



# Thriving in the Vine:

*Daily Reflections for Lent  
by the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia  
Daily Office Year One*

# Daily Office Lectionary

Ash Wednesday	Isaiah 58:1-12, 2 Cor. 5:20-6:10, Matt. 6:1-6, 16-21
Thursday after Ash Wednesday	Deut. 7:6-11, Titus 1: 1-16, John 1:29-34
Friday after Ash Wednesday	Deut. 7:12-16, Titus 2:1-15, John 1:35-42
Saturday after Ash Wednesday	Deut. 7:17-26, Titus 3:1-15, John 1: 43-51
First Sunday in Lent	Deut. 8:1-10, 1 Cor. 1:17-31, Mark 2:18-22
First Monday in Lent	Deut. 8:11-20, Heb. 2:11-18, John 2:1-12
First Tuesday in Lent	Deut. 9:4-12, Heb. 3:1-11, John 2:13-22
First Wednesday in Lent	Deut. 9:13-21, Heb. 3:12-19, John 2:23-3:15
First Thursday in Lent	Deut. 9:23-10:5, Heb. 4:1-10, John 3:16-21
First Friday in Lent	Deut. 10:12-22, Heb. 4:11-16, John 3:22-36

First Saturday in Lent	Deut. 11:18-28, Heb. 5:1-10, John 4:1-26
Second Sunday in Lent	Jer. 1:1-10, 1 Cor. 3:11-23, Mark 3:31-4:9
Second Monday in Lent	Jer. 1:11-19, Rom. 1:1-15, John 4:27-42
Second Tuesday in Lent	Jer. 2:1-13, Rom. 1:16-25, John 4:43-54
Second Wednesday in Lent	Jer. 3:6-18, Rom. 1:28-2:11, John 5:1-18
Second Thursday in Lent	Jer. 4:9-10, 19-28, Rom. 2:12-24, John 5:19-29
Second Friday in Lent	Jer. 5:1-9, Rom. 2:25-3:18, John 5:30-47
Second Saturday in Lent	Jer. 5:20-31, Rom. 3:19-31, John 7:1-13
Third Sunday in Lent	Jer. 6:9-15, 1 Cor. 6:12-20, Mark 5:1-20
Third Monday in Lent	Jer. 7:1-15, Rom. 4:1-12, John 7:14-36

Third Tuesday in Lent	Jer. 7:21-34, Rom. 4:13-25, John 7:37-52
Third Wednesday in Lent	Jer. 8:18-9:6, Rom. 5:1-11, John 8:12-20
Third Thursday in Lent	Jer. 10:11-24, Rom. 5:12-21, John 8:21-32
Third Friday in Lent	Jer. 11:1-8, 14-20, Rom. 6:1-11, John 8:33-47
Third Saturday in Lent	Jer. 13:1-11, Rom. 6:12-23, John 8:47-59
Fourth Sunday in Lent	Jer. 14:1-9, 17-22, Gal. 4:21-5:1, Mark 8:11-21
Fourth Monday in Lent	Jer. 16:10-21, Rom. 7:1-12, John 6:1-15
Fourth Tuesday in Lent	Jer. 17:19-27, Rom. 7:13-25, John 6:16-27
Fourth Wednesday in Lent	Jer. 18:1-11, Rom. 8:1-11, John 6:27-40
Fourth Thursday in Lent	Jer. 22:13-23, Rom. 8:12-27, John 6:41-51

Fourth Friday in Lent	Jer. 23:1-8, Rom. 8:28-39, John 6:52-59
Fourth Saturday in Lent	Jer. 23:9-15, Rom. 9:1-18, John 6:60-71
Fifth Sunday in Lent	Jer. 23:16-32, 1 Cor. 9:19-27, Mark 8:31-9:1
Fifth Monday in Lent	Jer. 24:1-10, Rom. 9:19-33, John 9:1-17
Fifth Tuesday in Lent	Jer. 25:8-17, Rom. 10:1-13, John 9:18-41
Fifth Wednesday in Lent	Jer. 25:30-38, Rom. 10:14-21, John 10:1-18
Fifth Thursday in Lent	Jer. 26:1-16, Rom. 11:1-12, John 10:19-42
Fifth Friday in Lent	Jer. 29:1, 4-13, Rom. 11:13-24, John 11:1-27, or 12:1-10
Fifth Saturday in Lent	Jer. 31:27-34, Rom. 11:25-36, John 11:28-44, or 12:37-50
Palm Sunday	Zech. 9:9-12, Zech. 12:9-11, 13:1, 7-9, 1 Tim. 6:12-16, Matt. 21:12-17
Monday in Holy Week	Jer. 12:1-16, Phil. 3:1-14, John 12:9-19

Tuesday in Holy Week	Jer. 15:10-21, Phil. 3:15-21, John 12:20-26
Wednesday in Holy Week	Jer. 17:5-10, 14-17, Phil. 4:1-13, John 12:27-36
Maundy Thursday	Jer. 20:7-11, 1 Cor. 10:14-17; 11:27-32, John 17:1-11(12-26)
Good Friday	Wisdom 1:16-2:1, 12-22 or Gen. 22:1-14 , 1 Peter 1:10-20, John 13:36-38, John 19:38-42
Holy Saturday	Job 19:21-27a, Heb. 4:1-16, Rom. 8:1-11
Easter Day	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20:1-18

# Introduction

“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:4-5

Jesus offers this teaching of a vine and branches on the night before he died. He had already shared the Passover with the disciples. Jesus knew his followers would soon scatter into the darkness out of fear when the arrest party arrived. And in those last minutes before his passion, he offered this image of the closest possible connection, telling them that as part of the Body of Christ, we would be as connected to him as branches are to the vine.

He told the disciples to abide. That is not a word we use anymore. Abide means to stay, remain, or rest. The passage could be translated remain with me and you will bear fruit, but also rest in me and I will bear fruit through you.

In a time when it is difficult to see or feel ourselves as thriving, the title of this devotional might ring false. But no matter the season, we know that the only way we can thrive is not through our own resources, but by staying connected to Jesus. It is in Jesus as the vine that we can find spiritual nourishment even in times that seem barren.

## **Resting in God this Lent**

Lent can seem like a time for doing. And that active way of leaning into Lent is not only fine, but can be right, good, and joyful. I always find it awkward to discuss my own Lenten discipline as I don't want to be holier than thou. So my personal favorite answer when asked what I am giving up for Lent is to say, "I am giving up eating desserts in front of other people."

Truthfully, Victoria and I usually give up eating meat in Lent, but more importantly, we also look for how we might take on some spiritual discipline. After a year of pandemic, we are not so ambitious. Resting in Jesus is enough for now. We do each have a Rule of Life, a list of our spiritual disciplines that we keep daily (such as scripture reading and prayer), weekly (gathering with others for worship, even if online), and even annually (a retreat). But layering on more seems like it makes Lent about what we do and this is a year for letting God work through us rather than trying to be super Christians. The one addition to our lives will be reading this daily devotional with you and hearing the voices of lots of people all around the Diocese of Georgia.

Even as we consider how to mark this season of preparation for Easter, we need to recall the grace that is ours even in Lent. Whatever we do is not to get on God's good side, but to find ways to make ourselves more in tune with that most important connection to the very ground of our being, the vine in whom we remain and rest.



I am grateful that you are reading this introduction, ready to journey toward Easter together. I trust that God will show up through these daily reflections, offering a glimpse at how God is with us.

Pax et Bonum,

+Frank

*Bishop of Georgia*

# Ash Wednesday

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

John 12:24

These words spoken by Jesus are a wonderful image of Lent for me. I can see myself as a seed in the dark depths of the soil waiting for Easter when I can burst forth from the earth bearing the fruit of my Lenten disciplines.

One of those Lenten disciplines is fasting. As a professed member of the Third Order, Society of Saint Francis, I am required to fast (at a minimum) on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

There are many definitions for “fasting”. From abstaining from food for the entire day to giving up meat on Fridays in Lent. About a quarter of century ago, when Frank and I were much younger, we would begin our fast after our Mardi Gras pancake dinner and not break it until breakfast on Thursday morning. Age has changed that! We now fast from Tuesday night until sunset on Ash Wednesday when we eat a small meal, and we fast similarly on Good Friday.

Fasting is a wonderful form of self-denial, but not all people can abstain for 24 hours from meals as some medications must be taken with food. But, if you must eat, you can still fast by eating less or by not eating meat or by giving up something else that is meaningful for you.

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) recommends fasting during the season of Lent, which should be observed “by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s Word” (BCP, p. 265). The BCP also designates the weekdays of Lent and Holy Week and all Fridays except in the seasons of Christmas and Easter as days of “special devotion” with “special acts of discipline and self-denial” (which normally include fasting) although an exception is made for the feast of the Annunciation in Lent and feasts of our Lord on Friday.

This year, in addition to fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, Frank and I will fast on all Fridays in Lent by skipping lunch and using that time to reflect on Scripture. I look forward to Lent every year because I find all my Lenten practices, including fasting, nourish me in so very many ways.

Also, fasting, along with other Lenten disciplines, such as reflecting on the upcoming daily meditations in this series, make the celebration of Easter much more meaningful.

Victoria Logue

*Third Order, Society of St. Francis*

# Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Yesterday was Ash Wednesday, a solemn day in which Christians were marked with ashes and told in no uncertain terms, we are going to die. Welcome to Lent! Lent, in Christianity, is a period of penitential preparation for Easter.

Lent begins with today's text from John's gospel, the focus is on John the Baptist and his prophetic role in announcing Jesus as the Promised Messiah. I would like for you to reflect with me about the description John uses of Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

John invites us to behold the Lamb of God, and for the next 40 days, we will hold two undeniable realities in tension, our mortality that leads to death and our immortality that leads to eternal life through the Lamb of God.

In purification rituals, lambs were commonly used in ritual sacrifices and, when a lamb was specified, it was to be a "lamb...without blemish." Sometimes a single lamb would be sacrificed; at other times, it could be as many as twelve or more. Jesus would be the single unblemished sacrifice to take away the sins of the whole world forever.

As Christians, this is where we make the connection between Jesus The Paschal Lamb whose blood was shed as an atonement for sin once and for all. And as John points out, "... not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world," (1 John 2:2). With the words from the

Ash Wednesday liturgy still ringing in our ears, “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return,” today John points us to the Lamb of God where we have the assurance of eternal life through faith in him.

This is why whenever you see the Paschal Lamb portrayed in religious art, it is never a young lamb leaping in the meadow; but it is a mature lamb, standing erect with head held high, looking you in the eye, holding a staff by its right leg with a victory banner waving in the breeze. It is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Choristers will also recognize this same lamb in musical settings of the sung requiem. In the final movement before the closing Benediction is the Agnus Dei: “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Lamb of God grant us thy peace.” The message is clear: For us, the lamb comes to save us from sin and death. In the end, the assurance of salvation is ours, through faith in the Lamb of God. It is in dying to self that we are born again to eternal life.

The Good News is that God has a plan for each of us, a destiny to fulfill. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming his way, he told his disciples, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” As you seek him in this COVID-19 wilderness these next 40 days, dare to let the Lamb of God come more fully into your heart and invite others to know him. Welcome to Lent!

