



## **Lenten Devotional 2020**

*Written by the St. Paul's Community*

# Welcome to Saint Paul's Lenten Devotional!

Many people give something up for Lent but taking on a new practice is also a powerful way to approach this season. This Lenten Devotional was created to help our community take on this new discipline of prayer, reading Scripture and reflecting on it together. While we might not be physically together every day of Lent, the voices of our parish will help guide us through the season wherever we go.

This booklet has been created to serve as a companion to you this Lent. Each day you will read a passage of Scripture that is pulled from the Lectionary text. We have inserted a card that can help you structure your time with this devotional, feel free to use it at any of the times listed ("morning," "noon," "evening" or "night.") After the opening Psalm or prayer, it will state "A meditation may be offered," and at that time, flip back to this devotional and read the daily assigned text and reflection. Then return to the prayer card to finish your time of reflection.

Thank you to everyone who offered to write a reflection. It requires great boldness to offer a personal reflection on our Holy Scripture and your contributions have been such a blessing to read.

Sincerely,

The Reverend Laura Di Panfilo

Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020

## PSALM 103:14

*For he knows how we were made;*

*he remembers that we are dust.*

I was a child of seven when I first received ashes. I came to the rail with my mother and knelt. Everything felt quiet and solemn; the only sound was the voice of the priest as he moved from soul to soul, though I could not make out his words until he came to me. Suddenly, he was there. I didn't dare lift my eyes, as he smudged my forehead with his thumb and said softly and clearly: *Remember, O Man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return.*

Afterward I asked my mother. What did he mean? I wasn't a *man*: I was a kid. She said, *It doesn't matter. 'Man' means 'everyone.' You are part of everyone. Everyone lives, and your life is part of that. Everyone dies, and your death is part of that.*

The Cross traced on our foreheads this day is for *everyone*. It is not only to be reminded of *my sin, my salvation*, that I kneel and receive. It is to know my share in the sorrow and hope of the world, my share in Christ Crucified, to quicken my mercy toward others, my prayer for the Church and all humankind.

*The Right Reverend Dorsey W. M. McConnell is the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.*

Thursday February 27, 2020

## JOHN 17:1-8

*After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.*

*"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.*

In penitential seasons we can find ourselves struggling with Imposter Syndrome\*. Do I go to church enough? Am I volunteering enough? Am I loving like Jesus? Am I enough? I imagine that this is something the Apostles struggled with frequently.

Do my words matter? Am I really glorifying God? Do people really believe me?

In this passage, we see Jesus describe his relationship with God: "I have brought You glory on Earth finishing the work you gave me to do." Later, we see Jesus asking God that "...they [Disciples] may be one as we are one..." With his divine knowledge, Jesus knew and could acknowledge the success and extent of his endeavors and is asking God to grant us the same knowledge. To accept that, while we may wish to attend more regularly, serve on more committees, and do more, we can find rest and assurance in the knowledge that whatever we can currently do is enough. To accept that no matter the circumstances, we are enough, and whatever we are able to give will bring glory to God.

While you may desire to do more, what you do now has meaning, and for the people you impact, it is enough.

\*Imposter Syndrome: A feeling of persistent inadequacy despite evident success. Feelings of chronic self-doubt or intellectual fraudulence that override any feeling of success or external proof of competence.

*Stephen Sumpter has been attending St.Paul's for the past five years. In that time he has served on the Vestry, and led the finance and sustainability commissions.*

Friday February 28, 2020

## **JOHN 17:9-19**

*I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in*

*the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

Two summers ago, Valerie June, a musician I really like, played at the Three Rivers Arts Festival. It was a great concert, and a perfect night to be outdoors. To end the show, she played one of her favorite songs, "This World is Not My Home," on a banjo she named "Baby." She explained that singing this gospel song in church growing up had been a joyful experience for her - and it was a joyful experience for me to sing along in the audience that night, too. It's funny, though, because the lyrics to the song speak of rising above the pain of suffering in this world - "this world is not my home, I'm just passing through / my home is laid up somewhere beyond the blue."

God's creation is a good place, full of banjos and outdoor summer concerts. I know there is deep hurt in this world, and it is difficult to understand why sin and suffering exist alongside such beauty and joy. However, I worship a God who lived in this world, loved his friends, and died. I know that any song, even a sad one, can be played loudly and on silly musical instruments. This Lent, I pray that my joy in Christ may be complete, even in the midst of questions and hurt.

*Erin Morey has worshipped at St. Paul's for eight years. During that time, she has served St. Paul's outreach and engagement ministries as a volunteer and vestry member, and also as a member of St. Paul's staff. Currently, Erin is pursuing her Master's of Divinity degree at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.*

Saturday February 29, 2020

## **JOHN 17:20-26**

*'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

*'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'*

My bible titles this text as "Jesus Prays for all Believers," which is fitting. Jesus prays for everyone, people who do believe and people that will believe. He knows his father loves him and everyone,

he will protect the world at all cost. Jesus plans to continue preaching the word of the Lord. What John is telling us is that we need to trust God. He will protect us no matter what, we just need to believe in him. Yet, the people that don't are still protected. God knows who will trust in him and protects them too. Even if your faith wavers God still loves you, he will love you forever and will never stop loving you. The foundation of our faith is trust and if we can do that God will open doors and shield us from evils. Jesus prays for everyone, knowing that someday soon they will see the ways of the Lord.

*Madigan Balfe is a Junior Drama major at Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School. She has attended Saint Paul's her whole life and serves as a Junior Verger, helps on mission trips and regularly attends EYC.*

Sunday March 1, 2020

## **MATTHEW 4:1-11**

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written,*

*"One does not live by bread alone,*

*but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,*

*"He will command his angels concerning you",*

*and "On their hands they will bear you up,*

*so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'*

*Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

*"Worship the Lord your God,*

*and serve only him.” ’*

*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

Temptation—so easy to give in to, so hard to resist. At least, that seems to be the devil’s take on things when he goads Jesus to use God’s power for his own satiation, then to test God’s love with a self-destructive act, and finally to gain riches and glory and dominion over the physical world at the mere cost of his integrity. But Jesus figured out early in life that heeding his conscience would be the simplest, most satisfying path—and he was able to deflect the devil’s enticements because he knew he could not live with himself if he gave up the core of his being for creature comforts, thrills, and power. Every time we follow God’s heart and withstand the lure of self-indulgence, we join Jesus, staying true to what really matters.

I think that the story of Jesus overcoming these temptations is meant not only to show him as an unblemished child of God, but also to show us that we have the strength and the courage and the will available to us to be such a person ourselves. It is a matter of listening to our hearts, hearing God’s voice, and heeding our consciences. Every thought and every act then becomes a prayer, and we become stronger and stronger until no one can tempt us to turn aside from the love of God.

*Ann McStay has been part of St. Paul's since January 2010, participating in the choir, Altar Guild, Claudia Circle, CLASP and a Good Book discussion group. With help from the parish and the diocese, she sponsors the St. Paul and Rose Orphans' Care Centre in Uganda and the home's first university student, Collins Mukisa, who is pursuing a medical degree.*

Monday March 2, 2020

## **MARK 1:1-13**

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,*

*‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,*

*who will prepare your way;*

*the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:*

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,*

*make his paths straight” ’,*

*John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'*

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'*

*And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

Often, when someone has something nice to tell, they preface it with "I've got good news...", just as it is in the opening verses of the Gospel of Mark. Great start. And then, immediately, who is it we meet? Not the Angel or the obedient teenager or her faithful fiancée as found in the books of Mathew and Luke. It's the hair shirt wearing, locust eating itinerant preacher named John the Baptist.

John's ministry was well known and he attracted his own troop of Disciples. His preaching wasn't to his own aggrandizement but to tell that someone greater was coming. Can you imagine a public figure today saying "...you may think I'm good but someone even better is on the way..."? John was quite the eccentric.

