

BEGINNINGS



Living Into the Spirit's Vision Of the Beloved Community

*A Lenten Devotional by
Fr. Jerry Schweitzer, Photographs
Rev. Dr. Don Wagner, Devotionals*

*This Lenten Devotional is a collaborative project for the sake of
Lent—
And for all those who find themselves on the Lenten journey desiring a new
Beginning.*

*Neither Fr. Jerry, nor Rev. Don, will receive any financial payment
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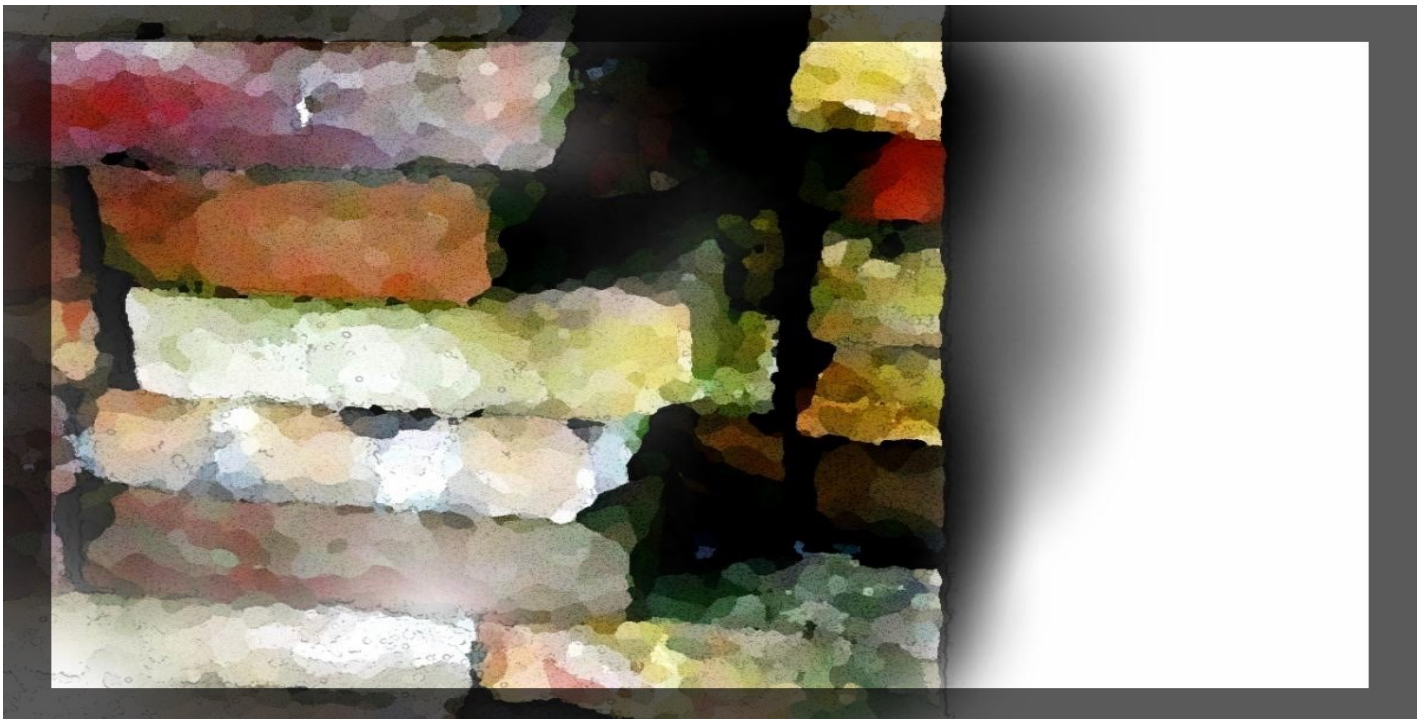
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Fr. Jerry Schweitzer and Rev. Dr. Don Wagner



Introduction

This project began with a simple text sent by my dear friend and brother in ministry, Fr. Jerry, inquiring whether I might be considering writing another Lenten devotional. My response back to him was, “Is this a nudge?” To which he replied, “No, not a nudge. Just a direct invitation!!!”

Anyone who knows Fr. Jerry well also knows that such an ‘invitation’ is more a request to service, than an invitation to a project—and who can say no to Fr. Jerry? In fairness, though, Fr. Jerry did not come inquiring of a project without a few thoughts in mind.

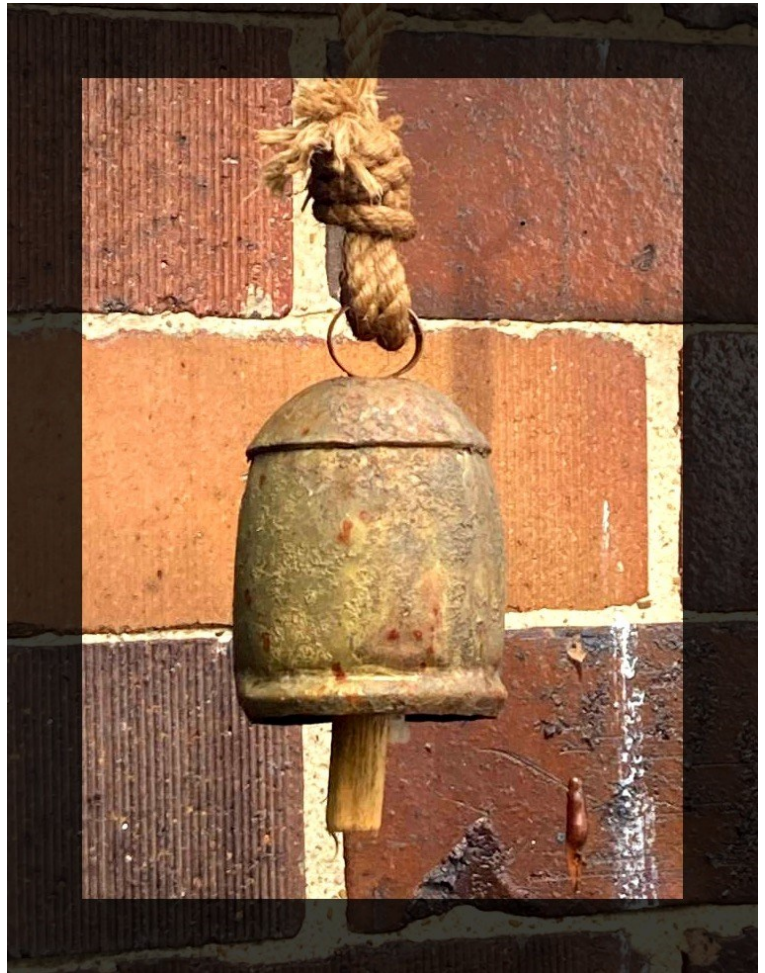
What follows on these pages is an expansion of Fr. Jerry’s intended Lenten series for this year regarding the attributes of the early Christian church in the days after Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.42. Fr. Jerry will be exploring the ‘Call to Mis-

sion’ from this text, while I will use the 40 days of Lent, not including Sundays, to flesh out our shared Christian ‘Beginnings’ and where Jesus is leading us from here.

As a bell, such as the one Fr. Jerry photographed here, rings in the movement of the wind, summoning the faithful to hear, to listen and to gather, so the Word of God calls us each day by the Spirit to be attentive to what the Still Speaking God has to say of the pilgrimage of life on this planet. The Maker tends to the Created, the Savior comes for the Beloved, the Spirit births Transformation in the community known to us as humanity—and we are requested to be ready and in attendance at the Wedding. Much as the early Christian Church took seriously their Baptismal identity and responsibility to others, so we in the current age are challenged to make this walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, not for the sake of reaching a goal as much as for discovering again and again and again, who and Whose we are and what such a reality demands of us.

You are invited to read this devotional one day at a time or over and over again, as it proves helpful to you. Pray for discernment as you read, silence your cell phone and other electronic devices, and give your fullest of attention to how God speaks to you, how the Spirit blows through your life, and how the Christ of our faith beckons you to follow, where you are and as you are. God created you to be the gift you are, let this be your Beginning.

May the disquieting and challenging Peace of the Spirit be with you on the journey.



Ash Wednesday, Day 1 of Lent

As Peter concluded speaking to the crowds in the Presence of the Spirit on that Pentecost Sunday, the crowds became deeply troubled and asked what they should do.

“Peter replied, “Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 2.38

Change. Few among us enjoy the thought of change, even fewer embrace the notion that such change can or should happen in us personally. The polarization of the political system in the United States and much of our world emphasizes that fact: ‘You either believe and act like me or you are wrong.’ There is nothing ‘woke’ about any of it, from either side.

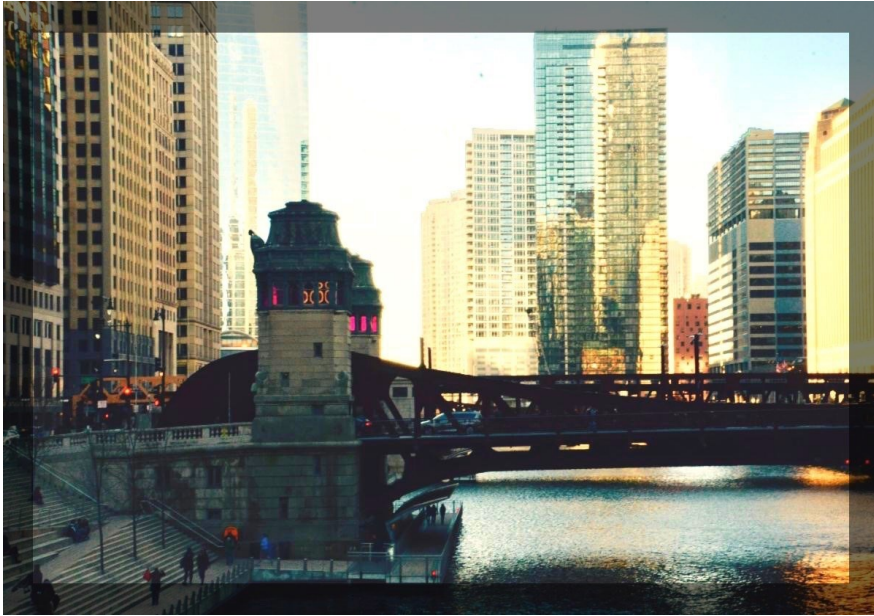
Yet, Ash Wednesday is all about change. Change your hearts. Change your lives. It is not about changing for the sake of change, but change for the sake of taking in, taking on, the Body of Christ in all which is the human experience.

The ashes signify the humility of making such a confession of brokenness, of recognizing human frailty, of stepping into a place where faith in God matters more than certainty of personal convictions. Change, from contentment with business as usual to the Gospel absurdity of caring more for others. Change, from destined to receive your own inheritance to preparing to share God’s goodness with others. Change, from centered on self to reaching out in Communion with others. Change, from holders of the law to receivers and vessels of grace. Change—and . . . be Baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your certainty, contentment, personal destiny, self-centeredness, lawlessness and dis-ease in what you are doing, that you might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Be Baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to shed the layers of distorted religious shaping and take on the Freedom of the Spirit who will teach you all things. Be Baptized—allowing the Waters of Baptism to wash away the

ashes of accumulated sin and separation. Be Baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, so the Divinity which is intimately inherent in you from beginning to Beginning can shine forth in the gathered community, for the welfare of all.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for Your Baptism into a new Beginning.





Thursday, Day 2 of Lent

“This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God invites.” Acts 2.39

Everybody. Ev-ery-bod-y.

Think on this today. Pray on this in the dawning of each new day. Everybody—is welcome.

Everybody is welcome, not because some law states it, some judge rules it, or some religious authority confirms it . . .

Everybody is welcome, not because of the color of their skin, their ethnicity, their nationality, their sexuality, their religious preference or their political affliction . . .

Everybody is welcome, not because they have an ‘in’ by genetics, not because they could afford a ticket, not because they ‘knew somebody who knows somebody’, and not because they have a particular vocational necessity . . .

Everybody is welcome—because God says so. God says so.

Try that on the next time you, or someone you know, makes an off-handed condescending remark about the homeless man laying in the gutter—because he is welcome, even down on his luck, addicted, hopelessly unable to maintain a job or mentally unstable. God names him as welcome.

Consider that in the moment you find yourself wondering who the person or family is who walks in the door of your worship home and does not have what you consider to be the ‘right’ clothes on or the right spirit about them. As unlaundered as the air may be about them or as disheveled a way as they may have, they are welcome.

Meditate on that when you watch the news and take exception with people from other lands who do not look like you, act like you or make a living as you. Can you see them as human rather than other? As a sister or brother, rather than an enemy? As a part of your family, rather than a stranger? They are welcome, too.

Everybody is welcome—because God says so.