The Very Rev. Billy Alford  
*St. Alban's & Atonement, Augusta*

## Friday after Ash Wednesday

In John's Gospel, we begin the story of the disciples by learning about the firsts – the first ones to follow Jesus. I can't imagine walking with the Messiah as He began his ministry, to trying to convince others that, yeah, this is the guy. No, THE GUY!

The first chapter of John soars through the celestial heights of the highest heavens, coming down to earth with the introduction of John the Baptist, and soon after, the calling of the twelve. By the time we meet them, John the Baptist is already Jesus' Number One Fan and uses the equivalent of a giant foam finger to point out Jesus to Andrew and Simon as the Lord walks by. And here's the thing – it doesn't tell us that there's a crowd following him. He seems to be walking alone, which makes what Andrew and Simon even more astounding; they follow him.

Being the first is a risk. John was already preaching about the Messiah who was to come, and right before this, he even declared Jesus as the Son of God. His fate of becoming a disciple wasn't a surprise or a risk to him and his livelihood. But Andrew and Simon Peter? They had lives that hadn't been devoted to the coming of Christ. They weren't obvious first recruits. I can imagine them pacing around, asking each other if they made the right decision, if giving up the life they had planned would be worth it.

We've all been there – excited to jump into a new adventure, whether a project, a new career path, or a new relationship. But haven't we all been scared, too?

When the shine and initial excitement wears off, are we still brave? Are we still confident in our decision to step out, to take that risk?

Simon Peter and Andrew knew what they were doing, had to have known that to be the first wasn't going to be easy, that their lives had taken a change in direction. And yet, they stayed. Their faith guided their steps until the very end, inspiring others to follow.

What risk are you taking? Where is your faith carrying you this Lent?

Liz Williams

*Diocese of Georgia Staff*

# Saturday after Ash Wednesday

“As the deer longs for the water-brooks,  
so longs my soul for you, O God.

My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God;  
when shall I come to appear before the  
presence of God?”

Psalm 42:1-2

There is a hunger in the human heart for a connection to the creator who formed us in the very image and likeness of God. In one of our Psalms for this evening, the Psalmist captures this longing as a thirst. In the same way that we have to have water to survive, we thrive through staying grafted into the vine that is Jesus.

Each Saturday in Lent, the reflections will be on a spiritual discipline, such as a commitment to daily times of prayer or reading scripture. These disciplines can be gathered together into a brief “Rule of Life.” The basic idea is to note the important elements of your own spiritual life along with some plan for how you will carry it out. For example, any spiritual rule of life should include worship with something like, “I will attend church on Sundays and Wednesdays when I am well.”

The statements should be simple and specific without “I will try” using instead, “I will” or “I promise.” Some of the main areas to consider in addition to worship are confession, your offerings, prayer, scripture readings and other reading, assisting others, and retreats. Begin with putting down what you already do and then consider adding one, and at the most, two small



additions and you will have your rule. Then go back and revisit it from time to time. I have found that this commitment helps me to stay more consistent in the ways in which I make room for God each day and every week.

So here is a practice you can try and see if you would like to keep up. In the evening, reflect briefly on what has been good in your day, what was bad, and what was Godly. Where did you get a glimpse of God today? You won't have an answer for all three every day, but you will most days.

Pausing to reflect in this way can cast the day in a new light as you might find the good you almost missed or in hindsight see something as Godly. For example, I recently received an annoying email first thing in the morning on what was to be a very busy day. But by early afternoon, I realized how the insight I wasn't ready to hear that morning was actually the Holy Spirit planting something in my mind. That afternoon, I took a different approach to a meeting because of that input and I could see how I had been wrong and needed a different perspective. That view of my way of leading was not an easy gift to receive, but it was a gift nonetheless. By that evening, the irritating email I woke up to had become the godliest moment in my day. Realizing that was, to use the image from the Psalm, thirst quenching as I saw how God had been with me.

The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue  
*Bishop of Georgia*

# First Sunday in Lent

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.”

Mark 12:30

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.”

Psalms 98:4

Why do we sing? Why make music?

At first glance, music, and most of the arts, are not “productive.” Most artists have heard a comment like, “but when are you going to get a real job?” And yet, music, art, theater, are still part of human life together. When we create, we touch the image of God deep within ourselves.

Singing is a challenge for many people, because we have been told that we are not good at it, or that we cannot make a beautiful sound. Or perhaps we simply hear performers on stage and think we cannot be as good as they are, and so we should not try. But congregational singing is a moment of artistic creation in a different way. Its power comes not because the music is pitch perfect, or exactly in time, but because we are all engaged in an activity that engages our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In the Psalms all creation is invited, not just once but over and over, to make “a joyful noise” to God. One of my friends and colleagues has pointed out on several occasions that the Psalms do not command an “in-tune” noise!

Of course, right now we still can't all sing together, and it hurts to still be without that aspect of our common life after almost a year. I am eagerly looking forward to the time when we can sing together safely. For now, though, sing along with your music, whether you are in the car traveling to work or in your own house taking part in a livestream from your church. Allow the music to engage your heart and stay connected to those who sing with you, even if you cannot hear them with your ears.

Sing together in spirit, and trust that we will one day sing together in body again, because by doing so, we love the Lord your God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind, and all our strength.

The Rev. Canon Joshua Varner  
*Diocese of Georgia Staff*

# First Monday in Lent

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk.’

I never come to the story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee without remembering a poem by Richard Wilbur about that same miracle, called *The Wedding Toast*. The line that always comes to mind has it “that this world’s fullness is not made but found.” The reality Wilbur marks is this: before you do or choose or undertake anything, the world’s fullness comes to you as gift, not as something you’re to engineer or design or contrive, but rather as something God-given: found not made.

The Cana servants knew the difference between finding and making. St. John takes care to tell us that much, distinguishing the servants who witnessed the miracle from the wine steward in charge of pouring it out. The steward was impressed by the quality of the wine, while the servants remained silent in the text. St. John, though, hints at what they might have been thinking.

Our translation sets this hint apart with parentheses, and yet it’s hardly parenthetical, is it? The servants know the wine for a miracle, know deep in the heart of all feasting — and yes, in the heart of the world as it is today — lives the miraculous provision of God.

They know the steward mistakes the miracle for human ingenuity, i.e., for the bridegroom's doing.

Wilbur wrote his poem as an actual wedding toast on the occasion of his son's wedding. His words aimed the hopeful couple on the threshold of new life away from thinking whatever came to them in marriage was all on them. The wine, he knew, would always run out. The losses would pile up. Yet through it, God's fullness would yet "hunger to abound and pour its plenty out."

Every day is a threshold. The challenge is to give thanks for the world as it is — and to know "where it came from." This isn't to say, you do nothing to tend or repair the world as it is. God in Christ Jesus calls you to love as he loved. This is only to say, before you do anything, you might begin with thanks for the world our Father in heaven sets before you this day and for the Son who began his work among us with a sudden miracle at Cana in Galilee.

The Rev. Lauren Byrd  
*Collegiate Church of St. Paul the Apostle, Savannah*

## First Tuesday in Lent

According to John's Gospel, this startling story took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, directly after the wedding at Cana. Talk about contrasts! From pleasing everyone with great wine at a feast, Jesus jumped straight into making the Temple establishment as angry as possible. Religious observance is a funny thing – it seems that the most grotesque things can become sacred just by their continued presence in a holy setting. We can all think of something awful, like a painting or a rug or a jangly piano, that we all tiptoe around, because it's always been at church, and too many people would be upset if it were changed or discarded. Well, this time Jesus was not worried about anyone's delicate religious sensibilities – he busted up the furniture, threw lots of money on the floor, and attacked the living things, both people and animals, whipping them out of the Temple if he thought they had no business there.

Let's not kid ourselves – this tendency to set up shop in the Lord's house didn't die out that day. St. Paul's Cathedral was used during the week as a commercial center, with goods for sale in the nave, before the Great Fire of London in 1666. Lots of churches and cathedrals have gift shops today. But this is the only time we see Jesus in full attack mode; he must have been a fearsome sight, wild-eyed and brandishing that whip.

Lent is the perfect time to take a good hard look at what we're doing, both as individuals and in our communities of faith. Are we allowing our accustomed habits,

because they are habits, to keep us from seeing the important things? Everyone was behaving as religiously as possible that day in the Temple, and Jesus showed them, in one shocking moment, that they were sacredly playing the fool, imagining that their own urges for money and power could be given a religious gloss, as a new coat of paint brightens up a dingy room. Are we indulging ourselves with similar pretenses?

This Lent is different. Getting together for worship doesn't feel the same, if it's even possible. Our habits have been so shaken up recently that we all long for "normal." But things won't be normal anytime soon – some of us have been sick, some of us have lost loved ones to the pandemic, some of us haven't been able to see our families in person, all of us have been inconvenienced in many ways. Let's use this abnormal time to observe a truly holy Lent, following our Lord as we ruthlessly sweep away the things that hinder His vision and our action.

Let zeal for His house consume us!

Emily Guerry  
*St. Anne's, Tifton*

## First Wednesday in Lent

In this passage, we get a little snippet of context at the end of Chapter 2 that prepares us for what we are about to hear from Jesus in Chapter 3. In the last few verses, we learn that Jesus “did not entrust himself to them” because he was fully aware of man and what was in their heart. Well, Jesus was fully human and fully divine, so we know that he very well understood what man is capable of doing and feeling, but he also had just seen the fickle nature of people through the actions of the people who had set up markets in the temple. Only after he was raised from the dead, did they truly believe what he had spoken and had full faith in what he had told them.

Then, we move to chapter 3, which makes the stories feel more separated than they really are. Nicodemus is a well-respected religious figure who is coming to Jesus to ask how best to explain Jesus’ actions to his people. Jesus is shocked that he has to explain faithfulness to a man who is supposed to be guiding others through a life lived by faith. Jesus says, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?” This question is meant to present the fact to us that we will never truly comprehend what an eternal life with Jesus has to offer, but if we have faith in Him then we will get there and be able to experience everything that he has been proclaiming.

No matter who we are or how well we think we understand God, there will always be a blind faith that



we have to accept. There is not a written-out path that has boxes that we can check to make sure we are doing the right things along the way. However, if we put our faith in God, then we are given the promise that we will receive eternal life in Him and that is all the knowledge that we could ever hope to have.

Katie Grant

*Church of the Good Shepherd, Augusta*

# First Thursday in Lent

We all know that Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before we celebrate Easter. Looking back at Lent 2020, it started like most other Lenten seasons: We had our fill of pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and had asked imposed on our foreheads. Then before the third Sunday of Lent, everything was turned upside down and sideways. We were impacted with a world-wide pandemic that took away our sense of normal.

This was the first time that the old saying “We have always done it this way” would not be true. Our in-person worship services were cancelled, we had to wear masks, social distance which is hard for us Episcopalians, and wash our hands more often. We all had to learn to either produce Livestream services and Zoom while others had to learn how to watch using this medium.

We are all mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually drained. In this morning’s reading, Paul tells the Hebrews, “The promise of entering His rest is still open.” REST. We all need rest - a rest that will sooth our minds, bodies and souls. REST.