Christianity's marketing department has largely moved beyond characters like John the Baptist as spokespersons. Yet it's important, and especially important during Lent, that we pay attention to all that give voice and witness to the Gospel. Of course, this includes the Bible and the thoughts of clergy and theologians. But also look for understanding of the Gospel message in the words and actions of our families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Further, be attentive also to strangers, those we feel are misguided or that we conflict with. And even the locust eating, hair shirt wearers. The good news of the Gospel is everywhere. Our duty is to be open and attentive to it.

*Geoff Hurd and his family have been members of St. Paul's for many years. He has been involved in a number of ministries including being a Sunday School teacher, Rector Search Committee, and Vestry and recently has begun a more intentional study of the Bible.*

Tuesday March 3, 2020

## MARK 1:14-28

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'*

*As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.*

*They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.*

As I read this passage, I was struck by one phrase in verse 15; “the kingdom of God has come near.”

This kingdom of God on earth was birthed in radical circumstances. Verse 14 reminds us that John has just been imprisoned. From the beginning, God’s kingdom has been at odds with the powers that be.

From the beginning, the kingdom of God needed people, and common people at that. Christ immediately calls some fishermen to be his disciples and participate in his mission. This calls to mind the beginning of John’s gospel and its emphasis on the Incarnation; “the Word became flesh and lived **among us**, and **we have seen his glory**” (John 1:14 emphasis added). God’s revolutionary redemption of this world invites the participation of common folks like you and me.

In the Lord’s prayer, we are taught to pray; “thy kingdom come.” Do we know what we are asking for? Would we still ask for it if we did know? That prayer comes with an obligation to participate. That prayer comes with a recognition of the new kingdom’s conflict with the one of this world.

We have seen his glory, and it has invited us in, hallelujah.

*Steve Comstock has been attending St. Paul's for about a year now and participates in the various meetings of the Young Adult group and in Lay Eucharistic Ministry.*

Wednesday March 4, 2020

## **MARK 1:29-45**

*As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

*That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

*A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.*

This passage begins with Jesus quietly healing Simon's mother-in-law while visiting Simon and Andrew's home, which quickly leads to what Mark describes as the whole city being gathered at the door to either be healed or witness healing. Jesus has a vision of what His primary purpose is - to preach to as many as possible - but everywhere He goes, word of His healing miracles brings masses of people, and derails His plans. In His compassion, He never turns anyone away, and He's ultimately driven to stay in isolated places in order to fulfill His purpose - to teach and preach. One translation (NIV) says that He "stayed outside in lonely places."

As a mom and a manager (which can be like motherhood on steroids), I can relate to Jesus' circumstances here. There have been countless times when people's expectations of me were beyond what I could manage in a healthy way and, not wanting to let anyone down, I never said no. I was at everyone else's beck and call 24/7 - by text, by email, in person. What that translated into, was my falling short of my best in most areas of my life, disappointing myself, and ending up feeling depleted and alone. I've learned from my experience. I've gotten to know myself better and given myself permission to set boundaries and to say no. I know that quiet time in what some might interpret as a "lonely place" fuels my spirit and makes me a better mom and colleague. Giving less in some ways has allowed me to give much more in the ways that really matter to the people who count on me.

*Kelly Johnson has been a member at St. Paul's since 2001. Over the years she has been a Sunday School teacher, coordinated VBS, led book clubs and volunteered in various other ministries. She is mom to Rachel (24), Carly (21), Max (13) and Samuel who passed away in 2003 when he was almost 4.*

Thursday March 5, 2020

## **MARK 2:1-12**

*When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic— 'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'*

The story is familiar to many of us. Jesus has returned to Capernaum. His fame has grown such that the place is mobbed with those that want to see and hear him. He is preaching to the gathered crowd only to have a VERY determined group of friends crash through the roof and lower their paralyzed buddy to Jesus' side, hoping for a healing miracle.

Jesus seizes the moment by focusing on the paralytic's spiritual wellbeing rather than his physical infirmities. He uses this opportunity to reveal himself as the 'Son of Man' with the authority to forgive sins as well as heal diseases and infirmities. To the ill man, Jesus proclaims, "your sins are forgiven." Jesus knows our soul is far more precious than our temporal body. The paralytic's friends are probably quite disappointed; they expected their friend's physical health to be restored. Would they have joyfully carried their paralyzed friend home knowing he was spiritually healed, but physically disabled? Finally, to prove his authority Jesus cures the man.

How often do we pray for physical healing without giving a second thought to the person's spiritual wellbeing? Pray for spiritual healing and forgiveness.

*Pam Ryan -is a long-time St. Paul's parishioner and EFM graduate, a member of the C.L.A.S.P. group and various outreach projects, previously served as a vestry member, confirmation teacher, stewardship and search committee chair, and discernment committee member. She is a pipeline engineer and with husband Tom, has two adult children.*

Friday March 6, 2020

## **MARK 2: 13-22**

*Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.*

*And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'*

*Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.'*

*'No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins;*

*otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'*

When I was growing up it was encouraged that we 'gave something up' during lent. I believe the idea and suggestion were well-intended that by denying one's desires and making sacrifices would help bring us closer to God. I usually would make it a couple weeks before I broke down and had a big bowl of ice cream or a Clark Bar (you remember those). Discouraged, I would just start again and 'do my best' until Easter Sunday. For me, that was the 'old way' of doing things!

I believe today's reading is an invitation for all of us to throw out the old and embrace the new. Just as Jesus calls and invites Levi to 'Come along', He also invites us (sinners, ice cream eaters and Clark bar munchers) to join Him at the wedding feast. It's not about fasting, but the relationship that we can have with Him when we 'Come along'. God promises in Ezekiel 36:26 that..." He will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; He will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh".

I find that when I am at the table with Jesus, focused only on Him and not on what I'm eating or doing, or who else is there, is when I can truly hear His voice. Take time today to 'come along' and be in His presence, and let Him change your heart.

*Mark Lamendola has been a member of St. Paul's since 2007; he currently serves on Vestry teaches Sunday school, and the Sunday morning Men's Group.*

Saturday March 7, 2020

## **MARK 2:23-3:6**

*One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'*

*Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out*

*your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

Oh God who knows our daily toils, help us to create Sabbath time throughout our hectic days. At times it seems creating Sabbath time is yet one more demand for us to manage. Keep us mindful that we are honoring you and the Sabbath when we seek to lessen another’s pain, when we speak truth to power, when we turn to simplicity in life and give you thanks for our being and all we have. Remind us that in those moments there is sacred Sabbath time. When we stumble bring us back to you and help us to rest in your love

*Anita Kinsley has recently moved from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. In Philadelphia, Anita was a member of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, where she was a vestry member, church schoolteacher, chair of Christian Formation, and facilitator of Beloved Community – a standing workgroup designed to respond to racism within the St. Martin’s parish, local and national community.*

Sunday March 8, 2020

## **JOHN 3:1-17**

*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’*

*‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

*‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

*'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

What sticks out to me is that Nicodemus has testified about Jesus' miracles, which he could not be doing if God were not with him, yet Nicodemus has trouble grasping the concept of being born again in the Spirit. Nicodemus goes as far as asking Jesus how a man can enter a second time into a mother's womb. Jesus goes on to explain to him about being born again in the Spirit! I like how Jesus makes an analogy between the wind and everyone born of the Spirit. Jesus even asks Nicodemus, you are Israel's teacher and you do not understand these things? I was Baptised as an infant but again with water and the Holy Spirit at age 27. I'm now 60, and I look back at how I could have handled many situations if I had remembered to see things through Jesus's eyes instead of my earthy eyes. The fact is, I am born of the flesh and no matter how hard I try, at times I will fall short; but that is where I find God's grace.

