross.

Our standard for love, then, should be held to a higher standard as Christians. We shouldn't just love things or ideas, but people, whether they are strangers or close to us. Our actions, words and thoughts should all come from a place of this new, stronger love.

This strong love, this love that cannot be equated to earthly things, is a language that can be spoken in small moments, grand gestures and everything in between. But, everyday at all times, Christians must strive to simply love in all they do.

It was what Jesus did every second of his life. It is the least we can do in ours.

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Mark 14:26

Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁶ After singing songs of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Reflections – Stacey Nickerson

I confess that I have too often overlooked this detail in the story of Jesus' last hours before his crucifixion. One brief verse tells us that after his last meal with his closest followers and friends, one in which he spoke of his body and blood being offered for them, Jesus sings a hymn with them. Amazing, isn't it? He praises God in the very face of his sacrifice and impending death.

What did Jesus sing? In the Passover Seder, Psalm 118 is the closing hymn traditionally sung. This psalm begins and ends with these words: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His steadfast love endures forever!"

I love to sing and music is often the best way for me to express my prayers to God. There have been times when I have sung with and for people who are very ill, even near death. I remember one man who loved the hymn, "In the Garden." I sang it to him when he was in the hospital. When I returned another day, his condition had worsened and I sang it for him again. When he told his wife, she thought he was confused and she didn't believe that I had sung a second time. After he died, she talked to me and I told her that I had been there and sung again. She was grateful that I had been able to sing his favorite hymn and give him comfort, particularly as his death drew near: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His steadfast love endures forever!"

One of the hymns we relate to the life and ministry of John Wesley gives us a picture of praising God as we transition from this life to the next:

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath; and when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers. My days of praise shall ne'er be past, while life, and thought, and being last, or immortality endures.

May words of praise for our God always be in our hearts and on our lips. "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His steadfast love endures forever!"

Prayer: Dear Lord, we give thanks to you for you are good. You love us with a sure and steady love that never ends. Help us to put our trust in you always. May we give you praise now and forever. Amen.

Friday, March 2, 2012

Luke 22:39

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁹ Jesus left and made his way to the Mount of Olives, as was his custom, and the disciples followed him.

Reflections – Stacey Nickerson

The last thing Jesus does as he waits for his arrest is to pray. What strikes me about this action is the way the Gospel of Luke describes Jesus going to the Mount of Olives to pray: "as was his custom." Jesus is depicted as a man of prayer in the Gospel of Luke. Over and over again, Jesus is reported to be in prayer. The disciples witness the power of Jesus' prayer life and they ask him to teach them to pray.

Jesus gives us the model for our own prayer lives. Prayer is to become a part of our daily routine. Prayer is to become our first impulse and not our last resort.

In the last week of his life before his crucifixion, Jesus not only prays every day but he goes to the Mount of Olives every day to pray. Why the Mount of Olives? Pastor Adam Hamilton reminds us that a clue to the significance of this place is found in the prophet Zechariah. Just a few days earlier than this night, Jesus enters the holy city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. The prophet Zechariah had described Judah's king riding on a donkey. Zechariah 14:4 states, "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives," and then in verse 9, "And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one."

The Mount of Olives would be a key for those familiar with the prophecy as to the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior, the Christ. And so Jesus returns to this special place, the Mount of Olives, one more time and enters into a time of prayer. He waits on God so that his strength and spirit will be renewed.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, teach us to pray. Help us to learn from your example how to give ourselves fully to God. Thank you for your amazing love for us. Amen.

Saturday, March 3, 2012

Mark 14:32-34

Common English Bible (CEB)

Jesus in prayer

³² Jesus and his disciples came to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James, and John along with him. He began to feel despair and was anxious. ³⁴ He said to them, "I'm very sad. It's as if I'm dying. Stay here and keep alert."

Reflections – Deborah Sugg

I wonder how much Jesus knew about his future during his last few days. Did he know every detail of what was going to happen to him and when he would perish? Clearly he knew death was coming and his friends would all betray or deny him.

If Jesus knew his purpose and felt God's presence why was he still filled with such distress and sorrow?

Perhaps while he lived his mortal life on earth he was more like us than we think. Filled with fear, anxiety and doubt.

People who are suffering from terminal illness go through stages of fear, anger, anxiety and stress. Some never find peace. Others who say they know God or Jesus and are "not afraid of death" appear to have achieved a level of faith that Christians strive for. Knowing their future is not on this earth but with God. Through Jesus, we find God.

Before Jesus died, he cried out on the cross, 'God, why have you forsaken me?' and he seemed filled with pain, fear and doubt. Moments before God's plan had been completed.

Now we mortals know, through Jesus, we find God.

Monday, March 5, 2012

Mark 14:35-36

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁵ Then he went a short distance farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, he might be spared the time of suffering. ³⁶ He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want."

Reflections – Sara Childs

If you have ever been in a situation where you know you knew you had to do something which would lead to great pain for you, then you can sympathize with Jesus' angst as he prayed that the "cup" (the agony of alienation from God) be taken from him. He was aware that doing the Father's will would cost him his life, yet he still prayed "not my will, but what you will be done. When we pray, we should also remember to pray the same prayer---"not my will, but thy will be done."