There are many passages in scripture that include the word “rest.” But do any of us really do it? Who can enter into rest? In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Yes, this means you and me who are weary and burdened to come and find REST. “The promise of entering His rest is still open,” so let’s accept the invitation during this Lent to find rest - true rest - and renewal.

Thanks be to God!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.

Ken Shradar

*Christ Church, Dublin*

# First Friday in Lent

I've always been fascinated by St. Paul's words in Ephesians 5:1: "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." You see, God is a good teacher. Like all good teachers, God teaches not just with words, but with deeds; not only by commands, but by example. God doesn't just tell us what to do. God does it and asks us to do it too.

As both a professional preacher and as a regular, old Christian, when I pick up the Bible, I am almost always looking for insight into who God is. How is God being portrayed in this part of the Scripture? What is at the core of God's character? Because answering those questions helps us understand our own vocation as creatures made in the Image of God. It helps us to clarify the voice of God as we perceive it in our hearts and minds. It helps us puzzle through how to live as Christian disciples in a confusing and confused world.

And in this passage, it's really straightforward: "17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, 18 who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. 19 You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 20 You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear."

When we pray and worship, we are praying to a God who is powerful, fair, and just. Our God is kind to the weak and brokenhearted. And by extension, our God is frustrated with the privileged and powerful who ignore the plight of orphans, widows, and strangers. When it says that God “executes justice” it means that God transforms systems that create orphans, widows, and strangers. The command to “fear the Lord your God” does not only refer to praying the right prayers and thinking the right thoughts. It’s also about doing the right things.

This Lent, remember that our vocation is more than just “being nice Christians.” It’s certainly about more than wearing ashes on our foreheads or passing up a cheeseburger on Fridays. Lent is about mercy. It’s about learning to care for people who are in need, and recognizing that that very act is worship. Lent is also about justice. It’s also about asking why the people we care for are needy to begin with and trying to address those root causes in society. That too is worship.

Lent is a time for us to take stock of both the spiritual and physical needs of our world, and work alongside God to transform them both. The God we worship is all about mercy and justice. How will we become imitators of that God today?

The Rev. Guillermo Arboleda  
*St. Matthew’s, Savannah*

# First Saturday in Lent

In my personal spiritual life, spiritual practice is an ever-evolving and vital part of every day of my life. My days start off the exact same way; I'm a creature of habit and I happily embrace it. I'm naturally an early riser. However, to accommodate the scripture readings, Daily Office, and other spiritual readings I wish incorporate into my morning, I have decided to wake up much earlier. It's a sacrifice, but I've gotten used to the earlier time. It's been an easy way to carve out a special time just for God while still being able to be present for all other aspects of my life.

The place I choose to conduct my spiritual practice is also very important. I prefer to do any reading sitting at a desk. I don't want to get too comfortable or I am prone to lose focus on whatever I may be trying to study or meditate on. I also make sure that I have closed my laptop and silenced my phone, just to avoid temptation and distraction.

For the Season of Lent, I have chosen to carry out my spiritual practices at a large dining table I bought from my home church, Grace in Waycross. I now use it as a desk. It was in a bad state of repair when I bought it and I was able to refinish it and breathe some life back into it. Mind you, I am neither a carpenter nor a refinisher. The surface is neither smooth nor free of blemish. It's imperfect like me. However, the table will stay like it is, yet I will not. The purpose of my sitting at the table is to understand my imperfections and learn to remove some, use some, and to learn to live with the rest.

Another vital component is what I don't do rather than what I do. I would venture to say that the majority of us either wake up to the alarm of a smart phone or come in contact with one within minutes of waking up. I am no exception. However, I've had to break the habit of automatically opening every CNN alert that came through overnight and seeing a play-by-play of every horrible event that occurred overnight. I also have to resist the urge to open Facebook and fall into an endless cycle of "doomscrolling."

I find that if I fall into this trap, I rob myself of the peace and stillness that the morning has to offer. I rob myself of the simple pleasure of hearing the tea kettle break the silence of the dark morning because my head is already filled with worry about pandemic, politics, poverty and other things about which I, an individual standing in a kitchen in a bathrobe holding a teabag and teacup, can do very little at 3:00 a.m.

James Israel  
*Grace, Waycross*

## Second Sunday in Lent

As a music minister, songwriter and performer I have to confess that the music of the Lenten season is not always at the top of my playlist! I almost always associate the music of the season with deeply introspective lyrics and minor keys though I know that's not always true. My own religious background did not include the Episcopal Church until about 9 years ago, and the traditions I had been a part of were far less observant of the liturgical calendar and particularly of Lent. As I've considered a reflection, based on Lenten music, I've settled on the scripture from Psalm 51 and the songs I am familiar with that have been based on it.

There are hymns, both contemporary and traditional, choral anthems and vocal solos that have been inspired from those familiar words "create in me a clean heart, o God; and renew a right spirit within me." The first arrangement of this beautiful passage that I became familiar with was by Keith Green, a contemporary Christian artist that I listened to in the 1980's. Later, I would discover the beloved choral arrangement by Carl Mueller. I have sung it in worship with several choirs in various denominations. It is a moving arrangement that stays with you in the way that well crafted music always does!

In the last three years or so I've even written my own solo arrangement of this passage and have used it in worship at St. Anne's several times. When I casually sit at the piano it always seems to be one of the first things I find myself playing. The scripture is so powerful and



personal that it always speaks to me deeply, no matter if it's to the tune of a contemporary chorus or a far more traditional choral anthem. "Create in me a clean heart, O God" are timeless words for all Christian people and they always seem to prepare and center me for the special season of Lent.

Stan Smith

*St. Anne's, Tifton*

## Second Monday in Lent

I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.

Others have labored and you have entered  
into their labor.

John 4: 38

Recently I was doing some COVID cleaning. You know; I was bored and tired of being at home so I finally tackled cleaning out some stored away “stuff”. I came across no less than three unfinished needlework projects. I reflected on them as I continued to clean.

Each project began with a plan, with hope, and a vision. I should interject here that I almost never work from a kit or a pattern, so these were all my own designs. But life happened and each ended up being shoved in a drawer. Fortunately, God neither loses interest nor forgets about the purpose of “projects” once started.

In this passage from John’s Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples in verse 34: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.” Jesus is to complete God’s ongoing “project” of sorts.

It seems that Jesus is making it clear that the work the disciples are doing and will do yokes them to the prophets God sent into the world before them. The “harvest” they will “reap” is from seeds planted and nurtured by others; it will not be “seed” that they themselves plant.

I generally like the reward of seeing a project through to completion.

Gracious Father, may we, with hopeful hearts join the Saints in their labors and with spirits offer the gifts we have to the benefit of our labors. With grateful hands we lift our harvest to you.

The Rev. Ri Lamb, Deacon  
*St. John's & St. Mark's, Albany*

## Second Tuesday in Lent

Today we remember Chad, Bishop of Litchfield, 634 – 672 CE. Appointed by the king to become Bishop, Chad was ordained by “bishops of the British race” who had not been ordained by Roman authority. When Theodore became the Archbishop of Canterbury, he declared that Chad’s ordination was “irregular” and could not stand.

Chad, a humble priest with a true servant’s heart, quietly offered his resignation saying: “Indeed, I never believed myself worthy of it.” Archbishop Theodore quickly had Chad’s ordination “regularized”.

God’s humor here: Bishop Chad is the patron saint of lost elections.

As we pray for healing and compassion within our own borders, Chad exemplifies St. Luke’s Gospel of Christ Jesus’s teaching about humble service: healing a man with dropsy on the Sabbath, exhorting us not to place ourselves in the seat of honor without the host’s invitation, and our including the least of these in our banquets.

A “servant’s heart” is often perceived to be a burden, a barren place of always giving, never receiving. Lent can mistakenly be thought a dry patch of wilderness. Yet, this letting go of self is where our hearts are most free, where springs of God’s grace bubble up with joy. Gifts of grace from God become richer than any pleasure we can devise for ourselves.

With the Psalmist, we can say:

O Lord of hosts, HAPPY are they who put their  
trust in you!

The Rev. June Johnson  
*All Saints, Tybee Island*

## Second Wednesday in Lent

The first time my daughters were placed into my arms on the respective days of their births, I recall feeling tremendous joy, yet that is an understatement. I also recall feeling some fear and reverence. Still, that does not capture my experience. Humility and gratitude were present, but more. I asked, “How could I be trusted with such a precious and vulnerable life?” I knew my sinful self. I’ve wrecked relationships, been dishonest, failed to care for the environment, given into pride and selfishness, lacked compassion and so on. My doubt continued, “Now I am expected to teach and mold and nurture and protect this child?” I did not feel worthy of such a responsibility.

We spend much of our lives proving our worthiness in our careers, in relationships, even at church. We may spend as much time judging the worthiness of others. How much tip does our restaurant server deserve? Does the applicant deserve the scholarship? Has a colleague earned my trust? This dynamic has value for maintaining social, economic and political order. However, it is antithetical to God’s unconditional and unmerited love – Grace.

It is curious the man in the gospel who received healing upon the word of Jesus shows no signs of gratitude or movement towards belief in Jesus and the good news He proclaims. When questioned by Jesus, “Do you want to be made well?” (v. 6), the man offers complaints as to why he cannot be healed (v. 7) instead of answering the question. In John’s gospel account seeing is believing.

We learn the healed man “did not know” Jesus (v. 13) because Jesus “disappeared” (v. 13), that is, Jesus was out of the man’s sight. Jesus reaches out to the man a second time and “found him” (v. 14). The man’s response was to turn away from Jesus and towards those who sought to bring harm to Jesus.

Through the lens we use to judge the worthiness of ourselves and others, the man in the gospel, did not deserve healing. It is suggested he neither wanted to be healed nor even desired to challenge his unbelief. Through the lens of the good news embodied by Jesus and made tangible through his life and “work” (v. 17), God’s unconditional and unmerited love is available to him because as Jesus says, “My Father is still working” (v. 17).

God’s creative and life-giving work begun at Creation continues throughout our broken and undeserving lives. God is still loving us into being the image and likeness of God. Deserving or undeserving, each time we take the hand of a sister in sorrow or a brother in need, each time we share food with the hungry or shelter the homeless, each time we provide a book to a child who has none or assist a single mom to earn her GED, each time we lift high the Cross and not the sword, each time a baby is placed into our arms, God’s unconditional and unmerited love is revealed.

The Rev. Dwayne Varas  
*St. Elizabeth’ of Hungary, Richmond Hill*

## Second Thursday in Lent

Jesus is beginning to claim his authority to God. God has given Jesus the authority to act and speak in the world on God's behalf. Jesus is ruffling the feathers of those around him. He is beginning to say and do things that many people do not want to hear, just like the prophets before him. However, he has started to identify himself as God's son, the one who has given the authority to act as God. Jesus is given the authority to not only act on behalf of God but to act as God.

