

Ash : Dust

A Journey Through 40 Days of Lent

Ash : Dust

A note about the production of this devotional:

This booklet was created as a tool to help celebrate the season of Lent in the year 2017. The devotions in this book were all written by folks who call St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Greenville, NC their home. They're all related to the season of Lent but can be meditated on year round.

Lent is the 40 days preceding Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday, not including Sundays. The purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer through prayer, doing penance, repentance of sins, almsgiving, atonement, and self-denial. The season is devoted to fasting, abstinence, and penitence in commemoration of Christ's fasting in the wilderness.

Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. said it well, "Lent is not a ritual. It is time given to think seriously about who Jesus is for us, to renew our faith from the inside out."
(The Liturgical Year, p. 111.)

We fast, we drop a bad habit or two, we intentionally create a void in our day-to-day lives and hope to fill it with something more meaningful. Maybe this booklet can act as a springboard for you during this holy season. Maybe you can use the stories, essays, pictures, and poems inside to "think seriously about who Jesus is." I hope it blesses you the way putting it together has blessed me.

May you have a holy and blessed season of Lent.

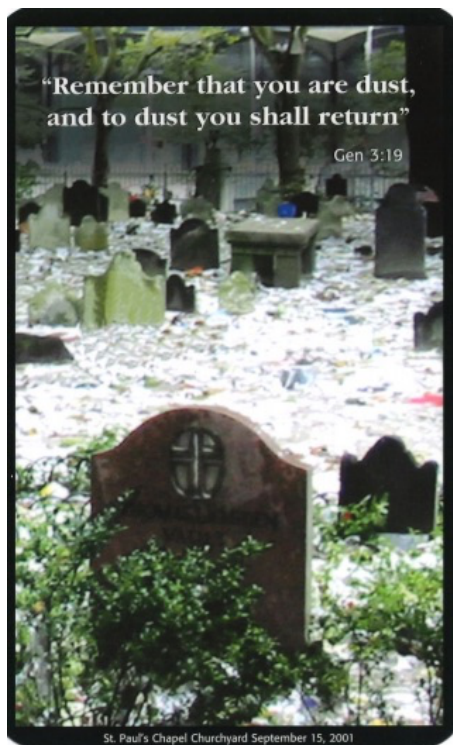
- Jay LaNunziata, Director of Christian Education at St. Paul's

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Ash Wednesday, 1 March

Ashes

Louise Hudak



Look carefully at the image this Ash Wednesday of St. Paul's churchyard at Trinity Church in NYC. At first glance, it looks as if Mother Nature surprised The City with snow, always a lovely sight, even in a cemetery. Look again! What we see are ashes – the incinerated remains of buildings, bodies and belongings of those suddenly lost in the holocaust of September 11, 2001. The rubble from the World Trade Center rained on St. Paul's churchyard in the form of ashes, a sobering reminder now almost sixteen years later, what Genesis 3:19 tells us - what we hear today as ashes are placed upon our foreheads:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

As resilient as the human spirit may be, these ashes remind us today of how fragile human life can be. Ash Wednesday puts this reminder front and center, like the ashes strewn all over St. Paul's churchyard, to pause and consider: who are we — and to whom do we belong?

What do we need to pay attention to, as we begin today our journey from Ashes to Easter? The ashes of defeat, disappointment and death need not have the final word as we journey with Jesus this Lent. The ashes of our past can become the ingredients of hope for our future through the invitation today to open new pathways to Easter.

Thursday, 2 March

Dust

Genesis 3:19

{By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.}



“London, St. Pancras Old Church: The Hardy Tree”

Thomas Hardy, (1840 – 1928) was an English novelist and poet, probably best known for writing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. He was also trained as an architect, and in the mid 1860s he oversaw the exhumation of hundreds of graves at St. Pancras Old Church, London, as part of the expansion of the Midland Railway. After the bodies were moved and buried again, many grave markers were left. Hardy took them and placed them in several circles around an old ash tree, and over the course of many years the stones have worn down and the tree's roots have grown over and among them.

Photo by cisko66 [CC BY 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

Friday, 3 March

Return

Jessica Stokes

{To return is not to 'go back' in time, but a going forward, a going beyond. To retrace one's steps is nothing on top of nothing, vanity of vanities, a renewal of the same absurdity twice over, in reverse.}

Thomas Merton, 1961

This contemplative season helps us purge the distractions and gridlock of our everyday lives. It is a time that we hope to “return” to a pure and focused faith, free of superfluous demands. Lent prepares us for Passover and Easter so that our spiritual compass can be realigned towards practicing Resurrection.

The devotion of return is an about-face towards God. Returning means renewing. Lent is a time of serious inquiry- a time to check our pulse and convictions. Are we ready to return towards the work of the Spirit? To lay down our own self-motivated pursuits? This is a time to silence the distractions and self-preservation and instead renew our commitment to Christ. We are resuscitated when we return.

“But I’m taking the day off.

Quiet as a feather.