Tuesday, March 6, 2012

John 18:1

Common English Bible (CEB)

Arrest in the garden

¹ After he said these things, Jesus went out with his disciples and crossed over to the other side of the Kidron Valley. He and his disciples entered a garden there.

Reflections – Sara Childs

Jesus knew, when he went with his disciples to the olive grove, what his fate was to be. Yet he went willingly. He was not forced to do this. This garden was a place where He and His disciples could pray in private. It was also a place where the people might not be alarmed at his apprehension; nor attempt, in their zeal, to rescue Him in a tumultuous manner, as might have happened had they stayed in Jerusalem. It was here where Jesus was betrayed and arrested.

As we walk or work in our own gardens (or yards) we can meditate on Christ's suffering and dying for us in order to save us.

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Mark 14:37-41

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁷ He came and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Couldn't you stay alert for one hour?" ³⁸ Stay alert and pray so that you won't give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak."

³⁹ Again, he left them and prayed, repeating the same words. ⁴⁰ And, again, when he came back, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open, and they didn't know how to respond to him. ⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, "Will you sleep and rest all night? That's enough! The time has come for the Human One^[a] to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Reflections – Cathy Bowden

Have you ever let a friend down? Not intentionally, of course. But, perhaps as a result of something you feel was "beyond your control." You were sick or tired or just "didn't know" what it meant to him/her. How devastating it can be to realize that someone you love and who loves you is disappointed in your behavior.

That fateful night in Gethsemane the disciples experienced this. They had the best of intentions, but they grew tired and couldn't stay awake. Their Lord Jesus was let down three times that night. His friends had not prayed with him and for him, as he had asked. Peter, who we've been told, would have died for his Master, was not even able to keep his eyes open for one hour to help him." Jesus knew that they were all in danger, not just physically, but spiritually as well. But his friends grew weary and so they disappointed their Master.

When the disciples realized what they had done, they were in despair. They had failed Jesus and they didn't know what to do or say. But Jesus knew. He realized that their spirit was willing but that their bodies were weak – no contest against the evil spiritual powers that were at work that night. So, how did our Lord Jesus handle this breach of trust? He

moved on, saying, "Enough! ...Rise! Let us go!" He didn't abandon them. He didn't reject them. He understood.

And so, there is a lesson for us to learn and remember. We are human. We may have the best of intentions to be faithful and to serve. And yet, there are and will be times when we fail. We disappoint, even ourselves. Yet, God's love and faithfulness to us is everlasting. When we are in despair, he understands and forgives.

We must resolve to keep trying. Acknowledge our mistakes. Pray for strength and press on, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, March 8, 2012

Mark 14:43-46

Common English Bible (CEB)

Arrest

⁴³ Suddenly, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came with a mob carrying swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests, legal experts, and elders. ⁴⁴ His betrayer had given them a sign: "Arrest the man I kiss, and take him away under guard."

⁴⁵ As soon as he got there, Judas said to Jesus, "Rabbi!" Then he kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they came and grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

Reflections – Paula Roberty

The suffering known as Jesus' passion occurs soon after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. In the ultimate act of betrayal, Judas uses a kiss as the signal to have Jesus arrested. It is hard to comprehend how singularly alone, and betrayed, Jesus must have been. Yet, Jesus trusted that God, his Father, was with him.

After my Grandfather passed away, my Grandmother lived alone for ten years. When I visited her, I noticed that Grandma had an assortment of magnets displayed on the front of her refrigerator. There was one magnet in particular that caught my attention. The magnet read: "Lord, help me, today, to remember that nothing is going to happen to me that you and I, together, can't handle." When my Grandmother passed away, I removed the magnet from her refrigerator door, and hung it on my own refrigerator. It reminds me of Grandma, and Jesus' example. Jesus trusted in his Father. Jesus' example in the midst of suffering gives us reason to hope in God. We know that God is with us, and we are never alone.

Friday, March 9, 2012

Mark 14:53, 55

Common English Bible (CEB)

A hearing before the Sanhedrin

⁵³ They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders, and legal experts gathered

⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they couldn't find any.

Reflections – Tonya Chandler

But ... they couldn't find any. Jesus led a pure life ... a life of love, joy, peace, goodness, kindness, compassion.

In working with my children, I often continue to use the phrase that was so popular when I was younger "what would Jesus do", trying to teach them to live a life in the footsteps of Jesus, knowing that there is no better role model. How often do I step outside those footsteps, maybe just a smidgen, maybe a whole leap? How often do I reflect on my day, thinking how differently I would do something, if I just had another chance or got that moment back. I cannot go back, I cannot undo. I can ask for forgiveness as God calls me back to those footsteps, and reminds me to do as He would do. But more than that, it is my responsibility to seek not to make those mistakes and to do all that I can do, to lead a life that walks in Jesus' footsteps.

Prayer: Dear Lord, We are not perfect, but we can strive to live a life in Christ where there would be no testimony against us. Help us to live that life in which that would indeed happen. Amen.

Saturday, March 10, 2012

Mark 14:56-59

Common English Bible (CEB)

⁵⁶ Many brought false testimony against him, but they contradicted each other. ⁵⁷ Some stood to offer false witness against him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard him saying, 'I will destroy this temple, constructed by humans, and within three days I will build another, one not made by humans.'" ⁵⁹ But their testimonies didn't agree even on this point.