People who are witnessing Jesus are not sure how to take this. People really don't like it. They begin to fear what they don't know; they fear that Jesus is disrupting their norm; he is too bold and audacious. We can look at these words and actions in retrospect and see that they are true. We know that Jesus did do things that were against the status quo. Jesus loved EVERYONE – and this was and is terrifying. It isn't easy to face that Jesus, with his authority, loves everyone equally at all times. We are also called to do the same.

Given this example of God's love through the authority of Jesus, I realize that I need to step back and take a look at the way that I love. We all have prejudices, whether against color, age, gender, religion, education, or ability. Jesus calls us to look at those prejudices. Jesus calls us to look at those whom we find unpleasant or offensive and to love them radically. Of course, this is easier said than done.



In order to love radically like Jesus, we must let go of our hate, anger, and fear and embrace love and acceptance. We must face the authority of God through Jesus.

Shayna Cranford  
*Trinity, Cochran*

## Second Friday in Lent

The older I get, the more quickly each of the seasons of our liturgical year seem to roll around each year. And somehow, that's especially true for Lent. But it's not for the reason you might think. When I was younger, I recall anticipating and experiencing Lent with something of a sense of foreboding. I used to experience Lent as a time when the church seemed to be telling me that we were broken, and we needed to fix or repair ourselves, "or else". But somewhere along the way, my parish priest helped me to see and experience Lent as the gift and the blessing that it really should be.

Lent calls us to prayer and penitence. Lent offers us an opportunity to put the world and all of its distractions "on a shelf" and to work on what really matters – our relationship with God. And the lessons for today point us in that direction.

The reading from Jeremiah recalls for us the estrangement of the people of Jerusalem from their God. The prophet speaks of the absence of justice or truth and talks of the destruction of Israel as the consequence of their having turned their collective backs on God. And they are reminded that their failure to return to God will cost them their lives.

Likewise, Paul's letter to the Romans reminds us that all of us have turned away from God. All of us are subject to the power of sin. But God is faithful and calls us to return and to put our faith, not in "the rules", but in God.

And John's gospel lesson gives us a glimpse of what lies ahead for Jesus and for us. Jesus testifies to his enemies, and he reminds them that the Baptizer was "the lamp" who testified "to the light". John points us to the trial of Jesus during Holy Week, and therefore points us to crucifixion, death and resurrection. And that recalls for us that it is through the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus that each of us finds our very lives.

So, on this second Friday in Lent, I am thankful for the gift and blessing of this Holy Lent. For in it we are reminded and blessed to know that God is gracious to all of us who have gone astray, and brings us again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of the Word made flesh.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

The Rev. Jim Elliott  
*St. James', Quitman*

## Second Saturday in Lent

Based on the Ignatian practice of using your imagination, this type of contemplative prayer only requires your imagination. Allow yourself to let your mind go and experience your imagination in all its forms.

Read The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus – Mark 10:46-52

- Invite God to meet you in this experience as you offer yourself to God and what God has for you this day. Begin with a few deep, life giving breaths.
- Slowly, intentionally read through the scripture once.
- Recall that we are engaging with the Word of God and what one desires from this encounter. God is present and because God is present one relies on God.
- Read the passage a second time so that the story and the details of the story become familiar. As this scene unfolds in your imagination engage all your senses within your mind's eye.
- As you enter the scene there is a desire to physically encounter Jesus. Visualize Bartimaeus beside the road, unable to see who is coming. Is the road wide or narrow, smooth or rocky? Imagine the crowd, who is in the crowd, are they rowdy and excited, or somber and quiet? Is the weather hot or cold, are the skies overcast or sunny? Do you notice any smells or possibly taste the dust as the crowd approaches? Suddenly, you are blind Bartimaeus.

What are you feeling, hearing, experiencing on the roadside? Linger here a few minutes allowing yourself to fully experience becoming Bartimaeus.

- Take time to engage with your character and the other characters in this scene. What emotions arise in you? Fear, excitement, dread, disbelief, joy...
- Suddenly, you find yourself face to face with Jesus. Imagine the conversation, his probing questions, your answers. What sensations are you experiencing in your body? You can see!
- At the end of this time with Jesus, allow your imagination to run free, is there more to this encounter, how does the scene play out for you? Take a few minutes to speak to Christ asking questions or saying what comes from your heart at this moment.
- Slowly, come back to the present. Take a few deep intentional breaths thanking God for what you may have received, gently open your eyes to this room and your surroundings.

Karen Cote

*St. Luke's, Rincon*

## Third Sunday in Lent

“Go Forward, Christian Soldier”

Hymnal 1982, 563; Hymnal 1940, 553

“Go forward, Christian soldier” concludes *Counsels of a Godfather* (1861), which the Rev. Lawrence Tuttiett (sometime Rector of the Episcopal Church in St. Andrews, Scotland) wrote to prepare his godchildren for Confirmation. As the imperative — “Go forward, Christian soldier, / Beneath His banner true!” — suggests, it focuses on what follows “After Confirmation.”

Confirmation strengthens us for the fight anticipated by the old baptismal liturgy. The child is marked with the sign of the cross, “in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed ... manfully to fight under [Christ’s] banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end.” Jesus’ own baptism shows that conflict must follow. Immediately after he was baptized, as today’s Gospel (Matthew 4:1-11) says, “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” The calendar presents the same pattern: Epiphany (manifestation of God’s dearly beloved Son) leads to Lent, our own forty days of fasting and prayer.

When the tempter challenged a starving Jesus to prove his divine sonship by turning stones to bread, his reply showed he was already feasting on God’s Word. He did not fast for fasting’s sake. Musicians don’t practice scales for the sake of scales, but to partake in the pleasure of beautiful music. Fasting wrenched his focus up to a

richer feast “with joy and spiritual longing” (as Benedict of Nusia said to embrace Lent). The hymn’s first stanza points us to that feast: “He can with bread of Heaven / Thy fainting spirit feed.” Neither saccharine nor naive, the hymn warns of “treacherous voices” and the allure of “peaceful rest,” of giving up rather than pressing forward “Till Christ Himself shall call thee / To lay thine armor by.” Jesus faced such temptations both in the wilderness and in Gethsemane, from the beginning of his ministry to its end. “Cast yourself off the ledge!” the serpent still whispers, “Doesn’t God love you? Won’t he save you?”

Be on guard, Tuttiett warns, “Cease not to watch and pray.” Yet even Peter succumbed to slumber and denied Jesus. What hope then do we have? The hymn answers: “The Lord Himself, thy Leader / Shall all thy foes subdue.” Indeed, “Because there is none other that fighteth for us.” Jesus resisted and the devil fled; afterward, “angels came and ministered unto him.” The hymn reminds us, “Far more o’er thee are watching / Than human eyes can know,” just as Elisha told his servant when the Syrian host surrounded them: “Fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them.” Then his servant’s eyes were opened “and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6:16-17).

May we go forward into this Lent with joy and longing, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews. 12:2).

Drew Keane  
*St. John’s, Savannah*

## Third Monday in Lent

Uncomfortable words. Speaking truth about deception. Those are the hallmarks of Jeremiah's sermon delivered in a time of crumbling empires and the impending exile of the Israelites. The prophet is preaching to a traumatized people embroiled in an uncertain world. His message to them is to stop clinging to the idea that being inside the temple without changing their ways would somehow keep them safe from the powers that were about to carry them into exile. The temple has become an idol, "a den of robbers" as the battles of worldly powers rage on. It is called "the temple of the Lord" but those have become empty words.

We, too, are a traumatized people. Much of our daily lives have been upended by a viral pandemic, our political life is polarized, and we continue to struggle with unresolved wounds of racism and classism. We are at a time that calls us to re-examine what it means to be in right relationship with God and with each other, taking care of the strangers and watching out for those who are the orphans and widows in our midst.

How do we show the love of Christ in our dealings with others in person and online, especially when we are under stress? Perhaps it is worthwhile to take a breath and consider whether it is a good thing to respond immediately to an email or text that rubs us the wrong way on first reading. Maybe we take a walk or say a prayer before we hit "send." In some communities, those wearing a mask during this pandemic are being mocked as having little faith in God as the protector rather than



seeing mask-wearing as a necessary and God-loving gesture to protect the other from a terrible virus.

Jesus constantly challenges us to come back into right relationship with God. That means putting aside our own wants and self-centered needs to benefit another.

As we move into this third week of Lent, how are we doing with that portion of our Baptismal Covenant where we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all people, loving our neighbors as ourselves”? Hopefully, we are striving in that Godward direction lest these be empty words.

Susan Gage

*Seminarian, Virginia Theological Seminary*

## Third Tuesday in Lent

Obedience. Faith. Life. This is the journey that our readings take us on today.

Jeremiah begins with a lament and a warning: God's people are not hearing – or not heeding – God. Historically speaking, this never ends well. God speaks to us and offers us a way out of our humanity, a way beyond our brokenness. But we have to be willing to listen, and obey. If we don't, if we listen to and follow only ourselves, then the only place our path leads is to more misery, more suffering, more death. Jeremiah begs God's people: please listen.

And what is the command to which we should listen? Paul points us to Abraham, and to Abraham's covenant with God. What was required of Abraham? Just to trust. Trust in God. That's what faith means. Not just reciting our Creeds at worship, but being willing to place our faith and trust and confidence in God alone, because it is God alone who has the power to save us, to bring us out of the pit we've dug for ourselves. "We have no power in ourselves to help ourselves...", and so we trust in God to do what we cannot.

Because as Christ himself says, when we are thirsty, if we only come to him, we can drink. We can drink the living water of the Spirit that is not just life but life abundant. We can drink so fully and completely that we ourselves become channels, streams of that living water, able to share the Good News to a thirsty world. We can become conduits of the Holy Spirit, able to help show

others the way out of their own pits, the way to living water. The way to life.

We all find ourselves stuck, at times. Our readings today give us a road map out: Follow God's word. Trust in God's grace. Live, and bring life to the world.

The Rev. Ian Lasch

*St. Francis of the Islands, Savannah*

## Third Wednesday in Lent

With dark fabric, it's easy to follow the direction of a golden strand that runs through it. That's not true with multicolored cloth. The same is true for daily readings. Some days, the strand is clear; other days, not so much. Today is one of those "not" days. But look closely with me.

In Jeremiah, it's not certain if the speaker is the LORD or Jeremiah. If you're a rules/right person, you could stew over this one factor and have a need to be right before proceeding. I decided not to. This passage is about heart-piercing, broken relationships: "worthless idols;" "unfaithful people;" "every one of them is a deceiver;" "friend deceives friend and no one speaks the truth." And it breaks the LORD's heart: "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed. I mourn, and horror grips me." Relationships are broken - those between God and God's Beloved and those between the members of God's Beloved. God grieves.

Enter Paul. Romans. If you're a rules/right person, you could stew over the questions of whether faith comes before repentance and reconciliation or is faith a happy result of repentance and reconciliation. Is there true repentance without reconciliation? Can there be reconciliation without repentance? I decided not to. This passage, the essence of Paul's "gospel," is also about right relationship with God and with our neighbors. We can get stuck trying to answer questions about the order of things (you have to have faith before you can repent and you have to repent before reconciliation can happen,

ad nauseum), or we can faith that God probably cares less about rules and right order than God cares about the healing of relationships. Even Paul doesn't propose to know exactly how this mystery of grace happens. He just knows, and tells us, that "while we were powerless" and "while we were still sinners" God's love for the Beloved drew us to God to make our relationships right.