I hardly move though really I’m traveling
a terrific distance”

-Mary Oliver, Today

Saturday, 4 March

Choose

Larry Barbour

The season of Lent will be intensely diverse with the current political climate; therefore we need to celebrate and truly experience God's mercy. Isaiah is one of my favorite books of the Holy Bible and I choose to share a timely verse:

{Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house: when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly.}

Isaiah 58:6-8

Joan Chittister is one of my favorite authors and I choose to share one of her quotes:

{Life is a journey to goodness. Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been and are not. Lent is the grace to grieve for what we should have done and did not. Lent is the opportunity to change what we ought to change but have not. Lent is not about penance. Lent is about becoming, doing, and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now. }

This is what I choose.

Monday, 6 March

Wandering

Chris Thomas

Proverbs 27:8

{Like a bird that strays from its nest is one who strays from home.}

Wandering happens - and that's okay.

Sometimes, wandering can be scary. You're not sure how you got to where you are and you're not exactly sure where to go from here - even if your course was set and your destination was clear a few short moments ago. But sometimes, wandering can be exciting and fun because you're open to whatever happens to cross your path.

You're never truly lost, though. Never - because the sun always rises and sets in the same direction. The stars always take their course, over and over again. Even without a compass, you can always find true north.

You may not end up where you expected but chances are, you'll end up somewhere - somewhere that will teach you something new and provide wisdom you never would have considered if you never left home.

Wandering happens - learn from it.

Tuesday, 7 March

Dry

Isaiah 58:11

{The LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.}



“Dried mud creeks on the shores of the Wash.”

Photo by Alan Parkinson [CC BY-SA 2.0
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Wednesday, 8 March

Time

Andrew Cannan

Time is the commodity that no company manufactures and yet most sell. This phone will save it for you. These procedures will reclaim it for you. That insurance will make sure you get your fair share or, if not, someone else will get compensation. Like other commodities, the more limited its supply, the higher its value (presuming, as we do, that our time is always in demand). So we buy our time in a market dictated by scarcity. Scarcity is an estimation of limits, and time is our ultimate limit. But what if it's not our time?

Among other things, the church describes a group of people learning to live in God's time. If our time is defined by scarcity, God's time is defined by abundance. The writers of the New Testament inherited two Greek words for "time": *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* indicates measured time; human time. *Kairos* describes time immeasurable; eternity; God's time. Jesus stands at the intersection of these two times. In Christ, we are freed from the scarcity of time. Through Christ entering into human time with us, he shares God's time with us. Consequently, through this encounter with God's time, time is redeemed from being solely ours. We are freed from scarcity to live into the fullness of time, as God's eternity cannot be wasted, lost, or stolen.

Of course, learning to live with that takes, well, time. Lent names the season that the church has been afforded to learn this through fasting and prayer. Admittedly, these may be foolish activities if you believe your time is short. If that's the case, then eat, drink, and be merry- for tomorrow your time may end. On the other hand, if you are one of those fools who wrestles with the hope that your time is a gift from God, then it may make sense to slow down, cut out some distractions, and spend a season dwelling on the time God's afforded us. You may find that you can, in fact, take your time.

Thursday, 9 March

Darkness / Light

Carolyn Myers

Genesis 1:1-5

*{In the beginning... darkness was over the surface of the deep.
And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light...}*

Light has many metaphors: goodness, virtue, wisdom, life, grace, and truth, to name but a few. Metaphorical light has considerable significance in scripture, occurring over 250 times and included in passages in its first and last chapters. In the Genesis excerpt quoted above, God creates light as a sort of antidote to darkness and, in so doing, gives order to creation and makes life possible. In the final chapter of Revelation, John speaks about the heavenly Jerusalem, where "there shall be no night... for the Lord God gives them light." God's word is described as a light and a lamp in the Psalms, and John's Gospel reminds us that "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all."

As we turn inward in prayerful meditation and self-examination during this season of Lent, let us embrace God's light within us and give thanks for its power to illuminate even the darkest corners of our souls.

(Recommended reading: *Dance Unto The Light*, a poem by Katrina S. Lucas)

Friday, 10 March

Reflect

Sandra Swan

1 Kings 19:11 - 13

{Now there was a great wind . . . but God was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but God was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle and went out of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'} }

While I was President of Episcopal Relief and Development, this Bible passage was vital to our work. Daily we responded to disasters around the world. We were in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch; in East Carolina in 1999 after the flooding of Hurricane Floyd. We provided earthquake relief in Japan and Turkey and Haiti; ice storm recovery in northern New England. Add to these drought in Sudan, AIDS and malaria throughout Africa, wars in Yugoslavia. But we knew that "God was not in . . ." any of these.

To continue our relief programs, we had to stop in the midst of our tireless emergency efforts and listen for "a sound of sheer silence." We needed to hear God's question, "What are you doing here?" and remember that we were doing God's work by easing suffering.

Too often we get busy just "doing." We get so caught up in the daily "doing" that we see only the wind, the earthquake, the fire. We forget to listen for the sound of sheer silence. But that's where God is. The silence is where God asks us, as God did Elijah, "What are you doing here?"