Reflections – Dick Childs

The statement that the false witnesses used as an accusation twisted Jesus' actual words. Jesus did not say "I will destroy this man made temple," he said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." (John 2:19) Jesus was not talking about Herod's temple, but his own body.

Although not detailed in the Scripture, other writings from that period indicate that practically all the laws that protect the accused were broken. However, Jesus had no public defender and did not complain because he knew it was God's will that He was to die for our sins.

Monday, March 12, 2012

Mark 14:61b-65

Common English Bible (CEB)

⁶¹ Again, the high priest asked, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed one?”

⁶² Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Human One^[a] sitting on the right side of the Almighty^[b] and coming on the heavenly clouds.”

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we need any more witnesses? ⁶⁴ You’ve heard his insult against God. What do you think?”

They all condemned him. “He deserves to die!”

⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him. Some covered his face and hit him, saying, “Prophecy!” Then the guards took him and beat him.

Reflections – Gail Peterson

During Jesus’ last days on earth, he knew he would be betrayed to the authorities by one of his Disciples and that his life on earth would end soon. In this passage, Jesus has been betrayed, arrested and brought before a council of priests and elders, who were looking for a reason to kill him. He’d been stirring up enough trouble, healing the sick, drawing crowds with his stories. He was, in their eyes, a threat to their civil authority, with people calling him the Messiah, the King of the Jews. They were envious of Jesus and wanted him gone. These local authorities couldn’t get him under local law—there was no testimony against Jesus that would stand up in their legal system. Even the false claims brought against him contradicted each other. But if they could get him to say he was the Son of God, a King, that was treason, reason enough for death under Roman law. So they asked him if he was Christ, the Son of God. He acknowledged it, saying, “I am.” And that was enough. They accused Jesus of blasphemy (“his insult against God”) and

taunted and beat him. He was carried off to the Roman ruler Pilate the next day.

Most of us put a lot of faith in our legal system. We obey our laws and assume that’s enough to keep us out of legal trouble. And it usually is. We trust that someone won’t attack us falsely or on trumped up charges, and if they do, we defend ourselves with evidence of our innocence. Jesus faced false and conflicting charges and didn’t defend himself, although he could have. He faced beatings and jeers from those charged with upholding the legal system of that day. Why would Jesus not defend himself? Jesus knew that his death was foretold in Scripture and that it was part of God’s plan for him and for us. He spoke instead of the future glory to be seen as “the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty.” It must have been hard for Jesus to take what was meted out to him with such patience and confidence in His Father. He is likely even setting an example for us, when we face challenges and challengers.

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Luke 22:54-55

Common English Bible (CEB)

Peter denies knowing Jesus

⁵⁴ After they arrested Jesus, they led him away and brought him to the high priest's house. Peter followed from a distance. ⁵⁵ When they lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

Reflections – Stephanie Cassidy

As a child, I judged Peter for denying Jesus in the same way I judged Judas for betraying Him, and Thomas for doubting Him. Comfortable in my Christian hindsight, I felt I would never have behaved as those who had turned away from Jesus. But as an adult, I contemplate whether the fear of being associated with a man who was condemned by most of society would have caused me to react just as Peter did. How many times have I turned my back on Jesus, unknowingly? It was not until the cock crowed that Peter fully realized his betrayal. There is no such alarm for many of us as we travel noisily through our busy lives.

At odd times, I am forced to admit I am sometimes embarrassed to publicly embrace Jesus. When choosing a greeting card, I used to stray from the card marked "religious". Or if expressing my concern to someone, I found myself saying, "My thoughts are with you" when in fact my prayers were much more powerful. If these minor choices of diction illustrated my ability to so easily turn my back to Jesus, how many of my actions have had the same effect? The Lenten season presents an opportunity not only to contemplate your relationship with Jesus, but how willingly you extend the power of that relationship to others. My prayers are with you as you prepare for the blessings of Easter.

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Mark 14:66-72

Common English Bible (CEB)

⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. A woman, one of the high priest's servants, approached ⁶⁷ and saw Peter warming himself by the fire. She stared at him and said, "You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus."

⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand what you're saying." And he went outside into the outer courtyard. A rooster crowed.

⁶⁹ The female servant saw him and began a second time to say to those standing around, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰ But he denied it again.

A short time later, those standing around again said to Peter, "You must be one of them, because you are also a Galilean."

⁷¹ But he cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷² At that very moment, a rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered what Jesus told him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down, sobbing.

Reflections – Deborah Sugg

Peter's story of denial strikes at our core. We have all told a lie. Some worse than others. Lies that hurt the most, usually involve those we love and trust, our friends and family.

Peter lied to save his life. He knew acknowledging Jesus meant crucifixion. Few can say we would never lie to save ourselves from that unjustly fate. Peter had done nothing wrong to be punished, just as Jesus did not deserve to be crucified.

I'm sure Peter thought I have nothing to gain by telling the truth but everything to lose. Peter walked the earth with Him then denied Him while Christians today acknowledge Him solely on our faith.

