

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



INTRODUCTION

The nature of these devotions are writings by three colleagues and friends, who strive to be followers of Jesus in ways that are unique, individually, but who are connected to one another by a shared story of study and friendship. We decided on doing our devotionals independent of one another, letting the Spirit guide us as led. Doing this may seem strange but we see ourselves, as a trio, who over the years have thought together and produced numerous videos on the narrative lectionary. We borrowed from the Jazz world, a style of trust and working together, allowing each to highlight their gifts within the structure and the call of the Lenten season. We entitled these devotions, “Lenten Improvisations” to say a little about what we are trying to accomplish in doing a devotional this way. Improvisation, as defined by the Jazz world, is the “spontaneous composition of melodies in the form and harmony of the song”. Each member of the trio takes the melody and breathes new life into it, using their instrument in ways that are expansive and unique to the instrument. Jenn, Steve and I are the instruments that God is using in this time and space to breathe new life into our Lenten journeys. We hope that you may experience the joy and understanding that comes from listening to a Jazz trio that has honed its life skills when reading these devotions.

Jennifer Long, Steve Langford, Mike Trautman

Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021

No matter how you try to avoid it, Lent punches you in the face and tells you the truth: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19)

Hmmnn, I think to myself, I am much more than dust. I am part of a species that is top of the food chain and is the apex creature in all the world. True, as that may be, when push comes to shove, one day all I shall be is dust, scattered to the four winds of the world, a speck in the sands of time. Lent brings us down and it hurts, no, wait, it is frightening. Yet, it also whispers of new ways of rising up and being selves, that make all of it, worth living in the first place.

Thursday

February 18, 2021

“You do you.” It’s a phrase I hear from my kids. Usually accompanied by a sideways glance or an eye roll. Usually preceded by the offering of unwelcome or unappealing idea... or maybe even some unsolicited advice. Not that I’d ever give any, of course. But when I move beyond just my automatic

response to this automatic response... it's not a bad jumping off place for thinking. What does it actually mean 'you do you'... or more importantly, what does it mean for 'me' to do 'me'? Then instead of a pushing aside of something 'un'... unwanted, unappealing, unwelcome (feel free to add in other 'un's here) it's an opportunity for me to reflect... what did I offer that provoked the response? Did I offer that out of fear? Did I offer it out of hope? Did I offer it out of curiosity? What do I learn about myself, the other and the relationship as I explore this... suddenly, all the 'un's take a back seat, and opportunity takes their place. If I'm going to seize that opportunity... I might just need to take the log out of my own eye first. (Matthew 7:3)

Friday

February 19, 2021

Pogo is credited with saying, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” How often am I my own worst enemy?! During this Lenten season, what might the Spirit show me about how to function in a healthier, less self-destructive way?

Scripture & Prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Weekly Summary

Ash Wednesday

No matter how you try to avoid it, Lent punches you in the face and tells you the truth.

Thursday

What does it actually mean ‘you do you’... or more importantly, what does it mean for ‘me’ to do ‘me’?

Friday

Pogo is credited with saying, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” How often am I my own worst enemy?

Monday

February 22, 2021

“To be or not to be, that is the question:” I prefer to be thank you very much! Yet that kind of misses Hamlet’s point, and that is what kind of being will I be. Ah, that is indeed the question, one that Lent does not shy away from asking, all those who volunteer to walk the walk with Jesus. Lent dares say to you, forget your preoccupation with what others do and pay attention to who you are, this moment and the next. What say you?

Tuesday

February 23, 2021

Still thinking about the early verses of Matthew 7—a true riff as they just kept repeating in my head—and offering to take the log out of my own eye *first* (‘you do you’... or rather, me doing me). I can’t offer to take the log out of my own eye *first* if I’m by myself; there’s no one to go second. I can ‘do me,’ but I never do ‘me’ alone. I don’t exist in a vacuum; I never have... I didn’t drop from the sky fully formed, but grew into who I am in a particular context. In conversation with the family where I raised, with the family I was a part of creating, and even with my ancestors from long ago. Conversations that have taught me... when I’m able to stand on my principles and when I’d rather not to keep the peace; conversations have brought me joy and laughter and, if I’m honest, conversations that leave me so anxious I go out of my way to avoid them. And

even the conversations I avoid... I'm not having with someone else. The only way to be a self, to become myself, is in relationship to others.