During Lent, let us take time to listen in sheer silence for God's voice and answer God's question, "What are you doing here?"

Saturday, 11 March

Action

Ann Harrison

Matthew 25:14

*{When you have done it unto one of the least of these my children,
you have done it unto me.}*

Action includes both an internal and external response. Before you act, practice listening with your heart. Declutter your mind. Let go of all negative thoughts and feelings. Listen each day in gratitude to God.

Become aware of resources and action possibilities. What needs are presently being met? Refer to Matthew 25 as a guide. What other needs have been identified? Open your heart and mind to new possibilities.

Review your baptismal vows, "Will you seek to serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as your self?" Begin with the people placed directly in your life - family, friends, neighbors. Look for small opportunities to serve - greeting a stranger, contacting old friends - a note, a call, a visit.

Put gratitude to God into action. Find ways to give back. Reflect on your actions daily.

*{ Lord take me where you want me to go;
Let me meet whom you want me to meet;
Tell me what you want me to say,
and keep me out of your way! }*
Mychal Judge.

(Mychal Judge was a Franciscan priest and chaplain to New York City Fire Department. He was killed during World Trade Center attack September 2001.)

Monday, 13 March

Daily / Day by Day

Linn and Sarah Klitzkie

Luke 11:13

{ *Give us each day our daily bread.* }

Matthew 6:11

{ *Give us today our daily bread.* }

There are two expressions that are sometimes used interchangeably. One is “daily” and the other is “day by day.” However, daily implies routine, and its use is based on the expectation of more days to come. Day by day carries no such expectation. Quite the opposite, as all the Twelve Step programs constantly remind their members in their slogan, one day at a time. In truth, no one can live life more than the today we are given. And the gifts of one day may become the sorrows of the next.

In relationship with God, we say “Give us this day” because every day is a new creation, waiting to be explored. Rather than viewing the days to come as falling from the future in a stream, try thinking of EACH day as a separate and new thing.

Start your day with “Bless the Lord, who made us, sustained us and brought us to THIS day!” You are opening the door to explore the gifts and wonders the day will bring. God’s path for us can only be traveled one day at a time. To stay within God’s path for you, you must stay mindful that this is the only day you’ve been given to do what God has planned for you.

Tuesday, 14 March
Father

Submitted by Amy Kirchoff,
written by Sri Chinmoy

Revealing Soul and Fulfilling Goal

If You but knew, Father,
What I have done for You:
Planted and raised a climbing tree
For You to dance on its top, smiling free.

If You but knew, Father,
What I have done for You.
I have become the world's lowest slave
Your Breath to serve in man, the grave.

"If you but knew, child,
What I ever think of you.
You are My Life's revealing
Soul, You are My Vision's fulfilling Goal."

Excerpt from 'My Flute' by Sri Chinmoy
Copyright © Sri Chinmoy 1974

Wednesday, 15 March

Poor

Jay LaNunziata

Luke 18:22

{ There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me. }

Mark 12:41-44

{ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." }

The teachings of Jesus are sometimes simple. Most of us have grown up in cultures that have been profoundly shaped by Christianity. We hear commandments such as, "Thou shalt not kill" and we think within our hearts, "obviously!" However, not all of Jesus' teachings are so simple and even some of the ones that appear simple are difficult to put into practice.

Jesus taught about money more than any single other subject. Jesus calls the love of money the root of many kinds of evil, and we can see from experience that he is not wrong. It is not money itself that is the corrupting influence, but the selfish, stubborn way we cling to our material goods. The influence is not in the amount of money, but the greed present in the human heart that would lead us to hoard it.

Money is a tool, like a hammer, and it is no more good or evil than a hammer is. A hammer can be used to build a home or it can be used as a weapon of violence. Consider the story of the widow, whose two pennies were more valuable than the large sums given by the rich. How can we individually and collectively use our money for good during this season of Lent?

Thursday, 16 March

Treasure

Margaret Brooks

Luke 18:22

{One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.}

Luke 16:13

{No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.}

Matthew 6:21

{For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.}

Giving away our monetary acquisitions, which we are encouraged in our culture to pursue, is confusing. Our lives from school and beyond revolve around doing all we can to gather knowledge that will help us achieve for one thing, financial security. We strive in our occupations to chase raises, benefits, and promotions. Our socially sanctioned addiction to acquisitions has to be broken if we are ever going to truly love God. Focusing on others who are in need and giving to them what treasure we have forces us outside ourselves. Sharing in this fashion offers an intangible reward for the soul allowing us to realize our essential endeavor is following Jesus.

Friday, 17 March

Listen

Susan Vickery-Mercer

Parents, teachers, friends, partners, coworkers, and children want, and often beckon, a “listening ear.” I think we all know the difference it makes when someone really listens to us, truly gets us, and absolutely has our well-being at heart as they listen – or better yet, as they affirm the holy in us.