*Bill Higgins has been employed as Sexton at St. Pauls for over 15 years, and he considers himself blessed to attend church five days a week!*

Monday March 9, 2020

## **MARK 3:7-19a**

*Jesus departed with his disciples to the lake, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!' But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.*

*He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

*Then he went home;*

Jesus' miraculous power attracts people from all over. People know that there is something special about Jesus, but they do not know who Jesus is or seem to even care. They are satisfied

to be cured of their issues. They gladly receive Jesus' healing but show no curiosity about Him. Receiving the benefit of Jesus' action is enough.

Ironically the unclean spirits know Jesus' identity and bow to Him as their deity, unlike the recipients of Jesus' healing who seem oblivious. Did the recipients ever think that it was Jesus' divine personal intervention that healed them? Unfortunately for them, they seem happy to keep everything on the surface and be thankful for the relief from pain and suffering. What powerful revelation might have been revealed if they looked deeper into who Jesus might be?

When we reflect on our own lives and the miraculous events that have occurred throughout our lifetime, do we ever reflect on the possibility that it was God's love for us that healed us? Or do we just accept the healing and move on as if nothing divine has happened to us?

How would knowing that it was God who personally healed you change you?

*The Reverend Ted Babcock is an Honorary Priest Associate at St. Paul's and participates in the Ignatian Prayer Group and the Men's Bible Study.*

Tuesday March 10, 2020

## **MARK 3: 19b–35**

*and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

*Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.*

*'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'— for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'*

*Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking*

*at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'*

In this passage, Jesus comes home, gets mobbed by people hoping to glimpse this (in)famous preacher, is accused of Satanic powers, and is confronted by family members worried about his mental health. Answering in a parable, Jesus disputes the authorities, saying “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”

This idea is repeated in Matthew’s gospel, Shakespeare’s tragedies, and a historic speech by then Illinois senatorial candidate Abraham Lincoln. It echoes today in definitions of territorial limits to perceptions of politics, social class, gender, identity, belief, and unbelief. It’s human nature to want to find a home with people who look like us and share our convictions.

Throughout his ministry, though, Jesus repeats the dangers of dividing people into “us” and “them.” St. Paul later says we are neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free—but are all one in Christ Jesus.

This doesn’t mean we have to look, act, think, or live in exactly the same way. We should, however, recognize the humanity of all God’s children and work to heal our divisions in the name of that common heritage—lest our home on Earth fall.

*Michele Dula Baum lives in Upper St. Clair with her husband, Tim; son, Chris, and a trio of feline autocrats. A member of St. Paul's since 2002, she is a regular chorister and lay Eucharistic minister and has served on the vestry, Trinity Cathedral Chapter, and Pittsburgh Diocesan Convention delegation.*

Wednesday March 11, 2020

## **MARK 4:1-20**

*Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'*

*When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that*

*"they may indeed look, but not perceive,*

*and may indeed listen, but not understand;*

*so that they may not turn again and be forgiven."'*

*And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'*

In Lent, we are given the opportunity to reflect on our spiritual lives and go deeper with God. In this parable, Jesus asks us to consider what type of soil we are growing in. There are all sorts of soil that people are sown on, but some of them bear rotten fruits like hate and disrespect. One fruit of the spirit I have been reflecting on lately is love. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says "there is power in love!" and I agree! Love is important to Christians because love can change people and change the world. And sometimes love is expressed in simple ways. I remember a time when a neighbor brought me a baked apple and it completely made my day. A simple action that was based out of love for neighbor touched me. This Lent, I believe we are called to think about what sort of soil we are planted in and what fruit is coming from our actions. Because as Christians, we must bear the fruit of love.

*Maude McDowell has attended St. Paul's for 55 years. During her time here she has served on the Altar Guild, Canterbury Fair, chaired the Outreach Committee, and has served on the board of Old St. Luke's Church. She recently celebrated her 100th birthday.*

Thursday March 12,2020

## **MARK 4:21-34**

*He said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'*

*He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'*

*He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'*

*With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.*

When I was a college student, I started to question my faith and eventually became an agnostic. This was a scary and disturbing time for me because God had always been at the center of my life. As Father Ronald Rolheiser has written, agnosticism invariably leads to despair. That was true for me. So, I searched frantically for answers. I took philosophy and theology courses, and although I found some answers, I didn't find the answers I sought.

In today's readings, we find three of Jesus's familiar parables. But we also find that when Jesus was alone with His disciples, he explains in secret the meaning of the parables. Why? Why did Jesus decide not to become the "answer man" people like me would want? Why not tell us plainly what the answers are instead of teaching in parables? One reason, I believe, is that Jesus wants us to think. God has given us miraculous minds, and She wants us to enjoy the miracle of Reason with which She has blessed us. As I've gotten much older, I've come to realize that if Jesus came to Earth just to give us all of the answers, we would probably be pretty bored. Instead, God has given us a wonderfully complex universe to explore, and She wants us to enjoy the thrill of finding the answers ourselves. Jesus walks with us on this quest for Truth. He doesn't guarantee we will find all of the answers we seek, but He does guarantee that He will walk with us as we face life's bewildering complexity. In the end, I suspect, we will discover that our walking with Jesus is much, much more important than knowing all the answers.

Ken Matheny and his wife Katherine were received into St. Paul's on November 24, 2019. He is involved in Centering Prayer, Bible Study with the Rector on Wednesday, Book Discussion Group, and plans to participate in the mission trip to West Virginia in the summer of 2020.

Friday March 13, 2020

## MARK 4:35-41

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*



Jesus calms the storm in this picture.

*Molly Sheehan is a six year old kindergarten student at Jefferson Elementary. She is a St. Paul's Nursery School graduate, and also participates in Vacation Bible School and Godly Play at the parish.*

Saturday March 14, 2020

## **MARK 5:1-20**

*They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.*

*The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.*

We know the story; we've heard it dozens of times. Its most famous line – “My name is Legion” – has made its way into horror movies and cautionary tales about the power of the mob. Beyond that single line, however, beyond the bizarre, almost comical image of two thousand pigs hurling themselves off a cliff, the story has much to say about healing and hope...and fear.

Look at how this episode of Christ's ministry begins. The initial image seems designed to instill fear: a man, naked, bellowing, wandering through a cemetery, slashing himself with sharp stones. The text doesn't mention fear in the context of this gruesome, troubling image, however.

Instead, the story suggests that, after years of trying (and failing) to restrain the man, the Gerasenes have given up. They are no longer afraid; they have become used to this spectacle. In fact, the text mentions fear only much later, *after* Jesus has healed the man. Scripture tells us that when the people saw the formerly possessed man decently clothed and in his right mind, then and only then were they afraid. They are used to the demon, used to the madness, used to chaos and self-harm. The healing power of God changes the narrative, changes the status quo.

How often do we become accustomed to, even comfortable with situations that are harmful? We do not expect more. When God steps in and heals us, we can experience that healing as shocking, even frightening. We cling to what we know, even if what we know is less than the peace and wholeness that God wants for us. In this season, may we learn to let go of misery and chaos and doubt even if – *especially* if – we have become comfortable with them. May we embrace change without fear.

*Kathleen Davies Hendricks has been a member of St. Paul's since 1999. In that time, she has been involved with Music Ministry, Lectors and LEMs, Flower Delivery, Children and Youth, and Fellowship.*

Sunday March 15, 2020

## **JOHN 4:5-42**

*So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.*

*A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'*

*Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five*

*husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’*

*Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’ They left the city and were on their way to him.*

*Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, “Four months more, then comes the harvest”? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.” I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’*

*Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.’*

“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty. The water I give shall become a fountain within, leaping up to provide eternal life.”

Jesus spoke these words to the Samaritan woman at the well. She wanted water for her physical thirst. But here, Jesus is acknowledging that we have needs that are deeper than physical needs. Spiritual thirst. His water will quench that spiritual thirst.

Maybe this living water is the Holy Spirit. God created us as creatures with spiritual thirst. Deep within us there is a desire for truth. Maybe God made us this way so that we make our way to Him. He gave us Jesus’ life as an example of how to get there. In the mystery of the Holy Trinity, God is Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Three in One.

