

**SAINTE
PAUL'S
MILL
BANDON
* '24**

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

PREFACE

It isn't hard for us to imagine the wilderness. We live in a place of remarkable forests, beautiful rolling hills, and flowing rivers and creeks that sway back and forth through the earth. Growing up, Lent made sense to me because it is easy for me to imagine why Jesus started his ministry in the wilderness. It is a place for recreation, renewal, and in some cases, proving that you can survive and thrive in contest with the natural elements. I have been to the Judean wilderness as I know some of you have. It is much different than ours - instead of rolling streams, there are endless formations of rocks. In place of trees, there is sand. It is a barren, difficult, almost frightening landscape. But there is a feeling that is similar - that there is something different about the space, the air, the feeling of solitude and smallness, that draws our experience in the wildernesses closer to the first Lent.

In Lent, the collective church journeys into the wilderness together. People across the globe, while understanding wilderness very differently, uses our words, liturgy, and our hearts to follow the footsteps of Jesus as he spends 40 days alone fasting in the wilderness and preparing himself for public ministry. I invite you to use this devotional to walk that journey in preparation for our ministry here.

Each day, one of our authors has reflected on the Gospel reading from the Daily Office, drawing from something in their own experience to guide our collective Lenten journey. The stories that they tell are illustrative of their own walks. I would especially like to thank these authors for their contributions and the editors for their work in compiling and proofing the works.

The Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families can be found on the inside of the back cover (page 25) of this booklet or on page 136 of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Theodore Some, III on behalf of the Editors:

Rich Creehan, Ken Matheny, Alexis Sheehan, Gina Brownfield, Gerry Dugan, Jerry Rutledge, Jack Brownfield, Pat Dunkis, Jim Miorelli, Lauren Miller, Jen Linger, Kathleen Davies and Eric Meyer

Treasures, Laura Di Panfilo, February 14, 2024

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

In Matthew, Jesus invites us to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” With this, he invites all of us to consider what we value the most in our lives. Lent is a time to reexamine ourselves by setting time aside for prayer, spiritual reflection and practices. Maybe you will give up something for this season or maybe you will take on a new practice. These practices (or their absence) creates space for us to listen to God in new ways. This is a season where we can renew our faith and refocus our attention on God. What a gift!

On Ash Wednesday we receive the mark of an ash cross on our foreheads and this is to remind us of our mortality. Jesus reminds us of our mortality in this passage of scripture too. This is why he invites us to consider where we focus our attention. Is it on things that are passing, or things that are eternal? This Lenten season, let us all refocus our hearts and minds on the eternal, on the things that God is calling us to do and the people God is calling us to be. Amen.

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

Continuing His Work, Ann Coffaro, February 15, 2024

John 17: 1-8

“I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.”

Jesus prayed these powerful words as he readied for his walk to the cross. As I read them, I breathe in the hope that His prayer holds... that I can glorify God by my work. With retirement, I have asked God to illuminate this new journey and have felt the pull to focus on the cornerstone mission ***“to love one another as I have loved you.”***

This year, I spent time delving into this call to love with the exploration of God's love for ***me*** as a roadmap to loving others, or I should say all others. Because it is not difficult for me to love “others” but sometimes difficult to love “all others.”

This has been solid work and at times I have really stunk at it and at other times I have had glimpses of the vast, uncomplicated love God has for me. I see how my uniqueness, bumps and humps can be used to join like the pieces of a puzzle to form universal love. Leaning into the fullness of God's love has cracked me open and I have found the very wellspring of God. It is my “eternal current” (Niequist), “true self” (Rohr and others) and my “point of nothingness that is God's glory” (Merton).

There is more good news. It seems I am building a bit of “love memory” and, like the muscle memory used for swings of the baseball bat by the pros, it comes a *bit* more automatically with use. It is exciting that this deep place of God allows me a wider snapshot of the wholeness of others and to connect in ways that are devoid of human expectation. I describe it as if I am seeing in burst photography with not simply one still photo of a person but images from their life journey to aid me in loving them. Joining with this deep God space within me allows me to let my personality traits, my opinions, preferences, culture, history, triggers, and notions fall away to reveal the Truth. This is God and this is the work that God gave me to do. I pray that I am glorifying God. It is so simple and yet so very, very hard for me. Peace be with me and also with you.

Ann Coffaro appreciates the opportunity to share about her faith journey. She is grateful for all of you that have shared their journeys and in turn, expanded hers.

As the Father Would Have Us Do, **Jan Stewart, February 16, 2024**

John 17: 9-19

“And now I am no longer in the world but they are in the world ... protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one... I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.”