True, that does not mean everybody will choose to receive the gift—or even consider walking the way with you, but their choice does not limit your choosing. If you are welcome in God’s eyes, then everybody is welcome. If everybody is not welcome, then why should you be welcome? In the end, it is all about God’s choices—and our response.

Prayer: Thank you, God, that You welcome everybody. Thank You that ‘everybody’ includes even me. Help me, God, to embrace this new Beginning with everybody I meet along life’s winding way, extending to them Your invitation, as You invited me. Amen.

Friday, Day 3 of Lent

“With many other words Peter testified to them and encouraged them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Acts 2.40

One of my favorite all-time hymns is “I’ll Fly Away”, written by Albert Brumley. Whenever my childhood family gathered around the piano or organ, both of which my Mother played, we would sing this hymn, harmonizing to the best of our abil-

ity and forever trying to outdo one another in inserting the echo lines throughout the hymn. “Just a few more weary days and then, I’ll fly away, to a land where joy shall never end, I’ll fly away”, is the second stanza. Just a few more weary days . . .

More than anything else about this hymn, the image of flying away from all the troubles of life always intrigued me. Were it only that easy. The adult version of me now has a better understanding of what the words of the oft-repeated refrain truly mean, but the child version of me—I dreamed of flight above the moon, beyond the fray, to a land where joy shall never end. A land where big brothers do not pick on you and little brothers do not bother you. A land where parents truly appreciate the gifts you have and do not expect you to work for more. A land where people get along, respecting each other and helping each other. A land—well, you get it, a land of a little boy’s imagination.

Albert Brumley, who wrote the lyrics to this hymn as he first imagined them while he picked cotton in the South, would have either cringed or laughed at me yet, ultimately, are we all not hoping on hope for the little child version of this hymn? Is this not another version of what Peter advocates when he says, “Be saved from this perverse generation”? Is there not something in everyone of us who believes there is something *more* in life than the current struggle?

“Change your hearts and lives . . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ . . . receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” God gives you flight in the fray, not away from the chaos, but through its very core. God lifts you in Peace, God transforms you in Faith, and God perseveres in you through the Spirit. “Be saved . . .” is not for tomorrow, but today. “Be saved . . .” is not for another time, but for now. “Be saved . . .” is not a bubble wrap of protection, but a Cross of salvation.

Take flight in the Joy which is yours to experience today, if only you dare to receive the gift. Thank you, Albert Brumley, for giving a little boy language and song to claim the Grace.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the witness of Peter, the songs of Albert Brumley, and the mission of your Church, inviting us each day to take flight in Your new Beginning. Amen.



Saturday, Day 4 of Lent

“Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day. Acts 2.41

Tell me, is it the bee which pollinates the flower? Or God, using the bee?

Is it we who make a witness in the world? Or God, at work within us?

Sometimes, despite us?

Even the author of Acts has to stand back and ponder on this question. Was it Peter’s message which brought people to Baptism that day? Or God at work in Peter? The tension of that thought resonates through the ages as we, today, again read the text.

Who is the Catalyst? Who is being put into motion?

Who is the Originator? Who is the created?

It is a little acknowledged human foible that individuals have a deep seated need to take credit for something, anything, to prove their worth and claim their place in history. Regardless the simplicity of the act, the lowliness of the job, someone has to do it and will, inevitably take credit for it, especially when what is done proves mightily worthy on some grander scale. Does the bee take credit for the beauty of the blossom? Does the butterfly wait for the cameras before flitting about from plant to plant? Does the farmer wait for a reporter to

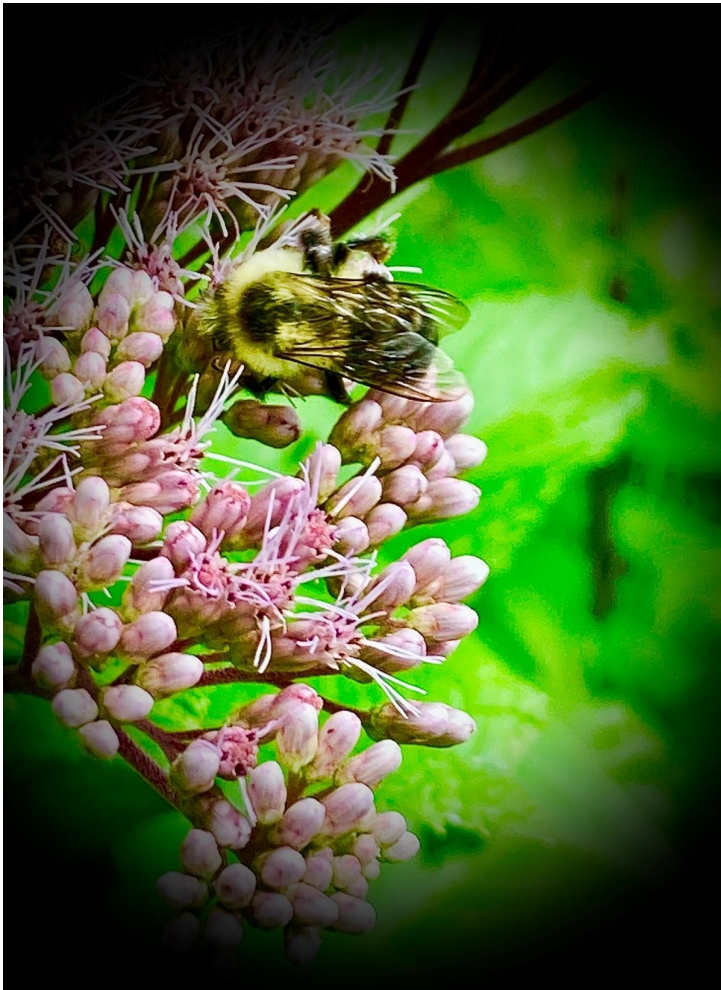
track her work before starting with the planter? Does Jesus wait for the paparazzi to cleanse the lepers, give sight to the blind or to carry a cross?

Is it truly Peter’s witness which brings 3,000 people to Baptism that day? Or God’s Spirit at work in Peter which causes the people who are present to *hear* and *believe*?

The season of Lent is for receiving the gifts of God and living into them, as each has ability and calling. *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God, is rooted in humanity’s ultimate willingness to lay down their own ways to take up the Divinity within them, then to make their witness to the Good News of God in Jesus, as did Peter.

Join the humble bee, the servant Peter and the loving Christ in extending God’s care to others in this season.

Prayer: Lord God, allow Your new Beginning to live in me, to Your Glory. Amen.



The First Sunday in Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching . . .” Acts 2.42

On the Sabbath day, people of faith are encouraged to gather together, tend to one another, share the Word of God, receive of God’s Goodness and, in Christ, strive to become that eucharistic community envisioned by the Spirit in those first days after Pentecost. It is as simple as that.

We are the ones who make it difficult. We are the ones who nuance our responses and choices. We are the ones who boldly bargain how our days will be spent, our hours encumbered or freed. We are the ones who negotiate our personal and spiritual investments. We are the ones who put up the walls to separate Light from dark, Will from willingness and Love from hate.

Still, there God stands right behind

us, never leaving, forever tending, watching without forcing. There God is, in the midst of the apostles as they teach, opening ears of those who want to hear, softening hearts of those who long to love, and shaping the souls of those who dare to believe.

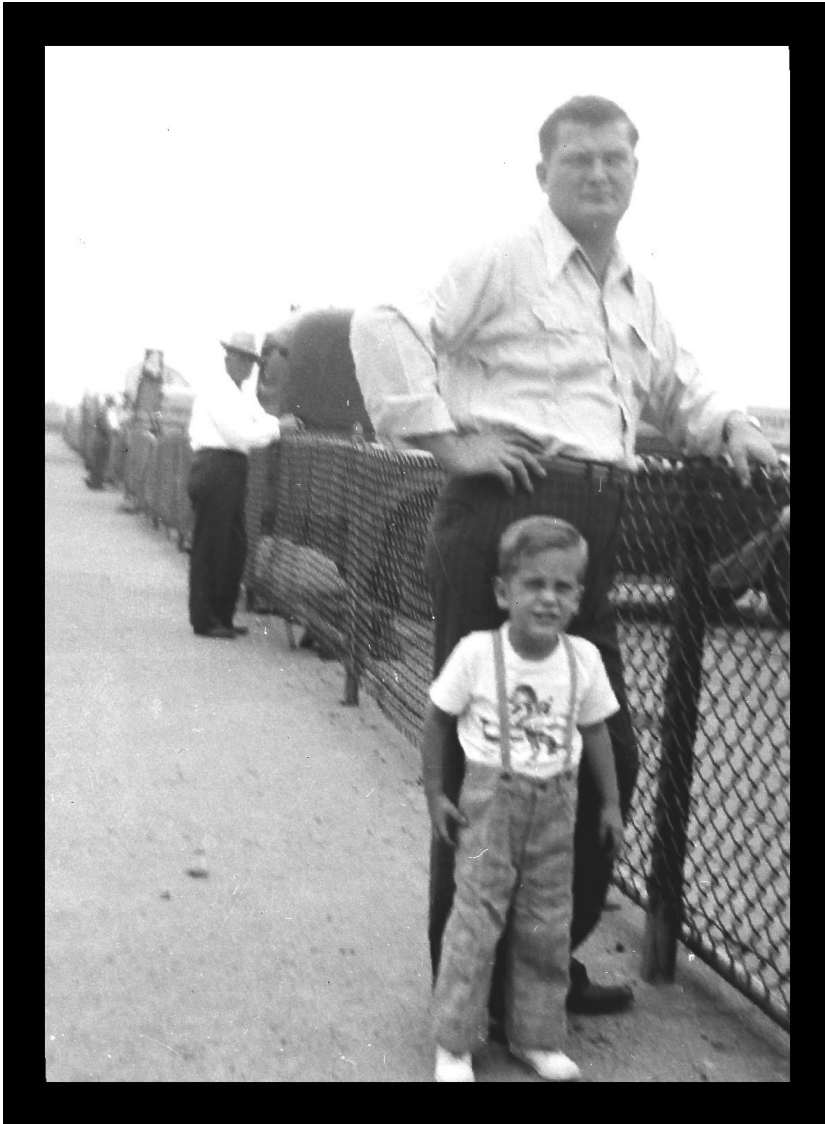
There God is, in every word spoken, in each story of Jesus told, in the audacity of deliberate hospitality to the marginalized, the forgotten, the child, the orphan, the widow and the enslaved. There God is, justice being expressed, mercy blooming wildly, grace recklessly spilling over in every gesture. There God is . . . Easter in the midst of Lent, Life emerging from death, and Hope overcoming despair. There God is, wherever two or three gather in Christ’s Name.

Of such as this is Sabbath. Do you feel it?

In such as this is Sabbath. Have you received it?

For such as this is Sabbath. Are you living it?

Prayer: Lord of the Sabbath, in me forever, may my every Beginning be for You. Allow this and all my days to be spent in service of Your Will and Way. Amen.



Monday, Day 5 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. . .” Acts 2.42

What do you suppose the first of all Jesus’ apostles, Mary, taught to those who were coming to the faith? The patriarchal telling of the early church history silences Mary’s voice, as though her departure from the cross and empty tomb were enough. Yet, what of this strong and confident woman of God who dared to believe Gabriel, who was visited by angels and held Divinity in her hands? What of this one who pondered all things in her heart and dared Rome to challenge her place in history, even as she stood at the foot of the cross which held her Son, God’s Son?

What of her teachings concerning changing water into wine, casting demons out of those possessed, healing those with withered limbs, standing with the Samaritan woman at the well, or calling Zacchaeus down from the tree? What did Mary say to them about the betrayal by Judas, the denials of Peter, the shouting of ‘Crucify him!’ by the crowd, or Pontius Pilate washing his hands of guilt? How did Mary describe to believers the sound of nails tearing through the hands and feet of her Baby or the awful thud of the cross as it was lifted up with Him on it then dropped into the ground? What words would convey in compassionate terms the hell which was on display on Jesus’ body after the beatings? Or as He carried His cross along the Via Dolorosa of our demanding?

How can a Mother speak of Hope in the face of grief, Peace in the moments of waiting, and Joy in the dawning of an empty tomb? Why was her voice silenced by the very text which she agonizingly birthed in Jesus? Only the authors know, but this I believe: Mary was among those who taught the new believers—and their Beginning was rooted in her witness, the telling of the Child’s Story, as only a Mother who lived it can relate it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Son of Mary and my Savior, may my Lenten Beginning be found in your Story as told by Mary, Your Mother and my sister in faith. Amen.



Tuesday, Day 6 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. . .” Acts 2.42

There is nothing quite like sharing stories with fishermen, you just never know what you can believe. How big was that fish? What time of the day did you catch it? How many fish did you catch with that lure? Was that crappie really as heavy as you claimed it to be? Who was with you that could confirm your claims?