Maybe the only way to get this Living water is through faith and love. Jesus' message is one of love. Even in this passage, He ministers to the unloved, a sinful Samaritan. And Jesus loved her.

So maybe the Living water is love. Jesus is love personified. He is God and Spirit. And what more perfect love is there than God's love? That's the love that gives eternal life. We have to have faith in that love and we are called to live that love. May we never veer in our journey.

*Jose Ramirez-Del Toro attends St. Paul's with his family. He has served Shepherd's Heart Ministry.*

Monday March 16, 2020

## **MARK 5: 21 – 43**

*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' So he went with him.*

*And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'*

*While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?' But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

In this section of Mark, we find Jesus at the height of his popularity, with large crowds following him to catch a glimpse of this great teacher and healer. We are first introduced to Jairus, one of the officials of the synagogue. This was an important man, a learned leader in the community who risked humbling himself before Jesus so that his daughter might live.

In contrast we find a woman “afflicted with a hemorrhage for a dozen years”. She was an outcast, shunned and no doubt scorned by the community who probably thought that she or her ancestors had done something wrong to bring this affliction upon herself. She risked additional scorn and embarrassment by pushing through the crowd to reach out to Jesus.

Yet they are as similar as they are different. They both have tremendous faith in God. They both trust Jesus. They both take enormous risks to be with Jesus.

In response, Jesus exhibits his perfect faith and trust in his father and bestows his compassion upon them. He illustrates that God’s love and grace is for everyone, from the venerable official, to the lowly outcast. Jesus takes risks as well. It seems that healing has an effect on him, of what kind we don’t know, but he clearly recognizes that some sort of power has left him when the woman touches him, and he risks even larger crowds as word of these miracles spreads. Jesus generously and courageously presses on, continuing to do his father’s work so that all of God’s children might see, believe and be saved.

*Jim Miorelli and his family have attended St. Paul’s for 10 years. He has been blessed to participate as a LEM, LEV, Usher, in the Men’s Group, the World Vision 6k, Monday morning bible study, and The Ignatian Way.*

Tuesday March 17, 2020

## **MARK 6:1-13**

*He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear*

*sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

There are only two times in scripture when we hear of Jesus being amazed, and one of those times is when he returns to Nazareth. He was amazed at their unbelief. Here he is, back in his hometown, surrounded by friends and family, those he grew up with, and Jesus is rejected. Interestingly enough, his fellow Nazarenes didn't deny his power or his wisdom. Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given to him? And they didn't doubt that he could do great works. What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Yet they despised him and rejected him. What turned their amazement into doubt? Was he too familiar? After all, he looked like one of them, had the same recognizable Nazarene accent that they did and actually had acquired carpentry skills during his youth right there in this small village. Why would God send the Savior of the world in such a common and ordinary way? As Jewish people, Jesus's family and friends were indeed longing and looking for a savior. Perhaps the people of Nazareth were unable to see past something so familiar and as a result were unable to catch a glimpse of something so holy in their midst.

Before I critique the crowd in Nazareth, or judge what seems to be obvious blindness, I wonder in what ordinary ways God has tried to intersect with me? Where did I miss the opportunity to see his hand at work? Where have I busily rushed by His very presence? I remind myself Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us - in both ordinary and extraordinary ways.

*Eileen Sharbaugh and her husband Dave first attended St. Paul's in 1986 as newlyweds and were recruited during their initial visit to help with EYC. They have four young adult children who grew up at St. Paul's. She began working as a classroom teacher in the nursery school in 1989 and continues to enjoy her time with the children, families and staff who make up the St. Paul's Nursery School community.*

Wednesday March 18, 2020

## **MARK 6:13-29**

*They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

*King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'*

*For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.*

In this somewhat challenging reading I see a timely message. We see what unfortunately has been part of humanity's story for thousands of years: rich and powerful people carelessly--and often illegally and certainly immorally--acting against the interests of the poor, oppressed, and those who bravely challenge those powers and cultural norms only to be punished and even executed. John's execution was followed by Jesus' crucifixion as well as by the killings of Peter, James and Stephen.

While Herod is clearly intrigued by John the Baptizer, Herodias is a mean spirited social climber who is furious to have been called out on the illegality and immorality of her marriage to her still-living husband's brother, Herod. Instead of owning up to this blatant wrongdoing, she is determined to end the life of the "whistleblower," John. Herod is too timid to renege on a promise in front of a multitude of friends, and apparently no-one else had the courage to step in and say "hey, wait a minute ..."

In reading about John and other martyrs (including more recently Martin Luther King and Dietrich Bonhoeffer), I ask myself: when I see wrongdoing, when I see acts of intolerance, will I stand by silently or will I bravely follow Jesus' call to radical love at all costs? We know that there are constant opportunities for us to show our courage and obedience to God, and that most of the time, it won't be the easy road. We learn from this story of John that following Jesus does not necessarily bring us earthly success or a painless life. Let us pray for the strength to do Your will, God. Amen.

*Ginny Barnicoat has taught second grade Sunday School for 10 years. She has served on the vestry as both a commission chair and as Senior Warden. For the past three years, she has mentored a refugee family from the Congo and is active in many of the outreach activities at St. Pauls.*

Thursday March 19, 2020

## **MARK 6:30-46**

*The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?' And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' When they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.*

*Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.*

A friend of mine has a ministry of hospitality to the grieving at her church for funerals. After each one, she and her very small committee gather foods and beautifully arrange them on table cloths using real dishes, real silverware, and lovely serving trays. She takes into consideration the need for a picture table, maybe a microphone for storytelling, flowers, and other special requests. She knows how to feed the weary soul, and there is always enough to eat.

Today's reading follows Jesus and the disciples just after they heard about the beheading of John the Baptist. This tragic event happened in the midst of their mission of preaching and teaching. It was overwhelming and they were already tired and hungry. When Jesus invited them to get into a boat and go for some quiet time in a secluded place he already planned on feeding them.

Yet, upon arrival in the secluded place mobs of people showed up. Had they heard about John the Baptist? They came on foot from many towns to be with Jesus and the Disciples fast enough to be waiting as the boat landed. They knew the power of being together, and he fed them. Sometimes we are fed by just being together in the presence of Jesus.

*The Reverend Catherine Munz joined St. Paul's in October as an Honorary Priest Associate. In 2019 she retired after 25 years of ministry, 21 as a rector. She, and her wonderful husband Bill chose to resettle in Pittsburgh because of their children and grandchildren.*

Friday March 20, 2020

## **MARK 6:47-56**

*When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake. He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.*

*When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.*

When going through life it can sometimes seem as the world is constantly pushing back and resisting. It often seems futile and a little bit scary to challenge the status quo. However, sometimes we have to challenge the world. Living a Christian life does not ensure easy living and comfort, far from it. To do God's work in the world one must labor and toil constantly, and I believe Mark 6:47-56 is a great example of that. The disciples's straining against the oars of their boat is a symbol of the hardships everyone must go through to live a holy life. It is also a reminder that sometimes it will seem as though God is absent in our lives as though He has forsaken us. Although as soon as we open our eyes again we realize that God is always with us. This happened to the disciples when they looked to the side of their boat and saw Jesus walking on water, coming to help them in their time of need.

When I was twelve, I prayed to God to give me courage before a Cello recital. When I stepped up to my music stand that day, my body filled itself with divine courage and my fears dissipated. Jesus walking on the stormy waters of the Galilean Sea is a symbol showing that humans can achieve anything with the help of God and Jesus. Whether it may be crossing an ocean, mustering up the courage to talk to someone new, or simply the will to live a holy life. Sometimes in life we are simply astounded by God's glory as the disciples are. I have been astounded constantly by the world's glory, whether it is the beauty of the Atlantic Ocean, the willingness of people to give up their time to help others at a homeless shelter, or just the grand forests and creeks running in our very own Bird Park. I am simply astounded about how Jesus could do so

much simple good. No one could ever compare their own actions to God's of course, but we should live up to his standards. We must draw upon the courage of the Holy Spirit to help us live a holy life and preach the holy word in our everyday life as so many have done before us with the Holy Spirit behind them.