As I read these passages from John, I hear Jesus’s own prayer to God the Father. Jesus is reporting back to God about fulfilling His responsibilities on earth before His death at the Cross. We read in John 17 that the task which God has assigned to Jesus is “to spell out God’s character to the men and women on earth.” What a privilege for us to understand this direction and Jesus’s love for us in carrying it out.

What I hear Jesus saying in his prayer with God, is that He, Jesus, has done what God asked of Him and now asks God to protect these people in the world as they continue God’s work on earth. Jesus is not asking God to take the people themselves from the earth but rather to be with them in their earthly mission.

Reading these passages, I am struck by how intimately we become a part of God’s plan. This scripture and Jesus’s words remind me of a parent or caregiver whose child is about to step out on their own from the protection and direction of their home. I think of my own children as they prepared – to go to college, to grow relationships with others, to work in the wider world – all without me by their side. Perhaps I felt as a parent just a bit of what Jesus is feeling.

Reading these passages again from this human perspective renews my feeling of responsibility as we – using words from our post-communion prayer – head out into the world, sent by God and taught by Jesus, to do the work God has given us to do.

Jan Stewart and her husband Mike have been St. Paul’s members for six years since moving to the Pittsburgh area. They have helped with various outreach projects. Jan serves as a LEM and enjoys small group Bible and book studies, Claudia Circle, and Book Club.

Jesus Prays for Us, Gina **Brownfield, February 17, 2024**

John 17:20-26

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you.”

At first, I was disappointed in this passage. I wanted something dramatic, maybe a miracle or parable, something familiar from Sunday School. My verse seemed dense and dry, as though nothing was happening. This was the end of Jesus’ prayer at the Last Supper. By then Jesus knew that death was near. He prayed aloud for himself and for those around the table, trying to prepare his closest friends for a time when he was no longer with them. Praying with loved ones about a future without him seems normal for someone facing death. Then I realized that it was so much more than that. Jesus wasn’t just praying for those with him, he was praying for all who would come after, for those who would become his followers through his friends and their testimony. He was praying for generations onward from the people his disciples personally would meet all the way down to a baby baptized in 2024. This meant that Jesus was praying for us and including us as being one with him and the Father. Although this message was there in the plain words, it took me some time to appreciate its magnitude: on the night before He died, Jesus personally thought of us, prayed for us, and invited us into unity with God and with himself.

Gina Brownfield is finishing her second term on vestry where she is active on the Pastoral Care Commission. She and her husband joined St. Paul’s in 1997 and have raised their 3 sons here.

Reflecting the Light of Jesus, Lyn Babcock, February 18, 2024

John 12:44-50

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. John 12:46

Holy Week ends at sundown on Holy Saturday and we celebrate it with the Easter Vigil. The clergy and acolytes prepare the Easter fire in a metal container outside the church doors. The Paschal Candle is lit from the fire and is processed into the darkened church as the priest or cantor chants, "The Light of Christ." The congregation responds, "Thanks be to God." As they process the congregation lights their own candles from the Paschal Candle, and gradually the light in the church spreads and grows brighter and brighter.

In scripture, "light" can symbolize so many things: the scattering of the darkness, faith, hope, goodness, truth, purity, protection, joy, kindness, knowledge or guidance to name a few. In the verses for today, Jesus tells us that he has come into the world as a light. He embodies all of the above referenced qualities of light, and more. And if we are to enter into the light, and leave the darkness, then we also need to be a reflection of Jesus' light. Like the moon reflecting the light from the sun, we can find ways to reflect Jesus' light in the world, and to scatter the darkness.

We are all called to be like the moon, to reflect Jesus' light. It can be a small gesture, or something significant. Recently I was waiting in line at the grocery store with just a few items. The woman in line in front of me with a full cart said I should go ahead of her to the cashier. An unexpected kindness.

Last year the parishioners at St. Paul's were asked to contribute to a nonprofit that relieves medical debt. Not only was the goal reached, it was exceeded.

We visited friends and relatives in New England in January when we experienced more snow than we've seen in years back home in Pittsburgh. Without being asked, a thoughtful neighbor shoveled our walk and driveway. We can all SEE opportunities to reflect Jesus' light. Each one of us can make the choice to BE that reflection.

The Episcopal church has been Lyn Babcock's home for her entire life. She has appreciated the liturgy, music, youth groups, bible study, and stained glass windows. But St. Paul's has provided opportunities for her to delve deeper into mysticism, contemplative prayer, spirituality, and meditation. She has found that you are never too old to learn new ways to see God or to examine your faith.