In John, Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world." The very next words come from rules/right thinking: "your testimony is not valid." (Here, let's avoid the real question and find some rule to distract us from truth.) Jesus loves his Beloved, so he tries to answer. But if we are rules/right folks, so set in hearing only what rules should apply, then we may not hear or see what Jesus has to offer. Jesus offers a relationship with his Abba and with himself. And when they try to trap him with his own words, he replies, "You do not know me or my Father."

My spiritual director once advised, "If we must err, let's err in the direction of love." Let's try that. Let us "err in the direction of love." Let's relinquish our need to control (that's really what it is... this need to be right, this clinging to rules over relationships) and live into love. That's the single gold strand whose direction is worth following.

Zibi Davidson

*St. John's & St. Mark's, Albany*

## Third Thursday in Lent

Writer Philip Yancey in his book *What's so Amazing about Grace* tells a story about a British conference on comparative religions. Learned scholars focused their debate on what belief was unique to Christianity. The discussion had gone on for some time and was becoming heated when in walked C.S. Lewis. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked. When told they were discussing what was unique about Christianity among world religions, Lewis responded, "Oh that's easy. It's grace."

Today's reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans initially sounds like another diatribe against sin designed to make us feel bad about ourselves except for this - woven into the thread of this chapter is grace. Paul says that in our lives in Jesus, grace abounded. I also like to think of it as grace unbound; grace set loose in our lives and in the world.

The world, of late, has seemed an increasingly graceless place, full of rage, hate and fear. And for too many, Christianity has seemed an agent of gracelessness by being a harbinger of judgement and hypocrisy. Yancey describes tells of a woman who was encouraged to go to church with her many needs and problems. "Church!", she replied, "Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

You see our challenge?

C. S. Lewis said that the goal of Jesus was to make each one of us little Christs. Or to put it another way, we are to be grace notes to the world. It's not hard to identify those grace notes. In a New York Times piece on grace – yes, the NYT – writer Peter Wehner reflected that “If you find yourself in the company of people whose hearts have been captured by grace, count yourself lucky. They love us despite our messy lives, stay connected to us through our struggles, always holding out the hope of redemption.”

“You don't sense hard edges, dogmatism or self-righteous judgment from gracious people. There's a tenderness about them that opens doors that had previously been bolted shut. People who have been transformed by grace have a special place in their hearts for those living in the shadows of society. They're easily moved by stories of suffering and step into the breach to heal. And grace properly understood always produces gratitude.”

This is grace unbound.

Frederick Buechner said, “people are prepared for everything except for the fact that beyond the darkness of their blindness there is a great light” You are part of this great light and called to point people in the direction of the light of the world. And if they can't see it for themselves just by pointing, take them by the hand and lead them to Jesus, to love and grace unbound.

The Rev. Cynthia Taylor  
*Holy Comforter, Martinez*

## Third Friday in Lent

In John 8:33-47, Jesus is teaching the importance of having the love of God in your heart. As a society that oftentimes sin, we may not realize that sinning is having a detachment from God. In other words, when we sin, we are not acting in accordance with the love of God. As we are reading verses 33-47, one may be confused on why the Jews were still trying to kill Jesus after He explains who He is. And they were still unable to understand why their actions were not coming from a place of love. Jesus says to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word."

Although the Jews were believers in Jesus, they put the Pharisees above Him. When we continue to put people or things above God, we will act upon those desires, like Jesus states in verse 44. It is much more difficult to understand the guidance from God despite the way in which the message is delivered when we are not welcoming of his love into our hearts. Through worship, prayer, and the sacraments, we can continue to grow closer to God and walk in His path. This brings me to one of my favorite prayers by Saint Augustine to keep God's presence with me in everything I do:

"God be in my head,  
And in my understanding.  
God be in my eyes,  
And in my looking.  
God be in my mouth,



And in my speaking.  
God be in my heart,  
And in my thinking.  
God be at my end,  
And at my departing.”

-Saint Augustine  
From the Sarum Primer

Cole Maddox  
*Canterbury Club, Augusta University*

## Third Saturday in Lent

Most Christians today think of retreat as some time spent in a different setting for a period of time to learn some type of lesson we can take back to our everyday lives to help us practice our faith more effectively. I've been on a few and these types of retreats are valuable. Especially those that are in peaceful natural settings. There is great value in taking a break from our hectic culture to recharge and grow. Some of us fantasize about having a dimmer switch and volume control for the world around us.

I'd like to suggest a simpler retreat practice that has been vital in deepening my spiritual life. Just periodically take a day, or a couple of days, the duration doesn't matter as much as the practice itself and get alone in the midst of a natural setting. The woods, cabin, park, wilderness area, backyard, the wilder the better. Sit down. Don't read or write. Take no mechanical apparatus with you. Maybe don't even try to pray or meditate. Just listen. Feel the presence of God. Feel it filling your soul. When you get tired of sitting, walk. When you get thirsty or hungry, partake in what you've brought with you. Resist the urge to think you need to be doing something.

I've realized on this type of retreat that this may be the most important work I can do. Commune in God's wonderful creation. Notice the connectedness of all matter. Begin to understand why there are so many references to the natural world in scripture.

The goodness of the creative act. God speaking in silence, wind, and breath. The value of the birds of the

fields, the vine and the branches, seeds sown and food harvested. And my favorite, God as a rock. In this setting, it's hard to be self-centered enough to think that God is through creating and that we're not partners in it. We may realize there are infinite creations of God waiting patiently for humans to evolve enough to understand them. To see birth and death as a divine dance of cyclical love. To recognize that just as incarnate God, through Christ, came to show humans how to be, the same incarnate love permeates all life forms in all worlds.

This type of retreat has the potential to put things in perspective. It may tend to make us more mindful of the ways we approach our relationships with each other and the daily numerous decisions we make. It may open your soul in love.

Cleveland Beach

*St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Richmond Hill*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Each year when we sing the Lenten hymn “Wilt thou forgive the sin where I begun”, #141 in The Hymnal 1982, my mind immediately goes to the seventh chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. That’s the unforgettable one that goes something like, “I do those things I don’t want to do, and I don’t do the things I know I should.” If you have ever been the lector on the Sunday morning when this text is appointed, you know Paul’s words here are a mouthful to recite!

But I think Paul’s words and the text of this hymn get at something that is fundamental to the Christian journey: growth is gradual, and change is slow. There is no greater confirmation of this for me than when I start to examine myself as Lent begins each year. I ask myself, “What is it that I have been able to make better? In what areas have I grown?” Too often, I feel like Paul taking an inventory of his own life and responding, “Why can’t I just get it all right already?” (My paraphrase)

The liturgical calendar that we live by, in our tradition, gives us a chance to take this inventory of our own lives every single year. And for this reason, the Lenten season can be a frustrating reminder of just how gradual growth is and how slowly change is realized. But it can also be, if we let it, a chance for a radical encounter with the grace of God. Hearing those words “you are dust” on Ash Wednesday gives us an opportunity not only to make a recommitment to living more deeply into the life of Christ, but it also gives us another opportunity to allow God’s grace to seep into

the very cracks of our habits, unhealthy and healthy, and lead us from death into Easter life.

The words of the last verse of this hymn make a bold request to God that might be paraphrased something like this: When I die, promise me, God, that at my death, your Son Jesus will shine as brightly as he shines now. If you can make that promise, I will rest in that light of Jesus - that grace and mercy of Jesus! - and worry no more.”

I pray that this Lenten season we would take an honest inventory of our lives, confront our own sins, and, as French Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, “trust in the slow work of God.”

Gabriel Perkins-Lawrence  
*Seminarian, Sewanee*

# Fourth Monday in Lent

“When they were satisfied...”

John 6:12 NRSV

The story of feeding the 5,000 is so familiar that I wonder if we miss this little fragment of a sentence. “When they were satisfied...” (I much prefer it translated as satisfied instead of filled. There is a difference!) And I wonder if they were satisfied only because they had had enough to eat. Or if it was that in the bread they remembered Passover and manna in the wilderness for all those hungry, discouraged, weary people.

People hungry, as we are today, and seldom satisfied. We have our ideas about what we need to feel satisfied: time and touch with those we love, freedom to go through our days without fear of illness, church together, some peace in our conflict-weary country, something that looks like normalcy, please... And Jesus, who hears our complaining, bids us sit down with him, sit down and be satisfied (and filled) with what is ever before us: people to love, the freedom of prayer, church that continues in all its variations, and that promised peace that passes all understanding.

All those things are food for our weary souls, passed out by the One who loves us through it all. Perhaps we are called to redefine satisfied for our time.

The Rev. Patti Davis, Deacon  
*Christ Church, Savannah*

## Fifth Tuesday in Lent

“I am of the flesh,” St. Paul says. (Alas, aren’t we all?) He then engages in a dialogue with himself that reveals the conflict within his soul: “I want to do good, but I will sin.” Does this sound familiar? In 2000 years, not much has changed. We want to do good. We make resolutions and commitments about our time, our gifts, our treasure. We do this, fully intending to follow through—to do good, to follow Christ. But the world calls; we lose our way. We forget where we are going, and why. Like Martin Bell’s ‘Rag-tag Army,’\* “most of us are afraid and lonely (especially during the crisis created by the Covid pandemic) and would like to hold hands, or cry, or run away.” We forget who we are called to be. St. Paul reminds us as he struggles with his own will, and God’s will for him. “I delight in the law of God,” he says, then bemoans the humanity that represents the “other law” – what we often call “the lure of the flesh.” Then St. Paul calls out in that lament we have heard hundreds of times (and may have cried out ourselves), “Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?”

The struggle is not new. Nor was it original with St. Paul. We come from a long line of sinners. We are tempted sometimes, in our self-centeredness (in our sin) to think that no one else has ever suffered the disappointments, the griefs, the loneliness we experience. A quick look around should dispel us of that notion, and lead us to repenting our sins of indifference, ingratitude, and neglect (among many others).

Almost 2000 years later, we pray for grace to affirm and own St. Paul's conclusion to his lament: "Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." We sin. We fall short. We cannot save ourselves. Yet the promise endures. It is the grace of God through Christ Jesus that brings us together, disperses us to serve, and will at the end fulfill Christ's promise of one flock, one shepherd.

\*Martin Bell was an Episcopal priest who published, among other writings, *The Way of the Wolf*, a collection of parables that included the much acclaimed "Barrington Bunny". "Rag-tag Army" is a parable in that collection.

Joni Woolfe  
*Calvary, Americus*



## Fourth Wednesday in Lent

“Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”

Jeremiah 18:6

I am an artist, I have thrown pots on the wheel and built sculptures with my hands. The mystery (and fun!) of throwing a pot is that you truly cannot predict how the piece will end. The final shape, curve, and glaze cannot be “perfected” the way other artforms can be. Once you place your pot in the kiln, its fate is out of your hands.

And yet, we are reminded that God’s relationship to us is the exact opposite of this “earthly law.” When we open the kiln, we get whatever we get, be that a crumpled pile of ceramic or a beautiful work of art. When God opens the kiln, all that is visible is perfection.

