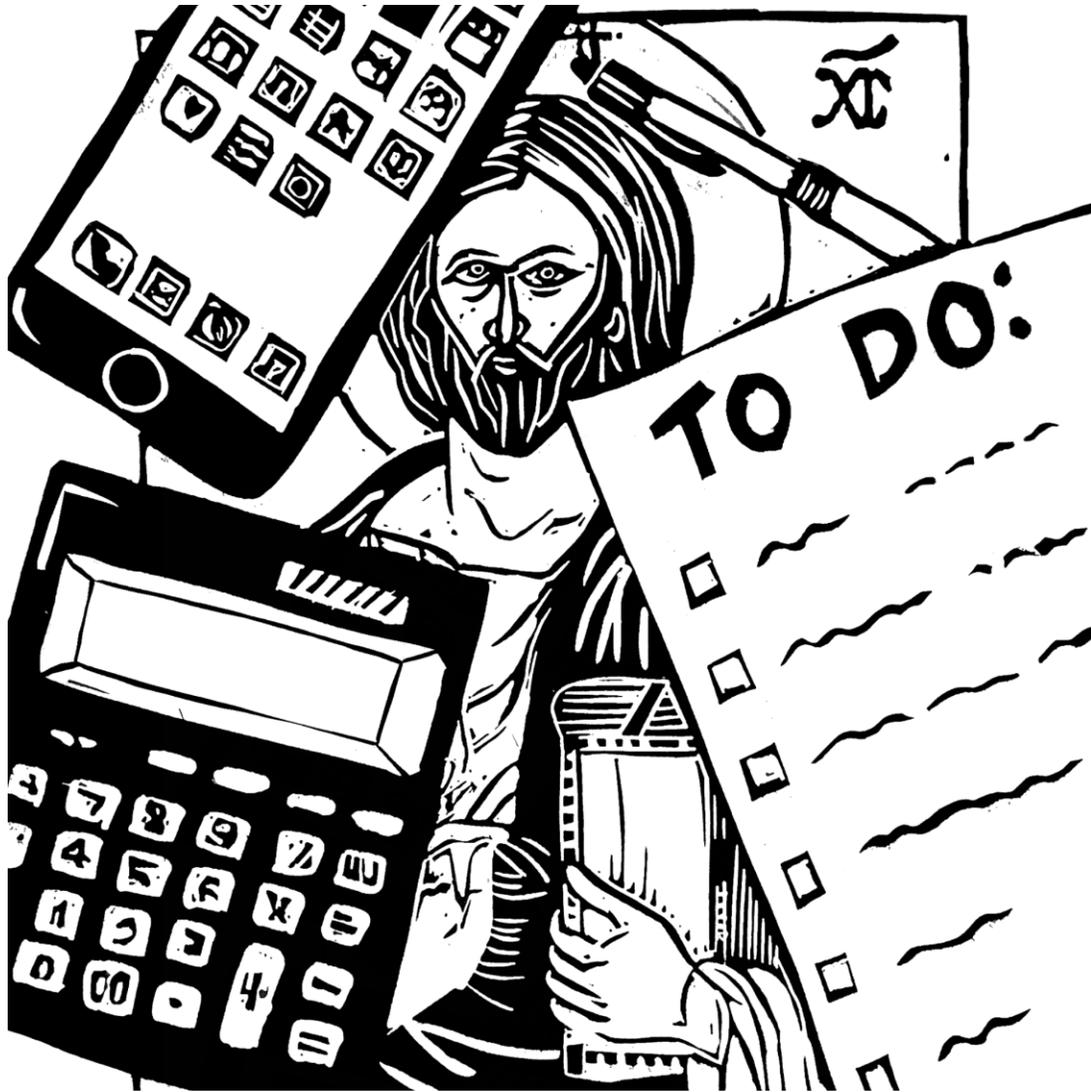


St. Paul's Lent Devotional 2023



"Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths."

-Psalm 25:4

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
1066 Washington Road, Mt. Lebanon, PA 15228
www.stpaulspgh.org

Lent 2023

Dear St. Paul's,

Welcome to our fourth Lenten Devotional! Each year we receive nearly 50 entries from members of our community to create this booklet and I am always moved by your reflections and grateful for your enthusiastic participation in this project.

On the cover of this booklet is an image created by the New Zealand priest and artist The Rev'd Sarah West. More of her art can be found at visiolectio.com. I chose this image for the cover because it feels so relatable. Whatever we have going on in our lives, Jesus is with us. In Lent we are invited to become aware of this presence in new ways.

Lent is a time that invites us to pause, reflect and pray in order to prepare our hearts for Easter. In this season many people take up a spiritual discipline and I invite you to make reading the scripture and reflections in this devotional one of yours.

In Christ,

Laura Di Panfilo

Associate Rector, St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon

Thank you to those who helped edit and organize this devotional:

Ginny Barnicoat

Michele Capuano

Rich Creehan

Jill Gordon

Jan Litrell

Carley Lyon

Chris Peak

Rebecca Oreto

Marles Streitmatter

Ash Wednesday
February 22
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

"But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door..."

In Matthew 6 Jesus instructs his followers how to give, pray and fast. Jesus says that when we do these things, they should not be done with the intention of gaining attention or praise. He is so serious about this that he even invites us to pray in secrecy, behind a closed door so that no one can see us. This is practical advice from Jesus. I think there is another benefit of praying behind a closed door that Jesus doesn't explicitly name. When we close the door, we close out noise and distraction. Behind a closed door it can be easier to focus on God.

It is easy to get distracted. It is tempting to put prayer on the backburner while we tend to the other demands of our lives. One of the reasons I love Lent is because it invites us back to spiritual practices that connect us with God. In this season we often give something up or take something on in order to make more space for God. What if we understood this as closing the door on something in order to have more time with God? What might God be calling you to shut the door on this Lent?

The Rev. Laura Di Panfilo is the Associate Rector at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Thursday, February 23
John 1:29-34

"I myself did not know him..."

In this passage, John the Baptist offers the admission "I myself did not know him" not once but twice in explaining that it was upon seeing the "Spirit come down on Jesus in the form of a dove" that he was able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. John the Baptist is described not only as needing a sign of the Holy Spirit, but he is also described as being specifically instructed to look for it.

While this passage no doubt carries great weight in our faith with respect to divine revelation and the transition to an era of Baptism with the Holy Spirit, to me, during this Lenten season, John the Baptist's story is a reminder of how easily we can miss opportunities to recognize God in those around us. In my experience it is much, much easier to spot the human stuff, like our shortcomings, than it is to see the Divine in one another.

Compounding my worry about missing signs of God's presence, a quick Google search reveals that doves are really not all that uncommon in the Middle East. If this is the case, then John the Baptist might not have witnessed an out-of-this-world, stop-everything-and-bow-down

type of sign of the Holy Spirit. It is possible, and perhaps even more likely, that he recognized the Holy Spirit in the dove because he was actively looking for such a sign.

While a pessimist might interpret all of this to mean that it's incredibly easy to miss God, I am inclined, this Lent, to take the position that, if one is looking, it's just as easy to find God in the world around us. The Holy Spirit shows up in our everyday encounters and in ordinary ways. Like John the Baptist, we just have to be looking. There's no doubt that actively seeking God in those around us requires intentionality and effort. So this Lent, one of my practices (hopefully one that I will carry forward long-term) will involve actively tuning in to others so that I might become better at recognizing, and responding to, God's presence in my family, community, and beyond.

Jennifer Lingler and her family joined St. Paul's in 2017. She is currently serving on the Vestry and is active on the Social Justice & Anti-Racism Commission as well as the Children and Youth Commission.

Friday, February 24

John 1:35-42

"The next day, John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the lamb of God!'"