Prepare the Way of The Lord!, Erin Morey, February 19, 2024

Mark 1:1-13

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. Mark 1:1

The Gospel of Mark starts by announcing it is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus. Immediately after, the writer extends this "beginning" even farther back in time, recounting God's promises in the Book of 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'"

Most scholars believe this Gospel originally ended abruptly, with the women who were coming to anoint Jesus's body instead encountering an angel and an empty tomb. Despite the angel assuring them they do not need to be afraid, they "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

I like this lack of "ending," and multilayered "beginning," too. It reminds me we are part of the ongoing story of God's Good News for the world, which extends back across human history. Let us remember to be like John the Baptist - and the women, who eventually found the courage to tell this story that we might hear it - to proclaim "prepare the way of the Lord!"

The Rev. Erin Morey is Assistant Rector of St. Paul's.

It's Go time!, Eric Meyer, February 20, 2024

Mark 1:14-28

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.

The suddenness of Jesus' teaching virtually jumps off the page. The abruptness of these unsuspecting fishermen, going about their daily routine, leaving behind their nets and their families to follow Jesus -- to become fishers of men. Were these fishermen chosen at random? Or were they chosen because they had prepared themselves in some way that is left unknown to readers of scripture? Could this suddenness be deceptive? Had they been preparing in some way? Were they searching, yearning, questioning -- opening themselves up to a new way of life?

As with many in our congregation, my faith journey has seen major twists and turns. There were years of sincere, dutiful faith practice. There were long fallow periods. There were years of searching, doubting, yearning, and praying. And then -- wham! An experience -- an encounter that was every bit as unexpected as that between Jesus and the fishermen that -- changed my life. This encounter brought me back into the fold of God in a way that was far more personal and authentic than anything I had ever experienced. It was strange, awkward, and, frankly, unbelievable. Why or how this happened, I cannot say; though one thing I can reflect back on for certain is that I was prepared for it.

Eric Meyer and his family have been attending St. Paul's for two years. He is involved in the music program and in preparing meals for the Neighborhood Resilience Project.

Jesus Heals Many, Amanda Harris, February 21, 2024

Mark 1:29-45

“Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told of her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her.”

In this famous passage, Jesus and his neighbors are just beginning to learn that He has miraculous powers. After healing His friend Simon's mother-in-law, the whole town shows up at their door asking for their own miracle. So, Jesus cures them, one after another.

But in the morning, while it was very dark and everyone was still sleeping, Jesus left. He needed some “alone time”, so He went to a deserted place and prayed. Yet they found Him again. Can you blame them? Who here wouldn't want their loved ones instantly cured, if this was possible? And can you blame Jesus? Who here hasn't felt overwhelmed by others, and needed a break? But what Jesus did next, is what sets Him apart. “He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.” And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons”.

Jesus returned to the people -- the same people who were overwhelming and annoying Him, and He helped them. Though tired and overworked, He pushed through and helped as many people as possible. Let us use this as an example in our own lives -- yes, we have too much on our plates -- but how can we also make room to do Jesus' work for our neighbors?

Amanda Harris is so thankful for finding St. Paul's and for the uplifting relationships she has formed there over the years. She enjoys volunteering on the Stewardship Committee and with VBS. She is also especially thankful for her family: Sam, Juliana, Averie and her dog Sadi

What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Pat Dunkis, February 22, 2024

Mark 2: 1-12

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Child, your sins are forgiven.’”

I have always loved hearing the scripture reading about the paralytic man who was lowered through the roof of a house to be healed by Jesus. I’ve heard it as a story of friendship: a man of faith convinces his friends to take him to see Jesus. However, while preparing to write this reflection, I heard in a new way the words that tell us that Jesus was moved by seeing their faith, that is the faith of the man and his four friends. It set me to imagining the conversation that must have preceded their action. It surely included things like: “Jesus is back in town, he’s healing people, we should go to him and take our friend.” Imagine the consternation of the four friends when they arrived at the place and found the crowds so dense that they couldn’t get their paralyzed friend anywhere near Jesus. But, undeterred, their faith in Him was so deep, so secure that they opened a space in the roof to lower their friend into the room where Jesus was! And scripture tells us that Jesus was moved by their faith, all five of them. Jesus regarded friendship and speaks several times about it, commanding us to love one another as He has loved us. As the old hymn says: What a friend we have in Jesus!

Pat Dunkis has been an active member of St. Paul’s since 2018. She is a native Pittsburgher, now residing in Mt. Lebanon, and a retired public educator.