You said Jesus told you on which side of the boat to cast your nets? That Jesus was able to feed five thousand people with only two fish and five loaves? How big were those fish? Do you really expect us to believe that Jesus was able to walk on the waters, while you all shrank in fear of the storm that seemed ready to swamp you and your boat? And, that the resurrected Jesus had fish ready for you to eat on the shoreline of your fear and grief, while Peter, John and the others hauled the nets full of fish out of the waters?

It all seems a bit fishy—until one after another of the apostles tell the same stories, the same way, with a Passion which seems beyond them.

What is the Spirit trying to convey to the early Christian church in entrusting fishermen with such a precious catch? How do we hear those same fishermen today?

Could it be that the gift of the Gospel is as much in the accessibility of the tellers of the Story as it is in the Story being told?

Might we be making a mistake today in drowning the gift of the Spirit’s Vision with our own insatiable need to give every story order? And make every Story teller believable?

Is it possible that we remove the need for faith in the One who makes the oddballs-out to become Fishers-of-humanity when we sterilize their backgrounds and bearing, while substituting in liturgy, law and qualification?

Do we miss the opportunity for awe in what God is doing when we insert our own necessity for a manageable story, rather than bow humbly before a God who can make fishermen truly believable in telling an unwieldy Truth?

Prayer: Elohim, God of Holiness, may our Beginning this day be as believable as the Fisherman You sent. Amen.



Wednesday, Day 7 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching . . .” Acts 2.42

Now! Immediately! Without delay! Urgent!

The life of many in this culture is one of instant gratification and immediacy. Telephone calls with prolonged personal conversations is yesterday’s communication link. Today people Text, Instagram, Snapchat, Zoom, Videoconference, LinkedIn, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, Dropbox, Google, Messenger, and Facebook each other, just to name a few and, when they are in a bind, sometimes they will actually use their cell phones to place a call.

Every point of contact is an expectation of response, preferably within the next couple of nanoseconds. Have you closely watched a teenager’s hands on their cellphone as they communicate with someone? The speed at which words and symbols become the new age hieroglyphics of attention demanders is blinding—and some of the words or abbreviations are deafening. There is little time left for thought, puzzlement or pondering when living on the edge of highspeed articulation, which makes me wonder how Jesus does what He does in this age.

What would the 21st century Pentecost community look like in the days after the Spirit blew through the apostle’s hiding place? I am not sure it is fully describable by folks above a certain age—like me yet, on the other hand, maybe I am not giving the Spirit enough credit. There are just some things which have to be taken in, digested, wrestled with, mulled upon, given perspective, and owned or dismissed. Much like maple syrup flowing from a tree, regardless of the century, passing on the Story from one generation of believers to the next demands time, space, heart and soul.

The Holy Spirit of God taps into the inner desires of those most hungry, most thirsting, most in need, most marginalized, granting them a blessing of listening deeply and receiving of the



sweetness of God’s Wonders. The delicious nectar of the Gospel is then poured out, for one and all, to experience in Word and deed in such a manner which befits the believer’s soul. It is . . . a miracle of God. Prayer: Adonai, fill my Beginnings with the strong sweetness of time well spent with and in You. Amen.

Thursday, Day 8 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching . . .” Acts 2.42

Dad always told us boys to stop working in the field with enough time to make it to the shed with the equipment before the rain started. Sometimes we just were not very good judges of how fast the weather front was coming in—and sometimes we just tried to get one more round in on the field. Regardless, everyone of us got wet, more than once, pushing our luck too far—

and every time Dad just shook his head—mainly because he had gotten wet, too.

Rain seldom hurts you, but the storm around it can prove difficult. High winds, hail and lightning can change the nature of a simple Spring rain in an instant, so carefully watching the weather as you perform farming operations, whether tilling, planting, baling or harvesting, is crucial. Granted, today’s technology allows farmers to see the incoming weather more clearly than ever yet, from what I have seen, farmers are still getting wet before making it to the shed.

There is a huge difference between knowing what you are supposed to do and doing what you know needs to be done. Just ask Jesus.

Jesus knew the leaders of the religious community would not take what He was doing lightly, He probably knew they would find a way to silence Him. Still, He kept making rounds in the field. Still, He kept teaching the crowds and answering the questions of the Pharisees. Still, He kept healing on the Sabbath and spending time with sinners. Still, He kept giving His time to the needs of women in the community, going so far as to sit at the well in conversation with a Samaritan woman who, in today’s parlance, knew a lot of men. Still, He cleansed the lepers and gave of His heart to the marginalized.

Teaching those who were coming to Baptism about the life of Jesus is more than just telling the Story, it is about preparing them for the storms which are coming—and having them ready to stay in the fields anyway. The harvest is ready, the laborers few. . .

Prayer: El Shaddai, come, take away my fear of human storms and root my faith in Your new Beginning, whose Name is Jesus. May every round in the field of my life be for You. Amen.



Friday, Day 9 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching . . .” Acts 2.42

Who teaches the seagull to fly? Or instills an understanding of both, the ocean and flight in its mind? How is it a gull learns to tap its wings on the surface of the water to stir up a particular fish? Why are gulls monogamous, often mating for life in the same region of the world? Who instructs the gull about the meanings of certain cries from other gulls? And how to watch out for other animals which might prey upon its young?



When one stands back and considers the broader perspective concerning gulls—or seagulls, as some would call them—it is not a large leap to then consider other species in much the same way. Who teaches the young giraffe which tree tops taste best? Or the young anteater how to find the best anthills? What makes a mockingbird mock others? Or geese to fly in V-formations? What wonder is it that causes a cow to turn towards the wind in a storm, yet stand perpendicular to the sun to warm its’ flanks in the morning?

The environment in which we are nurtured in our youngest days is often the strongest source of life’s wisdom and skill as we age. Human or animal, plant or fish, we all begin absorbing essential life-giving information from the day we are birthed, hatched, emerge from the ground or in some other fashion appear. The inherent consequence of ‘being’ is that we are created to be learners, reflections of our Creator, each generation evolving to a higher level of understanding than the last, yet also each not nearly capable of being complete in and of itself. An awesome and intricate thought, to say the least, and a troubling and frightful consideration, to put it mildly, especially when one ponders . . .

Who taught the religious leaders to condemn Jesus? Who taught the Romans to crucify? Who taught the heart to seek pieces of silver? And, who taught the crowds to desire blood? The lessons God taught the infant Israel in the wilderness were about trusting God for all things, worshipping God in all ways and serving God and others in every day. Jesus expands those teachings and calls the disciples to follow Him on the way to learn from Him.

Now, they instruct the next generation—and the one after that. So, what have you learned?

Prayer: Lord, may Your word of Love instruct most powerfully in my Beginning again. Amen.

Saturday, Day 10 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching . . .” Acts 2.42

At the Beginning of this new day in the history of the faith community, it is profoundly important for the Church of Jesus Christ to own its place as steward of God’s goodness, celebrating in its identity the essential mission of instructing others regarding the Story of God’s ongoing history and putting into practice all that Jesus has shown us. We are not the owners of creation, neither is the Body of Christ ours to negotiate on God’s behalf. Our call and place today, as it was in those first formative days after Pentecost, is to prepare the congregation of believers to witness and serve in the power of God’s Holy Spirit, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide the life and work of the Church as best serves the Will of God.

Much as the farmer in the field, such a mission is never complete, requiring our constant attention, year after year, season after season, that the harvest of the Landowner be given its best opportunity to flourish. As the farmer does not control either the sun or the rain, the light of the days or the dark of the night, neither does the Church hold control over what God chooses to do in granting the growth of Wisdom and Knowledge in the heart of those who fear God. Ours is to do our best in tilling the ground, preparing the seed bed for planting, for planting the very best our generation has to offer in the Spirit, and to faithfully tend to the tender plants as they grow. Ours is to offer of ourselves the depth of our experience in living out the commands of God through Christ in loving God and neighbor, without respect to which field it is we are in—or which fields it is from which others come. Ours is to demonstrate in acts of kindness and mercy the lessons which cannot be written in a book and to trust in the Authority of God to make the most of the weather conditions around us and the crop yields which come after us.

Ours is not to write the final chapter of God’s Word, but we are blessed to offer our voices in praising God in this day, in this moment, in this gift of a new Beginning. The Holy Spirit will not let us alone and the Love of Christ will see us through, forever.

Prayer: Lord, plant us in You that we might grow in Wonder and bring You delight in every Beginning.

Amen.



Second Sunday in Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to the community. . .” Acts 2.42



Sabbath arrives with the humility and compassion of One who takes on the dissonance of the world and transforms the original Composition with a Divine Harmony established in Faith, Hope and Love. What is revealed by an orchestra of Angelic Voices is a Triumphant Victory, set upon the most unusual of stages, an empty tomb.

In Faith He clarified the key by which humanity is called to live. In Hope He took on the darkness of twisted plots and brought to Light the Vision of Eternal Melodies. In Love He sets before creation the resounding Peace of Life that is beyond the grip of those who would distort Goodness with personal interest.

In this Sabbath the family of Christ is called to gather as community, daring to publicly embrace a radically differ-

ent ethic of valuing others along the journey. The family of the Risen Christ boldly reaches beyond the length of their arms to receive the embrace of One who lifts them up before they knew they were down, who dries their tears before they thought to weep, and who gathers them in before they perceived they were lost.

On this Sabbath day, as on that first Pentecost day not so long before us, the Body of Christ is summoned together, bone to bone, sinew to sinew, breath to breath and life to life, to become united and uniting, purposeful and purpose-filled, including and inclusive, sighted and seeing, hearing and listening, healing and making whole—a Vision of the Spirit none before have observed and those who come after will strive to emulate. On this Sabbath we are at God’s Beginning for us, taking on God’s Composition in us, and endeavoring for God’s Divinity through us, a Song of Joy unto the nations, and the Identity only possible by the Son and the Spirit. Do not miss this moment on your Lenten journey.

Prayer: Sabbath God of Righteous Beginnings, bring us into your Vision and Purpose, this day and forevermore. Amen.

Monday, Day 11 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to the community . . .” Acts 2.42

What is community? How is community shaped? Why does community exist?

Bear in mind, in the days of Jesus walking this earth, the Roman soldiers considered themselves to be a community, as did those around the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, and those around the Roman leader, Caesar Augustus. Three communities, each serving a purpose, each having a place and each carrying a certain amount of authority in those by whom it was made up.

The Chief Priest and Elders were a community, too, as were the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes. The lepers and marginalized were a community, outcast as they were, not unlike the Samaritans, who were despised by the Jews and disdained by others. Even the blind, lame and unclean were a community, slung together by chance and dependent upon each other for support.

God shaped the Israelite nation into a particular community through their exodus from Egypt and forty year journey through the wilderness. It was not the land which made them a particular community, but the One they were to worship and serve in the land.

Maybe that is the problem with land, laws, office or wealth: Those with such things

presume themselves to be one level of community, while those without such things are shoved into quite another kind of community. Which only makes it more interesting the disciples Jesus called to be His community, as well as those communities where Jesus chose to spend His time, and to which communities He offered His healing and hope—and, ultimately, by which communities He was betrayed, tried, beaten and crucified . . .

This we know, the Community of God raised Jesus from the dead—and offers Life to those as good as dead. Of which community are you on this Lenten journey?

Prayer: Lord, as we continue on this Lenten journey, let me not make my Beginning in community the cross upon your shoulder. Amen.



Tuesday, Day 12 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to the community . . .”

Acts 2.42

The parallel nature of these two images tugs at the Christ within us. Either we see in these two the connective tissue of the Beloved Community the Holy

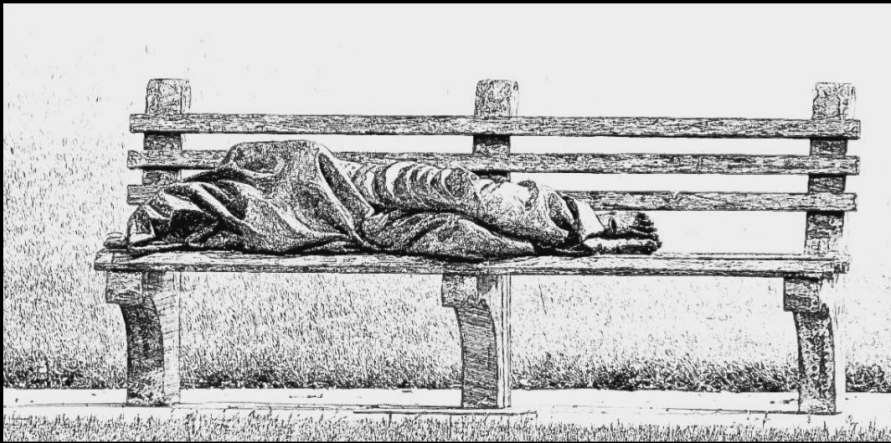
Spirit seeks to shape in and through the Body of Christ—or we opt to hold on to the dichotomy between them as a frightful and disgusting acknowledgement of our own unwillingness to dwell in the Baptismal waters of the Spirit for very long. Such scenes disturb our lofty and romantic images of any community of which we are a part, much less, the Beloved Community of Christ.