We are complex beings, with longings to be understood and loved, and to love and understand. As these longings are fed and as we feed these longings in others, I believe these are some of the most powerful moments of grace and joy that break down complexities that can move us apart.

Jesus taught us to love one another, and I think that loving includes listening with open hearts and all our being, not just our bodily ears; seeing beyond the annoying surface idiosyncrasies; and beholding the beautiful soul and creation of not only others, but also ourselves.

May we abide in the comfort of God’s 24/7 availability to listen with love and understanding, and may we learn from the Master Listener how to be listeners that foster grace, love, and joy. Don’t wait - Master Listener courses are available every hour of every day!

Saturday, 18 March

Forgive

Elder Vance Dunn, Jr.

2 Chronicles 7:14

{ If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. }

Forgiveness doesn't come naturally. It isn't always easy. Forgiveness requires self-sacrifice and humility. It lets go of the need for revenge. It releases the past so that you can move forward.

But my lord, I try it my way and it did not work. My God is able to teach you how to forgive. No religious book except the Bible teaches that God completely forgive sins of human beings. God's forgiveness of us demands that we forgive others.

Monday, 20 March

Rest

Elaine Foeller

Matthew 11:28

{ *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*}

Many, like myself, find that we go with the busy-ness of life and become exhausted, not just in our bodies, but also in our souls. We work, spend time with family, and often with friends. However, we must remember that we also need to spend time with God.

For it is when we are quiet that God gives us rest for our souls. With our souls refreshed, we can go back into the world and shine God's light.

May we all find rest during this Lenten season.

Tuesday, 21 March

Weep

Anne Tilley

If you're not crying now, you will be sooner or later.

As Ray Charles crooned,

{It won't be long before it's crying time.}

Suffering is simply part of the human condition and weeping is its expression. It may not be deserved; it's certainly not fair; but we all weep. It's an equal opportunity and leveling experience. Physically, weeping is good for us. It relieves stress, lowers blood pressure, and removes toxins. But what does it do to one's soul? When that deep down, gut-wrenching, soul-searing pain convulses into sobbing, it can be hard to avoid despair. That's where surrendering to faith can make all the difference. It can restore hope, heal pain, and even become a springboard for unexpected joy.

As the Psalmist wrote,

{Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.}

Psalm 30:5.

I think Anne Lamott was on to something when she observed that tears don't dry out the soul. She suggested they cleanse and hydrate it, eventually bringing her home.

Wednesday, 22 March

Sin

Andrew Scanlon

Sin is very simply: turning away from God. For Christians, repentance and forgiveness join with sin to make a constant three-part litany for our way of life. In many ways, the issue of sin has become taboo in popular culture, and yet it is at the very core of humanity. My Roman Catholic upbringing taught the notion of categories of sin: original sin, mortal sin, venial sin, habitual sin, conscious sin... a focus on sin can easily overwhelm, invoking fear and worry- emotions that come too easily. Fortunately, Christ's ultimate sacrifice paved the way for the other two concepts mentioned above: repentance and forgiveness. While there are so many profound aspects to the poetry below by the metaphysical poet and Anglican priest John Donne (1573- 1631) , one of the pervasive messages found therein is one of assurance. Might I suggest reading this poem alongside Psalm 51? Also, enjoy Donne's clever word-plays on his own name, his wife's name (Ann More) and the idea of Christ the Son/Sun.

*Wilt Thou forgive that sin, where I begun,
Which is my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive those sins through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.*

*Wilt Thou forgive that sin, by which I won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.*

*I have a sin of fear that when I've spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
Shall shine as He shines now, and heretofore.
And having done that, Thou hast done,
I fear no more.*

Thursday, 23 March

Lost

Phil Hartenstein

{And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them 'Rejoice with me for I found my sheep that was lost.'}

Luke 15:6-7

In 1989 I was on a trip to France with friends. After three days of touring Paris together, we decided to go our separate ways. I wanted to visit the Pere Lachaise cemetery where many famous people were buried.

After studying the tour guide carefully (and leaving it behind accidentally), I embarked on my journey to the Pere Lachaise. I easily found an entrance and began my exploration. The monuments, statues and gravestones were beautiful. I wandered around aimlessly for hours but always kept the visual of the park entrance in my mind.

When dusk approached, I meandered back to that entrance only to find the gate was closed and locked. Unsure of my options and not being fluent in French, I simply followed the other visitors to the only gate that remained opened. Unfortunately, this exit took me to a neighborhood I knew nothing about. I was lost in Paris. What could I do? I prayed hard.

My prayers were answered when a plan formed in my mind. I remembered that I had a postcard from the hotel in my jacket and the postcard had the hotel's address. So I hailed a cab for the first time in my life and gave the card to the driver. Twenty minutes later, I was back at my hotel and very thankful to God for showing me the way.

Being a Christian means Jesus is always with you. Always. The Scriptures tell us that we will never be lost or abandoned. Jesus will find you and love you. Always.