New Wine Into Fresh Skins, Christine Mains, February 23, 2024

Mark 2:13-22

“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.”

Jesus, the teacher, chose to dine with those in need, those with questions, those facing challenges. Sharing food and company with “sinners” offers a different perspective. Embracing something or someone new can be challenging. We find comfort in routine.

Teachers can impart knowledge, but the best strive to inspire those who follow them to become problem solvers and effect positive change. Leaders and educators strive to follow Jesus’ example while working to provide equitable support for all learners. We are, at every age, continuing to learn. Each of us participates in our own personal, spiritual, and intellectual development with the support of the community with which we find connection. Being open to the new thought, idea, or experience will allow us to understand, support, and grow with one another developing “fresh skins for the new wine”.

Christine Mains has been the Director of St. Paul’s Episcopal Nursery School program since June 2022. She believes that all children have the right to play, imagine, and learn in an environment full of diverse materials with educators who believe in their competency, capability, and potential.

What Action Will Bring Me Closer to God?, Christin Cooper, February 24, 2024

Mark 2:23-3:6

Mark 3:5. "He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart."

This sentence spoke to me because it called to mind Audre Lorde's profound and singular definition of anger: "Anger is a grief of distortions between peers." Lorde's framework has helped me immensely as events in our world have sparked anger in me over the past few years. Recognizing the element of grief in my anger has allowed me to process that anger and return to the core emotion that is really driving it: grief over a perceived loss of connection with others. Now, in the context of this Gospel reading, Jesus is not really among "peers." But his grief over the sense of separateness, the breakdown of understanding, is clear.

In this passage, Jesus is repeatedly challenged by those around him as he violates certain rules regarding the Sabbath. The Pharisees want to know, "Is it ok to heal a suffering person on the Sabbath, even though the rules say you should not?" At the core of Jesus' angry response is grief over the depth of misunderstanding this question reveals. In his response, he implores the Pharisees to reframe their understanding of the Sabbath rules to be not about the rules themselves, but about the impact of those rules. Jesus contends that a better question is, "What action will bring me closer to God?"

May your spiritual practices bring you closer to God this Lenten season - even if it means breaking the rules.

Christin Cooper can be found participating in various and sundry musical activities throughout St. Paul's vibrant music ministries. She has served on the Social Justice and Anti-Racism Commission and currently lives in Ross Township with her husband Seth and dog Devo.

Audre Lorde quote can be found in the essay: "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1981)

In all Truth, Scott Hudson, February 25, 2024

John 5:19-24

"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."

As Christians, Lent is our time to honor Jesus Christ for His sacrifice and discipline. To make sense of these verses, we need more context. Where is Jesus speaking and to whom?

John 5:1-18 is the story of Jesus in Jerusalem at Bethzatha, a healing pool visited periodically by a heavenly messenger. For 38 years, a crippled man laid near waiting for help into the pool. Enter Jesus who instructed the man to pick up his mat, be cured, and sin no more.

What the Jewish leaders witnessed troubled them for two reasons: a) Jesus healed the crippled man on the sabbath, the day of God's rest, and b) Jesus called God His father an equal. If God attends to His labors on the sabbath, so does His son.

John 5:19-24 describes Jesus' relationship to God, advises believers how to take the relationship to heart, and warns non-believers against being indecisive. For us, the relationship is alive in our acts of kindness in the name of Jesus and the ultimate sacrifice that He made for us.

In the final verses in Chapter 5, Jesus is leaving Jerusalem for Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee where He will feed multitudes with five loaves and two fish. He is traveling on what is today's Route 60 that connects Jews and Christians with Muslims, and Israelis with Palestinians. Let's keep everyone in our prayers and the focus of our labors of kindness.

Scott Hudson supports St. Paul's social justice and community-based programs, and Susan Erson sings in the choir and plays the bells.

You are the Son of God, Lois Cusick, February 26, 2024

Mark 3:7-19a

The large crowds who were following Jesus were on a quest to find out who he was. Some of them may have known him as Jesus the carpenter or as an outspoken member of his temple. They undoubtedly wanted to witness the man who could heal others or perhaps be healed themselves. Every generation shares the task of discovering who Jesus is. Within this passage I found the presence of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine.

In Mark 3:7-19 Divine Jesus is recognized by impure spirits as the son of God and Jesus directs them not to tell anyone. Jesus also heals people and unites people from all over the region.

Human Jesus takes time to withdraw from the crowd. He identifies a safety risk and makes a plan to avoid injury through the use of a small boat. He also builds a team of 12 and gives them authority to preach. This strategic planning is a very human approach to life.