Some of my St. Paul's friends know that I have a true devotion to the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd. The beautiful icon in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd features these words from Isaiah, inscribed on the edges of the Lord's cloak: "He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms."

I hold fast to this aspect of Jesus most of the year-round, feeling grateful to be a lamb of His flock. That is, except during the season of Lent. During Lent, more than at any other time, we think of Jesus as the Lamb of God, who redeemed the sins of you and me. In this passage, John the Baptist proclaims to two of his disciples, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The metaphor of the lamb would have been familiar to them because, as followers of Jewish Law, they knew about the ritual slaughter of a lamb, without blemish, on the evening before Passover. The lamb was an offering to God and an atonement for sin and was meant to recall the first Passover when the Israelites were saved from the tenth plague by marking their doorposts with blood from a lamb. (Exodus, Chapters 7-11).

While scripture is replete with mentions of lambs as sacrifice, scholars tell us that the reference to Christ as the "Lamb of God" occurs only in the Gospel of John and in the book of Revelation. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we sing the *Agnus Dei*: "Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us; Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us; Jesus, redeemer of the world, give us your peace."

This Lent, let us remember with all humility and awe that the Lamb of God was crucified on the day before Passover, the same day that the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. As a result, we were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, "...like that of a lamb without defect or blemish." (1 Peter 1:19)

Pat Dunkis was a member of St. Paul's in the 1980's and—together with her late husband Joe Werlinich—returned to St. Paul's early in 2018. She participates in the Rector's Bible Study, Claudia Circle, and the Good Book Club, as well as serving on the Social Justice and Anti-Racism Commission.

Saturday, February 25

John 1:43-51

"Nazareth? You've got to be kidding."

The Bible never, ever gets enough credit for its comic timing. In today's passage where Jesus is beginning to call the disciples, Philip finds Nathanael and gives him the great news that they have found "the One Moses wrote about in the Law...Joseph's son, the one from Nazareth!" And Nathanael's response? An all-timer, but especially in *The Message's* translation: "Nazareth? You've got to be kidding." But then Philip simply urges, "Come, see for yourself." Jesus understood then and understands now that we are experiential (and temperamental!) beings, *needing* to be invited to come and see – and so we are continually, eternally beckoned to do so. To reckon with and bear witness to God's activity in the world and in our community. To reckon with and bear witness to each other and to the signature of God we all contain. *And to let it in.* To let it affect our waking and sleeping, our coming and going, our values and priorities. And if we tune in to what God is up to – if we come and see for ourselves – then it'll be just like Jesus later said to Nathanael: "You haven't seen anything yet!"

Bob Melvin is the Youth Minister and Director of 8:45 Music at St. Paul's. He has been attending with his wife Karen and children Elijah and Crow since 2014.

Sunday, February 26

Matthew 4:1-11

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

Lent is a season that many of us do not prepare for. There is no pre-season for Lent. There is no gradual working up from the reporting of liturgical pitchers and catchers to a full on Spring training for the season of Lent. Lent quickly comes upon us, if we are ready or not, and immediately we are thrust into the thick of it all.

The adverb “then” is used throughout the pericopy as to alert the reader that something is taking place NOW. The closer that we read the text, the more aware we become to the immediacy of movements. There is movement from when the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness and concludes when the devil leaves Jesus. The Spirit has a plan and the devil has an agenda.

Too often, we can become distracted by others agendas and are not in tune to the plan that God has ordained for our lives. We become overwhelmed with all that is going on around us without paying as much attention to where God has carried us from. Are you guilty of saying, “if I had only known” or “I wish someone had prepared me for...”?

Trust what you are going through because the Spirit wouldn’t send you there without a plan. Lent is just that. It is a season of preparation for something greater to take place on the other side. Trust the process. You are being prepared through it all.

Let us pray...”Give us the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Adapted from Ephesians 3:18-19, NRSV)

The Rev. Charles L Fischer III, Honorary Priest Associate, has been a part of the St. Paul’s ministerial staff since September 2019.

Monday, February 27

John 2:1-12

“His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”

The story of the wedding feast at Cana speaks to me of the faith of Mary as well as being a directive to each one of us.

While there may be some details missing from the story, we never really hear Jesus say he would help that presumably embarrassed family who had run out of wine. After Mary mentioned this to Jesus, we do know that Mary had faith that Jesus would take action at the wedding and help make a bad situation better for everyone. Mary is confident enough that she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. When they do follow Jesus’ instructions, good things happen for all those in attendance.

I also like to think that Mary is speaking to all of us in saying, “do whatever he tells you.” We have many examples in the Bible of Jesus telling us what to do: turn the other cheek, give to the poor, do not judge others, forgive. The example that most often comes to my mind is, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

During this Lenten season, as we strive to deepen our spiritual life and more closely follow Jesus, may we take these examples (and the many others we hear) to heart and find the strength to do whatever he tells us.

Paul Golebie started attending St. Paul's in 2015. He is Chair of the Vestry Finance Commission and has been involved in Music Ministry, the Sound System, Morning/Evening Prayer Groups, Worship Commission, Friends of Music, and Taize Planning.

Tuesday, February 28

John 2:13-22

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

As I read these verses, I needed to look back at John 1 where we learn about Jesus Christ, the son of God, who has come into the world. I hear about the spirit descending on Jesus like a quiet, gentle dove. I meet Jesus gathering his disciples with a simple “follow me...” I join Jesus at a joyful wedding in need of a miracle. In John 2, however, it seems I meet a different Jesus. In the Temple, amidst the usual pre-Passover buying and selling, Jesus is angry with the moneychangers, throws over their tables, pours out their coins, and with a whip drives them out of the temple. I focus on this zealous anger, imagining some Renaissance painting depicting the scene. I read Jesus’ angry words: “Stop making my father’s house a marketplace.” It seems that Jesus warns against putting a price of admission on our worship. We don’t charge admission, do we? Our worship is free, right? Well, fortunately I read all the way to verse 23, because the important news is there—the Jews ask Jesus to give a sign explaining his outrage. Jesus answers: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus foretells his own death and resurrection and the coming of a new temple. Jesus presents the Good News that he, Jesus, has already paid the price for our gift of salvation from a loving God who does not turn away those who somehow don’t pass the test or don’t bring the money or can’t purchase the sacrifice. I wonder how many on what started as an ordinary day in the Temple with Passover drawing near, understood Jesus’ extraordinary answer.

Jan Stewart has been with St. Paul's for five years. She is a LEM and helps with various outreach projects. She enjoys small group Bible and book studies, Claudia Circle and Book Club.

Wednesday, March 1

John 2:23-3:15

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”

This brief passage found in John 3:10 appears to have sparked an “aha” moment for Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a well-educated and highly regarded Pharisee. He visits Jesus at night, possibly because he knew Jesus was of God but did not want others to know he needed Jesus to teach him. During this visit, Jesus tries to explain that to see the kingdom of God, we must be born of both water and spirit. Despite his education, Nicodemus has difficulty fully understanding Jesus' teachings. For him, "born of water" could be associated with flesh or physical birth, but "born of the spirit" required opening his mind beyond what is tangible.

When Jesus says one must be "born of the spirit," He is referring to accepting the Spirit of the Lord within oneself, which allows one to have a pure heart and a desire to do good. Jesus uses the wind as an analogy to the Spirit, which is something we know exists but cannot see or precisely calculate. During this Lenten season, I hope to allow myself to have a broader understanding of Jesus' teachings beyond what is tangible, and to allow myself to be open to accept the Holy Spirit.

Don Prosser has been a member of St. Paul's for nine years and currently is an acolyte coordinator, helps with meal trains, and recently became a member of the Worship Commission. He lives with his wife, Christine, and two boys, Logan (10) and Liam (7).