The words of Jesus in today’s scripture reflect this truth: “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” “See the Son” is a translation of the Greek word, *theoreo* (tay-oh-ree-oh). There are multiple words for “seeing” in Greek. To see with the eyes. To see, as an understanding of the mind. *Theoreo* does not mean “with eyes, with the mind.” It means “to see something special.” Something otherworldly, something that can cause us to feel awe and wonder.

My friends, I pray that in this season of Lent, we may see the Son. I pray that we feel the awe and wonder that can bolster our belief. I pray that we theoreo that God is molding us as a potter does clay. That God is molding us into something perfect, something that not even the weakness and provisional reality of the flesh can prevent. When Easter morning arrives, we will see with our eyes and live into the triumph of the Spirit over the Flesh. The more we live in the Spirit, the more we will experience the awe and wonder of the Great Potter. Go make something special today, you never know when you'll have the opportunity to see the Son.

Roger Speer

*Church of the Good Shepherd, Augusta*

## Fourth Thursday in Lent

“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?”

Romans 8:24

There is an old fable attributed to Aesop that details the story of a relationship between an ant and a caterpillar. The strong ant continually mocks and belittles the caterpillar for his slow movements and lack of productivity. Each day, the caterpillar endures the scathing ridicule and goes about his tasks at his natural pace. The ant briskly runs about and builds complex structures, while the caterpillar seems to meander with no sense of purpose or urgency. Much to the dismay of the ant, the caterpillar begins to quietly and masterfully weave a cocoon. In a matter of time, he gracefully flies over the ant in the form of a large butterfly. The ant is now at a loss for words.

In this challenging year, we have been forced to learn the value and importance of delayed gratification. Many of our goals and expectations have been punted off into the unforeseen future. It feels as if we are simply confined to a state of watchful waiting. We are continually forced to strengthen our sense of patience. Our patience has become entirely intertwined with our deepest sense of hope. St. Paul reminds us that we cannot hope for “what is seen”. If hope were found entirely in the visible realities of the present moment, we would cease to grow and work. Hope implies a continual sense of forward movement and positive

change. As Christians, our shared sense of hope is one of the realities that bind us most tightly together. Our faith is built on a foundation of unceasing hope for that which is not yet “seen”. May this Lent be a season of delayed gratification, patience, and hope. May each day of quiet and diligent work on our cocoons bring us closer to our emergence and grand flight as new butterflies.

Ethan White

*Christ Church, Savannah*

## Fourth Friday in Lent

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:38-39

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

John 6:56

Nothing can separate us from the love God so freely gives to us. Nothing. St. Paul's conviction about God's love is not mere empty words that sound nice, but a belief forged in the hardships of his life. St. Paul had many reasons to believe that God wouldn't love him, the chief of sinners. After all, he at one point was determined to destroy God's Church. After becoming a Christian and planting several churches, he still had to defend the legitimacy of his ministry, even at times to those very churches he helped to start. He suffered affliction, persecution, and imprisonment. Yet in all he experienced, he still had a sure and certain hope in God's love. St. Paul knew that God's love was real even when the circumstances of his life might suggest otherwise.

Nothing can separate us from the love God so freely gives to us. God's love for us—God's love for you—is real even when the circumstances of our lives might

suggest otherwise. In the midst of the changes and chances of this life, God's love for us remains constant regardless of what we may face today or tomorrow or next week or next year—nothing can change that.

Nothing.

Throughout Lent, we work our way once again to the Cross. God's inestimable and immeasurable love so freely given for us is most clearly apparent on the Cross. There we are invited to feast abundantly on the riches of God's grace and divine life, joining ourselves to God for ever. As Jesus says in John's Gospel, we abide in him and he in us. God's abiding love is with us all the days of our lives and nothing can ever separate us from God or from the love God has for us. Nothing.

The Rev. Nathan Wilson  
*St. Paul's, Jesup*

## Fourth Saturday in Lent

Ignatian spirituality, particularly Ignatian contemplation, changed my life. I used to say I was not good at praying. I struggled to pray and rarely spent time in prayer on my own. Whether it was the extemporaneous prayer styles of my Baptist upbringing or using the Prayer Book once I embraced the Episcopal tradition, prayer often seemed out of reach for me or like a rote exercise devoid of any real spiritual depth. I read the Bible, but I didn't understand what it meant to pray scripture. Did that just mean reading it and saying "amen" at the end?

Then I was introduced to Ignatian spirituality and the imaginative form of prayer known as Ignatian contemplation. Developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century, Ignatian contemplation is a form of praying with scripture that employs your imagination in placing yourself in a scene from scripture or in the presence of Jesus. This form of prayer allows you to enter into the events of scripture and your prayer can become an event itself that you remember and reflect upon. It lends itself best to narrative passages of scripture, particularly Gospel passages. Jesus invites us into His story to make it our own. Ignatian contemplation gives us a way to do that.

Using your imagination you can feel the heat of the campfire as the risen Jesus cooks breakfast on the beach, taste the bread and fish Jesus has multiplied, feel the water as Jesus washes your feet, and hear the words of your Savior spoken directly to you. Ignatian

contemplation isn't always easy. It takes practice (after all, it does come from Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises), but when employed it can make scripture resonate in deep, meaningful, and exciting ways.

Turn to your favorite Gospel scene or today's Daily Office Gospel reading. Read the passage through, noting any words or phrases that strike you. Use your imagination, a gift from God, to engage all your senses. What do you hear, smell, touch? What is the feeling in the room? You are not just a distant observer, you are a participant. Where is Jesus? What is he doing? What is he saying? Is he speaking to you? How will you respond? Sit in the scene and let Jesus work through your thoughts and emotions. End the scene when you are ready.

Ignatian contemplation has invigorated my prayer life in ways that I have a hard time putting into words. I struggle because when I attempt to put these prayer experiences into words they can sound too ethereal and, me being human, I fear that people will think I'm silly. I hesitate because it feels too much like I am bearing my soul and exposing intimate things that I do not want everyone to know. But when you ask Jesus to be present with you as you pray scripture this way and you have experiences such as cupping your hands before Jesus for him to feed you or Jesus coming to you and telling you to "put down your nets (or career equivalent) and follow me," well, it has an effect on you. It changes you and brings you closer to Jesus, our friend and companion.

Brandon Medley

*St. Anne's, Tifton*



## Fifth Sunday in Lent

Climbing the steps to the church organ loft each week, I observe several stacks of hymnals and prayer books looking rather forlorn, all piled up in the stairwell. Having been placed there in accordance with diocesan guidelines during what feels like a never-ending pandemic, it seems as though they may never make their way back to the pew racks, and likewise, we might never sing again as a congregation. I've grown so weary of this sad state and eagerly anticipate the day when we will gather again and sing in full force. Can I get an amen? Meanwhile, a hymnal can be a valuable devotional tool—a treasure trove of sacred poetry, which, when used in combination with holy scripture and the prayer book in personal devotions, family worship and in small groups (masked and distanced, of course), can be quite useful.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) was a Scottish pastor in the Free Church of Scotland. At that time, congregational singing consisted solely of metrical psalms. Bonar was concerned about children's understanding of the psalms in worship, so he penned over six hundred hymns accordingly. Seven of these have been included in our current Hymnal 1982, and one of his most beloved is "I heard the voice of Jesus say," No. 692.

I invite you to meditate on these words, noting the scriptures referenced.

I I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
"Come unto me and rest; [Matthew 11:28]  
and in your weariness lay down

your head upon my breast.”

I came to Jesus as I was,  
so weary, worn, and sad;  
I found in him a resting place,  
and he has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
“Behold, I freely give[John 4:14]  
the living water; thirsty one,  
stoop down and drink, and live.”

I came to Jesus, and I drank  
of that life-giving stream;  
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
and now I live in him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
“I am this dark world’s light;[John 8:12]  
look unto me, thy morn shall rise,  
and all your day be bright.”

I looked to Jesus, and I found  
in him my Star, my Sun;  
and in that light of life I’ll walk  
till pilgrim days are done.

In both the 1940 and 1982 Episcopal Hymnals, Bonar’s hymn is paired with The Third Tune<sup>1</sup> an original psalm tune by Tudor composer, Thomas Tallis (1505?-1585). With its irregular rhythm and minor mode, it lends itself more to be sung by choirs than congregations.

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*1 I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say - Thomas Tallis - Saint Ambrose Schola Cantorum*

English composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), adapted the folk tune Kingsfold<sup>2</sup> for use with Bonar's hymn text in *The English Hymnal*, 1906, and since then, it has often been the tune most associated with it. (Having grown up in the Southern Baptist tradition, I remember hearing this hymn sung to the tune of "Drink to me only with thine eyes" during a Sunday evening service, by a soloist who sounded just like the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*. Imagine the giggles!)

Here's the icing on the cake, as it were. Ralph Vaughan Williams, a composer of operas, ballets, chamber music, secular and religious vocal pieces and symphonic works, was strongly influenced by Tudor music and English folksong. His *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis*<sup>3</sup> (1910) is based upon *The Third Tune*, the one found in our hymnal. Scored for double string orchestra, it is, in a word, glorious. I shall never forget a live performance played by the strings of the Savannah Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maestro Chelsea Tipton in the newly restored Cathedral (now Basilica) of St. John the Baptist. It was like heaven on earth. (The voice of Jesus, perhaps?) Treat yourself, listen, read the hymn text again and meditate. Vaughan Williams also composed *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*<sup>4</sup> (1939)

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*2 Hymn I heard the voice of Jesus say Westminster Abbey Choir, 2015*

*3 Vaughan Williams Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis HQ*

*4 Camerata Chicago Vaughan Williams Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*

for string orchestra and harp, based upon the folk tune we know as Kingsfold. My personal experience with the piece goes back to another Savannah Symphony concert in the Johnny Mercer Theatre, a couple of decades ago.

As Chorusmaster, I had the honor of conducting a Masterworks Series concert of my choosing, so I selected three of my favorites—Duruflé Requiem, Vaughan Williams Serenade to Music and Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus. As the concert progressed, I felt as though I was standing a few inches above the podium, as the music, the chorus and the orchestra transported me to another plain. For me, the experience was like drinking from a “life-giving stream.” I pray you are transported to a place of rest and peace upon hearing this heavenly music.

Gracious and loving God, we praise you for inspiring hymn writers and composers with words and melodies which afford us glimpses of your glory. Thank you for being our song in the night, especially during this time of isolation, fear and loss. As we listen for your voice, may we rest in you, drink from your life-giving stream and walk as children of the light. Amen.

Timothy L. Hall  
*Christ Church, Savannah*

*\*Footnotes can be found at YouTube*

## Fifth Monday in Lent

In 2007, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Why? At that time, my children were ages 19 down to 6. They didn't deserve this. I spent more hours than I care to admit wallowing in fear and self-pity wondering why and what I could have done differently. In spite of my inability to pick myself up out of the muck and mire of my own thoughts and fears, the Holy Spirit was at work.