Jesus's incarnation is a distinctive sign of the Christian faith. God sent his son to be our model of holiness and to make us partakers of the divine nature. Because Jesus was both fully human and fully divine we can trust that we can take all of our pain and struggles in life to him and he will understand. We can also trust that his Holy Spirit resides within our being and we can love and heal as he did.

Lois Cusick has been attending St. Paul's for five years. She is an Usher and helps with both the Neighborhood Resilience Program and the Summer food program for kids.

We Are Family, Eileen Sharbaugh, February 27, 2024

Mark 3:19b-35

“Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

In this crowded home, with Jesus at the center, we see a familiar dualling of words between the Pharisees and Jesus, this time with accusations of insanity or possible demonic possession. The religious leaders are hoping to dismantle Jesus’s ministry and recognize his growing popularity is a direct threat to their own status and authority. In typical fashion, Jesus’s rebuttal to their allegations is to tell a few parables.

What I imagine to be an intervention of sorts, his family shows up to “take a hold of him”.

They were clearly concerned. Depending on the relative you ask - they are either here to rescue Jesus from the Pharisees or from himself. I wonder if Jesus’s family was simply looking for him to fulfill the responsibilities of the first-born son instead of all his traipsing around Galilee. Is it possible that they knew he was the Messiah and thought he should be leading a revolution instead of teaching, healing, and hanging out with sinners and fishermen? In any event, Mark’s gospel does not clarify; it merely sets up a confrontation. When the family summons him from outside the crowded building, he stiff-arms them.

The response can be a bit startling. Yet as Jesus redefines family, I see he is suggesting a new and more expansive way of experiencing belonging. Families are not just those whom we share a household or bloodline with, but rather Jesus redefines family as those who are doing the will of God. I like to imagine the faces of those seated around Jesus in that crowded Galilean home, listening, observing, nestled in community, when he responds to his relatives beckoning, and points to them saying “Look, here are my mother and brothers”.

Eileen Sharbaugh has been a member of St. Paul’s Church for many years and enjoys participating in a variety of church ministries.

Crop Production, Jennifer Lingler, February 28, 2024

Mark 4:1-20

“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

In this passage, Jesus uses the parable of scattered seeds to explain possible outcomes when the Word of God finds people in different circumstances, often against competing interests or negative forces. Think rocky places, thorny surroundings or otherwise vulnerable spots along the life’s path. The culminating verse instructs us that, alternatively, when circumstances are right and the Word is heard and accepted, we are to multiply the effect by producing a crop.

Produce a crop. That phrase repeatedly struck me as I read Mark’s passage. I found myself wondering how the crop metaphor applies in my life and in the life of our parish. What is it that I am responsible for producing? And, how do I ensure that my crop production remains true to the seed of God’s love and doesn’t drift or succumb to the vulnerabilities that my humanness brings to the process? The more that I struggled to assemble a potential list of my crops, the more I came to realize that this duty to perpetuate God’s love can be honored in every interaction that we have with one another, our communities, and with the world around us. I shifted my thinking from the specific (maybe I cultivate God’s love in my kids by showing them to care for aging grandparents) to the general (my crop is the love that I bring to my encounters with other individuals, communities, and the environment). I circled back to the question of how my humanness might taint or even undermine my efforts, concluding that prayer, vigilance, and support from others within a Christian faith community seem essential to success. This Lent, I plan to continue this exploration of what crop production means in my life, and extend that thinking to consider the crop metaphor in the life of our parish.

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.

A Light, Water, Soil, and a Growing Seed, Jerry Rutledge, February 29, 2024

Mark 4:21-34

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable will we use for it?”

Where is the true light to help me grow? I don’t start every day with sunny weather. When it is cloudy, I am human and sometimes feel the clouds inside. God gives me help even when it is cloudy because God can see through my clouds. Where is my rest and self-care that God says is good? A warm cup of coffee or tea in the winter. An icy cold refreshment in the summer with a relaxing walk in the woods. I journal to God and pray for God to remember me and sustain me with God’s light.

Where is my seed today? I can’t see my own roots before they have grown. I don’t think any person can. Am I in a pot or have I transplanted to a garden? Am I creating something with God’s help? If not, what is making me feel tired as if life was the illusion of a prison, only a chore or a drudgery? What is preventing my roots from freely growing in the soil and drinking in God’s water to help me grow? In the midst of uncertainty, vulnerability and transition, I pray for the open mindedness to have the courage to make a positive change to say yes to my life.