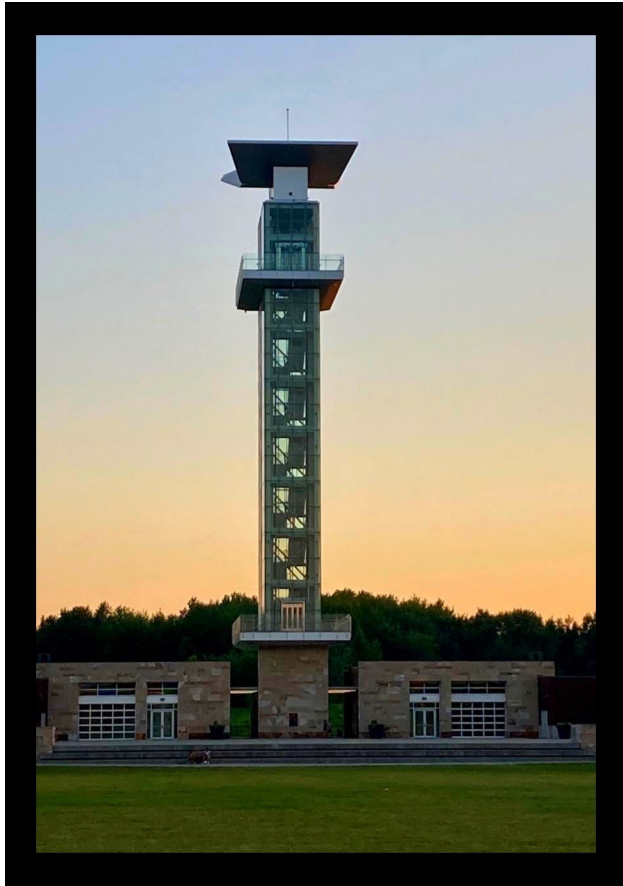
We can throw money at the homeless, give them food, a place to sleep on a cold night, even offer job training and placement, but are they an intimate part of our heart and soul? Do we see in them our own life, our own sister or brother, or own fate were circumstances different, our own Beginning were it not for the Jesus who lifts us up?

Dare we lean over their bodies as Mary leans over the Crucified Jesus? Dare we wash their wounds with the salve of our love or weep for their gruesome end from the depths of our being? Is it within us to extend beyond the steel and ceramic of statue and plaque to touch the blood of their being, to feel the flesh on their bodies becoming cold, or to sit with them as the breath of God’s life within them ceases to flow?

What is this overwhelmingly demanding community to which the believers devote themselves? And, can it be so today? With me? Only in the Spirit, only in the Spirit.

Prayer: Spirit of God, breathe into me your Love and shape my Beginning in communal service. Amen.





Wednesday, Day 13 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to the community . . .” Acts 2.42

Maybe you are a pilot or a pilot in training. Maybe you are a air traffic controller or one in training. If you are either of these—or belong to any part of the industry which depends on these two vocations to communicate with each other for your own well-being, then God bless you all.

Fact of the matter, though I have dreamed about learning to fly for about as long as I am old, I have yet to take the steps necessary to make it happen, partly because of cost and partly because of the time it takes. Yet, there I am, earth bound and in awe of all those who are not. Yours is not an easy industry to enter, but yours is an essential blessing to a world which is constantly on the move. One other thing: Yours is a language all your own, reserved for those who dare to

spend the time learning the anacronyms and utilizing the necessary training to maximize every transmission, from aircraft to tower, from tower to aircraft, and from aircraft to aircraft. It is a thing of linguistic beauty to hear on a good day—and the basis for sheer terror when things in the air or on the ground are not going well. The speed at which essential information is exchanged in a moment’s notice is unfathomable to the novice—and becomes even more so when heightened by the extension of the language into space travel. I find myself just shaking my head in admiration. “Godspeed, John Glenn.” Three simple words, so much spoken.

So it is in the Beloved community of the believers—which is both good and bad. The language of commonly held understandings and stories in any particular community is to be expected and honored. Yet, when that language is perceived to be both, a wall to keep others out and a measure of how much one knows before becoming accepted, well, I wonder what Jesus would have to say about that in the faith community. When the Spirit inspires the new believers to focus on community, it is not for the sake of keeping potential believers out but, rather, for extending the circle of believers to the fullest extent possible.

Such is the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, far beyond the limitations of the established faith community of the time. How does that gift of community live in you for the sake of others? I pray no one crashes on my account trying to find the way Home in what I say.

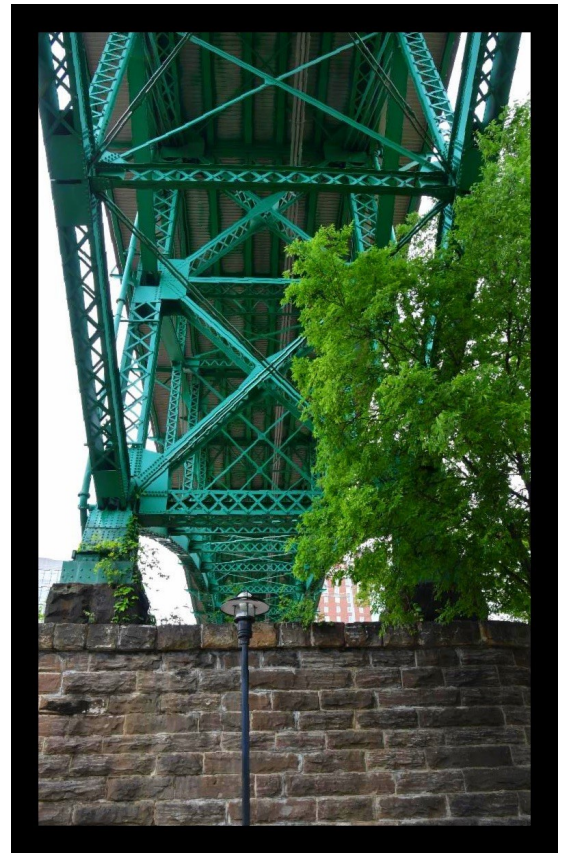
Prayer: “Jesus, Savior, pilot me . . .” Speak in tones we can all understand and believe, that our journey Home be on time and on your Course and Keeping. Amen.

Thursday, Day 14 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to the community . . .” Acts 2.42

Nearly anywhere one goes these days, you will find it necessary to cross some sort of bridge, whether it is a simple culvert in a ditch along the road or a majestic concrete and iron structure spanning the widest streams, rivers or even parts of oceans. Somewhere, someone stood or commuted along the path you are on and paused for a moment to imagine how others who come after them might more easily cross the chasm of the immediate challenge. Someone saw an answer to a problem, an engineering response to a question or a dream beyond the speculation. Someone dared to speak, to risk putting pencil to paper, investing savings in capital projects, or leading the way from one side of the equation to the other. Someone took the lead and was resolute in seeing it through. Someone saw the possibilities in spite of the objections and limitations.

Is it possible that the Holy Spirit of God is, in fact, the Great Engineer of the Beloved Community? That in the gift of Pentecost, through Peter's witness and the Spirit's energetic imagination, the chasm between the limitations of day-in, day-out human negotiations and what we are birthed to become in Baptism is bridged in the lives of those who come together to form a new community of faith? Could it be that the wood planks and beams of the first bridges, as well as the concrete and steel of more modern bridges, were resolutely set by the Hands of the Spirit in the attention given by disciples in being together when everyone and everything else seemed determined to tear them asunder? Might it be reasonable to believe God's



Capital Investment in you and me through the Christ was the price required to bring us Home? Think on that the next time you cross the bridge of a river—or a new understanding. The Spirit is at work, still.

Prayer: Engineering God, Spirit of Construction, may Your Beginnings in us guide our steps on this journey across every chasm, making us one in You, for all the world to see. Amen.

Friday, Day 15 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to the community . . .” Acts 2.42

Yes, Canadian geese can be messy. Most communities are. You have to be careful where you step among them.

There are the bossy ones, the biting ones, the ones who eat before asking if there is enough, those who lay down to rest before the work is over, those who honk their alarms at every perceived threat, those who never volunteer to do anything, those who turn down every chance to make a difference, and those who, no matter what, will get every project done, provide leadership even when the flock hisses and cackles about it, and also fly lead on the V-formations making it easier for those who are not yet prepared to offer their strength. Say what you will about Canadian geese, they can be messy—but they are also loyal to the flock and to each other.

Canadian geese are known for their monogamy, even killed for it. Hunters who drop one goose will watch to see if the mate swings back around to see where the other fell. It is humbling to observe, whether they are feeding in a snowy field, swimming across a lake, tending to their young in the Spring and Summer of the year, or making their Fall and Winter migration flights, Canadian geese are remarkable reflections of the human spirit—or is it visa versa? Their attention to protecting the flock does not keep them from welcoming in strangers, but those who join an existing flock know they must earn their place and defend the others diligently.

The community of the believers in those first days had many lessons to learn, they perhaps had more to learn than the apostles had to teach them, still they practiced devotion to gathering, devotion to each other, and devotion to becoming that which the Spirit already knew them to be: Beloved. That does not mean the community is not without its messiness and challenges, but it does mean God has not given up on us—an neither should we. There is more to be revealed in this Beginning.

Prayer: Abba, God, guard our flock under Your wings and shape us in Christ. Amen.





Saturday, Day 16 of Lent

"The believers devoted themselves
... to the community . . ." Acts 2.42

Across the valley a shofar sounds and the people begin gathering. In another direction, in another place, a shofar sounds and a particular memory is restored and folk begin their journey to home. Outside the door of the worship center the shofar sounds and the community is given direction, a sense of purpose, and recognize the only acceptable answer to the shofar's call is to come together as God's community, lifting voice in praise and offering self for service. Community.

God's Beloved Community.

Birthing in the Spirit, sustained by a Word, sent in Mission for the Ministry to which it is called, God's Beloved Community takes on the Life of Christ Jesus in all that it is and seeks to become. God's Beloved Community is

pliable in the Hands of the Creator, responsive to the Commission of Jesus and given authority and direction in the Winds of the Spirit.

God's Beloved Community is not unto itself, for if it were it would not be God's. To exist for *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God, is to exist for God. It is that simple—and that difficult. It requires hearing the shofar and knowing by Whom you are being called. It requires living in the world, while not becoming a part of the world. It requires gathering for the sake of the Communion being the Beloved Community offers, as a unique identity and for a common call. It requires all of us, all the time.

Those first believers in the moments and days after Pentecost were, perhaps, the most fortunate of all, for what they did was pure, unique and new, lacking the precepts of institutionalization and full of Hope and Delight in a time of despair and sorrow. In this Lenten season we are called once again to respond to the shofar's call, to gather at the Spirit's command and to live the Baptism we claim, that we may be God's Beloved Community.

Prayer: Summoning, Calling, Invoking God, gather us in this new Beginning as Your Beloved Community that Your Name would be praised, on earth as in Heaven. Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to their shared meals . . .” Acts 2.42

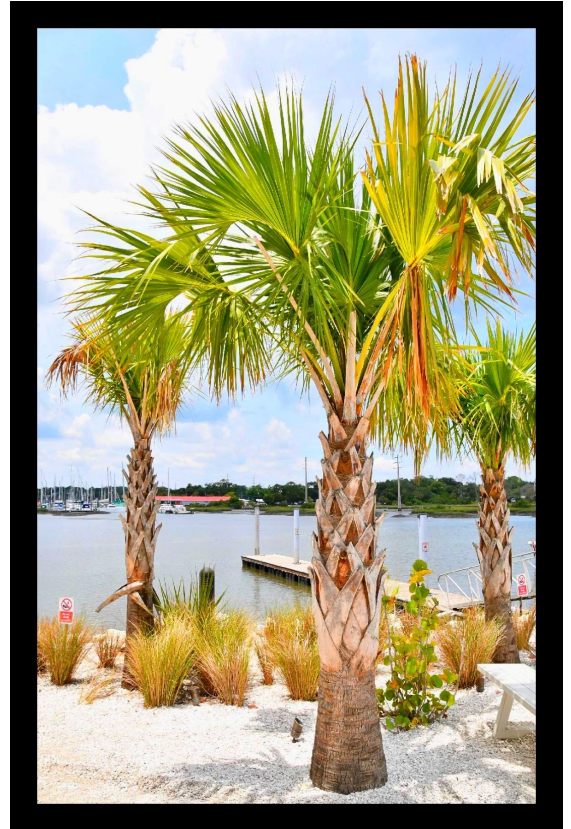
Sabbath gatherings, regardless the tradition or day, must include food. As it is written in the unpublished worship book of the Unreformed Common Everyday Church, “Thou shalt not gather, nor shalt thou worship, in the absence of food to sustain thy body and thy strength. Thou shalt, at each meal, share thy substance with those about thee that they, too, findeth security in thine offered culinary fellowship.” (Reference Chapter 2, under ‘Green Fluffy Jello Salads and Other Such Biblical Delights’)

Tongue-in-cheek as this may be, you know this to be true, too, don’t you?