Thursday, March 2

John 3:16-21

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son."

Confession: I've always struggled with this verse, probably because I most associate it with some judgmental-looking person holding up a sign on a televised football game. I don't respond well to proselytization on TV sporting events. It all feels a bit cringy. My heart sank when I discovered that this was the verse assigned to me!

But yet, reading it again...

I am the mother of an adult son (and an adult daughter). As I read those familiar words, now considering them as a parent who has launched (dare I say "gifted"?) children into the world, the phrase takes on new resonance. How much must God love us to have given us God's most precious gift and creation, a piece of God's own self? How much can we relate to the ever-persistent parental hope that our child, our gift, will be fully embraced and celebrated by the world? And how soul-crushing is it that this hope is tempered by the knowledge that the world very well may reject, scorn, and perhaps even destroy our child, our own beloved, our most precious gift? It's almost enough to make me want to hold up a sign.

Lisa Brown has been a member of St. Paul's since she was a child. From a little girl sitting in the pews, to being a teen participant in EYC and handbells, to being the mother of preschool students, and to being an adult serving as a staff and vestry member, Lisa has always seen St. Paul's as a foundational part of her life.

Friday March 3

John 3: 22-36

"After this Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, and he spent some time there with them and baptized."

In the NRSV, verse 22 says, "Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized." Other versions say "he tarried with them" or "he remained with them," but the idea of Jesus "spending time" with his disciples feels warm and intimate to me.

Jesus's followers diligently wrote down what Jesus said. But, when I think of Jesus "spending time" with his disciples, I think he listened to them a lot, too. Most good leaders are good speakers. Almost all great leaders are great listeners.

We believe that Jesus listens to us when we pray. Sometimes I feel that, but more often I'm just taking it on faith. That's why I think we need to stand in for Jesus, to be Christ to each other. When my mother died last summer, many friends, with loving intentions, sought to comfort me by talking about their own experience with grief. But what helped me most was when people listened to me. I needed to talk and talk about my mother's long process of death.

This Lent, I feel called to take a word fast, and be more a listener than a talker.

Kathy Bashaar and her husband Al have been part of the St. Paul's community for about a year and a half. Kathy is active in Claudia Circle, CLASP, an Ignatian Way study group and the women's book group. Kathy and Al also have completed the Sacred Ground course, and often spend Saturday morning packing lunches for the Neighborhood Resilience Project.

Saturday, March 4

John 4:1-26

"I am HE, the one who is speaking to you."

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is filled with lessons of who God wants us to be and how we are to live. The most familiar of these include the profound image that through Jesus one can receive the living water that gushes up to eternal life. It speaks of worship stating that God wants us to worship him in truth, bringing our spirits and true selves in adoration. He also chose to reveal himself to a strong spiritual woman to reveal himself to and, subsequently, an entire group of outcasts. The message that most drew my attention was Jesus's final words to the woman: "I am He, the one who is speaking to you."

I believe that God continues to speak to us in a variety of different ways. He speaks to me when I am in pain and he consoles me. He has revealed himself through bible verses identifying the bible as the living word of God. I experience communion with God through the

Eucharist and I've been led into a christian community. I can find God in all places, especially in the beauty of nature. Most importantly, God has reassured me of his love for me.

I know all of this comes from God because when God speaks you are changed. You are enlightened and healed in a way that is absolute. You know it comes from God when the question or need you were carrying around has been permanently cast aside. As with the Samaritan woman, God shows up unexpectedly and matter-of-factly changes your world. Nobody is off limits. God speaks to everyone. We only have to recognize his voice.

Lois Cusick has been attending St. Paul's for about four years. She serves as a greeter and attends weekly bible study.

Sunday, March 5

John 3:1-17

“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.”



This picture was drawn by Andrew Peak.

Monday, March 6

John 4:27-42

“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 Savior of the world.”

When I was in graduate school, my piano studio professor required all of the performance majors to attend concerts given by world-class pianists once per semester. She would give us a list of “approved” recitals to choose from, and it was up to us to get ourselves there. This usually required travel to Philadelphia or Baltimore, both of which were fortunately within a 2-hour drive of campus, but not a quick trip either. Turning in a copy of the concert program was our proof of attendance.

The primary reason for this requirement was that she wanted us to hear, as she put it, “what is possible.” She knew that there were some things that we wouldn’t understand just through hearing about it in a lesson or listening to a recording or even practicing in the practice room. Something magical happens in a concert hall that simply can’t be captured elsewhere.

All of us have things that we can recall “knowing” in a different way once we heard it from the right person at the right time in the right place. Perhaps, like the Samaritans in this Gospel passage, we needed to hear it from the source. I like to think that, not unlike the other-worldly revelations of a gifted concert pianist, when we listen for the voice of Jesus in our own lives, we can begin to understand what is possible.

Christin Cooper can be found playing the organ and piano, singing with the Chancel Choir, and strumming on the ukulele as a member of St. Paul’s wonderful and varied music ministries. She has served on the Social Justice and Anti-Racism Commission and the Friends of Music Committee.

Tuesday, March 7

John 4:43-54

“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.”

In today’s passage we see Jesus returning from Samaria to Galilee. In Galilee he continues his ministry of teaching, healing, and performing miracles. And through this Jesus is quoted, in what must be frustration on his part, “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe”. Jesus is totally exasperated. Will the people ever get it?

In the midst of Jesus’ frustration, an official approaches him and requests that Jesus come with him to heal his child. Jesus declines and simply says “Go – Your son will live.” The official takes Jesus at his word and returns home. Hope and for certain Faith. There was no cajoling, he left – believing.

How difficult it is to take Jesus at his word, to have unquestioning faith.

As Episcopalians we often look to the Saints for inspiration, men and women who have stood and stand steadfast in their belief of the risen Christ. Many of these people I have watched over my lifetime and had the privilege of being with as they crossed into glory. And with each passing day, I meet more of these saints.

Currently I am serving as a chaplain intern at Friendship Village of South Hills. It was a required part of my path to ordination in the priesthood, a requirement that I thought redundant, having taken a course in hospital chaplaincy and a CPE course in Family Systems. But through this wonderful opportunity I have had the privilege of meeting a remarkable group of individuals who while in the midst of their physical/medical struggles have held firm in their belief of the risen Christ.

My official responsibility at FVSH will soon be over, but the impact that these saints have had on me will remain with me for the rest of my life. How abundantly blessed I was to be 'required' to have this experience.

When you have doubts, and we all do, we can look to the saints of old for inspiration. Or we can look to our left and right during Sunday morning worship services. For the saints are all around us.

David Boyd has served as a United Methodist pastor and has a Doctor of Ministry degree from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. He is a veteran and served as a Race Relations Officer. David has served as a leader in the Sacred Ground program at St. Paul's, and will be leading additional groups on the diocesan level at Trinity Cathedral this coming year.

Wednesday, March 8

John 5:1-18

"Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked."

Sometimes, I'm like the man at the Sheep Gate. I wait for a miracle when, in fact, I just need to do my part to make that miracle happen.

The poor man at the Sheep Gate had been lying there, with the other people with disabilities, for 38 years! He was unable to get into the water because nobody would help him, and people kept passing him by on their way to the water.

Then Jesus came along and said, "Do you want to get well?.....Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." And the man, of course, picked up his mat and walked.

There is no doubt that Jesus performed a miracle that day; but he also pointed out the obvious—the man needed to participate in that miracle.

I like to think the man with the disabilities learned something that day. We can all learn from this story. God feeds the birds, but doesn't throw worms into the nest. Miracles happen all around us, but we can't sit around and hope for them. Rather than just hoping for a miracle, try getting up, grabbing your mat, and walking!