Wednesday

February 24, 2021

My self-sabotaging, self-destructive ways lie outside my awareness – in the realm of the unconscious. That's the bad news! How can I address what I cannot see? The good news is the Spirit works to transform the heart.

Transformation is the Spirit's work. My role is to be open and responsive to the Spirit's work. Such is the work of the Lenten season.

Scripture: “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within” (Mark 7:22-23a).

Prayer: Help me, Spirit of God, to be open to what you are doing within me.

Thursday

February 25, 2021

What is my true self? Who am I after all is said and done? Do I have a true self? I mean a self that can stand the tests

of time. The universe is over 13.8 billion years old, and if all the stars align perhaps, I will reach 100. 13800000000 vs 100, talk about perspective. It makes one feel a little less awesome, however in a “Lenten twist” it also offers comfort, knowing I am loved by the One who alone has been present for all those zeros. I am just a dust speck in the vastness of an expanding universe, but I am here to do my part in being the best me that I can.

Friday

February 26, 2021

“Take on me...” cue familiar sounds of Norwegian 80s band, ‘A-ha’ here. Lent is thought to be a time to give something up. For me, that’s been a mixed bag of success and failure, scales tipping, more often than not, toward failure. I’ll give up dessert for Lent... but then a birthday or holiday (regularly St. Patrick’s day) falls during the season. I’ll give up television... inevitably March Madness gets in the way. I’ll give up going out to eat for Lent... which doesn’t really feel like giving up anything since COVID-19 has made that my norm. But what if instead of giving something UP, I take something ON? Lent is also a time of reflection and discernment, so a great time to think on what really matters to me... and how is that ‘what really matters’ shaping my life and my work? Guiding me in what I do or don’t do? What can I ‘take on’ that helps me live out of my best self? Wonder what I’ll take on...

Summary for the week of February 22-26 2021

Monday, February 22

What kind of being will I be? Ah, that is indeed the question, one that Lent does not shy away from asking.

Tuesday, February 23

The only way to be a self, to become myself, is in relationship to others.

Wednesday, February 24

Transformation is the Spirit's work. My role is to be open and responsive to the Spirit's work. Such is the work of the Lenten season.

Thursday, February 25

Who am I after all is said and done? I am loved by the One who alone has been present for all those zeros.

Friday, February 26

Lent is thought to be a time of giving up something. What if instead of giving something UP, I take something ON?

Monday

March 1

The story of the Garden (Genesis 3) reflects our inclination to blame others as a way to avoid looking at ourselves. We judge and find fault in others, so we don't have to see what is lacking in

us. This inclination is a part of our human condition. While this common pattern is designed to hide what we don't want to see about ourselves, it can also be a source of insight. It can be a window through which we glimpse what is in our hearts. What I judge and condemn in others tells me something about myself. Scripture: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5). Prayer: Give me the courage and strength, O God, to see what I don't want to see in myself

Tuesday

March 2

Paul Simon's Graceland, is one of my favorite songs. Beside the catchy tune, the words touch my spirit and invite me to think about the human condition, which after all is my condition.

"There is a girl in New York City

who call herself the human trampoline

And sometimes when I'm falling, flying

Or tumbling in turmoil I say

'Whoa, so this is what she means'

She means we're bouncing into Graceland"

I so get that. Yep, life is a messy journey but it is headed to Graceland with all the "falling, flying and tumbling in turmoil" that goes with it. Thank you, God, that we all are on our way to Graceland!

Wednesday

March 3

Ok... I've riffed on taking something on, but I also find merit in giving something up... even if I have regularly failed at it. I understand the discipline of giving something up for Lent as intended to both emulate and remind me of Jesus sacrifice when went out into the wilderness to begin his ministry. I wonder if it is also an opportunity to create space... to give something up and use that as a door (or a window) to bring me closer to God. What might I give up? How might that effect my relationship with God?

Thursday

March 4

When I was growing up, teachers always used red pencils to grade my papers, marking the mistakes and circling my grade in red. I dreaded the assignments that bled red. Even when I did well on an assignment, my eyes were always drawn to the red markings, indicating what I got wrong. No matter how many questions I answered correctly, I only focused on the ones I got wrong.

It seems most of us are adept at grading ourselves. It's as though we carry a red pencil around so we can mark how we get it wrong. Our focus on our failings keeps us stuck ... in guilt and shame and self-reproach. When the pain of our failure becomes too great, we anesthetize it by focusing on how others fail to measure up.