Pastors, Priests and other Worship Leaders do their best to create a profound and powerful worship experience in the Sanctuary, motivating the believer to action and inviting the stranger to be at home in the gift of broken bread, table stories and children’s laughter. Then, at the end of the day, the well-meaning parishioner will shake their hand, thank them for a delicious lunch, and remark what a memorable time it was to be the Church in the fellowship hall. Sigh . . . Been there, done that, was given the tee-shirt and seldom wear it.

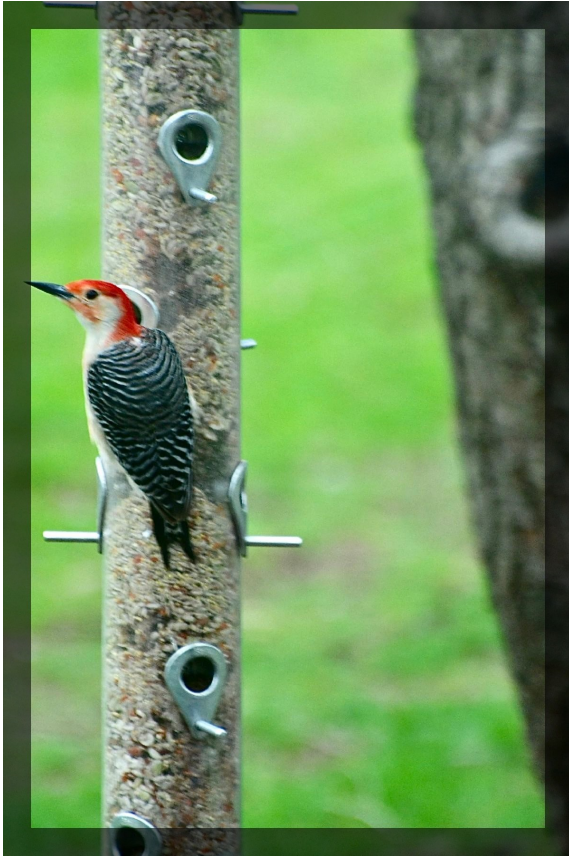
Bottom line, as palm trees on the beach and pine trees in the snow are both trees in God’s creation in need of nurture and care so, too, are faith communities of every type and temperament all made up of human beings in need of God’s nurture and care. Just like the trees, human beings may be of vastly divergent settings and far different shapes and beliefs, but all of us, all of us, are God’s people—and food, God’s Food, however it is shared, is what fills our souls to overflowing. Jesus knew this as, time after time, He sat down at table with saint and sinner alike, there teaching them how to be the Beloved Community God intends for us all. You know it, too.

Prayer: Creator God, do not allow ice or beach, faith tradition or past experiences, to blur our shared need to be fed by You on this Sabbath. Amen.



Monday, Day 17 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to their shared meals. . .” Acts 2.42



I am one of ‘those’ people. You know who I am talking about, one of those who feed the birds year-round with a variety of bird seeds and feeders intended to bring in large numbers of song and migratory birds who find themselves in my neighborhood whatever day it may be. The problem inherent in that, at least from my perspective, is that I find myself spending a lot of money and time feeding birds which tend to be bullies at the feeders and parasites on my goodwill. Woodpeckers, cardinals, song birds, wrens, finches and such are welcome anytime—sparrows, blackbirds and cowbirds, not so much.

It is truly a conundrum.

The early community of believers was made up of all kinds of people, from all kinds of places. “Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs . . .” (2.9-11) were all there and heard the mighty works of God in their own languages. These were among the ones who asked Peter what they must do to be saved. These were among the three thousand who came into the new community of believers that day. These were among the ones who found a place at the Table of grace, where all things were held in common and the needs of one were the needs of all. Yes, there it is, the inherent danger: When you offer to feed one, God dares to feed them all.

Prayer: Holy Feeder of all the people, use me to feed others. Amen.



Tuesday, Day 18 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to their shared meals . . .” Acts 2.42

Old grain elevators dot the rural landscape of the Midwest much as struggling small towns line the way of old railroad beds. Both are remnants of an earlier age when booming commerce was carried by the fastest means possible, by train, and towns were spaced just far enough apart for farmers to be able to bring their produce to an elevator which was built upon a main railroad line. As railroad companies expressed willingness to extend their sidings, rural commerce expanded to include saw mills, factories and mines. Then, when highways improved and trucking became more popular, along with upgraded transport on our nations waterways and through the air, the railroads chose to run, first, fewer trains, then to close some rail lines altogether, leaving grain elevators built for rail commerce languishing and towns built on rail transportation dying. Sometimes, just sometimes, our investment in one way of being limits us in considering other ways to be or live, rail line grain elevators and small towns along now non-existent rails among them.



The new faith community being formed in confession, forgiveness, Baptism and unity was committed to living in the way of the Christ in whose Name they were Baptized, before ever there was such a thing as a formal 'Church'. An essential mark of this fledging community was open table fellowship, where everyone had a place. If you have not been hungry and had nothing to eat, if you have not been hungry and been turned away from a table overflowing with food, and, in being turned away, if you have not walked away more sullen, sad and confused than hungry—then you will not understand how absolutely out of the ordinary these first moments of the Beloved community are. In a place of privilege, these were the underprivileged; In a place of power, these were the powerless; and, in a place of plenty enough, these were the ones without anything—and the mark of God's new community among them was the privilege of sharing the power of food, that all might live into everything God intends. There is an innocent beauty to behold in Life before laws and Faith become the institution. Such Life and Faith as this will never disappear, for it will inevitably, irrevocably arise again and again out of the many deaths we cause it in our need for privilege, power and enough. Just ask these new ones in the faith.

Prayer: God of New Beginnings, show me the way of plenty enough for all, that Your Will would endure in us all. Amen.



Wednesday, Day 19 of Lent

"The believers devoted themselves . . .
to their shared meals . . ." Acts 2.42

One of the gravest mistakes we can make, maybe even one of the worst sins we can commit against the Holy Spirit, is to believe for a second that the Church of Jesus Christ is limited by the walls of a congregation, the laws of a tradition, the beliefs of a denomi-

nation, the understanding of religious leaders or the combined wisdom of humanity throughout all the ages. God is simply not that small—and we, all of us together, are not that omniscient. God acts, moves, speaks, transforms, reforms, mitigates, uses, inspires, invokes, revokes, calls and shapes as God wills, and the most faithful thing we can do is get out of God's way. We are to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God—and be open and observant enough to be fully in awe of who God chooses to empower to do God's Will far beyond our lines of comfort and convention. God will feed and save God's people most in need, sometimes in spite of the very people who make a living in service of God's Name.

The old farmer and his wife who lived in this home and worked the soil of this farm are among those whom, I suspect, will be most honored at the Table set in the Home of God's Heart. Popes, Priests, Pastors, Theologians, those versed well in the law and those highly gifted and capable in administration, will watch as these who shared their bread with the hungry, these who gave a cup of cold water from their well to the thirsty, these who quite literally took the shirt off their back and gave it to one who was without, these who visited the sick and welcomed every stranger as friend, and these who tended to the imprisoned as sisters and brothers of their own soul, meet God face-to-face. On their earthly journey they often suffered the indignities and arrows of disdain in being outcast in their financial poverty, even while rich in their spiritual life—and God heals the wounds of God's servants. These are the images of the earliest Church at its best and most vibrant. These are the Fire and Breath of the Spirit birthing a new Beginning in the present age—and most will never notice them, though paradoxically they live right next door to every one of us. These are the scripture being Embodied.

On this day, stop your busyness, not for the sake of Lent, but for the sake of your soul. Open your eyes and see who is truly your neighbor and ask if you are the neighbor to them you are Baptized to be. Unstop your ears and listen to the cries of the children who know only the pain of your disregard, however unintentional it may be, and strive to open the Gospel to them without speaking a word. Become the Grace, Mercy and Hope of Christ for another, that you not be found hungering for that which you did not offer of yourself.

Prayer: Lord God, break down our walls of disbelief and create in us Your Beginning.
Amen.

Thursday, Day 20 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their shared meals . . .” Acts 2.42

When I was a boy growing up on a dairy farm, on some of the coldest days in the Winter Dad would choose to load the chain saws, axes, and tools on the trailer, hook it to the loader tractor, then take us into the pastures which ran along the creek to cut down dead and dying trees. We did this in the Winter so the cattle would not be in our way in the pastures but, also, because this kind of work was best done in the season when we were not needed in the fields. The deep cold of the days provided the frozen ground over which we could safely travel and do our work without getting stuck, so—we boys did not really have a choice. To the pastures we went, somewhat begrudgingly because it was so cold, but we went with Dad’s encouragement in our ears to “Get that first tree down and cut up so we can start the fire and warm up!” Cold fingers and toes are excellent motivators, even today.

Yet, one of my favorite parts of this annual job was standing close to Dad when, after the fire was started, he would take the time to look carefully at the stump and help us to see the life of the tree in the rings which remained on vivid display. He taught us to see drought years, along with years of ample water; He taught us to see when the tree had specific challenges, such as insects and wind stress; and, He taught us to be grateful for life well lived, both for the tree and with those who depended on that tree for shade and protection. The rings of every tree have stories to tell, if only we pause long enough to listen . . .

Long enough to listen the way God listens to the stories the rings in our lives tell God. The rings in our lives tell God of richness and poverty, of sharing and greed, of challenges and ease, of mercy and anger, of grace and stinginess, of forgiveness and grudges, and of plenty on the table for all and of none on the table for any. God reads it all and listens to our witness. Think on that.

Prayer: Lord God, read in me the best of Your Life at work through me. Hear in the rings of my life Your Story being told, Your new Beginning rooting anew each day. Amen.



Friday, Day 21 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their shared meals . . .” Acts 2.42

I am not a Trivia Night aficionado. I am, though, the member of the trivia team who is ready and willing to bring the treats, get the drinks, eat lots of food and be a good supporter of those who are Trivia Night aficionados—just ask those who mistakenly ask me to be on their team. It would be an excellent trivia night contest if I was somehow able to provide four or five answers throughout the evening. Really. Even in the Bible categories where, most often, only the most obscure tidbits of knowledge is sought, it would be more of a fluke than a given that any correct answer would originate from the seat occupied by me. Trivia is just not my gift.

It never fails to truly amaze me how people retain that sort of information, such as that associated with the Lombardi Trophy. Named for Vince Lombardi, who passed from this earth in 1970, a new representation of this trophy is presented to the winning team of the Super Bowl each year. The first trophy, presented in 1967 to the Green Bay Packers after they defeated the Kansas City Chiefs, was called the ‘World Professional Football Championship’ trophy. The first ‘Lombardi trophy’ was presented

after Super Bowl V, which is all interesting to note to the casual observer, but is hallowed history to a true football fan. Maybe now that I have written this down for you I will remember something of it for a future trivia night, but don’t count on it.

Things I do remember are when I am asked to enter a home and sit at the kitchen table for conversation, when a cup of coffee or cold beverage is offered to drink, when cookies or bread is set on the table to share, and when I am blessed to look someone else in the eye across the table, take their hand and be thankful for their place in my life. The things I remember on the journey have more to do with human connections and the building of community, than with bodies caught up in competition. I am less inclined to remember chapters and verses of the Bible, and more inclined to never forget who was a neighbor to me, who wept with me and who wrapped my life in the Hope of the Gospel they held dear. That first community shared their meals for a good reason, they knew the new ones among them would never forget it—and they didn’t.

Prayer: Adonai, El Shaddai, Elohim, in this Beginning may we forever remember Your Name and our connection to others through You, in Jesus. Amen.





Saturday, Day 22 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their shared meals. . .”

Acts 2.42

If you sit back and close your eyes, you can almost hear the cries of gulls over the sound of the lazy lapping blue waves on the sand. If you allow yourself time and space, you can taste the salt in the air and smell the awesome mix of ocean and seaweed drifting in over the lounge chair you occupy. If you dare to take it in, you can see the distant ship on the horizon and the dolphins at play across the waves directly in

front of you. The slowly stalking pace of the heron which fishes in the shallow waters is not impeded by your dreaming, nor afraid of your waking up, for it is walking the beaches of those places you long to be and knows you will not disturb it for fear of losing your own bit of heaven in this moment.