Jan Littrell has been at St. Paul's for about 2-1/2 years. She regularly plays the piano for the 8:45 service, and has recently accepted the challenge of organizing the church archives.

Thursday, March 9

John 5:19-29

"In all truth I tell you, by himself the Son can do nothing; he can do only what he sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does, the Son does too."

I was raised in a very loving home, the next to the youngest of five. My dad was the oldest of ten children and my mother was the middle of three. Both were raised practicing their faith, with high work ethics and devotion to family and community. They were a remarkable couple. Watching, and now reflecting on the relationships of my dad and my siblings, not only the males, and this passage from John, highlights Dad's impact not only on my brothers but my sisters and me also. All five of us worked jobs related to our field of study, had families, practice our faith, and help in our communities. What an example was set for us by both parents. It was what he did, how he did it, his consistency in action, commitment to the St Vincent De Paul Society, commitment to faith, and unrelenting love for his family, no matter what the challenge or circumstance, that continues to resonate in each of their children. My mother was always beside him as a unified force. It was never how 'loudly' he did it, as that was definitely not his style. Dad was a quiet man. The same quiet that is outlined in the passage from John. You don't read 'loud voices' in the passage. I think this passage is a classic example of "actions speak louder than words".

You never know who's watching your reaction, devotion, commitment to community, commitment to family, friends and the not so friendly. And, you'll probably never fully realize the impact you'll have on your immediate family. I know I didn't.

The commitment comes in just doing everything to the best of your time and ability. That doesn't take money. That takes time. You have the time to show your children and others around you what THE Father does. Are you that role model? It's commitment. But we knew that.

Gerry Dugan is a 5 year member of St. Paul's. She is involved in Outreach Commission, fundraisers, Bible Study, a Greeter and helping out whenever possible on projects. She facilitates a monthly NAMI support meeting held at St. Paul's for family members and caregivers of the mentally ill.

Friday March 10

John 5:30-47

“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

This passage of Scripture was not very familiar to me, and at first glance, doesn't seem to offer many relevant applications to modern day. But as usually is the case with Jesus, there is more than meets the eye in this text. Just prior to this passage, Jesus had healed a man at the pool of Bethesda (pictured here) on the Sabbath and declared himself equal with God. This passage is part of his response to the people who were seeking to kill him because of his actions and words. I find it interesting that Jesus chooses 3 separate “witnesses” as his defense to the Jews: John the Baptist, Jesus' works, and through the Scriptures. One of my initial reflections on this passage is thinking through how I would “defend” myself in the face of those doubting my faith. What would my witnesses be? How is my faith made evident to those in my life, or to my coworkers, or to my community?

I think I am most struck by the verse above, which when I read in my head, I don't hear the voice of a condemning Jesus but of a loving Jesus: “You study the Scriptures diligently... yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Jesus is trying to help us differentiate between the “things we do” and the essence of who we are. No matter how much of the Bible I read, or how many good deeds I do, or even how much I give to the poor... those are the things I do, not who I am. Jesus says that coming to him to have life is something altogether different. The life of God is about something deeper than the external parts of our life; it is hidden deep in our hearts. Allowing my identity as God's beloved child to define me is what truly gives me life, and it also gives me the freedom to do all those good deeds, not because I need to in order to prove my worthiness, but out of a heart of gratitude. May we all find that life that Jesus offers as we open our hearts to his love.

Andrea Kamouyerou and her family have been attending St. Paul's since 2017.

Saturday, March 11

John 7:1-13

“Jesus said to them, ‘My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.’”

Jesus' public ministry was sometimes done in secret.

Have you ever done something that was right for you but had to keep it a secret? A secret is private and involves a closeness with any that are in on the secret. In this case, between Jesus and God the Father, and the brothers.

And then, when to reveal the secret...soon...never. But Jesus said, "My time has not yet come." And thus, when the secret was revealed, some accepted it and loved it. Others were afraid and did not like it. The others just did not get it. Hopefully those others will someday *get it*.

So, Jesus goes about on His journey doing many things intimately, all good, in order to fulfill His mission. How amazingly wonderful that He is so wise, but then, He is the Son of God. And Creator God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus.

Jesus knew why He was in this world, in the flesh, with all its vulnerability. He knew it so strongly that He could be referent to the call and do it fearlessly and all in the fitting time. He made His time exclusive to all He was to accomplish. There were no mistakes with Him, even though throughout the stories in the Bible, the disciples did not always understand what He meant when He said, "My time has not yet come." Yet they followed Him because they knew enough to stay on the journey.

I like reading the Book of John. It emphasizes the gift of eternal life through Christ.

Elaine Mycoff was confirmed in the Episcopal Church by Bishop Perdue in the 50s and has been a member of St. Paul's since 1988.

Sunday, March 12

John 4: 5-42

"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.'"

As with the Samaritan woman, God knows everything about us and still wants to save us and give us eternal life. Our sign says "no exceptions" - everyone is welcome at God's table and today's reading says it all.

I've been praying over the past few days about writing this devotional so here I am at 1AM having coffee and writing!!

Jesus told a non-Jew, a woman and an outcast that "I know the Messiah (called Christ) is coming...." Then Jesus declared "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:25-26). She then proceeded to lead the ones that treated her as an outcast to Christ. I have learned that I have led others to Christ through prayer and example. The first friend I made when I moved to Florida was a woman at church; after a few months of friendship and attending church together, she asked me to pray for her husband to come to church with her. Several months later, one Sunday morning when I went to pick her up, her husband joined us, Praise God.

Then the story goes on for a couple of years, with bible studies and him becoming active in the church. One evening my friend called me and said “Can you please quit praying for him”. He decided to quit his good job and become a priest!

The Holy Spirit will give you the courage and words to do God’s work of leading others to Him. Beating someone over the head with a Bible won’t bring them to Him; it will give them a headache and a dislike of you. Praying and being an example are what works for me. The first time I wasn’t even aware of doing it. A longtime Pittsburgh friend called me on Easter and told me she decided to go back to church because of me. That was a real surprise since I never remembered ever talking with her about Jesus. She told me it was my actions that did it. Praise God, again.

And the last thing is don’t forget to THANK HIM.

Diane Hubiak joined St. Paul’s in 2019 after returning to Pittsburgh after being away 28 years. She has learned over the years that she has God’s special gifts of being a “prayer warrior” and a photographer.

Monday, March 13

John 7:14-36

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

When I retired four years ago, I insisted that my decision-making days were over. No more deciding which tie to wear, which meeting to attend, how to juggle multiple responsibilities at the same time. I simply planned on sitting in my recliner and reading.

And yet, even now, I am called to make the biggest decision of my life. Just like the people who heard Jesus speak on that autumn day in Jerusalem, I must decide who Jesus is, and who he will be in my life.

Repeatedly, Jesus tells the people that he, his wisdom and authority, have come from God, that he was here to make God and God’s love visible. Some understood while others didn’t. Some couldn’t see what was right before their eyes because they had pre-determined how the Messiah would appear. People debated minor details of the Messiah when God’s love in Jesus was able to be found, seen, and received.

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment,” Jesus declares.

And so it remains today. Will I follow Jesus in every aspect of my life. Will I allow him to love the world through me? Will I permit him to reach out to those who have been excluded through my open heart and hands? Will his compassion set the direction of my decisions that God might be glorified?

Yes, even in retirement, the most important decision is before me. And it’s the same for you, too.

Tom Barnicott is a retired United Methodist pastor who lives with his wife, Linda, in Brentwood. They began attending St. Paul's in January, 2022 and enjoy singing in the choir.

Tuesday, March 14

John 7:37-52

“On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink...’ ”

Look how beautiful the Temple is - how it shines in the sun. I love to come here; it is the last day of the festival of booths or the Priest says Sukkot. We have slept outside in little booths for seven nights. We can see the stars through the coverings of the roof as the Almighty, blessed be He, told us to do.