Scripture: The LORD “does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:10-11).

Prayer: Teach me, O LORD, to live more out of your grace and forgiveness and less out of my critical, red-pen spirit.

Friday

March 5

“Blessed are the poor” or is it, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit”. The first version comes from Luke’s Gospel while the second is from Matthew’s. Let me think, which one was Jesus’ original words? “Blessed are the poor in Spirit” because I not in any way poor and at least for Lent, I can say that I am poor in spirit. Does it matter? It only matters. when we get all up in arms, because deep down we wonder if God’s love is sufficient enough to bless us.; even those of us who are not poor and do not care to be poor. So that leaves me with this question; are we so fragile in our faith , that we have to hoard all of God love and blessings for ourselves?

Summary

March 1-5

This week’s devotional thoughts included:

- insight from the garden
- life’s messy journey
- giving something up
- red-pen measuring up
- God’s love sufficient enough

Monday

March 8, 2021

I’ve been longing... longing for longer days, more sunshine, time with family, a world made new. And as soon as that word

‘longing’ popped into my head, I heard the words of Psalm 42...
‘As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you.’
I’m also wondering... what *don’t* I long for? What opportunities,
experiences, people do I turn *away* from? Is there something in
that lack of longing... in the desire to be distant from... that might
be worth listening to? What could be learned from moving toward
that which I instinctively, automatically move away from? How
might Lenten longings... or lack of longing... have to teach me?

Tuesday

March 9, 2021

It seems we are afraid of being known. In the story of the Garden,
the first thing the man and woman did after eating of the forbidden
fruit was to hide behind fig leaves. Hiding, it seems, is a part of our
nature. Certainly, we don’t want others to know us because "if
they knew me, they wouldn’t like me." But we are also afraid of
knowing ourselves. We focus on how others fail to measure up as a
way to avoid facing how we fall short. It’s as though we are afraid
of the same thing: if we really knew ourselves, we wouldn’t like us
either. Deep inside, we are afraid we are flawed, no good, and
unlovable. What might we find if we really knew ourselves?

Scripture: “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes
no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2).

Prayer: Trusting your grace and forgiveness, move me, O LORD,
beyond my fear of knowing myself.

Wednesday

March 10, 2021

One of my favorite Lenten hymns goes like this: **We must walk this lonesome valley; we have to walk it by ourselves. Oh! Nobody else can walk it for us, we have to walk it by ourselves.** Yes, by myself, I get that, but I am struck by the use of “we” in this hymn. “We” have to walk this valley reassures me that there are others walking this same lonesome valley. I am not alone in the craziness of walking a lonesome valley called life. Maybe, just maybe, if we keep our spirits awake, we might bump into others on their lonesome journey. And when we do that, it changes everything.

Thursday

March 11, 2021

In the true nature of ‘riffing,’ the words of Psalm 42 continue to repeat themselves inside my head and heart; this time coming to rest on verse 3, ‘My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?”’ Tears have been food for me over the course of pandemic... and I have heard that in the stories of others... loss of expected mile markers, loss of seeing family, loss of health, loss of a loved one, loss of joy... where is my God? But I found myself wondering... what happens if the script is flipped? What if tears do not signify the absence of God, but rather the presence of God? What if God is found *in my tears*? And in the tears of others? What if, what ever is leading to the tears, just might be a place where God resides?

Friday

March 12, 2021

When a toddler is learning to walk, we don't scold or spank her when she falls on her bottom. Rather, we pick her up and comfort her. Then we offer her our fingers to help her regain her balance so she can try again. Our response to her and to her "failure" is guided by our understanding that she is "in process." She is growing and learning. We understand that falling is a part of her learning to walk. We respond with understanding, compassion, and encouragement because we understand that she is not yet mature. How might we deal with our own "failures" if we lived out of the awareness that we were still in process, not yet mature? What kind of progress might we make if we responded to our own "failures" with understanding, compassion, and encouragement?

Scripture: The LORD God is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7).

Prayer: Fill me, O LORD, with your mercy and compassion. Teach me to be slow to find fault and quick to forgive ... especially with myself.

Summary

March 8-12, 2012

Monday

What could be learned from moving toward that which I instinctively, automatically move away from?

Tuesday

Deep inside, we are afraid we are flawed, no good, and unlovable. What might we find if we really knew ourselves?