I pray to trust God. Growing is hard work. I pray to have wonder and gratitude for the small things God has given me to grow a little each day. When I struggle, I pray for God’s eyes to see the shade and shelter of the harvest -- the happy moments with family, the hospitality of strangers, and the unexpected kindnesses and angels in my life. Where I have given and received, the branches of large trees have already grown together with God’s grace present. I believe we are not alone when in God’s community, but called. With this mission, we can move the world.

Jerry Rutledge is a member of St. Paul’s parish, a father with a loving wife and three children, an attorney, a member of the church’s Spiritual Growth Commission, and an intern Associate Spiritual Director with the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality.

Faith and Fear, Paul Golebie, March 1, 2024

Mark 4:35-41

“Then he asked them, ‘Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”

I find this passage, and this sentence in particular, to be very apropos to the current times in which we live. We are experiencing numerous fierce storms in our country and in our world - the political situation in our country has pitted one side against the other with no room for compromise; the covid pandemic is still causing many health and economic problems; gun violence continues to plague many of our cities; wars rage in the Ukraine and Middle East (as well as many other places); the climate problems affecting so many areas of our lives in every part of the world. Additionally, most of us are experiencing storms of a personal nature.

All of this can leave us feeling frightened of where we are headed and what the future might bring. When I am feeling this way, I have to remind myself of Jesus’ words from this passage and feel as though he is speaking directly to me when he says “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” During this Lenten season we are encouraged to strengthen our faith in him who will help us survive these times and bring calmness to the storms.

Paul Golebie joined St. Paul’s 8 years ago and is currently a member of Vestry where he chairs the Finance Commission and Co-Chairs the Worship Commission. He also plays guitar for the 8:45AM Service on most Sundays. He’d like to invite everyone to participate in Morning or Evening prayer at least once during the Lenten Season.

His Name is Legion, Stephen Perryman, March 2, 2024

Mark 5:1-20

“‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’”

Jesus sees the man possessed by a "legion" of demons and allows them to go into a herd of pigs which then run down a steep hill into water and drown. The miracle challenges the modern mind: demon possession, spirit transformation, and the community response, "Get out".

A story from the late renowned preacher, Fred Craddock:

"A young woman said to me during her freshman year at college, 'I was a failure in my classes; I wasn't having any dates; and I didn't have as much money as the other students. I was lonely and depressed... One Sunday afternoon, I went to the river near campus. I had climbed up on the rail and was looking into the dark water below. For some reason I thought of the line, 'Cast your cares upon him for he cares for you.' I stepped down... '

I said, 'Where did you learn that line.' She said, 'I don't know.'

I said, 'Do you go to church?'

' No ... well, when I visited my grandmother in the summers we went to Sunday School and church.'

I said, 'Ah...'

No, pigs aren't flying, but this lady had a "legion" of troubles.

May we provide legions of hope from our suffering and healing Savior.

Stephen Perryman was a life-long Presbyterian until being received by St Paul's in 2018. He is grateful for a radically welcoming congregation loving all with no exceptions.

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath, Molly Bozick, March 3, 2024

John 5:25-29

“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. **Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.**”

Here Jesus tells us to be prepared for the ultimate judgment. He says people “in their graves” have moved on from past choices – good or bad – and, after realizing Jesus’s message of rebirth and renewal, rise up and ask him for affirmation. Jesus responds by saying that people will have to accept the consequences of their actions, a hard pill to swallow. Good actions will be rewarded, and bad actions will be followed by punishment. And while many real life choices might not be so binary, Jesus believes that in order to forgive and forget, you first need to acknowledge and own up to your decisions.

With Easter nearing, we are reminded that Jesus gave us the highest sacrifice of his own life, so we could live. He accepted that he needed to die and went willingly, owning up to the facts of his choices.

This Lenten season I challenge you to acknowledge your wrongdoings and ask for forgiveness. It is so much easier to pretend like your decision was right or justified, but it takes courage to swallow your pride and admit when you’re wrong.

Molly Bozick has been a member of St. Pauls since 2018 and was happily confirmed this fall. She is a freshman at Mt. Lebanon High School.

Small Things, Jack Brownfield, March 4, 2024

Mark 5:28

“For she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’”

Biblical people have a lot of dramatic religious experiences. I don’t just mean miracles, like the two in our passage today. I mean conversions, like Saul the persecutor walking on the road to Damascus and encountering a vision of Jesus that transforms him into Paul the apostle. Or dreams where God speaks, like Joseph learning that his betrothed, Mary, is with child by the Holy Spirit. People today have experiences, too – they see visions, they receive miracles, they feel the Spirit and know that they are born again. Maybe you have had one or two moments like this.