Friday, 24 March

Fast

Nina Paul Vinson

Joel 1:14

{Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.}

Matthew 6:16

{Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.}

We don't put as much emphasis on "fasting" as some others do, which I think is a result of the world being too much with us. Roman Catholics are rather good at this spiritual discipline known as fasting! Fasting, for many reasons, is often associated with the season of Lent – that 40 day period before Easter when we purposefully prepare ourselves for an encounter with Christ. Fasting should heighten our hunger for God.

Calvin identified two purposes of fasting: to discipline ourselves and to give up something to better prepare ourselves for holy meditation, like Jesus in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry. Fasting is grounded in the Bible and many references are found in both the Old and New Testaments.

The general concept of fasting is to give up something such as food or drink to focus on self-discipline and self-denial as Christ did. Years ago, I determined that I was to fast during Lent: I gave up sweets! One year, it was red meat!

In the last few years, I decided to "take on" something rather than "give up" something. The idea is still the same: self-discipline and self-denial. I determined to read a good theology-based book. Now, that was tough! But, I was better for it!

Saturday, 25 March

The Sweeter Things

Submitted by Daniel Van Liere,
written by Elizabeth Van Liere

What is the first goodie to disappear on a dessert table during the fellowship hour at church? Anything chocolate—especially brownies. And happy day! I just read, “Dark chocolate is good for you.” Those words help push aside my guilty feelings when I let a piece of chocolate slowly melt in my mouth.

It's not so much the one piece I savor. It's when I buy a box of chocolates. One of my daughters-in-law can buy a Hershey's candy bar and eat one square a day. Not me. I open the box . . . slowly inhale the aroma . . . linger over the choice. Will it be a chocolate-covered caramel, a chocolate-covered truffle, or a crunchy chunk filled with nuts?

I snatch the truffle and shut the box.
Moments later the lid is off again. Just one more piece, then I'll stop.

Sin is like my addiction to chocolate. To live as God wants me to live, especially in light of His grace, requires that I develop self-control in all things—including chocolate. Paul tells us we are to glorify God at all times. This includes eating, drinking, working, or playing. “I will not be mastered by anything,” Paul told the church at Corinth.

Chocolates are only one of God's gifts to us. Gobbling one piece after another means the object masters us instead of our being the master, just as overindulging in anything can rule our lives. God's sweetness is more important than cravings for chocolate. Do you suppose a chocolate obsession reveals a soul that is weak and easily led astray?

Heavenly Father, You know I cannot keep my hand out of the box of chocolates by myself. I need Your help. So let my eyes skip over the sale at Walgreens for chocolates. Keep my eyes on the road ahead instead of to the side where Stouffers beckons. Grow self-control in me in everything, so all I eat, drink, or do, glorifies You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Monday, 27 March

Quiet

Jay LaNunziata

Zechariah 2:13

{ *Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD.* }

Psalm 46:10

{ *Be still and know that I am God.* }

There is a tradition within the Church of centering prayer, which differs from other forms of prayer in that it involves no rote or extemporaneous speeches made unto God, but rather is a practice of a silent mind.

For many of us, (for me,) a quieted mind is a difficult thing to come by. I have anxiety and when I try to clear my thoughts, I find that they come back to me with an even greater ferocity.

I have read that many others who have found great fulfillment through contemplative prayer have also had trouble quieting their anxious minds. The trick, they say, is not to resist those intrusive thoughts, but neither can you dwell on them. Release the thoughts just as soon as they arrive.

I would liken contemplative prayer to my experience of friendship. In the early days of friendships we often schedule a great quantity of activities and fill moments of silence with speech. After many years, though, you can sit in silence with a true friend and draw comfort from their presence.

Be still.

Be silent.

Know that you meet with God.

Tuesday, 28 March

Bread

Michael Blackmon

Matthew 26:26

{ While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." }

In our modern society, bread may not seem all that important. Most of us do not spend a lot of time thinking about bread on a daily basis and even fewer are in the habit of making our own loaves. Like a lot of foods, bread has become a mass produced product without much heart and soul. But I think bread is beautiful.

There is something special about using flour and water to create something delicious and nourishing. Although basically the same, all breads are just slightly different. Different quantities of yeast and different types of liquids drastically affect the bread you produce. Even going past the recipe and looking to the technique of kneading and shaping the dough you will see how small variations will affect your final product.

Humans are a lot like bread. We are all made of basically the same stuff but we are all unique because of our experiences. Some of us get kneaded longer than others. Some of us are a bit more yeasty than others. Some of us have been sent to the proving drawer more than once. But, despite all of our differences, we are all beautiful.

Wednesday, 29 March

Water

Tyler Stocks

Naturally we

Hear

Rain drops pitter, pattering against
a metal roof

Leaky faucets tluck, tlocking.

Ocean Waves lapping, crashing

Water pouring, gurgle, gurgling

Smell

A fresh autumn rain

The saltwater in the ocean

Feel

Water spraying in the shower

Water caressing sore, aching bodies

Spiritually, we can

Hear

'I baptize you in the name of the
father
and of the son
and of the holy spirit.