Wednesday

Maybe, just maybe, if we keep our spirits awake, we might bump into others on their lonesome journey. And when we do that changes everything.

Thursday

What if God is found *in my tears*? And in the tears of others?

Friday

How might we deal with our own “failures” if we lived out of the awareness that we were still in process, not yet mature?

Monday

March 15

Matthew 7:7 reads “ask and it will be given to you , seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” Ask, seek, and knock are the action verbs, but exactly what am I asking, seeking and knocking for? What do I hope to accomplish by doing these tasks? What is my reward? Then it hits me in the face once again: is my faith just a game I play to get what I feel what I need to live life? Thinking that way is all about me and that makes me sad.

Prayer: Jesus break down the barriers in me that prevents me from seeing the big picture of your expansive love for each one of us.

Tuesday

March 16

‘Repent and believe in the gospel’ is a phrase associated with Lent; even used as ashes are placed in the sign of the cross on one’s head. I am struck by how often I have heard ‘repent’ as a call to survey, account and apologize for all the ways I fall short, all the times I have not been good enough all the ways I don’t measure up

to some standard, set by someone else. But at its Hebrew roots, the word repent means to turn around... to go in a different direction. To change course, turn around, go in a different direction... in a job, in a relationship, in a church can be a high anxiety experience, but also a truly life giving one. If I'm truly going to give 'repent' a chance, it seems to me that I'll *need* to believe in the gospel. I'll need something strong to hold onto as I not only change direction but see where that direction leads me. Where in my life or in what relationships might I be invited to turn around? Where will that journey lead?

Wednesday

March 17

Grading and judging – others and ourselves – come naturally, without thought or effort. They are a part of our human condition. Grading and judging are rooted in merit-based thinking. We use some standard of expectations to measure how the other fails to measure up. Pointing the finger at how the other fails to measure up reinforces our sense of being better than them. We build ourselves up at the other's expense. Merit-based thinking and functioning are the way we humans relate. Notice how often we speak of “deserving.” Thankfully, God relates to us out of grace and forgiveness, not merit. Grace and forgiveness free us from our red-pen focus on how we and others fail to measure up. Grace and forgiveness are the way we “in process” people make progress. Grace and forgiveness free us to learn and grow. Scripture: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8).

Prayer: “Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name” (Psalm 86:11).

Thursday

March 18

The sage, Howard Thurman, asks the question, “How can I be me, without getting in the way of you being you?” I have tried in the last few years to ask that question in the most personal relationships I have in this life. It can be exhausting at times, but it does serve me well and lets me see with the eyes of the other.

What would happen if I reframed that question and ask: How do I be me without getting in the way of God being God in my life?

Like all good questions that will take some time to answer.

However, what I am sure of is God can sweep me away in a blink of an eye when I get in the way, but God does not act that way, now that is a mystery. Does my question for me resonate with you in any way? AH, Lent so many questions for just 40 days.

Friday

March 19,

“Like a rock, like a rock, God is under my feet.” The words are the first line from a Linnea Good song that I have grown to love over the years. It has been a strong reminder when I have needed one—especially over the course of pandemic—that my strength does not depend upon me alone, but on the rock that is under my feet. I have found that rock in God, but also in the strong testimony of others living through this time with fear and grace, joy and grief held together. I also feel called to explore... what strong foundation or foundations have I experienced in my own life?

What people have supported me? Family? Friends?
Congregations? How have they been a resource to my life? Where
have I had the opportunity to be a resource in the life of others?

Weekly Summary

March 15-19

Monday, March 15 - is my faith just a game I play to get what I
feel what I need to live life? Thinking that way is all about me.

Tuesday, March 16 - at its Hebrew roots, the word *repent* means to
turn around... to go in a different direction. If I'm truly going to
give 'repent' a chance, it seems to me that I'll need to believe in
the gospel. I'll need something strong to hold onto as I not only
change direction but see where that direction leads me.

Wednesday, March 17 - Merit-based thinking and functioning are
the way we humans relate. Thankfully, God relates to us out of
grace and forgiveness, not merit.

Thursday, March 18 - How do I be me without getting in the way
of God being God in my life? Like all good questions that will take
some time to answer.

Friday, March 19 - my strength does not depend upon me alone,
but on the rock that is under my feet - in God.