It is ironic that today I hear athletes or celebrities first acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior before accepting their award or accolades in front of millions of fans.

I'm sure some are sincere and truly do not judge them. We are all imperfect.

Whether we serve and acknowledge Jesus sincerely, or for earthly or heavenly gain, only Jesus knows.

Thursday, March 15, 2012

Matthew 27:3-5

Common English Bible (CEB)

Judas' death

³ When Judas, who betrayed Jesus, saw that Jesus was condemned to die, he felt deep regret. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, and ⁴ said, "I did wrong because I betrayed an innocent man."

But they said, "What is that to us? That's your problem." ⁵ Judas threw the silver pieces into the temple and left. Then he went and hanged himself.

Reflections – Debby Lawrence

Judas knows he has sinned as Jesus predicted he would. The chief priests and elders do not forgive him even with his offering to return the thirty silver coins they gave him for turning in Jesus. They feel he has made the decision, good or bad, and now must live with it. Judas disposes of the "guilty blood money" and decides to end his life rather than live with his decision. Sometimes we make mistakes or bad decisions, and we suffer the consequences. Have you heard of the saying "What goes around, comes around?" Have you ever experienced regret for something you have done and then later find it happening to you? Maybe, it is something as simple as not letting the other car yield in front of you when you are in a hurry. Do you stop and think, now I know how it feels? Hopefully, you have learned from experience, but God forgives.

Friday, March 16, 2012

Mark 14:63-64

Common English Bible (CEB)

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we need any more witnesses? ⁶⁴ You've heard his insult against God. What do you think?"

They all condemned him. "He deserves to die!"

Reflections – John Campbell

Condemned, how often we feel condemned by others, by our culture, sometimes even by the church. How often we condemn others with little information, or second hand information making our own assumptions. Even in court one is "presumed innocent", until proven guilty and yet we are quick to condemn. When we read this passage we are quick to pass judgment on the High Priest and others who condemned Jesus unfairly, for their own purposes, considering only their own needs and wishes.

Our condemnation is in great contrast to God's grace which accepts us as we are, for whom we are, "faults and all." Do we get what an incredible thing that is? Do we understand how life enhancing that grace is? It builds up, rather puts down. It creates possibilities rather destroying persons. Consider the times in your life when you have been falsely accused. Then consider if you can give others the "benefit of the doubt." Can you withhold judgment, at least until the facts are in? God's grace abounds in you. Consider sharing that grace with others.

Prayer: O God, for all the times we have felt condemned by others we know that it is nothing compared to what happened to Jesus. Help us to control our judgments and allow your grace to be at work in us and in others. Amen.

Saturday, March 17, 2012

Mark 15:1b-5

Common English Bible (CEB)

Trial before Pilate

¹ They bound Jesus, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate. ² Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus replied, "That's what you say." ³ The chief priests were accusing him of many things.

⁴ Pilate asked him again, "Aren't you going to answer? What about all these accusations?" ⁵ But Jesus gave no more answers so that Pilate marveled.

Reflections – Tonya Chandler

I have always loved this verse. I cannot imagine being in that situation. I don't think any of us could. But Jesus handles it in such a way, showing incredible dignity and restraint, in my opinion.

Jesus knows that his days are numbered, that his time has come. Yet he does not force his message, does not confuse the situation, does not challenge Pilate. And Pilate marvels.

I think I often speak when perhaps silence would be more meaningful. I have to remind myself that it is not always about my opinion. God's word shows through us when we teach and speak, but it also shows through us when we are silent by our actions. Help us, dear Lord, to make certain, our actions speak louder than our words.

Monday, March 19, 2012

Matthew 27:15-17

Common English Bible (CEB)

Death sentence

¹⁵ It was customary during the festival for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they might choose. ¹⁶ At that time there was a well-known prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ When the crowd had come together, Pilate asked them, "Whom would you like me to release to you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?"

Reflections – Tonya Chandler

While at the funeral of a friend/coworker recently, the minister shared a saying from a church sign that my friend's son had found. "Patience is trusting God's timing." Her sudden death had shocked all in the room, and yet, the family had already found comfort in knowing that she was with God. God's timing.

A chance, a small chance, but a chance: One last moment, when Jesus could have been released to go back to the people, in order to do more for God, in order to teach us more about God. And yet, that was not part of the plan. Jesus' had more to teach us, yet from cross. God's will that we be saved, that Jesus should die so that we would live eternally. God's timing.

Prayer: When we face uncertainty and confusion, O Lord, help us to remember to find comfort in understanding YOUR timing.

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Matthew 27:19

Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁹ While he was serving as judge, his wife sent this message to him, "Leave that righteous man alone. I've suffered much today in a dream because of him."

Reflections – Jeannie Schick

I have to be honest here, I was not even aware of this one sentence passage in Matthew's Gospel. I chose to write about it here because I wanted to have to learn about this message from Pilate's wife to her husband while he was in the throes of this loud and unruly trial with Jesus and Barrabas. In my experience, these one sentence scriptures in the Bible are easy to overlook and often gems waiting to be discovered and uncovered.

I have read many accounts of Pilate's wife's note, thanks to the internet, and will sum up what I learned.