Or maybe not. Maybe you are more like the unnamed woman with the hemorrhage, who had never seen any vision, never had any dramatic experience, who had only “heard about Jesus.” Maybe you wonder why the astonishing things in the Bible do not happen to you, why you don’t feel more ‘spiritual,’ more connected to God. If that sounds like you, listen to her trust: “if I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Such a little thing, to touch his clothes. No big gesture. No extraordinary experience needed. Jesus saves in the smallest, the least noticeable ways. A sprinkling of water, a wafer of bread and sip of wine, a murmured prayer. It is enough. The Lord is enough, and he says, “Go in peace.”

Jack Brownfield is a Candidate for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church and a lifelong member of St. Paul’s.

Out of Nazareth, Jon Delano, March 5, 2024

Mark 6: 1-13

Jesus said to them, "Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns, among their relatives, and in their own households."

This familiar passage in Mark combines two of the great events of the early church – first, Jesus' great preaching in Nazareth with his declaration that he is the anointed one, the Messiah, sent to fulfill Jewish Scripture (recounted more explicitly in Luke's version) to which his neighbors in Nazareth are aghast and critical – and, second, his early commissioning of his disciples, sending them in twos to preach and heal throughout Galilee with the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's no surprise perhaps that those closest to Jesus were astounded when he walked into the synagogue and preached from the Book of Isaiah. After all, he was just a carpenter's son, presumably never taught to read or write. "Where did this man get all this," they ask, knowing Jesus' family and siblings were among the uneducated poor and certainly not of the priestly class.

We, too, often misjudge people either because of their economic or cultural background, their racial or ethnic identity, or communities from which they come. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth," exclaims Nathaniel in John, a small village regarded in those days as a real backwater place. How many times have we thought, if not said, something similar about people from certain neighborhoods in Pittsburgh?

The fact that God anointed somebody from the last place in the world people would expect should give us all pause in our day-to-day dealings with others. In rejecting Jesus, his neighbors in Nazareth made a colossal mistake for all the wrong reasons.

In this reading, Mark couples that rejection of Jesus in Nazareth with Jesus' first instruction to his disciples to go in pairs to villages throughout Galilee to cast out demons and anoint with oil – and to do so with nothing but a cloak and a walking stick. This is a preview of the Great Commission that Jesus will give his disciples following his crucifixion.

While we don't have to walk half-naked through the South Hills, shaking the dirt off our feet when we exit the home of a naysayer, we do have an obligation as Christians to take part in living out the Good News.

By our own example, in relationship with others, we too are disciples of Christ building a movement that demonstrates, by our actions, that something good did come out of Nazareth.

Jon Delano has been an off-and-on parishioner at St. Paul's since 1958 and is a former Senior Warden, current member of the Vestry, chair of the Stewardship Commission, and the coordinator of the Lay Eucharistic Ministry program at St. Paul's.

The Death of John the Baptist, Jan Littrell, March 6, 2024

Mark 6:13-29

"She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' 'The head of John the Baptist,' she answered."

Sometimes Bible passages can be violent, jarringly so. This one is an example.

Herod had John the Baptist imprisoned because John had accused him of adultery for marrying Herod's brother's wife. His new wife (Herodias) wanted John killed, but Herod hesitated because he recognized that John was a "righteous and holy man." But Herod ended up killing John anyway in deference to a promise he made to Herodias' daughter while she danced at his birthday banquet. John's head was brought to him on a platter in front of all his guests.

What are we to make of this violent imagery?

This is a story about hard choices and doing (or not doing) what is right. Yes, there is evil in the world. Yes, there are people who would do us harm, sometimes without meaning to. And, yes, we get sucked into situations that seem like there is no way out. Doing the right thing is not always easy. We are all called to stand up to powerful forces that tempt us.

John stood up to Herod; Herod did not stand up to his wife and daughter. Standing up to violence and evil in the world is what we are all called to do. John's courage contrasts starkly with Herod's commitment to self-preservation, and reminds us all that followers of Christ who challenge those in power often suffer significant consequences. In this violent tale, the choice is clear.

Jan Littrell has been a member of St. Paul's since October 2020. She often plays the piano at the 8:45 service and is co-director of the St. Paul Handbell Choir.

Feeding the Five Thousand, Dianne Hubiak, March 7, 2024

Mark 6:30-46

"But many ... ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them ... so He began teaching them many things. ... 'You give them something to eat.'"