*Tommy Harrold is currently an acolyte and in the confirmation class. He is also in 7th grade at Mellon Middle School.*

March 22, 2020

## **JOHN 9: 1-41**

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'*

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'*

*The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus*

*to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'*

*So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.*

*Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.*

This reading tells of Christ's healing of a blind man who had not seen from birth. As a consequence of Christ's intervention, he came to hear, see and believe in the divinity of Christ. The Pharisees, however, did not accept this event as valid. They believed their knowledge of the tenets of faith were paramount; that they, not Christ, were the sole arbiters of God's works in the world. To them their seeing was absolute. The lesson John shares is those who are blind yet come to recognize Christ in the world shall see, while those who believe they see absolutely, yet do not recognize Christ's divinity, shall be blind.

For me, the Pharisees' behavior represents my blindness challenge. By definition, in their times they cloaked themselves with "pretensions of superior sanctity." I react adversely when I encounter their counterparts in these times: individuals who are self righteous and hypocritical. My challenge, however, is not managing such adversity, it is recognizing that that which I find troubling in others is very likely part of myself. My lesson from this reading of John is to be careful that I am not my own Pharisee.

*Jeff Dunbar has been a member of St. Paul's for fifteen years, served on Vestry for six years, and currently serves on Money Counting Teams and sings in the Choir.*

Monday March 23, 2020

## MARK 7:24-37

*From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'*

"Good night," the mother kissed the little boy's head and turned out the light.

"Good night," he whispered as she left. His eyelids felt dreary and soon he drifted off to sleep.

A giant spider had the boy in one of his eight legs.

"I will eat you!" it hissed as it climbed its giant spider web. The boy struggled but could not escape the grasp of the ferocious spider. This of course was the boy's dream, but to him it seemed so real. The spider set the boy down in the center of the web and went to fetch his babies. Despite the boy's efforts, he could not scramble out of it.

"Mommm!!" the boy startled awake and sat bolt upright in bed. He ran down the hall and threw open the door.

"What's wrong, Jackson?" inquired the mom as she pulled her son close.

"There was a huge spider, and I mean *huge* and he took me to his spiderweb and he and his family were going to eat me!" Jackson started to cry.

"Don't worry, there's no spider; you just had a nightmare,"

Jackson looked up. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

And in a moment, the mother and her son were fast asleep holding each other's hands.

This story relates to verses Mark 7:24 - 7:31 because the Gentile woman looks to Jesus for help and puts all her trust in Him just like Jackson put all his trust in his mom to comfort him after waking up from his nightmare. So too did the deaf and dumb man trust in Jesus. I think God gives us family, and in particular, the love of our parents, to show His love for us. As children, we believe and love our parents with everything we are. How much more should we trust in our Heavenly Father who always has our interests in His heart.

*Molly Bozick is a ten year old fifth grader. She has been a parishioner at St. Paul's for just over a year but is a proud St. Paul's Nursery School alum. She enjoys creative writing and hopes to be an author/illustrator some day.*

Tuesday March 24, 2020

## **MARK 8:1-10**

*In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.' His disciples replied, 'How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?' He asked them, 'How many loaves do you have?' They said, 'Seven.' Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.*

The disciples, even though they have *already* watched Jesus feed thousands before, seem to be saying 'Um, Jesus...we don't have enough,' as they examine their measly seven loaves.

The self-storage industry is one of the fastest growing industries in modern-day America. If you ask people that utilize them why they do, you're likely to hear 'I just don't have enough space'. Far less often, you'll hear 'I have too much stuff.'

That's not to pick on anyone using self-storage. I believe that in many ways, we are conditioned to believe that we don't have enough, don't produce enough, or that we are ourselves are not enough in some way or another. How many times have you told yourself, or have been told by others that you don't have enough? Not enough space, time, or money. Not enough patience, courage, or talent. Or maybe not

enough friends, followers or likes. I'm certainly guilty of telling myself that I'm not enough in different ways.

The beauty, but also one of the great challenges of being a Christian is accepting that we always have enough in Jesus. However, in the day-to-day battles of daily life, that can seem too abstract, at least for me. We don't have the luxury of having Jesus by our side to perform the actual miracle when something *is* truly lacking in our lives. But we *do* have our church, family, friends, and other support groups. These are the earthly surrogates who help pick us up during times of relatively minor doubt, and who carry us during those rare times when we truly don't have enough to get through the day.

*Derik Moore has attended St. Paul's for five years. He is an active participant in the Men's Group, Newcomer's group and the Rector search.*

Wednesday March 25, 2020

## **MARK 8:11-26**

*The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.' And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.*

*Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.' They said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' Then he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'*

*They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'*

Our passage today contrasts proper and improper approaches to engaging the Kingdom of God. The Pharisees demanded physical substantiation and Jesus refused, for he operated out of a

different realm – his spirit – the place where one is most immediately open to God and sensitive to matters of the unseen. The disciples were similarly misguided, perhaps by the “leaven of the Pharisees,” the human tendency to intellectual appeasement and concern with the superficial. In contrast, the healing of the blind man demonstrates initial trust in the spiritual realm, which is foundational to receiving a miracle and results in continued growth toward spiritual wholeness. Do I desire proof in order to trust?

In admonishing his disciples for not seeing and hearing, Jesus was referring to spiritual perception, to being sensitive for the still small voice of God within and to seeing in a different way. I am reminded of how many times I fail to see the larger picture in a situation, the more subtle movements of God, because I want to control and feel secure. For me, taking time in silence to attend to God facilitates recognizing His inward and outward presence and promptings. Jesus also challenged the disciples to remember. How often do I fail to remember God’s past provision when faced with a new, difficult circumstance? Yet He has always been faithful and will continue to be, perhaps in a unique, miraculous way if only I trust.

*Jan Klemick has been around St. Paul’s for two years and facilitates the Centering Prayer group and serves as a Lay Eucharistic Minister.*

Thursday March 26, 2020

## **MARK 8:27-9:1**

*Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.*

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’*

*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’ And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.’*

When I first read the passage, it was really confusing to me. I didn't understand why Jesus would tell his disciples to keep the fact he was the Messiah to themselves. I also just didn't understand some of the text itself. After some more examination, however, I found that the passage was really about how Jesus had to explain to Peter and his disciples that his sacrifice would result in the abundance of joy that is today, yesterday, and tomorrow. The reason he wanted to keep it on a low radar is so he could teach his disciples what to do after he was gone. Peter and the others didn't fully understand the idea of God being in the driver's seat and not them. Some people don't like the prospect that another person or force could be driving them to do something because they like to be in control. But sometimes, you need to let God take the wheel and just allow that serenity of unknowingness overtake you. When I told my mom this, she responded, "Yeah, that's faith."

*Jack Melvin is in eighth grade and is a crisp 13 years old. He really enjoys making art, playing the piano and playing my bass guitar. At church, he serves as an acolyte, and participates in confirmation class/EYC. Jack and his brother are going on the mission trip this summer, and he attends Sheldon Calvary Camp as well.*

Friday March 27, 2020

## **MARK 9:2-13**

*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.*

*As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. Then they asked him, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He said to them, 'Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.'*

"The fear of God" is an odd phrase. It has always seemed to me entirely contrary to the teachings I heard every Sunday in church. After all, if Jesus lived for love, why should we live out of fear? Mark 9:2-13, however, told me that maybe fear isn't a choice. I wasn't on that mountain top that day, but I can put myself in the disciples' shoes. If I were to stand on a mountain, see my friend

transformed into otherworldly robes and talk with prophets long departed from the world, I'd be pretty scared. Add a heavenly, booming voice declaring my friend's divinity, and I'd be downright spooked. With that fear in mind, it seems almost natural that the disciples would not understand what Jesus meant when he said he would rise from the dead. Their fear led to their doubt. These are the same disciples who would refuse to believe that Jesus had risen until he appeared to them himself in Mark 16:14, despite Jesus's warning in this chapter. Peter is the same disciple who would deny Jesus three times out of fear. But they are also the same disciples who would spread Jesus's church and who Jesus would call friends. Fear is inevitable; Jesus welcomes us all back anyway.