Smell

The incense of heaven

Feel

God's kiss as the waters wash over
us

Swim

In vast oceans of God's incessant
grace

Bathe

In streams of mercy

Cleanse

Our wounds and begin to heal

Drink

And never thirst again

Come

And live forever

In the sacrament of our baptism

Thursday, 30 March

Serve

Dianne Jenkins

Mark 10:45

*{For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.}*

Mother Teresa

{Holy living consists in doing God's work with a smile.}

Scripture is clear about the importance of service. Service is the heart of Christian life. It's easy for us to remember that we are saved by faith while sometimes omitting the expectation to serve. James begins in James 2:14 by using the example of someone who says he has faith but has no works, "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" Faith and service go hand in hand.

We live in a busy world that can easily motivate us to self-serve. Service is a great way to put aside our self-centeredness and connect with others. It has been said that a mark of spiritual maturity is when we become more concerned with serving others than with being served. Joy comes from giving and serving.

Friday, 31 March

Temptation

Glyn Young

{No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation God will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.}

1 Corinthians 10:13

Jesus offers an upside down paradigm for addressing temptation. This principle is the secret to overcoming temptation. It may seem counter-intuitive, it may seem confusing at first, but if you can “get it”, it can change everything. To overcome temptation, when you are tempted to take the short gain... Go Long!! When we most want the short gain, we need to Go Long!! In every temptation, there is a tendency to be caught in the moment. To only see the short term. And miss the Long Game. To miss the bigger picture. To see what is fully at stake in this moment. To not see the connection between this temptation, this decision, this circumstance and a much bigger picture.

In the short term, lying will probably make your life easier...

In the short term, fudging the form will get you some extra money...

In the short term, holding back the truth will probably help you avoid an awkward conversation and not hurt someone's feelings...

In the short term, one more dessert isn't going to hurt anyone...

In the short term, one little look at that website isn't going to destroy your life...

In the short term, one little flirtatious look might be fun and harmless...

In the short term, profit over people... gossip about colleague...

That's the whole point of temptation. It will get you and me to focus on the short term. To stare into the “immediate,” but overcoming temptation is about an upside paradigm. When you want the short gain, you need to Go long.

Saturday, 1 April

Body

Jo Skipworth

{ This is my body which is given for you. Do this in Remembrance of Me. }
Luke 22:19

{ The church is the body, Christ is the Head. }
Colossians 1:18

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D. says "The body is considered a sensor, an information network, a messenger with communication systems both physical and emotional." Our bodies have many functions to maintain ourselves, so does the Body of the Church. Coming in many styles and sizes, all believers work together to follow the example of Jesus. We experienced this recently with the churches (bodies) coming together to aid and support the victims of Hurricane Matthew. Nationally, we watched as thousands of citizens acted quickly to comfort and assist the victims of the disaster of 9/11. W.W.J.D. may be a cliché but it is also a reminder to the church (body): "Do This In Remembrance of Me".

Eph. 4:15-16 sums it up best. *"...grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."*

Monday, 3 April

Stranger / Neighbor

Bob Hudak

Leviticus 19:34

{The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.}

The image of a lifeless toddler, found floating in the water on a Turkish beach is imbedded in my memory. The family of three-year old Aylan Kurdi took a risk. Broken-hearted, frightened, desperate, they left the sinkhole of their war-torn home in Syria, crossed the sea in hope and expectation - and for a brief moment, there was light in the midst of the ugly darkness as the world seemed to open its eyes and hearts and homes to the plight of refugees. But then, terrorists attacked Paris, and the City of Light became a terrifying place of darkness. Fear of terrorists. Fear of refugees. Fear of immigrants — and even a growing suspicion and mistrust of neighbors, fueled mostly by fear and ignorance of ‘the other,’ casts a dark spell on God’s world this Lent.

A rabbi once asked his students: “How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?” “When from a distance you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep,” suggested one. “When you can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine,” offered another. “No,” the rabbi said. “When you look into the face of a human being and have enough light to recognize that person as your brother or sister. Until then it is night, and darkness is still with us.”

Our Interfaith Refugee Ministry helps people coming out of the darkness of a shattered life into the bright hope of a better future. Can we look into the face of immigrants living in the shadows — and recognize them as our sisters and brothers? Our response might determine if the hour of dawn has arrived.

Tuesday, 4 April
Betrayal



In icons, traitors and unbelievers are shown in full profile. They have turned away from God.

It is popular wisdom that betrayal cannot come from an enemy, only one in whom you have put your trust can betray you. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Lord, was there from the beginning, was one of his closest friends.

Wednesday, 5 April

Giving Up

Erik Barrow

1 Corinthians 16:13

{Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.}

Joshua 1:9

{Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.}

These verses reminded me of my mom. I, many times, lack faith. I worry too much! Faith is very hard to practice. We can though, if we do not give up. My mother has been absolutely selfless her entire life, and even more so since our children were born, despite significant health issues. She is always there, lending her time and attention. She is a cornerstone of our family. Last Fall, she was mistakenly diagnosed with sudden congestive heart failure and had to be hospitalized. We were distraught. As we waited for more test results, I was by her bedside, in tears. We didn't know how long she had. We didn't know anything.