First, she may not have been given a name by the writer of Matthew on purpose so that Pilate's wife's message would be more important than her identity. What we do know is that she eventually became a Christian, which I find interesting. I wonder what Pilate thought of that.

Second, in that time, people put much more stock in messages that they received in dreams. In her dream she was told that Jesus was innocent and should be spared and she felt compelled to get that message to her husband. Pilate's wife certainly knew of Jesus but almost definitely never met him. His preaching and followers were making the people in charge nervous in this barley-under-control city. Still, she felt strongly enough about her dream to get an urgent message to her husband.

The overwhelming majority of analyses I read strongly believe that Pilate's wife's dream was sent from God. She seemed to believe that, too, which drove her to act on it. Several people who studied this

passage also believe that the wife's message sent to Pilate to free Jesus as an innocent man was God's way of giving Pilate one last chance to exonerate Jesus. He didn't. Instead, after receiving the message, he washed his hands (literally) of the whole mess.

Now, here is some of what I take away from this short scripture after having read what many others (Bible scholars at that) have said. God speaks to us and is guiding us all the time, if we'll just listen. He might come to us in our dreams. It is up to us to be open for God's messages and then act accordingly. Of course the hard part is knowing if the message is from God, right? In my experience, God makes His messages pretty clear but if we miss them He doesn't give up until we get them. I think this scripture is also a testament to doing the right thing. When you see an injustice, do what you can to make it right. Don't sit idly by. Speak up! Don't let your hindsight be 20/20. Let God guide you and then act with conviction and purpose. When it comes to our faith in Jesus we often have to go against the crowd. But, we must still act the way we know we should. God will guide us and in that we can gather strength and courage.

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

Luke 23:7-11

Common English Bible (CEB)

⁷ When he learned that Jesus was from Herod's district, Pilate sent him to Herod who was also in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ Herod was very glad to see Jesus, for he had heard about Jesus and had wanted to see him for quite some time. He was hoping to see Jesus perform some sign. ⁹ Herod questioned Jesus at length, but Jesus didn't respond to him. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the legal experts were there, fiercely accusing Jesus. ¹¹ Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt. Herod mocked him by dressing Jesus in elegant clothes and sent him back to Pilate.

Reflections – John Campbell

It seems Herod was just a small pawn in all the events around Jesus' trial and death. He was "glad to see Jesus, for he had heard about Jesus.." Herod wanted to see the show, some sign of greatness from this man he had heard so much about. It seems Jesus knew his game and just remained silent. This infuriated Herod and his response was to mock Jesus. So often we are in it for "the show". Even in our faith and church lives, we want to be entertained. If the sermon is too serious we are often disappointed. If the message hits "too close to home," we feel uneasy. We want to be entertained, not engaged.

A recent study of where folks get their news indicated that an increasing number of folks get their news from "The Daily Show", and "Steven Colbert." The analysis indicated that many folks don't trust the news, and so if we can be entertained while we get the news, if it isn't very accurate, we're OK with that, at least we had a good laugh. Sometimes we need to deal with serious issues in a serious way. May God help us to know the difference!

Thursday, March 22, 2012

John 18:33-38

Common English Bible (CEB)

Pilate questions Jesus

³³ Pilate went back into the palace. He summoned Jesus and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?"

³⁵ Pilate responded, "I'm not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

³⁶ Jesus replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here."

³⁷ "So you are a king?" Pilate said.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice."

³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

Release of Barabbas

After Pilate said this, he returned to the Jewish leaders and said, "I find no grounds for any charge against him."

Reflections – John Campbell

What is the truth? Is it only our particular version of a particular situation? If you have three witnesses to an accident, you invariably get three different views of what really happened. Sometimes there are truths that move beyond our particular view. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." But even these truths had a perspective. They didn't include women and didn't include folks who weren't property owners.

It is true, that Jesus was a King, but not like any King the world had ever known. He was not a King of some geographical area or even a particular people, but rather one who would "testify to the truth."

Consider what are the truths, the values, that you hold that don't change with the tides, but provide the grounding for your life and faith. Make a list of 5 essential truths, or values for you that cannot be compromised.

Friday, March 23, 2012

Matthew 27:22-25

Common English Bible (CEB)

²² Pilate said, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

They all said, "Crucify him!"

²³ But he said, "Why? What wrong has he done?"

They shouted even louder, "Crucify him!"

²⁴ Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere and that a riot was starting. So he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I'm innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It's your problem."

²⁵ All the people replied, "Let his blood be on us and on our children."

Reflections – Debby Lawrence

It is often a hard decision and one that requires quick thinking – do you go with the crowd, your peers, when in your heart you know something is not right, only to avoid confrontation? Or, do you state your feelings? Do you just walk away so you can feel better that you were not a part of the decision? Do you walk away from friends who are doing wrong? Do you quit the team, the job, or a class? It is often a dilemma which can have consequences we may not like no matter which decision we make. When I find myself in this kind of situation I try to remember to ask What Would Jesus Do (WWJD)? I ask myself, will I be happy with this decision tomorrow, or next week? Pilate was the governor and the decision maker. He was not totally convinced Jesus was guilty. He saw the beginnings of a riot from the crowd who thought Jesus was claiming to be the "King of Jews" and asked them who should be crucified. If Pilate chose to save Jesus and crucify Barabbas, the murderer, what would the crowd do to him? Did he feel they were wrong but a riot would be worse? Pilate washes his hands to symbolize it is no longer his decision, he walks away from the responsibility and places it on the majority – the crowd. The crowd even goes so far as to take the blame for future generations as well, their own children.