*Jack Horrigan is in 11th grade at Mt. Lebanon. At St. Paul's, he participates in youth group, mission trip, fish dries, and is an acolyte and junior verger.*

Saturday March 28, 2020

## **MARK 9:14-29**

*When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. He asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' Someone from the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.' He answered them, 'You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' Jesus said to him, 'If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You spirit that keep this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!' After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said to them, 'This kind can come out only through prayer.'*

Moments before this story we see John, James, Peter, and Jesus coming back down to meet the other disciples after this magnificent moment of Jesus being transfigured (transformed into another form) in front of their eyes. Meanwhile, the other disciples are disputing with the scribes about an apparent failure. A man, eager to see his son free from demon possession, asks the

disciples to drive it out, and they can't. The disciples, who witnessed countless miracles, lack the ability to heal this boy.

The father turns to Jesus, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help," to which Jesus responds, "If you can?" Everything is possible for the one who believes." To which the father cries out "I do believe, help my unbelief." The father's words feel wrapped in both anticipation and doubt—what will happen to his son? Is Jesus really enough to save?

Jesus often heals individuals because of their faith, but this miracle feels different. The doubt and discouragement encountered by the disciples and the father echo my own experiences of asking God to work.

I find myself asking God to help my unbelief on a regular basis. "I do believe, help my unbelief." Prayers that are full of anticipation and hope, yet still carrying doubt.

But the great news is that his son's healing is dependent on God's power, not the powerlessness of the disciples or the conflicting faith that the father displayed. Yet what little faith the father offered at that moment was enough for God's glory, power and kindness to be shown through Jesus' healing.

*"For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)*

*Ariel Wicker has served as your Parish Administrator since October 2018. When she is not working at St. Paul's, she is serving college students with the Coalition for Christian Outreach at Duquesne University with her husband John.*

Sunday March 29, 2020

## **JOHN 11:1-45**

*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

*Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'*

*When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'*

*When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'*

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'*

*Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

In the story, Jesus hears that his friend is dying and instead of going to see him he stays where he is for two more days. Then he goes to see his friend who died. When he gets there, Martha meets him and tells Jesus that if he was there this never would have happened. When Jesus goes to the tomb he starts to cry and says “come out” and his friend comes out in cloth.

It shows that you might not always agree with God but in the end, everything will be ok; God has a plan for everything. Jesus cries because his friend has died when he is about to raise him from the dead. It shows that even the Lord is scared and sad sometimes. I think that this passage means no matter what you believe or think God is always there for you. Life isn't perfect but there's always God.

*Isaiah Irwin Evans is an acolyte and in confirmation class at St. Paul's. He is in seventh grade and attends Mellon Middle School.*

Monday March 30, 2020

## **MARK 9:30-41**

*They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.*

*Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'*

*John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.'*

I visualize Jesus leading his disciples stealthily through Galilee, as a parent would. He has just told them of his death and resurrection to come. They do not understand. He is focused on the teaching he wants to accomplish. As they reach Capernaum, he addresses the squabbling he heard along the walk and finds that the twelve were arguing about who was the greatest. Soon, the disciples are in another predicament, admitting they stopped a man from doing good because he was not in their group.

Having been parented, and having parented, I imagine the anxiety, frustration, or irritation that I would feel if I was in this situation. How can the disciples not understand basic faith principles after their time with Jesus? It brings memories of my parents working diligently to shape and teach me, only to have me question, forget, and stumble through adolescence. But in this passage, Jesus the Parent hears the questions, predicaments and stumbles of his disciples, seemingly without an eye roll or a sigh, and draws them close to guide them once again.

This passage reassures me as a child of God. I can bring my worn-out worries, gratitude, questions, and toe-stubs to God, my Parent, time and time again. And when I do, I feel the Holy Spirit pull me close in relationship and fill me with God's steadfast love and with the patient, gentle whisper of guidance. Our Parent, who art in Heaven, Holy is your name.

*Ann Coffaro is grateful to be part of the St. Paul's community and St. Ignatius, The Rectors Bible Study and various book groups gives her juice for my continuing spiritual journey. She enjoys being involved in Outreach projects such as the SWES and the Walk-In Ministry. You will typically find her and her mister at the Saturday evening service. Please say hello!*

Tuesday March 31, 2020

## **MARK 9:42-50**

*'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.*

*'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'*

In this reading, Jesus is speaking with passion. With papa bear-type ferocity towards his believers. And He is speaking with certainty – He knows that what we face here on earth in no way compares to what we will face in heaven or hell. He is cautioning His listeners – do not get in His way – or the way of those trying to teach about Him.

He says, “And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.”

How would we modernize this text?

Could we add, “And if your cell phone causes you to stumble, put it in a drawer.” That just might be the perfect Lenten sacrifice – to give up your electronic of choice for the day/week/40 days and to spend those minutes typically squandered online and on social media doing something good – for yourself, or for your family, community, or God.

No, Jesus doesn’t really want us to pull off a Van Gogh and cut off an extremity. But I believe that Jesus wants us to realize which of our daily actions are getting in our way of living our best life and causing us to stumble.

*Amanda D. Harris has attended St. Paul's for two years and enjoys being a substitute Sunday school teacher and VBS camp teacher. She is lucky to be married to Sam and to have two daughters, Juliana and Averie. She is a freelance marketing communication writer and Jefferson Elementary volunteer.*

Wednesday April 1, 2020

## **MARK 10:1-16**

*He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them.*

*Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’*

*Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'*

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

You've probably seen depictions of this text before. Jesus, looking more Californian than Middle Eastern, exudes warmth and welcome as children run to him, sit on his knee, and are held in the crook of his arm. Maybe you've even seen parodies of this image, the infant in Christ's embrace being replaced by a velociraptor or the latest Hollywood extraterrestrial. However you've seen it, this Jesus makes sense. Of course Christ's kingdom belongs to children in all their innocence, playfulness, and wonder.

Yet, it's easy to sentimentalize this Jesus and to miss this passage's conflict and difficulty. Note that the disciples seem troubled by the children, how Christ is "indignant" to the disciples because of this. Note that this story follows a difficult teaching where Christ tells us divorce is, at best, an accommodation for human sin. This is at odds with the loving warm Jesus we've seen in those pictures.

What image does this text want us to see? Christ blesses the children not because they've done anything to merit the kingdom, but because they openly receive it. Contrast this with those who "test" Christ by debating him on divorce or with the disciples who are uncomfortable with Christ's welcoming of children. To receive Christ as a child is to do things quite differently than we're used to, to shift our perception of what we're called to, to challenge how the world teaches us to think. How might you be called to receive Christ as a child today? How might openly receiving Christ change how we see the world?

*The Reverend Luke Zerra is the Youth Minister at St. Paul's. When he's not working with the youth, he's taking care of his pug Gus, trying to write a bit of his dissertation, or playing the guitar poorly.*

Thursday April 2, 2020

## **MARK 10:17-31**

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud;*

*Honour your father and mother.” ’ He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

*Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’*

*Peter began to say to him, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’ Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.’*

Many of us are like the man who approaches Jesus, trying to “live our best lives” by checking every box, doing what we think is right, yet we can’t shake that feeling that there must be something more, something we’re missing. We know we want a deeper relationship with our friends, family, and most of all, God. What is holding us back? Jesus tells the man that following the Commandments isn’t enough, he must give away his wealth if he is to inherit God’s kingdom. At this the man goes away saddened, for he has many possessions. Jesus’ requirement challenges his very core, his identity, his sense of self. His emotional attachment to his wealth is an obstacle to following Jesus. The disciples also are troubled by Jesus’ words, for they lived in a time when wealth was thought to equate favor with God. Jesus’ call turns this notion on its head. No longer is adherence to Jewish law the key to God’s kingdom, nor do riches buy a ticket. In this new Kingdom, things are turned upside down, the first shall be last and the last first. What roadblocks do we set up that isolate us from God? Do we hide behind our work, our position, our status? Perhaps to follow Jesus we must give up these earthy shields and reveal our true, vulnerable selves.