Slowly but surely, I began to see tidbits of light. I began to understand that while I was the "main character" in this particular story, the story was about more than me. It was about humbling myself in order to allow others the blessing of serving. It was about showing my children that even when faced with adversity, trusting God to care for me and the ones I love is possible. And even to this day, it is about trying to be still and listen to how God wants to use me and my experience to be a reflection of Christ in the world around me.

I try, in my narrow thought processes, to figure things out. I get lost in the whys and wherefores. I want to justify why something happens.

But at the end of the day, when I get still and listen, my eyes are opened and I realize, it's not about me.

Molly Stevenson  
*Christ Church, Valdosta*

## Fifth Tuesday in Lent

In Chapter 9 of John's gospel, we find ourselves in the midst of a miracle, onlookers each of us, witnesses to a man whose sight has just been restored by Jesus, who using the spit of his mouth and the dirt of the earth, created a most holy (albeit an arguably unpleasant) salve. But the nature of the concoction smeared across the blind man's eyes matters very little when compared to the nature of the healer, a healer who supposedly sinned by breaking the sabbath, hence why the Pharisees are called by the man's neighbors to investigate and where our scripture selection continues today.

With Jesus physically absent when the questioning begins, the Pharisees are divided over the divine nature of Jesus and are becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of answers they receive. They first question the man who had formerly been blind, then unsatisfied with his response they move onto questioning the man's parents who, afraid to openly acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, defer to their son – and here is where it gets interesting. The Pharisees continue demanding answers from the man as to how he was healed and taking a dramatic turn the man pointedly asks them if the reason they want him to repeat the story of his healing is because they themselves wish to become Jesus' disciples, followers not of a sinner, but of a man clearly sent by God. And that, I feel, is what this part of the gospel is calling us to: *turning*. Blind into sighted, meek into empowered, apprehensiveness into witness; all through the power of Christ.

Let us ask, are we each in our own ways the Pharisees? What miracles have we been witness to – even just in the past year or so – but have not given witness to? Can we be like the man, formerly blind, and through Christ bring ourselves to see God at work in our world and in our lives, even now when we are facing crisis after crisis, loss after loss, question after question? Again, how can we each turn to Him without condition, accepting that though we may not have the answers and though we cannot begin to grasp at the mysteries of how God does that work, we have a God that loves us as His own, never to be separated from Him?

When Jesus hears that the man was driven out by the Pharisees, He is there; indeed, never having been removed spiritually from the action in today's gospel. Jesus is there waiting to affirm for this man and for us this truth: He came so that we might see, and in choosing to see that we may turn to Him, and in turning to Him that we may have salvation.

Shelley Martin

*Campus Missioner for Augusta University*

## Fifth Wednesday in Lent

It is written that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on Him in whom they do not believe and how can they believe if they have not heard? To believe you must accept and trust something is true. And how can they hear without a preacher?

EVANGELISM. The act of preaching the gospel with the intention of sharing the message and teachings of Jesus Christ to people who don't believe. The ultimate goal of evangelism is to lead non-believers to Christ. For those who truly believe that should be our ultimate goal.

God chose preaching as his means of conveying the truth to every generation. With technology today, the gospel can be heard through television, radio, tapes, facebook and zoom where you can interact with one another, yet the word still has to be preached.

This reading challenges us as believers to evangelize. We believe that everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. But what about those that don't believe or have not heard. We are all ministers of the gospel when we share God's word with others. During this Lent let us reflect on how we can be Evangelist to those who believe and those who do not believe.

Toni Blue

*St. Matthew's, Savannah*



## Fifth Thursday in Lent

For some odd reason, the reading from John 10:19-42, puts me in mind of one of my mother's old comedy records. After a hard day's work at a nursing home, lifting and caring for folks who very often didn't care much for her, my mother would go down into the basement of our home to wash laundry, have a sip, and listen to Mom's Mabley or Pig Meat Markum on an old record player.

My mother enjoyed washing clothes on her wringer washing machine. Seven children produced mountains of dirty clothes, but my mother saw to it that we were spotless. We had no money for anything new, so the secondhand clothes that had been selected with great care, were well maintained; so well in fact that they always looked new.

My siblings and I would listen through the floor vents to the grown-up humor that made her laugh. My mother had little to laugh about, but the country humor of the Black folks who'd been through what she'd been through gave her the relief she needed from the daily struggle of trying to feed, clothe and house seven children on her own.

"Is you is, or is you ain't who you say you is?" the comedian would say. The question was always asked by someone who by rights should have recognized their own people.

"So, the Jews gathered around him and said, how long will you keep us in suspense," is you is or is you ain't the Christ, just go on and tell us already.

But Jesus, like one of my mother's comedians, does not answer the way the listeners would like, instead, he tells them a story. In this story, he illustrates that who he is, is actually a two-way street requiring that the listener recognize the voice of the shepherd.

From those same floor vents, we would hear my mother's prayers. She would pray for our safety and for our wellbeing and she'd pray that we would never forget that we were children of God.

Is you is, or is you ain't who you say you are?

Dr. Bertice Berry  
*Christ Church, Savannah*

## Fifth Friday in Lent

As I read Jeremiah's letter to the Israelites exiled in Babylon, I am reminded of the hymn taken from Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon I wept, yea I wept.... How can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

Yet, Jeremiah does indeed tell the people to sing the Lord's song, thus setting the stage for the diaspora. He tells the people not to believe the false prophets' claim that delivery is imminent. Rather, he tells them to plant gardens, to marry, to raise children. It would be easy to construe Jeremiah's comments to mean that the people should assimilate into the culture. But that would be erroneous. Jeremiah tells the people to make peace with their captors, to pray for the city where they live, but also to sing the Lord's song and to keep the hope that God will deliver them. Throughout history, the Jewish religion has been kept alive by families who, though living in a less than welcoming environment, participated fully in the life of the community while maintaining their religious identity and never giving up hope of returning home in "God's time."

Reading this excerpt from Jeremiah, I cannot help but think about the many groups of refugees and exiled people who landed here in America. Of Africans who were captured and enslaved. Of the Irish who were driven out of their homeland by famine and then met with signs saying "No Irish Need Apply." Of Japanese Americans who were imprisoned during WWII. Of Latinos fleeing violence in their homeland, only to encounter a wall or to be separated from their families at the border.

Even while embracing American culture, these refugees struggle to maintain their ancestral culture. They plant gardens, they raise families, they learn the language. They become “Americanized,” just as the Israelites became “Babylonized.” But they still sing their song here in a strange land. They still hope for a better life.

Real hope, claims Jeremiah, is not immediate relief from difficult situations — situations like refugees escaping brutal conditions or situations in our personal lives that are painful and unsettling. Real hope is achieved in living through our experiences — even in times of great difficulties or in a strange land. Real hope is achieved in living as faithful people, waiting for the Lord. It means searching for God and praying to God, in the knowledge that we are called to be God’s people and that in God’s time we will be delivered.

So I ask the question: What can we do to flourish and find joy in the place where God has put us? What can we do to help the refugees and the exiles in our midst to find their joy and to sing their song?

Hulet Kitterman

*St. Mary Magdalene, Louisville*

## Fifth Saturday in Lent

In the midst of the pandemic over these past months, life may have felt neither loving nor kind. Perhaps for some of you, it has been difficult to even begin to understand fully God's loving-kindness for each and every one of us. Like David in Psalm 143:8, we too yearn to hear God's loving-kindness in the morning.

Reciting a loving-kindness metta or meditation is a spiritual practice that is essentially about love. This is a practice that allows us to offer our love without boundaries or conditions – to self, to family, to friends, to the world, even for those with which we are estranged. And while we may yearn to hear God's loving-kindness each morning upon waking, with this meditation we can offer loving-kindness to ourselves and to others. I invite you to consider integrating this practice during Lent.

Sit quietly with your hands resting loosely in your lap, or if you are comfortable doing so place your hands lightly over your heart. Take three deep, slow breaths as you slow down the busyness in your head. Open your heart to offer God's pure love without any expectation of reciprocity from others.

There are several versions of a loving-kindness metta. Today, I offer you one of the shorter versions. After you recite each line, take a long deep, slow breath as you inhale the love of God and exhale pure love. Feel your soul being lifted. With each breath, calm your mind and heart.

May all beings be protected and safe.

(Take a deep breath)

May all beings be contented and pleased.

(Take a deep breath)

May our body-mind-spirit be lifted in Grace.

(Take a deep breath)

May our lives unfold smoothly with ease.

(Take a deep breath)

Amen.

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I  
should go, for to you I entrust my life.

Psalm 143:8

Dr. Westina Matthews

*St. Peter's, Savannah*

# Palm Sunday

Holy Week is one of those occasions where I'm used to being in large spaces, singing for extended periods of time. But the symbolic procession of Palm Sunday "hits different". Not only is it a milestone in the journey of the life of Christ, it is a spiritual journey for Christians and a time to reflect. This year we are unable to come together as physical congregations and collectively reimagine Jesus' journey back into Jerusalem. No banner procession, no choirs and most importantly, no people.

One of my favorite musical moments of Holy Week was singing J.S. Bach's cantata *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen* (King of Heaven, Welcome). It is a beautiful, musical depiction of that very journey that weaves both musical symbolism and Bach's own genius talent with text. But the more digging I did about this piece the more I understood that it was the beginning of a journey for Bach as well.

On March 2, 1714, Bach was made the concertmaster in the court of Weimar after being court organist for many years. With that position he was charged with writing and performing a cantata monthly. This particular cantata (BWV 182) was his first in that position and happened to be written for the upcoming Palm Sunday.

The overture for this cantata begins with a sonata for solo flute and recorder. As the accompanying strings dance beneath one can imagine a bumpy ride for Jesus on the back of a donkey as he enters Jerusalem. The second movement is a joyous song for chorus singing:

*King of Heaven, welcome,  
Let us also be your Zion!  
Come within,  
You have taken our hearts from us.*

These are the kinds of pieces for which a chorister lives. When the various polyphonic voices transform into a chorus singing together, it can fill the space with a warm energy that reads pleasantly on the face of the congregation.

While the cantata begins with a pleasant, festive mood it eventually takes a turn and gives us images of the passion story to come:

*Jesus, Your passion  
is pure joy to me,  
Your wounds, thorns and shame  
my heart's pasture;  
my soul walks on roses  
when I think upon it;  
grant a place in heaven  
for me for its sake.*

When Bach took the position in Weimar he felt a tremendous amount of weight. He couldn't care less about the politics which accompanied the job. He felt his duty was to God. You can hear and feel the tremendous love Bach had for God in the way that he meticulously engineered masterpieces for every Sunday of the liturgical calendar.



As we enter this week of spiritual travel, I invite you to take a listen to some music that helps you experience that journey. Take a moment to be quiet, close your eyes and imagine yourself in that sanctuary. Surrounded by people you love. You may be celebrating this Holy Week alone but we are all together through God.

Daniel Garrick  
*Diocese of Georgia Staff*

## Monday in Holy Week

The despairing and contentious cry of the prophet Jeremiah is echoed in a sonnet written by Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit priest, shortly before his death at forty-four, who asks God, “Why must disappointment all I endeavor end?” Hopkins, a pioneering poet who died in Dublin in 1889, has long been a favorite of mine, and in dark times, I find myself repeating his words, “Why do sinners’ ways prosper?” Life can so often seem unjust.