The service has been long and it is almost time to begin our long walk home, someone else is standing to speak. It is Jesus, we can hear him even here in the women's section. He is speaking loudly, he says all who are thirsty come to him to drink, he says living water will flow from him. What does he mean? Is he thinking of the prophet Isaiah? Abba is teaching me Torah, because Eema said he must. I remember our prophet Isaiah and Jeremiah said living water is God's spirit. I will think on these as we walk. It is a long walk. Jesus said all who trust him and believe. Trust him and believe.

Several in our village went to hear the baptizer and told us all he said – one was coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, is this he? These thoughts make my heartbeat faster and I am warm inside. Is this what is meant by baptism of spirit?

I am walking with the little donkey and he wanders when he sees a bit of green. He wants to eat so I'll sit for a little while. This is a wonderful feeling. I am happy and no longer mad at my sister.

Almighty one, this is you in my heart. I am an ordinary girl. All my village is ordinary. Who am I that you would visit me? Thank you for this precious gift. Teach me what you want me to know. I will listen.

Come on little donkey – we must catch up!

Deana Sherline has been at St. Paul's for eight years and there are still groups with which she has not had time to become involved. Deana is committed to working as a Stephen Minister and she also enjoys being in the Altar Guild. However, she must tell you about morning and evening prayer (the Daily Office), which has become an integral part of Deana's life. Some Sunday morning, she is going to stand up during service and tell you about it; but not today. Try it out, take a chance, come to morning or evening prayer. You will be welcome.

Wednesday, March 15

John 8:12-20

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.””

Jesus is the light of the world and teaches believers who follow Him that they will have the "light of life." In John 8:12-20, the Pharisees judge Jesus as not credible. He did not provide a witness to testify His words were true. Jesus reveals the Pharisees were in darkness. They did not understand that they put God on trial for not appearing to them to testify that Jesus was truthful. Caiaphas also judged Jesus. He sought testimony from Jesus that would separate Jesus' words from the meaning of those words in the lives of those to whom Jesus spoke. How does Jesus challenge me to listen to others without judgment? Do I understand how God's word is light in others' lives? At St. Paul's, I am invited to read and hear about Jesus in scripture. I'm free to hope for God's light of life in myself. I am encouraged to follow Jesus' example. I see it around me in others that are included and offer their unique gifts to grow our faith community. I'm excited to discover the modern ways our callings meet in our faith community to bring Jesus' good news to the poor and oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, and to proclaim liberty to captives.

Jerry Rutledge is a loving husband and father of three. He attends Bible study, centering prayer and mysticism groups at St. Paul's. He is a member of St. Paul's Spiritual Growth Commission and offers Ignatian Retreats in Daily Life at St. Paul's. He also offers his service at St. Paul's as an in-training Associate Spiritual Director Intern at WVIS.

Thursday, March 16

John 8: 21-32

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed in Him, if you continue My word, then you are My disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Some say we live in a “post-truth” world - objective truth no longer exists or matters. People tell “their” truth rather than “the” truth. This can seem “freeing.” If we live by our own “alternative facts,” no one can tell us what to do. However, denying truth leads to chaos. Human tragedies, such as the Holocaust and the invasion of Ukraine, occurred because people chose to reject the truth.

The “truth” Jesus speaks of is the fact of who He was and the spiritual freedom this gives to those who believe. This verse follows the story of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus not only saves her physical life, He frees her from her life of sin. It no longer is what defines her.

Without directly saying it, Jesus gives a glimpse of the spiritual freedom that belief in Him promises. Knowing and living the truth of Jesus creates a whole new world.

It is the same for us. If we believe the truth that Jesus is the Messiah and we live by His teachings, then we are no longer bound by the external distractions of the world. Our sins, our flaws, our past mistakes - they all fall away and we are no longer slaves to them. Living the truth of Jesus even frees us from the ultimate spiritual subjugation - death - and gives us eternal life.

Gina Brownfield has been a member of St. Paul's for 25 years and she & her husband Todd have 3 adult sons. Gina serves on Vestry, is a lawyer, and works as a substitute teacher in Bethel Park.

Friday, March 17

John 8:33-47

"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Just prior to this passage, Jesus says, "If you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Jesus reveals that He is the Son of God, that He comes from the one true Father. He explains that He is not "of this world" as their perception of Abraham that they cling to was, and because they cling to their perception of Abraham, they remain "of this world" as well.

The word "devil" comes from the Greek word for "deceiver". They are unable to internalize his teachings and put aside their misconceptions, or "lies", around what they believe that God really wants for them. They are unwilling to do as Jesus does - that is, to do what is truly pleasing to God - and so they are "slaves" to the sin that comes from their deception.

Jesus gives them the "Word" and sets an example, but change is difficult. It can sometimes take a true "leap of faith," support from others, and the will to change. For those that do change and believe, for those that see through the deceit and recognize and embrace the Word, they are free to begin a life of spiritual growth and joy in Christ that God desires for them, inevitably drawing them closer to God, as God wants them to be.

May we all draw closer to God during this Lenten season as we experience God's Steadfast Love and Grace. The truth will make us free.

Jim Miorelli has been a parishioner for 14 years and is a LEM, Leads Morning Liturgy and Compline, participates in the Prison Letter Writing Ministry, is a seminarian and Candidate for Holy Orders.

Saturday, March 18

John 8:47-59

“Verily, verily, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Some people say that Jesus never declared himself to be God, but this statement to the Jews in the temple seems to contradict that. “Verily” or truly is an expression used only in John and means honestly, or something of great importance is about to be affirmed.

So Jesus is saying - believe what I am saying to you “before Abraham was, I am.”

There are two things to note here. The first is that “I am” is how God introduced Himself to Moses. “I am” indicates a God who embodies “the name above all names,” sometimes translated as Yahweh or Jehovah.

Secondly, Jesus speaks as if he existed before Abraham (who died about 2,000 years before Jesus’ birth.) This could only be true if Jesus was with God from the beginning of time.

The Jews were appalled. Jesus was declaring himself to be equal to God. In Jesus’ time, making a statement like this was blasphemous, and the legal penalty for blasphemy was stoning. “They picked up stones to cast at him.”

Jesus’ statement of equality with God and the Jews’ response make me believe that in John 8:58-59, Jesus did indeed, declare himself to be God.

Lyn Babcock is a past member of Claudia Circle, Building and Grounds, and current member of mystics group.

Sunday, March 19

John 9:1-41

“I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.”

Jesus tells us that seeing clearly is about recognizing Jesus for who he is and what he is doing in the world. We can recognize God’s light when we focus on God who loves us, performs miracles, and sheds light where there is darkness. I know I have struggled in the past with being able to understand why some things in life happened the way they did. I have had “great pretenses” where I thought I knew the world in and out, but I realized that I didn’t have all the answers and couldn’t really see the truth.

That truth is that I can’t go at it all alone, and sometimes I need God to help me see the light. When I think about the loving truth and kindness of God’s word, I realize that at times there is

no good answer for why there is darkness, but there is a light to help me accept and heal.

Maximilian James Emerson Busch is a student at Mt. Lebanon High School. In addition to being a student, he spends (most) of his Sundays helping with the live stream of the 10:45 service, and is also a part of St. Paul's Youth Group and Scout Troop 284.

Monday, March 20

John 6:1-15

"So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."

He had to be tired after a day of healing the sick and teaching. He was also likely grieving, as other Gospel accounts place the feeding of the 5,000 just after the murder of his cousin, John the Baptist. There were more than 5,000 following him and celebrating Passover. Among the group, there must have been loyal followers, curiosity seekers, and even detractors. (Some may have even argued that Passover was getting too commercialized.) Jesus probably most desired some time to recharge his soul.