Such is the gift of a shared meal, a bit of heaven breaks through when a sandwich is torn in two, the bowl of vegetables is passed, the soup is stretched, the dessert is cut into more pieces or the water pitcher fills additional glasses. The Spirit stretches the loaves and fishes to feed five thousand, the saints and sinners sit together as bread becomes Body and wine becomes Blood. The already, but not yet of eternity shines through where tables are extended instead of walls being built, where those who mourn have comfort embrace them, and where the joy of being part of a Beginning shines brighter than the dismay of being overshadowed by the miserly behavior of an I/me culture.

Shared meals destroy the power of apathy. Shared meals loosen the cruel fist of poverty. Shared meals bring rulers to their knees and raise the lowly from their graves. Shared meals make inclusion the norm—and exclusion the sin. Shared meals are Divinity’s sign of reconciliation with a humanity lost in its own extremes. Shared meals—are not ours to control, but Heaven’s to grant in Christ and the Spirit. Go, share, as God shares with you.

Prayer: Extravagant God, bring to my heart Your desire to share all things Good. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . .
to their prayers.” Acts 2.42

As I imagine the moment, it is Easter Sunday morning and seven year old Nolan is gathered with his friends in class between masses. His teacher greets all of them, tells them the story of the first Easter, then hands out a simple coloring sheet for each of the children to decorate as they choose. The work you see before you is Nolan’s artistry.

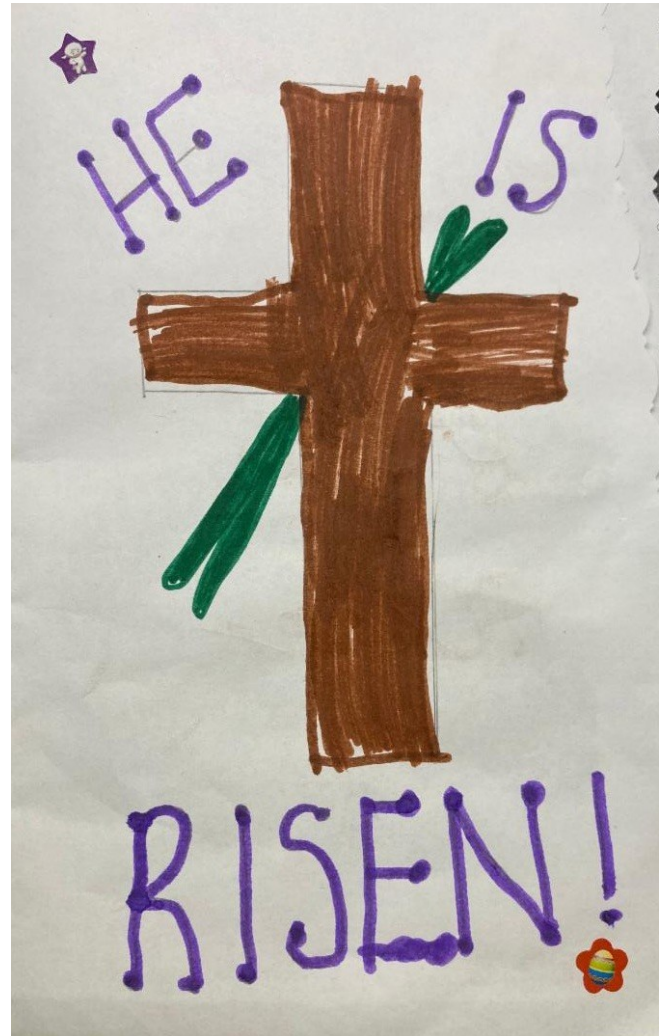
Each Sabbath in Lent is Easter, in the midst of repentance, reconciliation, renewal and recommitment. Nolan invites his classmates, teachers, family and, by extension, you and me to savor the gift of Easter, of Christ’s Resurrection. He highlights the green of Life springing from the brown of the cross’ rough hues. He offers a message of Hope and Joy in the colors of Royalty and Lordship. He centers his work on the paper, carefully following the lines of the text as they have been provided and staying within the lines of the cross as it has been drawn, that we would center the Resurrected Lord in our daily living as Jesus prescribed it. So beautiful, powerful and humbling, all at once.

If only Easter were so simple, crosses were so well drawn and the words so cleanly set, still it is Isaiah’s voice which reminds us, “. . . and a little child shall lead them.” Isaiah 11.6

The Pentecost community of believers gathered and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers: Prayers as only a child might offer; Prayers of innocent beginnings and seeker’s pleadings; Prayers—of waiting and listening for what God next will do in them: Prayers—much as a seven year old child might offer as they use colored pens to fill in what humanity left out; Prayers—of anticipation riding on the faith of a Story told over and over again, that this and every generation might come to fully know its Authority; and, Prayers—as uncomplicated as ‘Jesus loves me’ and as effortless as ‘Now I lay me down to sleep’.

Some will claim prayer to be a noun, but we are called to understand prayer as a verb, an action, like those first believers praying and a seven year old coloring an Easter picture. Let us devote ourselves to prayer and, there, find what Easter’s deepest meaning is today.

Prayer: God of Sabbath prayer and everyday answers, hear our timid, simple prayer and grant us Peace and Joy in Your new Beginning for us this day. Amen.



Monday, Day 23 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their prayers.” Acts 2. 42

You may not admit it in public, nor are you likely to say it in a confessional, but you know when you saw the lights start flashing at the crossing and the barrier arm start to come down, you prayed. You prayed to make it across before the arms were fully down. You prayed that the train would slow down. You prayed that time would be suspended and you would pass safely over before others were caught at the crossing and had to wait. You prayed to be the exception—to the rules of time, space and danger. You prayed for God to understand your hurry . . .

The only reason I know you have done this is that I have also done it. At railroad crossings, at traffic intersections, at constructions zones, you name it—If there is a red light, stop sign, safety arm, or portable traffic sign involved, I have prayed to make it through before being stopped. Funny thing about such prayers, at least from where I am in life, God has a good sense of humor and an incredible sense of what is best for us and does not grant us every prayer we utter. Thanks be to God.

Sometimes, the best thing we can do is stop, then pray. Pray with gratitude the train did not hit us. Pray with resolve for the greater things in the world which truly need God’s attention. Pray with a heart for humanity and the collective challenge we are to God. Pray with a sense of relief that, at least for this moment, we are at a point where we can listen more than speak, give more than receive, and learn more than instruct. Pray, as the early believers prayed for that which they did not know how to ask. Pray, as the early believers prayed attending to a community with which they had no prior experience or expectations. Pray, as the early believers who earnestly sought insight over answer and foresight over hindsight.

If the Lenten journey is anything at all, it is a time of intentional prayer. Lent is a time for stopping at the light recognizing that God is fervently acting to save your life, rather than get in your way. Lent is a season of prayer which beseeches God to show us God’s Will, rather than our will get in God’s Way. Prayer, is where the Beginning takes root and Eternity spreads its branches. Stop and pray.

Prayer: God of Prayerful Beginnings, slow us down long enough that our prayers become life itself in You. Amen.



Tuesday, Day 24 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their prayers.” Acts 2.42

What might be the prayer of the flower pots? Ever thought of flower pots having a prayer? Of what seems inanimate speaking a language all their own? That such ‘things’ are actually ‘beings’ before God and as heard in God’s heart as either you and me? Does that seem too out-of-the-realm-of-possibility for you?

What kind of prayer might a flower in a pot whisper to God? That someone water them? That the sun shine on them? Or the earth upon their feet warm them? If God notices the lilies in the valley and cares for them, would not God also take into account the feelings of the orchid on your porch? Or the poinsettia in your worship home at Christmas?

What of the soil which surrounds us? The earth which feeds us? The land which sustains all



things? What kind of prayer does the earth speak to the Heavens? That we not become lost in our orbiting? That the land which houses humanity be treated as a home, rather than as a mine to be dug up? That the richness of nations be counted in goodness, rather than as regions occupied?

The danger of believing that the only prayers which exist are those which humanity dares to utter is that such an utterance lacks faith in a God who is so intimate that all prayers are heard. Just ask the earth, whose soil makes the clay pot. Inquire of the pot which holds the plant. Ponder the water which moistens the soil or the plant that grows in the mix. Consider that God hears even your voice—and listens, then listen. God hears the voices of all which is God’s—and are we not all God’s own?

Prayer: Attentive God, loosen my rigid faith and understanding that my Beginning in You may thrive as the plant in Your pot. Amen.

Wednesday, Day 25 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their prayers.” Acts 2.42

Did it ever cross your mind that the disciples never asked Jesus ‘where’ to pray? Only how to pray?

Jesus teaches the disciples to pray in a manner which is familiar to most in the Christian tradition as *The Lord’s Prayer*, and He told them to pray fervently, often filling His own off-moments in ministry with a quiet prayer or two. Yet, the Gospels are strangely silent as to where the best places for prayer are.

Maybe that has to do with the fact that Jesus prayed on the cross, on a mountaintop, in a garden, in the wilderness, in the Temple and with those who came to him seeking

healing, teaching or just to be seen. Jesus prayed everywhere, constantly, insistently, personally and corporately. He was seemingly never limited by geography or chronological constraints. He poured Himself out where He was, as He was—and we would do well to take a page out of His notebook.

Our prayers tend to occur before meals, when we are attending worship or church meetings, and as we go to bed or when we rise up. Some pray while driving on the road, others while farming, and still others when they are taking a test and need Divine intervention. Parents tend to spill their prayers over every boundary their children cross, whether as they go out to play when they are young, as they maneuver through the maze of ever-changing landmines in their teenage years, as they learn to drive, pick a vocation or college, move out of the house/move back into the house, find a job/lose a job, seek a mate/struggle with their mate, have children—or, as Jesus might have said it, ‘Let those with children, understand.’

Prayer has no one location, no one formula, no one person who prays better than others, save for the Lord Jesus Himself. Prayer is the community of God relating, one with the other. Got prayer this Lent?

Prayer: Thank You, God, for open access to You, all the time, everywhere. Amen.





Thursday, Day 26 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their prayers.” Acts 2.42

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” So it is we pray, in the names of the community by which we are experiencing God—the One who was, is and shall always be, world without end. Amen.

When the plates of the earth

rattle life asunder in Turkey and Syria, when tens of thousands of God’s people perish or are injured, there hundreds of thousands, even millions across the earth respond in prayerful action, the community of God becoming flesh. “In the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sustainer. Amen.”

As the people of Ukraine are pounded by an oppressor and a nation who seeks domination over land, regardless the cost or the implications, there millions, even tens of millions around the globe respond in prayerful action, the community of God becoming flesh. “In the name of Abba, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.”

When racial injustice, apartheid in any form, ethnic discrimination, sexual harassment or anti-Semitism appears in the land of the living, the laments and terrors of millions upon millions whom have already been afflicted or perished under the weight of such tyranny and persecution cry out—and from among those convicted by their own forgiveness and Baptism rises a prayer of solidarity and compassion, such as Christ bleeding upon the cross, and the God of Exodus rises up giving the Beatitudes their fullest meaning. “In the name of the Parent, the Child and the Spirit. Amen.”

When our off-hand human judgments degrade the homeless, when our need to look down on others condemns the jobless, when our desires for the best in life reduces the most vulnerable to the worst in living, when our insatiable craving for wealth and prosperity subjugate the marginalized to a life of slavery—or worse, or when our thirst for power and control decimate even the thread of hope by which others exist, then the active prayer life of the redeemed gather in and hold close, heal and restore, transform death into new ways of life, and offers a Mercy and Peace for which most in this world long. “In the name of the One Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, and the Spirit by which all life is given Breath. Amen.” So our Lenten journey continues in solidarity with our ancestors. Amen.

Prayer: Holy One, Mother and Father of all there is, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Spirit of Never-ending Light, turn our words of prayer into commitments of faith. Amen.”

Friday, Day 27 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their prayers.” Acts 2.42

With two older brothers whose examples urged me from tricycle to pedal tractor to two-wheel bicycle with training wheels, then on to riding without training wheels, growing up on our family farm was always an adventure. To keep up with my older brothers, one of whom was eight years older and the other, five years older, required me to walk the fine line of a three-ring circus high-wire or tight-rope performer: On the one hand, wherever they went and whatever they did, I wanted to be and do; and, on the other hand, wherever they were and whatever they were doing, they did not want me involved. So, I was always walking the tight-rope of existence with them, hoping on hope they would not unhook one end of the rope by telling Mom and Dad what I was doing or simply make me lose my balance by giggling the rope and causing me to go head-over-appetite into our parent’s already low expectations of me. I must admit, carrying an umbrella on the high-wire seldom helped me. It was never the fall which hurt, only the sudden stop when my parents caught me doing what I was not to be doing, even if my older brothers were already engaged in the same thing.