*Gina Brownfield is the mom of three sons and the wife of Todd. She is a member of Vestry, helps with the Altar Flower Delivery and Funeral Reception Ministries, and enjoyed teaching Sunday School in the past.*

Friday April 3, 2020

## MARK 10:32-45

*They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'*

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'*

*When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'*

**"Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing"** is a well-known quotation in sports that is often incorrectly attributed to Vince Lombardi. It was actually said by UCLA Bruins football coach Henry Russell ("Red") Sanders. In 1950, at a physical education workshop, Sanders told his group: "Men, I'll be honest. Winning isn't everything," then following a long pause, "Men, it's the only thing!" As I read that quote, it strikes me as a good motivational quote. Whether in school, sports, business or life, putting forth the effort to achieve a favorable outcome seems like a pretty good idea. Indeed, schools, businesses, organizations, and institutions often measure greatness by personal achievement. It seems highly likely that the same belief was true in James and John's time. In fact, most Jews at that time, including James and John, believed that their Savior would free them from Roman control and oppression and establish a new kingdom on Earth. James and John wanted top positions in that kingdom. At that moment, they forgot Jesus's message and life example of God-serving and instead started thinking more self-serving. A self-serving mentality can easily creep into our schools, politics, sports, relationships, marriages, and families. And when that happens, disharmony usually follows. When I think of the failed relationships in my life or times of struggle in marriage or work, they can usually be attributed to a self-serving mindset. Like all of us at certain times in our lives, James and John forgot that winning in Christ's Kingdom is not attained by personal achievements. It is our service to God, not our service to self

that is most valued. Let us always remember that being first, or winning in Christ's Kingdom, means being last in this life. It is not seeking to have our every need and desire met, but instead seeking and searching for ways to minister and serve the needs of our earthly brothers and sisters. That type of winning is truly the only thing!

*Dave Choura has been attending St. Paul's for thirty-two years. He has been an interim Youth Minister three separate times and has led six mission trips. He is currently serving in my twenty-ninth year as Children's Chapel Leader and is blessed to worship with our young children on a weekly basis. St. Paul's has always been a family to him.*

Saturday April 4, 2020

## **MARK 10:46-52**

*They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*



Here Jesus has restored Bartimaeus' vision. In the bottom of the picture we see a before picture, where he was sad that his friends would not listen to him. To his right, we see an after photo, where he is happy that he has encountered a loving God who cares for him.

*The drawing was done by 5 year old nursery school student and parishioner Penelope "Poppie" Moore is a five year old nursery school student and St. Paul's parishioner.*

Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020

## **MATTHEW 21:1-11**

*When Jesus and his disciples had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,*

*"Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

*The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,*

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

*When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."*

We learn a lot about Jesus in this passage. He is a man who turns our assumptions upside down, who is constantly challenging norms. But we also learn about what it means to be a follower of Jesus from those who surround him in his final days. Here, Jesus tasks his followers with an errand, he tells them to go to town and find a donkey. And if anyone asks them why they are taking a donkey, they are to offer the vague reply of "God told me to do it."

This scene is so odd for me to imagine! This request by Jesus sounds so random. The disciples did not understand what was to come next, but they still obeyed him. And this is such a relatable picture of our faith. Jesus shows us the way, and oftentimes we have no clue where it leads.

But even if the disciples are a little confused about their task, they still complete it. Because ultimately their small act of service helps people encounter the living God. Every time we listen to the call of Jesus and follow his commands, we bring glory to God and service to God always reorients us back to God. Who was made man so that we might learn how to serve others in his, and his disciples' example.

*The Reverend Laura Di Panfilo is the Assistant Rector at St. Paul's Mt. Lebanon.*

Monday April 6, 2020

## MARK 11:12-25

*On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it.*

*Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written,*

*"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"?*

*But you have made it a den of robbers.'*

*And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.*

*In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. Then Peter remembered and said to him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.' Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea", and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

*'Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.'*

Recently I saw something small and green poking out of the dirt. It's the middle of January, however, the buds of our crocus bulbs are starting to push their way out of the ground. In JANUARY. "It's too early for this," I thought. Then I started to wonder, how far behind are spring flowers? WHERE are my flowers?

In this passage in Mark, it wasn't the right season for the fig tree to be producing fruit. It was too early. However, there WERE leaves growing. Maybe the weather had been unseasonably warm. There might have been an early fig or two on the tree. However, Jesus was left disappointed. So what does he do? He curses the fig tree. It will never have the opportunity to produce fruit.

Jesus saw that the fig tree was not bearing the fruit it was meant to bear. In the middle of this two-part story is the story of Jesus clearing out the temple, which was meant to be a place for worship and prayer. Instead of prayer, Jesus saw the people selling sacrificial animals in the

temple courtyard at outrageous prices. Clearly that place was not bearing the “fruit” it was meant to bear either. Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered within the same day, right before he went into the temple courtyard and flipped those tables right over. The vendors were chased out, coins flying all over the temple floor in their wake.

A fig tree with leaves but no figs is not unlike a person who claims faith in God but does not do anything with that faith. I wonder if Jesus ever looks at me and thinks, “Wow, she’s got a lot of leaves, but not very much fruit.” We are all meant to bear fruit and to provide evidence of a God who is Love to others. I hope to bear the fruit I’ve been given to bear, and, in doing so, to point toward the light of Jesus.

*Kristen Morgan is the Director of Children, Youth, and Family Ministry and has been a member of St. Paul's since 2009. Kristen and her husband, Doug, have two boys, Dylan and Noah. They all consider St. Paul's their Church Home, and all of its parishioners their Church Family.*

Tuesday April 7, 2020

## **MARK 11: 27-33**

*Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.’ They argued with one another, ‘If we say, “From heaven”, he will say, “Why then did you not believe him?” But shall we say, “Of human origin”?’—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’*

Jesus shows some temper in Mark 11, culminating in the Cleansing of the Temple, where He accuses the religious establishment of turning the temple into a “den of thieves.” Threatened, they plot to kill Jesus. First they try to undermine him, asking, “By what authority are you doing these things?”

We know the answer, of course, and this knowledge makes the priests’ question seem especially ridiculous. Jesus dispatches the question and poses a counter-question to the priests that easily paints them into a corner.

Imagine Jesus, walking into the temple, intercepted by “the chief priests, scribes, and elders,” who pose their question. Jesus is on “their turf,” challenged by *all* the members of the establishment. Their intent isn’t discourse. It’s intimidation.

But Jesus turns the tables. I'll answer your question if you answer mine, He tells them. They are afraid to answer, risk inflaming the crowd and exposing themselves as false authorities. The chapter ends with Jesus flouting their "authority."

At heart, the priests know their authority is false. So it's interesting that of all the questions they might have used to trap Jesus, they chose one based in "authority." This question was their "tell." They want to know where such authority comes from. Coming face-to-face with Jesus' authenticity, with *true* authority, they've revealed themselves to themselves. No wonder they're afraid.

Doesn't this same tension exists in each of us every day? We have an unfair advantage though. We hear the voice of true authority through the grace of the Holy Spirit. At our best, we listen to it and follow it. Thus commences a virtuous cycle. Our faith grows, and with that comes the courage to recognize the pervasive grace offered through the Holy Spirit. And through grace, more faith.