But this would have to wait.

Out of two fish and five loaves, he filled the bellies of 5,000 plus. Their stomachs could not consume all of the food. One can imagine that Jesus, like a doting grandmother, even sent the flock home with leftover bread. He fed them without questioning their loyalty, love, or motivation. He fed them all – no exceptions.

Jesus knew temptation, solitude, hunger, grief, pain, and all of our other human sufferings. God's indefatigable divine compassion consistently triumphed. We cannot consume all of God's love and compassion. As one writer stated, "I live in a wasteland of God's grace." And despite life's hardships, we live in confidence as another writer states, "Because God always gets last bats."

Steve Perryman was received into St Paul's in 2018. He loves worshiping in a community aspiring to love everyone – no exceptions.

Tuesday, March 21

John 6:16-27

"Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going."

On the wall of my doctor's office there is a plaque that reads, "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain." When I read it, I suddenly knew how to approach my assigned Bible reading.

In John 6:16-27, the disciples prepare to travel by boat to Capernaum. They're waiting for Jesus to join them but, with darkness falling and the wind increasing, they grow anxious and set off without Him. As the storm worsens, the disciples suddenly see a man walking across the water towards them. They are terrified until Jesus identifies Himself. **"Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going."**

Reading this, I realized that, although Jesus comes to the disciples' aid, He does not quiet the storm. Instead, He offers comfort and stays by their side to help them through it. And the moment they recognize and receive Him, they find themselves safe at journey's end.

Similarly, Jesus may not shield us from life's troubles, heartaches, and challenges, but He will not abandon us – even if we abandon Him. We need only recognize and receive Him, and He will give us courage to weather the storm – maybe even to dance in the rain – until we, too, find ourselves safely on the shore.

Mary Calland and her husband, Dean, have been members of St. Paul's Church for 5 years and are blessed to call it home.

Wednesday, March 22

John 6:27-40

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

On several occasions I had the experience of reading a book and then seeing a movie based on it. I was always interested to see what the differences were and what was the same with the settings, characters, and plot. Often this increased and enhanced my understanding.

The Gospel of John provides a similar exercise when comparing it to the three synoptic Gospels: Mathew, Mark, and Luke. Same topic, widely different treatment. The first three Gospels are filled with open-ended questions and infinitely explorable parables. Alternately, John is the domain of the direct message delivered by the simple declarative sentence. If the synoptic Gospels are Dickens, Faulkner and even O. Henry, John is Hemingway. Noun and verb matched so perfectly that adjective and adverb add little to the understanding. Theology so

succinct that the basic concept of Christianity can be encapsulated in a single verse (John 3:16) and displayed at a football game.

In this passage John takes a baby step into allegory. It centers around a simple truth: the human body, like all organisms in creation, must eat to live. Yet in the 1st century, as in all recorded history and continuing today, sustenance is not a given. It is subject to the vicissitudes of climate, weather, economics, and even political conditions. For the eternal soul, the situation is more direct. Jesus declares that he is the bread of life – immediately and forever sating spiritual hunger and thirst and the gateway to eternal life. Simple truth, presented concisely, so that all may understand.

Geoff Hurd is married to Pat, has three adult children and is a long-time member of St. Paul's. He has been on Vestry and a member of the Rector Search Committee. Currently he serves on the Property and Finance Commissions and is a Greeter and Flower Deliverer.

Thursday, March 23

John 6:41-51

"I am the bread of life."

Food is essential for our physical bodies to survive; without it we would starve and perish. However, food plays a much larger role in our lives than mere survival. Meals mark our days - morning, mid-day, evening. Food demonstrates culture, creativity, nurturing, and love. It fills us with pleasure and brings families and communities together. When I consider the passage "I am the bread of life," the first message I hear is the truth that God is the source of life; the One who *gives* us life (the "living bread"). As I reflect further, I think about the joy that a relationship with God brings to my life - peace, fullness, and purpose. A relationship with God is essential for my spirit to thrive, but also makes life inspired and joyful. Just as food serves as both nourishment and happiness, God's love gives me life, and also joy. Feeding my spirit with God's love brings the indescribable spark to my spirit that makes life exciting. When I open myself to God through prayer and service, my life is undoubtedly richer and my heart is sated.

Lauren Miller is involved in the Ignatian Journey and serves on the St. Paul's Nursery School Board and Spiritual Development Committee.

Friday, March 24

John 6:52-59

"So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'"

At the time of this Biblical passage, Jesus was teaching in Capernaum and had shown miracles to the people who followed Him. He had fed five thousand people with a small number of loaves and fishes, He had walked on water and He had done other miraculous acts.

Jesus then said, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day."

According to this same passage, "The Jews quarreled among themselves regarding this teaching as many questioned it."

In reading this passage I also found it hard to understand, and it raised the same question for me. That is, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" This same question has been asked for 2,000 years and many theologians have had different interpretations of this teaching. Some Christian sects regard this teaching as symbolic; others see it literally. The important thing is that for all Christians it is the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and it is in this Holy Sacrament that Our Lord gives us the means to receive Him into our hearts and souls. To me, this teaching, hard as it may be to understand, has made Christ available to us, and this is of utmost importance.

During this Lenten period of reflection, I invite you to read in the Book of Common Prayer under Collects Contemporary for Various Occasions Collect 5, entitled Of The Holy Eucharist.

Pat Sphar has attended St Paul's for about 20 years and is a Leader in Stephen Ministry, participates in online classes and works at the Donut Table.

Saturday, March 25

John 6:60-71

"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

While completing Clinical Pastoral Education last summer, I encountered many patients that were experiencing difficult problems with their health – young and old, from all walks of life. I sat and listened amid the pain. Especially in the beginning, I often felt helpless sitting in the rooms, unable to do anything to alleviate their physical suffering.

One day, a staff member approached me and asked if we could talk. In the break room, she shared what was proving to be a trying time for her - feeling the pressures of work, family, and health – all while trying to care for the patients she loved dearly.

I held her hand and listened to her pain, comforted her, and offered a prayer to God. At the end of the prayer, she began to pray, saying words I will never forget: "Lord, thank you for loving me so much you sent someone to care for me and love me in my time of need."

The words rang through my heart, and I was reminded of the life that God gives us in the Good News. Even amid difficulties, in a place marked by the failings of our bodies, the presence and words of Jesus gave spirit and life to both of us.

Theodore Somes is a senior at Virginia Theological Seminary and a Postulant for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Sunday, March 26

John 11:1-45

“And when He thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.”

Lazarus was the brother of Martha and Mary, and Jesus loved all of them. When Jesus arrived at their village, Lazarus had already been dead for four days. There was such sorrow and weeping that even Jesus wept (v. 35). Since Lazarus was already dead, could anyone believe that Jesus could help? Well, yes, actually — Martha. She believes that Jesus is truly the Son of God and anyone who believes in Jesus shall never die. Martha’s faith is great, and she is right. When Jesus calls Lazarus to come forth, he does. Lazarus comes forth out of the darkness and into the light of day.

The Gospel of John is about the triumph of light over darkness. Lazarus comes forth from the darkness of death. Many of us are like Lazarus in a way. We live in the darkness of despair, anxiety, grief, doubt, broken relationships, anger, and pain. Jesus calls us to come forth, but we do not have the power to escape the darkness without the Light of Love. Only faith, the kind of faith that Martha has, can bring us out of our darkness and into the light of hope. Martha believes in Jesus, the Son of God, the source of all light. Jesus commands us to come forth out of our darkness and into the light of God’s everlasting love.

Ken Matheny has been a member of St. Paul’s since 2019 and participates in Stephen Ministry, the prisoner letter-writing ministry, and the money counters ministry. He is also one of the Pickwick Boys.