Saturday, March 24, 2012

Mark 15:15

Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁵ Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, so he released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus whipped, then handed him over to be crucified.

Reflections – Tonya Chandler

How much easier it is sometimes to blame others for our actions, to go with the crowd, to look toward the easy way out? Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd. Pilate could wipe his hands of the whole event, by saying that he was only giving in to what the crowd wanted. How often do our actions go against our own interests or God's interests in order to satisfy others?

I think about times when God has challenged me to stand up for Him, to go against what others may want. I am disappointed in myself when I do not immediately call on God first, when I consider, going with the crowd as an actual option.

Prayer: Help us, oh Lord, to always stand up for you and to be influenced by you. Help us to always satisfy you. Amen.

Monday, March 26, 2012

John 19:1

Common English Bible (CEB)

Jesus is whipped and mocked as king

¹ Then Pilate had Jesus taken and whipped.

Reflections – John Campbell

Growing up I was occasionally on the “back end” of a whipping from my Father. In reality I only have one memory of such a time and don’t even remember what I did to deserve it. Our society has come to a time where we frown upon such means of discipline, mostly because they lend themselves to abuse. Too often they happen in the moment of anger rather than conscious reflection. Compared to the “whipping” that Jesus received, my own was not much more than a slap on the hand. Mel Gibson, in his movie, “The Passion”, goes a bit overboard in the descriptive portrayal of the whipping of Jesus. Its value may be in helping us to have some sense of the terrible suffering that Jesus went through. Can we even imagine subjecting ourselves to such violence willingly, on behalf of others?

When we claim in our Christian tradition that “Jesus suffered and died for us,” there is a literalness to this. It is not just that he symbolically carries the sins of the world on his shoulders, but he really did suffer. The closest we get to understanding this in our lives might be the sacrifices that we would make for our children or spouse. Most of us would willingly give up our own life to save the life of one of these persons who is precious to us. Can we even imagine what it means for Jesus to make the sacrifice that he did for all of humanity?

Consider the things you would be willing to die for... family, friends, beliefs, country. Most of us don’t even know until the situation presents itself. Christ died for the whole world... so that we might live.

Prayer: O Lord, we take for granted Your suffering on our behalf. Help us to be reminded that new life emerges from the ashes of suffering – even our own. Amen.

Tuesday, March 27, 2012

Mark 15:16-19

Common English Bible (CEB)

Jesus is tortured and killed

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the courtyard of the palace known as the governor’s headquarters,^[a] and they called together the whole company of soldiers.^[b] ¹⁷ They dressed him up in a purple robe and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him. ¹⁸ They saluted him, “Hey! King of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again, they struck his head with a stick. They spit on him and knelt before him to honor him.

Reflections – John Campbell

The crown of thorns has become a Christian symbol for Jesus suffering. Remember when you last handled some stemmed roses and accidentally pricked your finger? Try to imagine these same thorns nested around your head. In Mark’s gospel it says “Again and Again, they struck his head with a stick.” Torture is the correct word. Most persons would have succumbed to the situation and begged for their lives. Of course Jesus wasn’t “most persons.”

It is hard to be reminded of Jesus suffering. We would much rather move quickly to his Resurrection. In many ways it is like so much of life. From great suffering comes great triumph. Talk to the cancer survivor and you will discover that their perspective has changed. Would they forgo the suffering? For sure. To they appreciate life and even the simple things much more because of what they went through, you bet. It is a reminder to us that we can’t fully appreciate Jesus’ resurrection until we fully understand his suffering and death.

Prayer: Suffering Jesus, we remember you in our own suffering. In our pain, we come to know that great pain you suffered on our behalf. May our own pain help us to grow more faithful. Amen.

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Mark 15:21

Common English Bible (CEB)

²¹ Simon, a man from Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus' father, was coming in from the countryside. They forced him to carry his cross.

Reflections – John Campbell

It was common practice in Jesus' time that a man sentenced to crucifixion would carry his own cross to the hillside. It isn't hard to imagine that, given the torture of Jesus, he wouldn't be physically capable of carrying the cross. It appears that the Roman soldiers insist on the help of a by-stander, Simon of Cyrene. How often in life are we dependent upon the help of strangers to get us through difficult times?

When our youngest daughter was two and a half, she contracted meningitis. We were in the pediatric unit at Frederick Hospital and she was having convulsions that wouldn't abate. One of the caring nurses asked my wife if she and her church could pray for our daughter. It was exactly what we needed at this most difficult moment, and it came from a stranger.

Is it possible that a kind word from us to a stranger that we see in distress could make a difference?

Prayer: Gracious God, we know that too often we ignore the needs of others right around us because it "isn't our business." Help us to know when our word or action might be your word or action to others. Use us to be your hands and feet and mouth. Amen.

Thursday, March 29, 2012

Mark 15:25-26

Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The notice of the formal charge against him was written, "The king of the Jews."