She wiped my tears away and told me everything would be OK. She knew she was either going to be OK or she would be with the Lord soon. Either way, she was good. It turned out that she had excess fluid around her heart and that she would be fine. That was a lesson for me, in true faith. Faith is the cornerstone of our belief in Christ. It doesn't come easy, but rarely do, the good things.

Thursday, 6 April

Forty

Jay LaNunziata

Forty years they wandered
in the desert.

And their journey is ours
in these forty days we wander.

Pilgrims all, meandering on a path to life that begins at death
and all that hinders will be washed away.

And yet

we wander, we wander,

no one makes a beeline to the cross.

Friday, 7 April

Enemies

Megan Getz

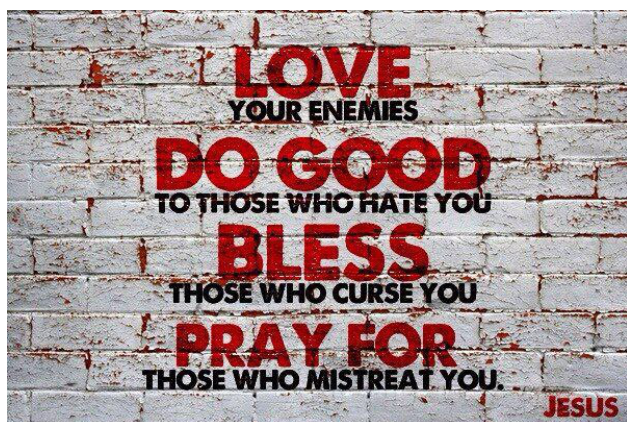
Matthew 5:44

{I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.}

Enemy is such a strong word to me. And how does someone even become your enemy? Are these people your neighbors who have been hateful to you or to your children, co-workers that you don't get along with, or a greater enemy; someone that doesn't agree with you about life or your life choices.

Greenville, NC isn't a war-zone after all, but are there people that we choose to avoid, who we have negative thoughts about, people we resent maybe?

Whoever your enemy is we are called to have grace, which is not an easy thing. It is helpful, however, to remind ourselves that loving your enemy doesn't mean you have to agree with their behavior.



Saturday, 8 April

Prayer

Ashley Cannan

{ Prayer is taking a chance that against all odds and past history, we are loved and chosen, and do not have to get it together before we show up. The opposite may be true: We may not be able to get it together until after we show up in such miserable shape. So prayer is our sometimes real selves trying to communicate with the Real, with Truth, with the Light. It is us reaching out to be heard, hoping to be found by a light and warmth in the world, instead of darkness and cold. }
Anne Lamott, "Help, Thanks, Wow"

During Lent, one of my favorite passages to read is when Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, right before he's betrayed by Judas and arrested. Jesus takes three of his disciples with him to the garden, but leaves them to pray in solitude. In Luke 22: 41-44, it says,

{ "And Jesus withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.' Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." }

What a picture of prayer. Even Jesus, the Son of God, seemed capable of being in miserable shape. Maybe He was second guessing the plan of His Father's, fearful of the painful death He knew He'd have to face. Maybe He felt alone, even with friends only a stone's throw away. Whatever He was feeling, He knew He needed to reach out to be heard by a Father who loved Him. And God provided Jesus with warmth and light by sending an angel to strengthen Him.

Every year during Lent, I read this passage and I'm filled with hope. I'm reminded that though there are times when I don't trust that God's will for me is good or I don't understand feeling alone even with friends and family only a stone's throw away, I can pray to my Father who loves me. He's always there, waiting to strengthen me with His presence and Light. Thanks be to God.

Monday, 10 April

Trust

Lisa Stockard

During the times when anxiety and fear can almost overwhelm us, the beautiful text of Lenten hymn #145, found in the 1982 Hymnal, calls us to prayer and reminds us to always put our trust in God.

*Now quit your care and anxious fears and worry;
For schemes are vain and fretting brings no gain.
Lent calls to prayer, to trust and dedication;
God brings new beauty nigh;
Reply, reply reply with love to love most high.*

*To bow the head in sackcloth and in ashes
Or rend the soul, such grief is not Lent's goal,
But to be led to where God's glory flashes,
His beauty to come near.
Make clear, make clear, make clear where truth and light appear.*

*For is not this the fast that I have chosen?
(The prophet spoke) To shatter every yoke,
Of wickedness, the grievous bands to loosen,
Oppression put to flight,
To fight, to fight, to fight till every wrong's set right.*

*For righteousness and peace will show their faces
To those who feed the hungry in their need,
And wrongs redress, who build the old waste places,
And in the darkness shine,
Divine, divine, divine it is when all combine!*

*Then shall your light break forth as doth the morning;
Your health shall spring, the friends you make shall bring
God's glory bright, your way through life adorning;
And love shall be the prize.
Arise, arise, arise! and make a paradise!*

Words: Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)

Tuesday, 11 April

Discipline

John Lee

For many and certainly in my younger years Discipline = Punishment. As I've grown older (more mature) especially in my spiritual journey I've come to recognize that Discipline = Correction Driven by Love , a pruning if you would.