Monday

March 22

We first learned to see ourselves through the eyes of others. Their reactions to us shaped how we saw ourselves. What if we learned to see ourselves through the eyes of God? How might we see ourselves?

Scripture: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are ... Beloved, we are God’s children now” (1 John 3:1, 2).

Prayer: Help me, Merciful God, to see myself through your eyes. Help me to claim my identity as your beloved child.

Tuesday

March 23

We are 25 days into our Lenten journey and with each passing day we move closer to Holy Week and Good Friday. The shadow of the cross grows larger and larger, threatening to block out all hope for a different tomorrow. Yet, if I have learned anything from this journey is that God can be trusted to love us no matter what may be. So, like many of you, I am holding on to my faith, come, even Good Friday. Faith reminds us that God’s love is resilient and fearless. Amen, so may it be true for the sake of the world.

Wednesday

March 24

“Like the starry night sky, God is over my head.” As I continue to riff on this Linnea Good song, the second line reminds me to look up. The closer holy week draws, the more likely I am to look down, to get tunnel vision, and to see only the same things I have always seen in the story of faith. But what if God is calling me to look up? To get a bigger picture... to turn around (repent) and see differently the narrative that has shaped the faith tradition I call my

own? Is there a bigger picture of the story of faith I am being invited to see and engage? And am I even capable of hearing that old, old story anew? If so, what might that look like?

Thursday

March 25

Until we learn to see ourselves through the eyes of God, we tie our sense of who we are (our sense of identity) to something *outside* ourselves. We tie our sense of worth and value to some kind of achievement – academically, professionally, financially. Of course, our sense of identity can be tied to our lack of achievement in these areas, too. In that scenario, negativity overlays our sense of who we are. We also tie our sense of identity to how well we are doing in comparison to others – the proverbial “keeping up with the Jones.” We link our sense of worth and value to some kind of institution or organization. This tactic lies behind our fanatical allegiance to a school or sports team or fraternal organization ... or church! These external sources of identity never satisfy. They leave us feeling empty. And they are always fleeting.

We discover our true sense of self in who God created us to be. This sense of worth and value is internal, rather than external. Our sense of identity is tied to our uniqueness – who we are that no one else can ever be. It is tied to our gifts and abilities - those things we have to offer to others. It is tied to our passions – those things that bring us a sense of joy, fulfillment, and purpose. Our sense of identity is grounded in who we are as God’s unique creation and God’s beloved child. It is inseparably linked to the divine likeness in which we were made.

Scripture: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14).

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Prayer: Come, Spirit of God. Fill me and cleanse me. Help me to find my identity in who you created me to be.

Friday

March 26

Waiting, waiting for the time when all things we be made new. How long, O God, how long, shall we wait? Such are the thoughts that occupy my mind this wet, cool and dreary, March day. I have no doubts that such conditions sink deep into our bones. Nor do I doubt that the hurts, pains and sadness of our world, also seeps deep into our dreams and hopes for ourselves and others. Such is the lives of those of us, made of dust to which we no doubt will return. However, if I look closely, I see touches of green; leaves bursting forth, and the beginning of nature’s rise from the coldness of winter, stirring as it must do. Today, I join with the movement of life at work in the world. I count myself blessed knowing that the work of God started in a collection of dust, long ago, will, must, finish its work.

Summary

March 22-26

Another week full of questions:

- What if we learned to see ourselves through the eyes of God?
- As the cross grows larger on the Lenten journey, how am I trusting God's resilient love?
- When am being invited to look up and see a bigger picture?
- Where do I find my sense of identity? Who or what am I waiting for... and how long will I wait?

Of the food for thought offered this week... what threads spoke to you as you encountered them? Which ones challenged you? What do you carry with you into the coming week?

Monday

March 29

The gospel of Mark records two things Jesus did on Monday of Holy Week. First, he cursed a fig tree for not having fruit (Mark 11:12-14). Then, Jesus drove from the Temple those who were selling and buying sacrificial animals, quoting scripture as he did so: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:15-19). The two incidents go together. The fig tree represents the Temple, specifically the commercialization of the acts of worship in the Temple. The fig tree gave the appearance of having fruit. It had leafed out, a sign of fruit. But it had no fruit. The Temple gave the appearance of worship, but the purpose of worship – connecting people with God – had been displaced by making a profit off those who came to worship. Both failed to produce what they were designed to

produce. As we walk the last leg of our Lenten journey, Mark's account raises a challenging question: where do we fall into the trap of appearances without proper fruit? The disciplines of the Lenten journey remind us that, in our own strength, we cannot produce the fruit of the Kingdom. We are dependent upon the Spirit's power to live love as Jesus loved, to love those whom Jesus loved, to forgive as Jesus forgave (Mark 11:25), to live as a servant as Jesus did (Mark 10:41-45). Apart from the Spirit's work in and through us, we wear the name of Christian without producing Christ-like fruit.