Reflections – John Campbell

We live in a time when titles don't mean much. We often call our family doctor by their first name. Pastors often prefer being addressed by their first name. In a former church I served the congregation struggled to use my first name. I didn't like reverend and so they settled on Pastor John. One of the youth shortened it to PJ and when my wife Bonnie came on staff she became PB and together we were PB and J. Titles in themselves don't mean a lot.

Jesus was given the title "King of Jews". It was intended to be a mockery. In fact he was the King of the Jews but so much more. He became the Sovereign of all the world. His sacrificial act, powerful teachings, and love for all of humanity elevated him to this role. It was not only a title give but one earned. What does it mean for Jesus to be "King" or Sovereign of our lives? What does it mean for us to be his "subjects?" Can we give our lives over to the One who gave all?

Prayer: Sovereign God, Ruler of all, Abba, Father, Holy One--- help us to let go of our lives and let you rule and work in us. Amen.

Friday, March 30, 2012

Matthew 27:38-44

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁸ They crucified with him two outlaws, one on his right side and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who were walking by insulted Jesus, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "So you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? Save yourself! If you are God's Son, come down from the cross."

⁴¹ In the same way, the chief priests, along with the legal experts and the elders, were making fun of him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others, but he can't save himself. He's the king of Israel, so let him come down from the cross now. Then we'll believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God, so let God deliver him now if he wants to. He said, 'I'm God's Son.'" ⁴⁴ The outlaws who were crucified with him insulted him in the same way.

Reflections – Amy Pumphrey

I have to admit that I rather prefer to read the account of the two criminals from the gospel of Luke than here in Matthew. In Luke's version, when one of the two rebels hurls insults at Jesus, the other rebukes him and instead turns to his Lord and asks for forgiveness. I find it easier to place myself in that story and that repentant sinner rather than find myself in Matthew's take on these two men. Here in Matthew, the Pharisees have convinced Pilate to crucify Jesus even though he originally had decided to set him free. Here, Jesus is hung on the cross, publically humiliated, and about to die. And here, the two men enduring the same torment as Jesus, the man to His right and the man to His left, join those passing by in mocking Him. And we have to ask why? Why are they, and if we are bold enough to see ourselves in these two men, why are we, so quick to demand so much of God in response to the pain and helplessness we see around us in this world?

Why are we so ready to face the disappointments in our lives - on personal, communal, and global levels – and wring our hands of responsibility and say, "Where oh Savior is the ability to save Yourself"

(or me, us, the world?). Sometimes we do demand "signs" to believe in God, and graciously, sometimes He allows them. Other times, our prayers go "unanswered" and we find ourselves in these voices in Matthew, fully human, seemingly without hope...which is perhaps not all bad either. Because the point is, that by dying on that cross, even still He loved them. And He loves us. All He asks is for our hearts. And if we are willing to listen for it, we will hear His voice, through the comforter of the Holy Spirit. He will meet us where we are, without judgment, and if we let Him and the power of His shared humanity, His death, and His resurrection to really sink into us, it is us who will be changed. And we will hope once again. Praise God for offering this gift to us each and every day!

Saturday, March 31, 2012

John 19:25-27

Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁵ Jesus' mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood near the cross. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Reflections – June Bond

My Dear Mary,

I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy for your loss. Your son was a fine man and a model citizen. When he talked, people listened. They noticed when he was in a room. I always left a conversation with him, with plenty to think about. He was wise and gentle - a welcomed combination in a man. I was in the crowd a number of the times when he taught and when he accomplished incredible things, or should I say miraculous things? He had an aura about him - a Godly spirit for sure.

I hope you are comfortable now at the house of John. I witnessed the moment on the cross when Jesus turned your care over to John. I am sure that it was comforting to Jesus to have someone assume that role. It was not surprising that some of his final thoughts were of you. That reflects his deep love for you.

Are you able to keep busy? It helps me to do so when I grieve. The mats in our home have never been so clean! And I am cooking enough for an army. Anything to pass the time. The nights are the worst, when everything gets quiet and dark. I go through memories of him in my mind, over and over again.

I am sure the grief is multiplied for you, his mother. How do you get up each morning and face the day with such a hole in your heart? I pray for you each day, my dear cousin and friend. Don't let anyone tell you that God does not give you anything you cannot handle. Perhaps, it is more important to understand that he does not expect you to handle it alone. You have God and your earthly friends and family, as well as your son who will never really leave you.

I have this feeling that something very special may come out of Jesus' death. Let's keep our eyes and ears open to the possibilities.

Let me know if I can help you in any way. I will bring you lunch one day soon (I have plenty prepared) and catch up. Give yourself a hug until I can do it in person.

Love, Elizabeth

Dear Lord, as we begin Holy Week, help us to remember the grief of Mary, the graciousness of John, and the love of Elizabeth. This week as we walk in your sandals, we will share your journey, culminating in Easter, and the rest of the story. Thank you for all you are. AMEN

Monday, April 2, 2012

Luke 23:39-43

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, "Don't you fear God, seeing that you've also been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ Jesus replied, "I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise."