Monday, March 27

John 9:1-17

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.” -John 9:17

Yes, the blind man who was cured saw what others who always had sight were too blind to see. Sometimes in my life things go wrong. Either health, finances, or relationships. I start fretting thinking I am alone to deal with the circumstances. You know, we are not alone.

Like the Pharisees, we sometimes do not see Jesus as our guide. He will guide us with his actions and words that we are not alone. He has given us vision through the kindness, love and respect we have received from others in our lives to tackle the problems. In turn, we will follow his example and give others that kindness. Love and respect to guide them to see they are not alone.

Jesus as a prophet is helping us to believe. To see God is always with us. This is a comfort to know and it can bring peace to our hearts. So, I think I need to open my eyes to see God's blessings are around me even in my darkest moments. He is always guiding us.

Helena Sobkowicz-Barinas has been a member of St. Paul's for approximately 30 years. She has participated in small discussion groups, Sacred Ground, taught in Sunday school and VBS to preschoolers.

Tuesday, March 28

John 9:18-41

We invite you to read today's passage out loud. As you read it, is there a passage or word that sticks out to you?

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 worshiped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgment 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.

After reading it out loud, read it again to yourself. Recall the word or phrase that first jumped out to you and see if there is new meaning as you reread this passage.

Read this passage a third time. This time, turn your thoughts to God. Allow the reading to become a prayer to God.

Read the passage a fourth time. Yes! A fourth time. As you read it for the final time, imagine yourself letting go of the word or phrase you have been sitting with, and hand it over to God. Has God given you a new insight about your life from reading this? Is God calling you to do something with this new knowledge? Thank God for this time as you close your prayer.

This is a standard Lectio Divina practice, hope you enjoyed it.

Wednesday, March 29

John 10:1-18

“...I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep...”

Twice in today’s scripture, Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd and twice he declares that he will lay his life down for his sheep. This is about priorities and who at the end of the day Jesus serves. Might it be also about us and who we choose to serve and follow?

Jesus knew that humans are easily led and enticed. Our ego and our desires to fulfill our ego’s longings often lead us to act on temptations. The devil constantly tempts us; but it is we alone who choose to act upon those temptations.

Knowing who you serve is the first step in avoiding the mistake of following the world and its desires. If we know we serve the world and its desires, we will go down one path. If we focus on serving ourselves, we will go down yet another path.

On the other hand, if we chose to make God the focus of our life, then we will find the path to God and avoid many of the temptations placed in our way.

If I am going to make God the center of my life, I need to know God. But how do I come to know God and God's voice? It is through a meaningful relationship with God, I come to know God and build a future with God, based on trust, faith, and love.

If I don't know God, I will never recognize God's divine voice, which limits my chances of hearing God. I become like a lost sheep who is lost, because the shepherd's voice is not known. Without knowing my true shepherd, I will hear false voices that will tempt, even entice me, into a perilous place.

This Lent provides a time to examine my life and to determine whose voice I hear – God's or the World's.

Ted Babcock is an Honorary Priest Associate at St. Paul's.

Thursday, March 30

John 10:19-42

"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Last summer, I met someone studying for ordination in another denomination. When he was seven or eight, sitting in church, he heard a voice promising that he would become a priest. Talk about telling him plainly! I have never had an experience like that, and it makes me sympathize with this question, "How long will you keep us in suspense?" I want Jesus to tell me plainly who he is, to explain everything once and for all, preferably giving me enough time to write it down so I can look back over my notes whenever I want. Things would be much neater, much tidier.

I think Jesus likes keeping us in suspense. It's not that he doesn't speak plainly- later in this passage, he tells us he is God's Son, that he is one with the Father. But telling us plainly only increases our suspense, our surprise, our longing to know Christ more and more. Like the first line of a book, he tells us enough to draw us in. We never get to the end of the story; we never have Jesus figured out so that we can stop reading. We're always leaning in, waiting for him to say the next word, to tell us again and again to follow him. Jesus Christ is alive and speaking today. May we have ears to hear and a hunger to listen.

Jack Brownfield is a lifelong member of St. Paul's. He is a postulant for ordination completing his final year at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Friday, March 31

John 11:1-27

“When God seems to be absent, He may be doing more than we could ever imagine.”

The parable of Lazarus, is rich and thought-challenging. It has lessons that take us from Jesus as the human archetype to our beliefs about miracles, suffering, and resurrection. On the surface, it is the gospel story of Jesus raising Lazarus, the brother of Mary & Martha, from the dead; but woven within, it is a far more complex tapestry that challenges our individual spiritual and cultural values.

Its relevance is very “today”. As we watch epidemic levels of Covid in China, US border immigration, war in Ukraine and soaring opioid overdoses cause death in magnitudes unimagined, we ask, “Why does God allow such suffering?” At the same time, we have a pattern in our culture that teaches us to insulate ourselves from suffering. We struggle with what to say and do beyond our flowers and sympathy cards. The action of Jesus and those who attended Lazarus is a story of power and empathy. It tells us we cannot lock ourselves out of the pain and suffering of others but must find ways to show our humanity in our communities in need. For when we do, the divine will be acting through us.

This is also a parable of transformation; not just about Lazarus’ death and return to life, but how we deal with death in our own lives. When we lose a loved one, our personal world falls apart. Our suffering is inconsolable, like that of Mary’s. Even though our faith teaches life is merely changed and not ended, it does not seem that way. **God seems to be absent but He may be doing more than we could ever imagine.** Jesus declared Lazarus’ sickness was for the glory of God. He calls for us not to ask “Why me?”, but to trust in God’s love and seek his inspiration to act compassionately to others in overcoming our suffering. The outcome of this path is more than we could ever imagine.

Rebecca Sohn has been a member of St Paul’s for over 30 years. She is among the past presidents of St Paul’s Nursery School Board, has supported many of the church’s outreach efforts, and participated in a number of the small groups.

Saturday, April 1

John 11:28-44

“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?’”

How many times have you witnessed the glory of God in your everyday life, from the very small things to truly large things? Believing is the power of prayer and you will see wondrous things happen in your life. You pray for something; however, the outcome is not specifically

what you requested but the outcome will still answer your prayers. Believe in the glory of God and you shall see!

When you're in a difficult position, you pray for guidance and there it is— the answer right in front of you. I have been in situations where I thought there was not an answer; however, I pray for a positive outcome and there is the answer right in front of me. I admire the tenacity of Martha as she asked Jesus to pray to bring her brother back to life. Martha saw the glory of God and watched her brother raised from the dead. How could you not believe? During this Lenten season watch the glory of God as he raised his only son from the dead to sit at his right hand.

Marcia Malardie attended Education for Ministry from 2009 to 2013 at Saint Paul's. She was received at Saint Paul's on November 21st, 2021.

Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 2

Matthew 26:14- 27:66

“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!’”

In their book, The Last Week, biblical scholars John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg tell us that at the same moment when Jesus and his disciples were entering Jerusalem from the East, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, was most likely marching Roman troops into Jerusalem from the West. They describe this moment on what would eventually be called Palm Sunday as a story of two processions. One is a procession of peace, justice, and compassion, and the second is a procession of violence, militarism, and materialism. These two processions collide in the events that we know as Holy Week, resulting in the crucifixion of Jesus.

This image creates a sharp contrast for me. I often wonder what procession I am joining in my own life. I also find that this is not so clear; it is more like a tangle than two clear lines. I have come to believe that much of the Christian life is about trying to untangle when I am following Jesus, and when I am following Pilate.

As we begin this holiest week of the Christian calendar, how are you following Jesus right now? And how have you (even inadvertently) joined the procession of Pilate? And how are you not sure? This week we carry all of this and offer it at the foot of the cross. At that place, we are forgiven and set free.