My parents prayed for me—constantly—mostly for God’s forgiveness.

Therein is the point, one generation teaches the next, prods the next, nurtures the next, chides the next, invites the next, challenges the next, admonishes the next, rewards the next—prays for the next. Whether it is as simple as riding a bicycle or following your brothers, whether you are reaching for the stars or are the only star in your own galaxy, whether you live in the connection of life with God or perceive yourself to be alone, much of what we learn—and some would say, all of what we learn—is passed from one to the next.



A life of prayer is no different. From the Beginning, God has invited humanity into an active conversation with God, a prayer life which spans everything we do and are, as well as everywhere we go. So, what are you teaching your siblings, your children, your grandchildren, of a life of prayer? Is it enough fun that all would want to do it? Or so complicated and boring that none would want to repeat it?

I learned to ride a bicycle because it represented to me the freedom others I looked up to already had. What of the prayers we live and speak? Pray on!

Prayer: Daring, Adventurous God, draw me into the delight of talking with You in all my moments. Amen.

Saturday, Day 28 of Lent

“The believers devoted themselves . . . to their prayers.” Acts 2.42

The story of the conversion of the Apostle Paul is a warning to each of us: None of us are as gleefully autonomous from God and others as we would imagine, even if we perceive ourselves to be righteous defenders of the faith.

Let me say that again: None of us are as gleefully autonomous from God and others as we would imagine, even if we perceive ourselves to be righteous defenders of the faith.

God will not be shut out of our daily journey, neither is God content to sit idly by or be put in a box as we run our race. The earliest of Christ’s believers in the then Jewish community did not have the written Gospels with which to confer, neither did the writings of the Apostle Paul, or the other early Christian writers, just magically appear on the shelves at the local Barnes and Nobles. What they had was the oral tradition being relayed to them by the first of the apostles which, I believe, also included the women who initially found the tomb emptied of the Body of Christ. Do not forget, the definition of an apostle is one who goes or is sent, even as a disciple is one who follows.

As with Saul, who was surprisingly called and converted for the work God intends, so it was and is with the women at the tomb and all those who come after. It takes everyone, everybody pulling together, sharing together, praying together, telling the stories together, standing with each other together, living for each other together—not for the sake of God, but for the sake of the wider community of God who, too, longs to have such an intimate and powerful conversation and relationship with the Author of Creation.

If we cannot grasp that simple notion concerning prayer and each other, how can we ever hope to understand the more complex challenges of becoming a ‘community’ of the faithful in the current age? None of us are as gleefully autonomous from God and each other as we would imagine. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Holy Adonai, thank You for Your steadfast love which claims and unites us through all the ages. In humble commitment to service we pray. Amen.



Fifth Sunday in Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.44



What are the colors of God's Covenant with humanity? Are you able to describe the richness and texture of an empty cross? Is there anything on the faith journey which surprises you with new understandings? Do you have the language to describe the salvation of your soul? How does the diversity of creation shape you? Is it possible that you and your understandings are still evolving? Where are we to go from here? What are we to do?

Sabbath is not only a time for giving thanks to God and resting, it is also time for a bit of honest pondering on the journey, whether in Lent or any other time of the year. Too often, it seems that Sabbath is something we turn on for an hour or two on a Sunday

morning, then inconsequentially turn off for the rest of the day.

What would be the implications in your life if all of the Sabbath day were to be an intentional mix of communal and personal spirituality? Could it be that, in letting go of all other plans and commitments we find more fully taking on the Presence of God to be the better portion? That in placing ourselves at Jesus' feet as He teaches and heals, as did Mary, we would come to a deeper sense of the power inherent in the unity and sharing of all things through community? The practical 'Martha side' of us silently rails against such suggestions, mainly because we perceive that there is too little time to do everything that we want to do, the way we want to do it. Yet, what of God in this formula of life, especially on the Sabbath? Could it be that the practicality of God far exceeds our own? Or that God's practicality is, without apology, absolutely impractical by human standards?

Do not allow your Sabbath journey to route around the Wonder of Sabbath exploration.

Prayer: Inquisitive God, grant us an inquiring heart for the Faith You have in us. Amen.

Monday, Day 29 of Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.44

Do not get in a hurry to arrive in Jerusalem, not everyone you meet will be happy you are part of a new community in the midst of what has been the traditional community for generations. The very idea of being united, however that may be defined, will inevitably challenge the constructs others hold as inviolate. Similarly, sharing everything along the way, however meaningful and just you may perceive it to be, will be viewed by some as a lashing out against the strength of a capitalistic culture, socialistic at best, antagonistic at worst. There may be a steep price to pay when entering the home of the established hierarchy, and the powers and principalities are likely to strike out quickly to mute your voice, erase your image, and spin the message differently among them. From the viewpoint of the realm, unity and sharing outside the orders of the emperor are counterproductive and yours is a life likely to be washed away, even if only by lies and deceit.

There is little room for conscience among those whose eagerness is centered more in position and politics, than in unity and sharing. It is just as likely in the Jerusalem's of the world that those who welcome you with the right hand of fellowship today will, tomorrow, use their left hand to betray you. Those whose kiss received you into their home this morning, could just as likely, tonight, use a kiss to turn you in to the civil authorities for your faith.

Should you choose to become a part of this movement of radicalized compassion and caring be aware that such choices are not without consequences—and if you have never met such consequences for the choices you have made in faith then, chances are, the choices you have made have not required much change in yourself or those around you. Just ask those earliest of believers among us whose walk into Baptismal waters led them to stand before others who cared little for their faith and desired more of their blind obedience. Ask Jesus.

Prayer: God of Steadfast Love, grant me the strength of faith to live my Baptism today. Thy Kingdom come. Amen.



Tuesday, Day 30 of Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.44

These last days of Lent may well be the messiest through which we go with Jesus, for through His suffering flows our redemption—and there is a brooding part of me which, with increasing fervor, will not abide our sterilizing the cost of our life in Him. The cross Jesus carries is laden with our lack of understanding of Him.

As much as Caesar and Rome arrogantly put down any hint of rebellion among the peoples they ruled so, too, were the religious authorities of the day capable and willing to consume their own young as they protected their turf in the midst of the Roman empire. There is much to be lost in riches accumulated, authority consolidated, and positions to be flaunted.

Jesus instructed His disciples not to do as the Gentiles do, showing off their authority by ordering people below them around, yet His words fell on the deaf ears of His own people for whom He was birthed.



“Let it not be so among you” is more than a suggestion, it is an imperative of Baptism. To share everything, making certain that the one with nothing has as much as the one who came to the table with everything, turns both Rome and the Temple upside down—in the same manner as sending a Savior by way of a Baby born in Bethlehem. God knows what God is doing and the Spirit does what the Spirit must do.

Unity does not mean uniformity, but it does mean that no-one is ever alone, regardless the weight they carry, the distance they carry it or the outcome of the trial. God has the final say—and God says in Jesus, ‘A new Beginning’.

Are you walking with Him?

Prayer: Holy God, center me on Your road before me, that I might live to Your glory. Amen.



Wednesday, Day 31 of Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.44

His blood seeps into the soil where He falls. The whips have done their worst and his skin is shredded in scores of places. Bones from His back and ribcage poke through the flesh—and no artist’s careful rendering can adequately disguise or cover the carnage. Carefully we arrange the cross to be fully present behind Him, but that is only for the observer’s benefit. On that day, Jesus would likely have carried only the cross beam to which His hands were nailed, yet even that would have been larger than what we see here and far more than He could have borne up for long, so broken His body, so poured out His blood. The

Man who fell down under the weight of our calls to crucify Him steadies His gaze into our eyes pleading, not to be released from this moment, but that we would join Him in the unity of Covenant, the sharing of Faith and the Life which is to come, as on earth we embody what we pray for in Heaven.

Lent, this kind of Lent, is not for the casual observer, but is intended for the Baptized who are committed to the Mission of God. These days of Lent summon from the bowels of our beings the urgency not to let Him fall down alone, unaided. These days in Lent cause no small amount of revulsion in the properness of our Christian understandings, for though we know this to be the Christ of our faith, this is not the bloodied, bruised and burdened Jesus we want everyone to see. This is not the Jesus of our modern day commercials, for this Jesus, this Jesus requires of us to share everything, including the way Home. Pray on this.

Prayer: God of every Beginning, lock our eyes on You and how You choose to bring all people together in Christ. Amen.

Thursday, Day 32 of Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.44

There was much my Mom would silently endure on behalf of her family and the family farm, but to suffer the stupidity of fools, especially if their folly was leveled at one of her children, it just simply was not in her. As infrequently as it happened, I can still vividly remember Mom, all five foot five inches of her, standing up straight and still, peering into the eyes of an offender, then leveling them with a few choice words. She never needed more than a few choice words. Mom had a way about her and, though we did not always deserve or adequately return her loyalty to us, always she loved fiercely and believed deeply in her sons.

So it is that in this moment on the way to Golgotha, as Mary defies the Roman soldiers and ignores the Jewish leader’s jeers, and steps into the path of her Son, Their Son, and touches His cheek, we are given pause to observe what none of us can bring ourselves to consider. As she did when as a baby He nursed at her breast, now she one last time does again and connects for each of us, humanity with Divinity in the most tender of motherly embraces. There is nothing she can say to the crowds, nothing she can do to stop the madness around her Son, but this she can do, she can comfort Him—and remind Him that nothing in the Heavens above or on the earth below can separate the Love which is between a Parent and their Child.

His blood covering her tunic as He receives her care, the little Boy, Jesus, prepares to lay down His sweet head, assuring Mother Mary one more time all will be well. The unity of Family spans the cosmos and the complete sharing of what is not limited by this world’s laws here defies an unjust sentence and names as Holy that which our inhumanity desecrates. It all happens with a Mother’s touch—and a Son’s response. Look at them, for us all.

Prayer: Loving God, soften our hearts in the Love of Mary for her Son, that in them we can perceive You at work among us in this day and age. Amen.



Friday, Day 33 of Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.42

Simon of Cyrene had no idea that fateful morning he would be involved in a moment such as this. It is one thing to show up and watch a man condemned to die carry His own cross down the streets of Jerusalem, it is quite another thing to be ‘invited’ by the Roman soldiers to help the man carry His cross. To deny assisting would result in his own beating and, possibly, even death at the hands of the Romans. Yet, to step up and take on the weight and bloodiness of this beam was to take on the plight of this man so clearly hated and disdained by the crowds. What had this Jesus done to earn the trial and beating which appallingly covered His body? Simon did not know for certain. But he did know for certain that he had no other choice than to take on this Man’s cross of guilt and walk the way with Him.

The Lenten journey is one of honest, forthright soul searching, repentance and commitment. It is a time to consider being invited to carry the cross with Jesus. The community of the Baptized who gather together in unity are not here just to be spectators, in the sharing of all things we accept that we share responsibility, labors, joys, food and, yes, even the need to sometimes carry the cross of Jesus as we take on the weight of oppression in the cause of our sisters and brothers around the world. Becoming a part of the community of the Baptized does not make everything fair, right, equal or just, but it does mean we worship the One who makes all things fair, right, equal and just, if we dare to walk with Him along the way in tending to the least of these, our sisters and brothers. Simon of Cyrene took on the cross of Jesus, even unto Golgotha. Will you?

Prayer: Lord, when the load becomes heavy, teach us not to ask for a lighter load, but to be friend enough to help another, even as we long to receive assistance along the way. Amen.



Saturday, Day 34 of Lent

“All the believers were united and shared everything.” Acts 2.44

What do we know of this woman, Veronica, who tenderly wipes Jesus’ face with her veil? We know she would not turn away from His suffering and showed Jesus all the compassion and care she could in that moment—and, according to the legend, the image of Jesus’ face remained on her veil after she stepped away. That is what we know. She became a disciple of this itinerant Teacher along the way. For how long? No one is certain, yet of this one thing we are certain: She did not remain in hiding after Jesus was arrested. Still, she continued to follow Him. Still, she learned from Him. Still, she tended to Him. For this she is remembered and honored to this day. When it mattered, she was where Jesus needed her to be: With Him.

An old friend of mine recently observed, “The Christian community has become so entrenched in our culture of compromise that very little is held as sacred, including our Christian Mission.” Veronica would not compromise. She would not hide away until this moment blew over. She would not remain anonymously in the crowds as He went walking by with the cross. She did not care for the judgment of the Jews who watched her touch His cheek with her veil. Nor did she shrink back from the Romans who drove Him on to the death

which awaited Him. She dared to stand up with Jesus, no compromise.

Such is the essence of our call to discipleship today in the community of the Baptized: Do not compromise.