John 15:1-3

{ I am the true grapevine, and my father is the gardener. God cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and God prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. }

Take few moments each day during this season to ask and listen to where God might be pruning us in order to bear more fruit and bear it abundantly.

Wednesday, 12 April

Washed

Linda Chamberlain

Washed is a satisfying state to keep coming back to:
our bodies, clean sheets,

Ahhhh.

Washed isn't a permanent condition, however,
it is part of a cycle where clean is only a beginning.

Our interaction with cleanness requires washing again.

And then there is closeness with God.
And that isn't a permanent condition either.

Life is messy.
This is God's invitation to come back to the awareness of His love,

Ahhhh.

Holy Thursday, 13 April

Thorns

Deb Warren

Matthew 27:29

{ And then they twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. }

How exceedingly painful was that crown of thorns placed upon Jesus' head by the soldiers prior to His crucifixion? We must not only imagine His physical pain, but also the emotional pain of being mocked as "King of the Jews". The soldiers taunted Jesus as they placed the thorny crown upon His head.

What a dark, painful, desolate time in Jesus' life! Yet, Jesus knew God's plan for Him and willingly endured this pain. Jesus knew that His pain was temporary and that His suffering would enable all believers to be welcomed into the glorious kingdom of heaven.

We think of thorns as sharp, pointy and painful. Yet, just as a crown of thorns surrounded our beautiful Savior, thorns fill the stems of beautiful and most fragrant roses. During our time of Lenten reflections, we remember that our difficult, painful and "thorny" times help us to grow in faith and appreciate great beauty.

Good Friday, 14 April

Crucify

Mason Mattox

Luke 23:23

{But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified}

Isaiah 53:7

{He was led as a lamb to the slaughter}

It can be very difficult to look towards a crucifix, or read the Gospel account of Christ's death, without the accompanying reminder of what man inflicted on God so many years ago. These solemn reminders continue to serve the Church as an account of that eerie event which the world tries so desperately to forget, the day in which great nails were driven through Jesus's hands and feet.

Christ endured great torment for our sins and in doing so humbled himself to the lowest realm of suffering comprehensible to man. By death, Christ destroyed death. Crucifixion, having been the bloodiest, and most degrading form of execution soon became a symbol of Victory for all.

Christ said to "Take up your cross and follow me." (Luke 9:23) We all have a cross, and we are never asked to bear it alone. Jesus had obtained assistance from Simon of Cyrene during his time of tribulation. May we also find a 'Simon' to help us carry our own crosses throughout this joyous and difficult journey that we call life.

Holy Saturday, 15 April

Death

Calvin Mercer

Birth, maybe, is sort of like death.

In the womb we're in a familiar, cozy environment with every need for sustenance met. Then, upheaval, followed by uncomfortable thrusting through unfamiliar tunnels. Suddenly, blinded by bright lights, hit by a cold wave of air, and surrounded by monster-looking beings.

They cut our precious cord, our lifeline. They used to slap our behinds. Now they stick tubes in our cavities and suction, causing loud noises and discomfort.

Our comfortable and familiar life, in an instant, is gone, dead.

But . . . as we adjust we find this new world full of new life, new possibilities.

Death, maybe, is sort of like birth.

If lucky, as adults we're in familiar, comfortable surroundings approaching death. Death can mean transition involving upheaval, pain, and unfamiliar territory.

I don't know the particulars of what's on the other side. But if it's anything like birth, it's full of new life, new possibilities . . . and not to be feared.

I've heard that maybe it's like slipping off a tight shoe, and we can affirm with the apostle Paul,

1 Corinthians 15:54
{ *"Death is swallowed up in victory.
O death, where is thy victory?
O death, where is thy sting?"* }

Table of Contents

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Production Note | 22. Fast |
| 2. Ashes | 23. The Sweeter Things |
| 3. Dust | 24. Quiet |
| 4. Return | 25. Bread |
| 5. Choose | 26. Water |
| 6. Wandering | 27. Serve |
| 7. Dry | 28. Temptation |
| 8. Time | 29. Body |
| 9. Darkness / Light | 30. Stranger / Neighbor |
| 10. Reflect | 31. Betrayal |
| 11. Action | 32. Giving Up |
| 12. Daily / Day by Day | 33. Forty |
| 13. Father | 34. Enemies |
| 14. Poor | 35. Prayer |
| 15. Treasure | 36. Trust |
| 16. Listen | 37. Discipline |
| 17. Forgive | 38. Washed |
| 18. Rest | 39. Thorns |
| 19. Weep | 40. Crucify |
| 20. Sin | 41. Death |
| 21. Lost | 42. Table of Contents |