Monday, April 3

John 12:1-11

“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”

A reflection on a paradox in John 12: 1-12 - honoring an expensive offering when, perhaps, that offering is ill-advised, “why was this ointment not sold... and given to the poor?” (verse 5)

Out of uncalculated zeal, we have sometimes given gifts that we cannot rationally afford; an abundance of time given to acquaintances in healing conversations, an unfunded financial gift to assist someone resulting in another's objection to such gifts. These gifts mirror Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet with expensive oils of overwhelming fragrance and Judas's indignation at such extravagance. Expense was not an issue. It was her final gift to Christ before his death. Jesus understood Mary but Judas, soon to betray Christ, did not. The seeds of that betrayal are revealed in Judas's ignorance, “why was this ointment not sold?” Judas has spiritually died from the aroma of Mary's extravagant gift of oils.

The paradox is two-fold. A gift normally given in burial was given in life, and the cost of the gift exceeded its use. My father, a pastor and teacher, often said, “You cannot out-give God.” But, as Mary gave lavishly in love, “it doesn't hurt to try.”

Doug Starr is completing nearly thirty years as Director of Music St. Paul's.

Tuesday, April 4

John 12:20-26

“...anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.”

The more I read this, the more that word “reckless” lingers with me. Now I'll admit, I'm not a very reckless person. Rather the opposite: I'm a prolific worrier. Sometimes it feels like I spend more time being anxious about the next task in my life than I spend actually doing it. That worry, that fear of what might happen next, can keep you stuck in place even as the rest of the world keeps going by.

That is what makes Jesus' words here so radical, so powerful. They are a call to let go, to deny that internal programming of doubt and fear that can seem so unshakable from the human condition. To not just love, but love recklessly. To give love to those who you have no business loving, who you've never met before, who hate you. To be so reckless in your love that it seems crazy. Because, even when confronted with his own end, that's

what Jesus did. And, in following his actions, we can learn to make something eternal too.

Jacob Vito has been part of the St. Paul's family for the last 15 years, and has been at different times an acolyte, Sunday school teacher, and verger. He is currently in college, pursuing a viticulture and enology degree at UC Davis.

Wednesday, April 5

John 13:21-32

"And it was night."

I have always been a morning person. The advent of night, for me, is a time of slowing down and getting ready for sleep. Nightfall often seems to me to be an ending, not a beginning. But I know that for plenty of people nightfall is when the many duties of their day are done and they can finally begin to engage in those things that bring them joy.

Jesus sends Judas out and the next chapter of God's story of salvation begins.

Stop. Close your eyes. Take a slow, deep breath and dwell in that phrase - 'And it was night'.

Feel the stillness. Is it the stillness that follows a busy day where the work asked of me is done? Or is it a time of gathering myself for the work of the night ahead of me? Is it a stillness filled with joy or with fear? Is it a beginning or is it an ending? Could it be both?

Jean Chess began serving as a deacon at St. Paul's during the Spring of 2020. She has recently been having a lot of fun playing the ukulele and singing with all the children and adults gathered for Children's Chapel on Sunday mornings.

Maundy Thursday

Thursday, April 6

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

"What I have done, so you must do."

What is it about feet? With infants, small toes can be a source of amusement and joy – think “this little piggy.” In adults, not so much. Some consider feet too private to touch or too gross to see. Picture twisted toes, scaly skin, bulging bunions, right? Yet feet are so common, so basic, so necessary to stand and move. Feet are a core foundation.

In today's passage, Jesus washes feet. Beyond the obvious lesson about a master acting as servant, we see Jesus performing a simple act that tends to the basic and necessary. He always

reaches for our very core. Jesus touches and soothes and heals everything about who we really are – bunions and all. Then he tells us to do likewise.

Tonight, we are invited to wash each other's feet. In another parish, years ago, we watched a film about the Catholic activist Dorothy Day. During one scene, where she washes the feet of homeless women, our jaws dropped upon realizing how readily she did for bruised and diseased strangers what we were hesitant to do among healthy friends. To love others as God loves us – no exceptions – we must touch their hearts and minds, and yes, sometimes feet.

As St. Paul's verger since 2006, Rich Creehan coordinates the logistics of our worship services, drawing on his career as a television news producer and his graduate studies in theology.

Good Friday

Friday, April 7

John 18:1-19:42

"Here is Your King."

These are the words of Pilate, meant to mock the battered Christ standing before him. Jesus could not look less like a king. He is in the courtroom; bleeding and humiliated, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, wearing our stripes. His reputation precedes him, judging by the reactions of the crowd. This is a man who associates with the poor and unworthy. Pilate sits in judgment; a figurehead of the full power of imperial Rome, a well-connected man exercising his perfectly legal authority.

There's something to be said here about all of creation groaning, and the rocks crying out because even in mockery Pilate can't help but preach the gospel. "Here is your King." Here, the gospel confronts our expectations about what power really looks like. Here too is a reminder that discipleship has a cost. Casting our eyes upon the broken body of Christ, can we affirm, "Here is our King"? Or will we side with the crowd and the empires of greed to say, "we have no king but Caesar."

Paul, reflecting on this call of the gospel had this to say: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection *and the sharing of his sufferings...*" May we long to know him just as well.

Steve Comstock has been attending St. Paul's with his partner, Dominique Comparetto since 2019. He has served at various times as a backup LEM, tent disassembler, and occasional mandolin player.

Holy Saturday
Saturday, April 8
John 19:38-42

“They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.”

Jesus is dead. Amid their grief, two of his disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, bury Jesus. They remove his battered body from the cross, wrap him with spices in linen cloths, and place him in an empty tomb, never expecting to see him again. It is in this space between death and new life that we find ourselves on Holy Saturday as we await Christ’s rising on the third day.

And no matter how many times I hear this story, I find myself remembering the first time Jesus met Nicodemus. Coming to him by night, Nicodemus asked Jesus how someone could be born again. Yet, in our reading for today, we find God working through Nicodemus and doing so when Nicodemus and the entire world believe there is no hope left.

Therefore, we can confidently proclaim that even in the overwhelming darkness of Holy Saturday, there is light. After all, in the midst of the darkness of Holy Saturday, Jesus descended to the dead. And as one priest memorably witnessed, he went there (in part) to find his friend Judas. For no matter what we have done, God is with us and raising us to new life. May we live our lives responsively to this abundant grace.

Nicole Starr joined St. Paul’s in 2018 and serves as a lector and LEM. She is a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and became a Postulant for Holy Orders in November.

Easter Sunday
Sunday, April 9
John 20:1-18

“He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.”

Reading this passage, I wondered why the writer of this Gospel went into so much detail describing Jesus’ discarded burial cloths. Then, I remembered looking for a roll of duct tape last week at St. Paul’s to quickly “fix” something. As it turns out, there wasn’t a single roll of duct tape anywhere to be found! When I stopped to think about it, I found the lack of duct tape to be an encouraging reflection of St. Paul’s values and commitments. It’s really tempting to stick duct tape over a problem, but it doesn’t actually fix it.

I really struggle to wrap my head around the radical way the Resurrection finally, and completely, transforms the world. God has defeated sin and death, and fixed everything that was broken, forever! When I try to understand what that means, it moves my heart to think about a day when the temporary “fixes” for our brokenness — bandages, linen burial wrappings, and duct tape — will be rolled up and left behind forever.

The Rev. Erin Morey is Assistant Rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. In addition to supporting the life of St. Paul’s sacramentally and pastorally, Erin serves as clergy support to the Outreach Commission and Social Justice & Anti-Racism Commissions, as well as St. Paul’s Acolytes, Healing Prayer Team, Confirmation Class, and environmental sustainability ministries.