But we fail often. We hide behind false authority, fear the crowd, and ask in our prayers, perhaps echoing the frightened questions of the priests, "Where can we find true authority?"

We know the answer. Of course.

*Frank Horrigan has been a member of Saint Pauls for more than 20 years. He is a current member of the vestry, serving on the stewardship and outreach commissions. He is also active in the men's group.*

Wednesday April 8, 2020

## **MARK 12:1-11**

*Then he began to speak to them in parables. 'A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watch-tower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture:*

*"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;*

*this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes"?'*

When I first read the passage, I thought it was kind of murderous for a fifth grader, but after reading it again and talking to my Mom and Laura, I realized there's a little more to the parable than murder. I think there are two main lessons in the story. First, selfish actions will not help you get to the top. And second, it explains something about Jesus. In the story, a landowner rents his vineyard to some tenant farmers. When he sends a servant to collect the wine he is owed, the tenants kill the servant. And the landowner keeps sending servants, and the tenants keep killing them. Finally, the landowner sends his son, and the tenants kill him thinking that they will then get the vineyard. I think the servants represent the prophets who told about Jesus coming and were not treated well or killed. And the son represents Jesus who will eventually be killed by those who do not believe in him. And even though the tenants killed the son, they did not get what they wanted. They could not stop the landowner from sharing the wine. Just like Jesus dying did not stop his word from spreading.

*Lia Petrillo is a fifth grader at Markham Elementary. She has been going to St. Paul's for 3.5 years and serves as an acolyte and attends Sunday School.*

Maundy Thursday, April 9th, 2020

## **EXODUS 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14**

*The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. [Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.] This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for*

*you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.*

*This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.*

Each family has its own way of celebrating significant events. Birthdays include celebrations with cake and ice cream. Anniversaries involve looking at the video from that special day or flipping through a photo album. Christmas begins with tree trimming, special dinners and attending midnight mass. Regardless of your family of origin, there are practices that connect one generation to the next.

The blessing in acknowledging these moments in our individual and collective lives is not the ritual that is established. Rather it is the opportunity to retell our stories so that these sacred times in our lives are not forgotten. When that which is important to us is not recalled we lose a piece of history, our identity, and our lineage. We may even become vulnerable, repeating the mistakes of the past, and not learn the important lessons from the experience.

It is the repetitive nature of doing things from year to year, recalling that which is exciting and important to us and being reminded of some hard truths which helps put our lives in perspective. Despite it all, we can proclaim the words of the Psalmist, "if it had not been for the Lord on our side..." (Psalm 124:1)

The rituals of this week are for us to remember and to never forget. We are humbled by the washing of another's feet; we can admit our own neglect and complicity in our absence at an execution; we wait for whatever will transcend because of our silence. We must recall the events of 2000+ years ago that took place at a Thursday evening meal, to a hill on Calvary, to the uncertainty of a Saturday until we reach that awkward, quiet, and mysteriously wonderful moment of peering into an empty gravesite.

*The Reverend Charles L Fischer III is an Honorary Priest Associate at St. Paul's.*

Good Friday, April 10, 2020

## **JOHN 18:1-19:42**

*After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen*

to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'

*Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'*

*After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.*

*Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'*

*Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'*

*When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.*

*So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews." ' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I*

*have written.’ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.’ This was to fulfil what the scripture says,*

*‘They divided my clothes among themselves,*

*and for my clothing they cast lots.’*

*And that is what the soldiers did.*

*Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.*

*After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

*Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘None of his bones shall be broken.’ And again another passage of scripture says, ‘They will look on the one whom they have pierced.’*

*After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

There are many things that stand out to me in this passage: the kindness that Jesus extends to the criminal, God’s provision demonstrated by appointing John to care for Mary, the humanity of Jesus in seeing how his pain torments him.

While this passage is familiar to many of us, it is difficult to read. We are watching the slow, torturous execution of an innocent man. It might be easier to skip over this part to get to the

resurrection. But we would miss the point entirely if we did that. The God of the universe, who created everything we see, who is not bound by time or space, took on human form just to show us what perfect love looks like. And in his last days, the depths of the physical, emotional and spiritual pain Jesus endured teaches us something essential about the character of God. In identifying with our sufferings, God is not unfamiliar with pain. It is our human nature to want to avoid pain at all costs, and to gloss over the pain in the world because it is too big, too much to bear, too hard to solve. But on the cross we find a God who feels deep pain and who can empathize with us in our sufferings. One of the messages of the crucifixion to me is that nothing I go through, nothing I feel or experience, is too heavy or big or scary for God, who truly empathizes with us.

And if the story ended here, Jesus would be just another moral teacher, someone who led an exemplary life, and then died and was no more. But the story does not end here. God transforms that deep suffering into something that gives life, beauty and restoration to the world.

*Andrea Kamouyerou has been coming to St. Paul's for about 3 years with her wife Sara and daughter Quinn. And as of September 2019, Andrea is the Director of Engagement at St. Paul's, working specifically with the newcomer and outreach ministries.*

Holy Saturday, April 11th

## **MATTHEW 27:57-66**

*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again." Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, "He has been raised from the dead", and the last deception would be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*

In this reading, we see Joseph of Arimathea go through the grueling and careful work of burying Jesus. As I read this passage, I began to wonder how Joseph felt. I wonder if he felt confused. I wonder if he felt foolish. I wonder if he felt angry or abandoned. I wonder if he just felt numb. I

wonder if he had any idea how it would all play out, maybe remembering something Jesus had said, maybe not. I wonder if he talked to his friends or just stayed quiet.

I'm always struck on Holy Saturday by how sad I feel despite the fact that I know how it all turns out. It's almost as if Jesus' absence can be felt now even though we have the Holy Spirit with us and we know about the miracle of the Resurrection. We know we'll get to dress up and celebrate tomorrow! But still today, it's pretty sad.

Joseph's deliberate and careful actions give us a bit of a road map for grief. There is a tenderness in this burial, a love you can feel. Despite his heartbreak, Joseph wanted to be close to Jesus. When I'm really sad or confused, I admit that prayer isn't always my first instinct. I sometimes question God or let depression and despair set in. Joseph is here showing us to go straight to Jesus, that even when we don't know how we'll get through something or how it's going to work out in the end we can draw near to God. God could have chosen to reveal himself in literally infinite ways, but chose to use the Incarnation. And that's always a balm to me because it tells me that there will most certainly be death and loss and sadness and grief in this lifetime, but that we will always have Christ with us. If we're able to stay close to Jesus, we will never be alone on the journey.

*Alexis Sheehan has been a member of St. Paul's for about three years. She is involved with the nursery school, has taught Godly Play with the preschoolers, served as a Lay Eucharistic Minister, hung out at lots of events and CLASP activities, and attended and led some awesome book clubs and bible studies. Her family loves the super kid-friendly 8:45 am service on Sundays!*

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

## **MATTHEW 28:1-10**

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'*

Early on that first Easter morning, the women went to the tomb looking to mourn a dead friend. Instead, their world was turned upside down. The tomb was empty. Everything had changed.

Then, an angel said, "Do not be afraid," and then they found Jesus, and he repeated the same words to them again. "Do not be afraid..."

Did you know the phrase, "do not be afraid" or "fear not" appears 365 times in the bible which is far more than any other phrase. In fact, that is once for each day of the year. A fantastic reminder of this very important message.

What are you afraid of? Is it your health, or is it failure? Is it the safety of your children? Is it personal rejection? Is it finances, or is it death?

Fear keeps us trapped in a very small world. In Star Wars, Yoda says, "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." God does not desire for us to live in fear. God instead desires for us to enjoy an abundant life: A life lived without fear.

On this Easter Day, know that the resurrected Christ drives out all fear, and all darkness. And in the end, Love Wins.

*The Reverend Noah H. Evans is the Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mt. Lebanon.*

# **St. Paul's Episcopal Church**

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