Did the disciples know, as they were walking jubilantly into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the despair and disappointments that they would face in just a few days when their rabbi’s short life ended at the cross? Did they remember any of the warnings Jesus had given them? Cheering crowds lined the road, waving palm branches and casting them under the feet of the humble donkey that carried Jesus. It seemed that all these people had heard that a man, Lazarus, had been raised from the dead by a rabble-rousing rebel from Nazareth, and the Pharisees, watching, were discouraged, wondering how they could discredit him. They turned away, to plot again.

In spite of trying to live as we believe we should, as we believe Jesus taught us to live, still we are often disappointed. But God promises compassion to Jeremiah, and Paul encourages us to press on toward the goal; to forget what lies behind. And the disciples will soon know, as we know, the joy of the Resurrection, and

the hope that there will be new growth and blossoming for us.

And so we pray, as Hopkins so fervently prayed in the closing line of his poem, “Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.”

Laura Campbell

*Trinity, Statesboro*

## Tuesday in Holy Week

Several years ago, my best friend died. It had to be one of the worst days in my life. We were very close and spent so much time together that most people even said that we looked like brothers. His death left my world spinning and I did not know how to even articulate how I was feeling even to those closest to me. I was not ready to move to a place of acknowledging that he was in a better place being in the presence of God.

I found it hard to pray because I was so angry and upset. The days that followed were nothing more than lament. Those days of lament gave me a space to scream and turn my anger towards God. I knew I had to get all of the negative things that I was feeling in order to move forward. I wanted God to fix it! It did not happen right away but eventually things were easier to accept. But to get to that point I went through many rough days and damaged relationships.

We find a similar message in Jeremiah is clear, he pleads with God to act immediately and decisively on his behalf. The prophet approached God with such confidence because he has demonstrated faithfulness to his God. It is because of the LORD's sake Jeremiah suffers. When Jeremiah was called by God into service, his attitude was one of joyful obedience. The "eating" of God's words illustrates that Jeremiah did not only serve as a reliable messenger of God's words, but he also embodied them in his life.

God offers a response to the prophet's complaint. The way that God answered Jeremiah is the same he answers our complaints today. It seems that it is never with the response we are ready nor want to hear. We must prepare ourselves that with honest prayer and lament, that we can get equal in return. All is not lost for Jeremiah. God tells him that "they will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you."

As it was a reminder for Jeremiah it is a reminder for us that the suffering, we experienced should not cause us to crumble. God promises Jeremiah that when bad things happen, he will be there to deliver him. That is a promise to hold on to when things get bad in our lives that we can lament to God knowing that he will deliver us from it. Death continues to take loved ones away from me, but I know that there is a place I can take my emotions and trust that God will be there to deliver me.

The Rev. DeWayne Cope  
*St. Athanasius', Brunswick*

## Wednesday in Holy Week

In our culture, we seem to believe that the road to success, to enlightenment, consists of a series of ascending steps, and we have to grit our teeth and pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps to get there. We regard failure with dread and we seek to avoid it at almost any cost. But according to the Gospel, in failure we find God.

For each one of us, there comes a time when our strength fails, when our efforts, our will, our determination, are not enough. It is in these moments when our comfortable illusions of self-sufficiency are laid out for us to see clearly, and we remember again that we need both God and each other. That our strength comes from “trust[ing] in the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:7), rather than in ourselves and our own efforts.

Be sure to note that, according to Jeremiah, trusting in the Lord does not prevent failure, or, to use his imagery, drought and heat. Instead, trusting in God allows us to move through those moments, and in fact encourages our roots to grow ever-deeper. In failure, we find God.

As you move through this day, remember a time when your strength was not enough, and you could not succeed on your own. What did you learn from that time, either in the moment or when you reflect back on it? How did you grow? Did you come away from that experience with deeper compassion, a sense of thankfulness, an awareness of connection with others, or something else entirely? If you don't have an answer

to that question, that's okay. Just let it sit quietly in the back of your mind.

We are in the middle of Holy Week, and about to enter into the Great Three Days that mark what our culture would consider Jesus' greatest failure. During these days, Jesus is arrested, put on trial, and executed. He dies as a condemned criminal. But his failure becomes the way in which God acts in the world, bringing healing and wholeness to all creation. One of the paradoxes of the Gospel is that in failure, we find God.

The Rev. Canon Joshua Varner  
*Diocese of Georgia Staff*

# Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is my favorite.

There, I said it.

But it's not my favorite like I have a favorite sports team or a favorite home-cooked meal. It's not my favorite because it's a grand celebration like a wedding or a birthday or some event that we are excited for and plan for every year. It's my favorite because it's in Maundy Thursday that I have experienced my greatest growth and holiest moments.

Please note that I said "in" Maundy Thursday and not "on" Maundy Thursday. In Maundy Thursday, I have experienced the unconditional love of Christ, I have seen the glory that was given to Him that He gave to us, and I have witnessed others sharing in this love and glory.

It has been in Maundy Thursday that I have been able to humble myself, following Christ's example, to serve others and grow as the person that God created. This doesn't just happen on this one day a year during Holy Week where we recall the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus. It should be a constant occurrence, to love one another as Christ loved and to be that example to others.

Again, Maundy Thursday is my favorite.

Jody Grant

*Our Savior, Martinez*



# Good Friday

The liturgy for Good Friday contains the Solemn Collects, a series of biddings and collects which unite us in prayer for the world. In one of them we pray “Let the cry of those in misery and need come to you, that they may find your mercy present with them in all their afflictions.”

Over the last year, it has often felt like we have been alone, not knowing the way forward...a feeling that’s exacerbated by the shadow of the Cross today. The words from John’s Gospel, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards,” spoken to Simon Peter at the Last Supper, provide a measure of comfort this Good Friday. “You will follow afterwards.” Even as he is headed toward the Crucifixion, he is letting his disciples know that he is not abandoning them, that this is not where their stories end. And letting us know it’s not where our stories end. In the midst of any trial, any pain, any sorrow, Jesus provides a way. The Way.

Of course, it’s not necessarily an easy way. We are, after all, following the road that Jesus walked, which, if we walk it correctly, is filled with self-sacrifice. But it is also filled with grace. Jesus says “you will follow afterwards.” This means that as followers of Jesus we will be given countless opportunities to shower grace abundantly, so that it reaches into places it has no business going, within ourselves and within a world that is broken and hurting.

The Rev. Canon Loren Lasch  
*Diocese of Georgia Staff*

# Holy Saturday

“The next day, Saturday, must have been the quietest day  
the world has ever known.

You could almost hear the earth breathing.”

Godly Play “The Faces of Easter”

When observing Holy Week, our minds and hearts sometimes move directly from the horror and heart-break of Good Friday to the joy and celebration of Easter morning. But what do we do with the Saturday in between. Holy Saturday is a quiet time, a time of waiting. Some may think of waiting as a passive act. In the Hebrew language; however, there are 25 different words for waiting, and one of them, Qavah, describes waiting as an active endeavor. Isaiah 40:30: “they that qavah upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.” Perhaps this Holy Saturday, this time of waiting, can be experienced as active, eager, and expectant, a time to be cleansed, a time to let go, and a time to seek.

How do we begin to practice this time of active waiting? As a speech-language pathologist, I work with patients seeking to find their voice and ability to more fully express themselves verbally. It is not uncommon in our work together to begin with breath, the foundation of voice. Breath provides the power to be heard. And while we actively engage in waiting, breath quiets and stills our hearts, our minds, our bodies. On this Holy Saturday, spend a few moments in a spiritual breathing practice inspired by the Prayer of Saint Francis:

## Instructions

Sit comfortably in a chair or lie on your back. Close your eyes and place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen. Take a long, deep breath in through your nose. As you inhale, feel your belly expand outward. When the lungs feel full, gently exhale between your lips. As you stretch out your exhalation, you should feel your belly gently moving back towards your spine. Take 5 to 6 deep cleansing breaths before adding the words in the lists below to your breathing practice. These words do not actually need to be spoken out loud but can be spoken in your mind and heart.

As you inhale gently and deeply through the nose you will begin, “Breathe in love.” When it is time to exhale, you will release with “breathe out hate.” Follow down the list. As you breathe in, you are filling your body, mind, and spirit with those things you seek. As you breathe out, you are releasing those things that you want to let go:

Inhale:

Breathe in love  
Breathe in forgiveness  
Breathe in unity  
Breathe in truth  
Breathe in hope  
Breathe in light  
Breathe in joy

Exhale:

Breathe out hate  
Breathe out injury  
Breathe out discord  
Breathe out error  
Breathe out despair  
Breathe out darkness  
Breathe out sadness

Kim Butler  
*St. Paul's, Augusta*

# Easter Day

“And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden,  
in the east...”

Genesis 2:8a

In the beginning, God was a gardener. The creator made everything that is from fertile soil and great seas, to wildebeests and goldfish. And then the Holy Trinity planted a garden and Genesis tells us, “Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.”

There in that perfect patch, God placed a man and a woman, both created in God’s image, and provided them with everything they needed. Only one thing was forbidden in all creation and that tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As far as we know, Adam and Eve only ate one thing in that garden, forbidden fruit. Such is human nature. Tell me not to do something, and it will create a fairly powerful urge to do whatever is prohibited.

But the creator of the whole cosmos tells us the way we should go not as some big meanie who wants us to put a toe over the line so we can be punished. God, instead, is the loving parent who wants us to be happy and whole and fulfilled. And when our disobedience took humanity further from the one who made us and loves us, God did not stand back as judge, but entered into creation to redeem it.

And at that moment, when the second person of the Holy Trinity was a babe in a manger, all creation was

different. Once God was no longer on the outside looking in, but within humanity, God had already so sided with us that history was going to change.

What humans did to Jesus is, sadly, not too surprising. Human suffering is ubiquitous. What makes Jesus' death on the cross unique is not what humans did to Jesus, we have often tried to silence the one standing for love and justice. But that Jesus would not give up on loving us even when the price of that love was death on a cross, that was new and revolutionary. It became the lever that shifted the whole universe as God responded with love to hate and with life to death in the resurrection.

In our Gospel reading, the tomb is empty. In and of itself, that is cause for anxiety as Jesus was missing. And when Mary Magdalene sees Jesus, she imagines that he is the gardener. How right she was! Jesus was the Good Gardener who never gave up on creation, who gave everything, his very life, to be the vine that offers us nourishment.

In this Lenten journey, we have traveled together through the scripture, read reflections on spiritual practice, and heard how hymns can support our faith. The Good News is that the life of faith is not working to earn or deserve God's love but living into the love we have been freely offered. And the more we stay connected to the only source of healing and hope, in the vine that is Jesus, the more we will thrive.

The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue  
*Bishop of Georgia*



Thank you for joining us this Lent. Be with us as we study together for 1Book1Diocese during Eastertide, *Love is the Way* by the Most Rev. Michael Curry. To find the accompanying study guide, visit [gaepiscopal.org/1book1diocese](http://gaepiscopal.org/1book1diocese).