Whatever else you may deem to be of more importance than living your faith, do not compromise. If we are united in Christ and share everything, then to take a stand against racial injustice is essential, to care for the immigrant is fundamental, to welcome the stranger is paramount, and to care for the marginalized and oppressed is required. No compromise. If only we would dare to so live, perhaps the impression of His face would remain in our soul as it did on Veronica’s veil.

Prayer: Eternal Yahweh, imprint Your Mission in our being through Jesus, that we would live in You forever. Amen.





Sixth Sunday in Lent

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.”

Acts 2.47

It is Palm Sunday. The word has spread that this is the day the Triumphant King Jesus will enter Jerusalem and a showdown is nearing. On an unbroken foal of a donkey the Prince of Peace rides in, as the people wave palm branches and sing, “Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the king of Israel!”

The scene is raucous and chaotic, an anticipatory celebration of God once again delivering Israel

out of the land of their slavery, out of the house of their bondage. The expectations piled on this King are high and the unwillingness of the gathered assembly to wait any longer, to pray any harder or to put up with any more promises without action are higher still. In their minds, Jesus is the One who is to come and now is the time for God to cast down all the other rulers of this world—and they want to be there to see it happen—to see it happen for them, maybe not so much with them or in them, but for them. ‘Why pay for the cow when you can get the milk for free? Jesus will do it for us!’

On this Sabbath day we gather to remember and be a part of welcoming Jesus into our hearts and lives all over again. We read the story and sing the songs of deliverance, yet we cannot do so for long, divorced of the reality we know is coming:

At this gate leaving Jerusalem, Jesus falls down a second time, the dirt of our demands, the disturbing acquiescence of our faith, and the anger of our disappointment shrouded on His body, covered in blood, gore and suffering as it is. On this day, ‘Hosannas’ and ‘Crucify him!’ all hauntingly fill the air, disturbing the comfortable and comforting the disturbed. God is at work, for us, in us, through Him—and we are to demonstrate God’s goodness to everyone in the praise we offer. This is a Goodness no one saw coming—and we are bowed down in humility before His riding by, then His falling down, before us, for us, forevermore of us.

Prayer: Lord of every ‘Hosanna’ and ‘Crucify him’, forgive our lack of understanding and our callous resentment, then send us out in Love and Mercy to walk with Jesus. Amen.

Monday, Day 35 of Lent

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.” Acts 2.47

Few people, even among the most devout of Jesus’ disciples, linger on the thought of this moment in time. To ponder Jesus falling a third time, beyond the catastrophic lack of blood flow through this body and His ever-increasing weakness due to his injuries, one might be led to also consider the Trinitarian nature of the story.

Here beyond the gates of the city, we see the fallenness of our own nature, especially as we seek to crucify in God that which threatens our own comfort and security. We condemn and whip the Creator with our self-indulgent appetite for ease, wealth and power. We drive the Christ down the streets of the Via Dolorosa with our anger at not being delivered the way we want to be delivered, for not getting what we want, when we want. We push down the Spirit in the dust of humiliation so that we feel better about our standing around and doing nothing, lifting up our own agendas on the backs of those unable to care for themselves, and claiming that showing up in worship once or twice a week is enough.

Truth be told, as He lays there under the weight of the cross we shaped for Him, there is a certain amount of, ‘You deserve that’, spilling off our lips. If only You, God, had listened more closely to our prayers. If only You, Lord, had not been so darned welcoming of others in your ministry. If only You, Holy Spirit, had not pushed us to go beyond our zone of polite acceptability and reach out to others the way You continue to reach out to us. If only . . .

For the third time, Jesus falls down, pressed into the soil by us. We are the ones driving this train. Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, forgive us. Forgive us.

We cannot praise You and demonstrate Your Goodness until we repent of our sinfulness against You, against all that You are, against all that You call us to be. We bow in dust and tears before this bloody scene, seeking to lift the cross from You as we repent of that which drives You onward in Love.

Prayer: God of Mercy, have mercy. God of Grace, have grace. Grant us a new Beginning in our heart and soul. Amen.



Tuesday, Day 36 of Lent

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.”

Acts 2.47

Carefully we craft the art of sanitizing the scene, the specter of humiliation, the grotesque nature of crucifixion. We make it someone else’s way of killing the body. We tell it as though it were only history. We carefully cover over the wounds of the whips with flesh tones of paint and fiber. We disguise the brutality of our own nature with kind expressions and relatable skin hues. We veil the starkness of self-hatred and animosity by removing blood from the scene and ugliness from the distorted lives hollering, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’ Then, as though that were not enough, we stand Him up—and portray Him in the act of being stripped of His robe, to save us

from acknowledging the nakedness of our sins before God. Jesus stands there naked before His accusers, before us, even as He came into this world not so very long before. All that He is, all that He has done, all that is yet to be accomplished through Him, cannot, will not, be covered over by our quaint puritanical sensitivities. It is our insensitivity to God, to Jesus and to the power of the Spirit which brings us here to this moment—and it is only God’s compassionate Mercy, Grace and Forgiveness, completely revealed in Jesus, that can move us on in discipleship, as a community committed more to the faith than to itself.

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone”, is the human response to a Divine Initiative. What we deserve, we have not received. How God chose to act in Love, we did not deserve. Those who understand this cannot help but to praise. Praise.

Prayer: Holy God who gives us reason to praise, cause our lives to never stop singing of You. Amen.



Wednesday, Day 37 of Lent

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.” Acts 2.47

Stop. Just stop and listen. Turn off the electronics. Silence the preachers. Still the noises in the room. Just listen.

There is nothing quite like the sound of a hammer driving a nail, whether the hammer is wooden or some substance even harder, the sound is startling, piercing. For some, the sound is associated with progress, homes being built, businesses being established, villages being set into place, walls created to keep threats out, bridges constructed to bring commerce in or something as simple as a piece of furniture taking shape. For others, it is the sound of war, of fortresses being thrust up, of weapons being cast, of hatred being heated, of self-defense being laid down—or of crosses and gallows being lifted up.

If you sit in silence long enough, you can hear the ‘thunk, thunk’ of hammer head meeting nail head. You can feel the point of the nail entering the wood, after piercing the flesh being hung upon it. Let those with ears to hear, listen!

God is not doing this to Jesus for us, we are doing this to God’s Gift. We nail Jesus to the cross day after day, year after year, millennia after millennia as we abdicate our role in this moment by means of making God the demander of blood and the seeker of sacrifice. Yet, as we listen the sound of the hammer driving the nail, our hammer driving our nails into the Divinity of God then, when we let go of blaming God and consider for our moment our own part in this aberration of justice, we can hear, too, the Compassion of God saying,

“Comfort, Comfort, ye my people . . . ” and even now, find a new Beginning in the Sacramental Waters of His body.

Praise without understanding is hollow. Demonstrations of goodness without the deepest of gratitude lack substance. For the Mission of God to find its fullest meaning in us, we must hear the hammer hit the nail, bowing in humility before the One who heals every wound and empties the tomb of our darkest deeds.

Prayer: Lord, unplug my ears and my heart that I may more fully follow and serve You. Amen.





Maundy Thursday

Day 38 of Lent

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.”

Acts 2.47

On this day we observe Jesus gathering with His disciples to share the Passover meal—and we watch in awe as He transforms a meal commemorating liberation from Egypt into a Sacrament of Grace and Mercy, setting free the oppressed and marginalized in every age. Who among the disciples, including Judas, could have imagined what the next hours would bring? How bread truly becomes Body? How wine actually becomes Blood? What person among them, among us, understood what Jesus was doing in that upper room? And how

it would translate just a few days later at the shore of the sea?

No one. No one. No one.

To make it incredibly more pertinent in the present age, I would posit that there is still an equal number of people who fully understand what it is Jesus did that night, the next day, three days later or in all of the days in-between then and now. To believe otherwise is to minimize the Sacrifice and maximize our own human arrogance and need to be in control.

No one understood. No one understands. No one ever will fully understand. Except God, in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit. They are the only Ones, God is the only One.

We are not worthy of His death, much less His Life, yet He gives it.

We are not able to grasp the depth of His Love, much less His Mercy, yet He pours it out.

We are not able to articulate the immensity of His Faith in us, much less His Grace for us, yet He wraps us in the shroud of new Freedom.

Jesus dies, giving to His beloved disciple the responsibility of caring for His Mother. He dies, giving to God the glory due God’s Name. He dies, taking on the many deaths we would still pile on Him in our eagerness to own what is not ours to grant. And, for this day, that is more than any of us can wrap our heads around. Jesus does not need our protection, any more than the Sacrament requires our permission. Jesus just wants our heart, so He can begin to open us to what the world cannot teach us of God.

Prayer: God of Love, pour into our longing to be at-one with You Your gift of Reconciling Faith in us. Amen.

Good Friday
Day 39 of Lent

“The praised God and
demonstrated God’s
goodness to everyone.”

Acts 2.47

Joseph of Arimathea may have asked to take the Body of Jesus down from the cross and arrange for its burial—yet, be certain of this, a Mother’s love, a Mother’s work, does not die or cease upon a cross as her Son gasps His last breath.

Look on this scene, however it may be depicted by any variety of artists, and consider the tenderness of Mary’s hands as she held His lifeless body, as

she touched each wound wishing she could heal it as He healed so many others. What lullaby takes away a Baby’s silenced cries? Or a Mother’s crushed spirit within her?

In the Mission to which we are called, how do we speak of praising God as we kneel with Mary next to the Body of Jesus?

In our call to demonstrate God’s goodness to everyone, how do we name the Goodness that here lies prone, that here is crushed into the ground through the anguished, helpless fingers of His Mother?

One Confirmation student not so long ago asked, “What is ‘good’ about Good Friday?”

They were not the first to ask the question—and I doubt they will be the last.

As our forty-day Lenten journey of Beginnings nears its conclusion, let us not be so ready to hop to Easter that we move past Mary and the lifeless body of Jesus. What is ‘good’ about Good Friday? What is good about death? Or, about this particular death? In this particular manner? In a place called Golgotha, the place of the skull, a garbage dump?

What is the goodness of God which causes us to tell others of this moment? Or do we just go to Easter Sunday, because Good Friday does not match any goodness we can explain?

Today, we must help Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, yet we cannot help them until we sit a bit longer with Mary, pondering with her in her heart this Good in her Son.

Prayer: Good God, may our willingness to sit a little while longer with Mary today give us the Peace to stand longer in caring for others through Jesus. Amen.



Holy Saturday, Day 40 of Lent

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.” Acts 2.47

In the quiet of this day we ponder what it is to which we have been witnesses.

The body of Jesus is placed in a new tomb and, at the urging of the religious leaders, a stone is rolled in place to seal the door, with guards watching over the place.

Jesus’ disciples are hiding for fear they will be next.

Peter is wrought with guilt for his denials, the others with regret they ran away.

Judas is no longer of this world, his payment scattered on the floor of the Temple, now the cost paid for a graveyard in which strangers are to be buried, today called ‘Field of Blood’.

The Jewish community is observing the Sabbath and the Great Feast of Passover.

Some believe that all is now back to normal.

Others are uncertain that there will ever again be anything which resembles normal.

Grief runs deep in the hearts of those who loved, and were loved by, Jesus.

Cautious satisfaction bubbles about in the souls of those who wanted Him silenced.

The women among those who followed Jesus made their plans to care for Him early the next day—because they could. They are the unseen, the marginalized, the unimportant. Little did they know the sight they would see, the news they would receive or the calling to which they would be called.

Today, among the community of those who followed Jesus, is a day of uneasy silence and wonderment.

Today is an anathema to the goodness of God in Jesus.

Today the songs of angels are quiet and the feet of running shepherds are still.

Today we wait for the Holy to Speak in terms we can understand.

Prayer: Holy God, to this stillness bring Peace.

Amen.



Easter Sunday

“They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.” Acts 2.47

From the great Easter hymn written by Charles Wesley in 1739,

“Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!”

How many of you, in reading these words, began to sing them? I know I did just in typing them! We are so ready, so eager to declare the Victory of God in the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, praise of God is our first response. The second—is our willingness and commitment to go from this place into the world to tell of God’s Goodness and Power.

Following the example of the first apostles of the Risen Christ, the women who were the

first ones told to go and tell others, we take this song of Resurrection on the highways and byways of our journeys.

God declares in Jesus a new Beginning for all who believe in Him, for all who repent of what once held them captive, and who are Baptized in the Holy Spirit. Along with earliest of Christian communities, as it is recorded in Acts, we devote ourselves to His teaching, we care for each other as He cares of us, we share our meals as He shared of Himself for us all, and we commit ourselves to an active prayer life—a life dedicated to the Mission of God, wherever we are, in all that we are. A blessed Easter to all!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
- is our prayer, now and forevermore. Amen!