Reflections – Lisa Greenlund

The authorities deliberately executed Jesus beside two known criminals. This was designed to publicly humiliate Jesus before the crowds and to rank him with robbers. When Jesus was nailed to the cross he was already more than half-dead. The scourging alone and the crown of thorns beaten into his skull had nearly killed him. In such a state it is all the more remarkable to see Jesus with a clear, sound mind and a tranquil heart. Jesus' first words are addressed to his Father as a prayer of forgiveness for those who have harmed him. Jesus' second words are directed to the repentant thief who asked for mercy. As long as we have breath, it is never too late to turn to Christ for pardon and reconciliation with God. Jesus' death on the cross reverses the curse of sin and restores Paradise for the lost children of Adam and Eve. God's mercy frees us to love and to forgive as Jesus did. Do you forgive those who offend you? How can we not.

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

Mark 15:33-34

Common English Bible (CEB)

³³ From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. ³⁴ At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*," which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?"

Reflections – Tonya Chandler

How many times I have thought that phrase, unable to utter it out loud, for I know in my heart, that God does not leave me, but yet, the thought goes through my mind. When tragedy occurs, disasters or devastation ... or even sudden illness or death, is it unheard of to question, "Where is God at a time like this"? When times seem tough, uncertain or even unexplainable, we doubt. God tells us to trust, Jesus teaches us to have faith, and yet there is doubt. But God has not allowed the whole to go dark. There is light, and though tragedy sometimes causes the light to dim, it is up to us ... to look for the light and to find comfort and peace in that which has been promised to us.

Prayer: Thank you, dear God, for continuing to keep present your everlasting light, even when darkness causes it to dim slightly. Help us to remember to seek your light in times of darkness. Amen.

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

John 19:28-29

Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁸ After this, knowing that everything was already completed, in order to fulfill the scripture, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was nearby, so the soldiers soaked a sponge in it, placed it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips.

Reflections – Loretta Himmler

Accepting that something is over, no matter what that something is, and trusting that the future will be not only OK, but likely better, takes a lot of faith. It is also very exhausting. And after a person accepts their fate, it is necessary to not only accept help from others, but to cherish it. We need to have our thirst quenched after a long race. And, maybe our own arm is too tired to hold the cup.

This was Jesus' final step in his faith -- that His Father and Mankind would carry him through. Little did He know what wonder lie ahead for all of Mankind, by letting go of his mortal life!

Thursday, April 5, 2102

John 19:30a

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁰ When he had received the sour wine, Jesus said, "It is completed."

Reflections – John Campbell

Finished. Completed. We usually think of these as being a good thing, getting done something that was on our list. Finishing that big remodel project. Completing a degree so that we can now find a job. It may seem that in the circumstances of Jesus that his words, "It is completed," or as some translations say, "It is finished!" would be a terrible tragedy. It was a tragic end to a compelling life.

Another way to look at it however, is Jesus' understanding that the thing he had come to do was now completed. Scriptures tell us that early on in his ministry Jesus sensed the inevitable necessity of his death. He talked about it with the disciples, who didn't want to hear this. Perhaps Jesus understood that his life was in fact "completed" but that this was also the beginning of something new.

If we think about the things that we have "finished" or "completed" in our own lives we discover that they are often the beginning of something new. How incredible it is that what Jesus completed became the new thing for the whole world.

Prayer: Great God we give you thanks that what was completed in Jesus was the beginning of something so new that the whole world would change. Help us to remember that the change is still happening and that we have the opportunity to be a part of that change. Amen.

Friday, April 6, 2012

Mark 15:37-39

Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁷ But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

³⁸ The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "This man was certainly God's Son."

Reflections – John Campbell

How ironic that the person to proclaim Jesus as the son of God was not himself a believer, not part of the discipleship community but rather a by-stander. It is a reminder to us in our own time that the truth about who God is and God's presence in our world does not always come from the institutions of religion but from the experience of individuals. We forget sometimes that each of us has our own experiences of God to share. What would it look like if each of us were to proclaim the presence of God in the moment, as the centurion did? Our proclamation won't remove the pain of the situation but it may help us to put it in perspective.

As we have relived the final day of Jesus' life, we too are invited to see him for who he was and is, God incarnate --"This man was certainly God's Son."

Prayer: God we give you thanks for the great sacrifice that you made on our behalf and on behalf of the whole world. Amen.

Saturday, April 7, 2012

John 19:38-41

Common English Bible (CEB)

Jesus' body is buried

³⁸ After this Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take away the body of Jesus. Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one because he feared the Jewish authorities. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took the body away. ³⁹ Nicodemus, the one who at first had come to Jesus at night, was there too. He brought a mixture of myrrh and aloe, nearly seventy-five pounds in all. ⁴⁰ Following Jewish burial customs, they took Jesus' body and wrapped it, with the spices, in linen cloths. ⁴¹ There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

Reflections – Nancy Skinner

This passage discusses the burial of Jesus. It has been two years now since the passing of my father. I visit his grave occasionally, but I prefer to remember him where I have planted a cherry blossom tree in his memory at my house with a heart shaped rock. I have so many fond memories of my father and when the tree blooms in the spring – it brings me lots of comfort. I do not travel to the place where Jesus was crucified; I come to my church to remember him. Church is where I have family and to me it is a place of comfort; just like home. I know my father and Jesus are looking down at me where they now live in heaven.