Scripture: "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 15:5). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Prayer: Come, Spirit of God. Fill me. Produce your fruit in me.

Tuesday

March 30

"Like the sun on the horizon, God is ever before..." I love the look of the sun on the horizon... the lovely colors so different from the sky's natural blue as it rises or sets. It is a marker... of a beginning or the ending of the day. Markers of beginnings and endings have shaped my life... big ones like births and deaths, baptisms and funerals, entrances and exits of people into families and congregations. What

markers have made and impact? What markers stick with me... both that I remember fondly and perhaps that I remember with distaste? How might God be in these markers... and opening an opportunity for me... to grow, to learn to see differently? Will I notice these markers? Will I embrace what they might teach me?

Holy Wednesday

March 31

The cross no longer is in the background but steps of the shadows and calls me out. Jesus says, “take up your cross and follow me!” Yikes, it is getting harder and harder to follow Jesus. The foxes are closing in on the mother hen, and her chicks are scurrying about to stay safe and out the turmoil that is surely coming. It is an ending we all know all too well, or do we? Hmmn, perhaps the only way I can really know, is if I take up my cross and follow Jesus. Mother Hen open my heart and give me the strength to follow you with resolve, even in the face of what is to come.

Maundy Thursday

April 1

Thursday of Holy Week is commonly called Maundy Thursday after the Latin word for commandment. This designation is based on John’s account of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and giving them a new commandment. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should

love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). According to the synoptic gospels, Thursday of Holy Week was when Jesus reinterpreted the Passover (Mark 14:22-26). What he did with the Passover ritual was unheard of, out of bounds, offensive. It was so offensive that the disciples remembered it clearly. His reinterpretation of the Passover was a gift, given to help the disciples make sense of his death as they looked back on it. They would come to see that, in his death, God was at work to deliver them from bondage just as God had delivered their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. From that point on, their identity would be tied to Jesus, not Moses. They would identify themselves by God’s delivering them from their bondage to sin, not God’s deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. That deliverance would free them to love as Jesus loved.

Identity – who we are – has been the recurring theme of these Lenten Riffs. This Maundy Thursday, we are reminded that our identity is defined by love. We are loved by God, expressed in Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. We are God’s children, claimed by grace through the waters of baptism. And we are known for loving as Jesus loved – through the power of the Spirit. Today, many of us will celebrate Holy Communion, remembering that last Passover Jesus celebrated with his disciples. As we partake of the bread and drink of the cup, may we remember the love that defines us.

Scripture: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Prayer: Merciful and gracious God, help us to rest in your love that we might love as Jesus loved.

Good Friday

April 2

Like the river runs to ocean, my home is in God ever more.” Golgotha. Calvary. The Place of the Skull. The hill on which Jesus dies. I’m not sure this is the place I want to make my home with God. And yet, traveling up that hill is part of the journey. Over the years I have found it confusing, upsetting and grief filled to stand at the foot of the cross. But I have the opportunity to see if I can tolerate my own pain long enough to stand here and learn and listen. And how do I bring that back into my own life... can I tolerate the pain of others, long enough to accompany them, and learn and listen? My home is in God has little to do with where I make it or where I feel comfortable making it. It has to do with how it opens me to reflect on what matters. At the foot of the cross, can I tolerate standing there, in my own pain and the pain of others, to explore what matters most? How might I be transformed by that opportunity?

No summary for this week, Saturday of this week is known as Silent Saturday. We invite you to use the silence that this Saturday brings to and to contemplate your journey on the Lenten road. It seems like all the world has stopped and mourns the death of an innocent man. No words can tell of its horror, a horror that has haunted humankind from its very beginning. Faith leads us to the edge of despair, yet someone is stirring amid the silence and that stirring resonates deep within us, a hope, a promise, a dream. Awake sleepers, God is not finish with him, nor with us!

Peace,

Jenn, Steve and Mike