When I was praying about what to write, the Holy Spirit reminded me of the morning when I was living in Florida and I was praying about my future. The Lord spoke to me, "if you follow Me, I will provide everything you need."

Four months later, I received 3 job offers within a 3-day period. After praying about it, I chose the one outside my comfort zone. I left my career of 27 years in computers, moved to Massachusetts and began working for a construction company as a job cost accountant.

When looking for a place to live, we drove by a house and the Lord said that is your house! It was already sold (with 3 offers pending). One week later, I received the call that the house was mine if I still wanted it. I spent 22 great years in it! This story of all those people following Jesus all day long: running to keep up, then He provided what they needed, food in abundance - with plenty left over.

Over the 25+ years since that morning in Florida, this has been proven to me over and over. If I listen and do what the Lord asks of me, He has provided everything I have needed and more....I believe the important part is LISTENING and DOING what He asks.

Listening means developing a close personal relationship with Him....to know when He is speaking to you. And then Doing what He asked of you....sometimes it may be hard or it may be as easy as making a phone call.

Diane Hubiak returned to Pittsburgh in 2019 after retiring 3 times. She has learned over the years, she has been given the special gifts of being a "prayer warrior," a friend, and a photographer.

Jesus Walks on the Water, Deana Sherline, March 8, 2024

Mark 6:47-56

"Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Jesus is on the mountain, the crowds have moved off and the disciples are moving into the sea, a precious time of quiet with Father. We don't know how much time he had but I hope a few hours, then he felt the wind change. The Sea of Galilee is a fickle friend, warm and welcoming when the warm breezes come from the south and a mass of roiling wind and waves when the wind comes from the east. Jesus knows the southern breeze has changed to an eastern storm. Why did he not just stand up and say, 'Peace Be Still,' or walk down to the beach and calm the storm? He didn't, he walked toward and into the storm. Is this the lesson hidden here? We focus on his walking on water and the disciples struggling, maybe we miss what he is teaching us – lean in, do not fear. As Jesus strolled into the sea was he smiling knowing the wind and waves could not overpower him? That is the lesson, do not fear I am with you and even the sudden storm on the Galilee sea cannot overwhelm me. Fear takes up space, when we fear there is no room for joy. Thomas Aquinas said "Joy is mankind's noblest act." In my imagination, I see Jesus smiling and laughing, joyous in the storm. If he can do that, we can surely trust him in our storms and even smile with him.

Deana Sherline participates as a Stephen Minister, and in altar guild. St Paul's offers opportunities for many activities and finding what best works for you is an adventure, try everything.

How We Process, Jim Miorelli, Saturday, March 9, 2024

Mark 7:1-23

“Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

Once food enters our bodies, we don't have control over what happens next. The digestive system handles that part on its own, and frankly, in terms of spirituality, it's a non-factor. How do we process other things from the world around us that we must digest, perhaps emotionally, spiritually, or theologically? This process we do control, and how we digest them determines what comes out.

We have choices we can make, and lenses through which we can look that guide us. A mentor once told me that in order to be offended, one has to take offense, so don't take offense and you will be a much happier person. When we digest potentially hurtful things, do we become offended and exude hatred in response or do we experience compassion for those who have difficulty loving and show them love instead? When we have arduous, painful tasks ahead of us, do we process them with ungrateful disdain and exude negativity and malice, or do we remember that God is always with us, and all things come from God, and proceed with a sense of joy and inner peace that we can share with others? This Lenten season let's focus on how we process the world around us, and what comes out will take care of itself.

The Rev. Jim Miorelli is a transitional deacon and pastor-in-charge at St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, Canonsburg.

Bread of Life, Ann Tinnemeyer, March 10, 2024

John 6:35

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

During family dinner, there is nothing like a fresh loaf of Mancini's bread! While that kind of bread is amazing, the essential part of my life is my relationship with God. Over the past few years, I have experienced several injuries that have altered the plans I set out for myself. Instead of defining myself by success on a basketball court or lacrosse field, I have learned to listen to God and trust in God's plan for my life. Having God at the center of my life means that I don't have to worry about how things will work out, because I know that it is in God's hands. God has given me many gifts. As long as I keep focused on the blessings in my life, then I can get through the tough times. God's promises keep me from getting discouraged and give me hope. During Lent, as we spend time reading God's word, we should try to concentrate on making God the center of our lives. If God is the bread that sustains us, then we can see past our challenges and have hope for what is to come!

Ann is a freshman at Mt. Lebanon High School. She was recently confirmed at St. Paul's and thanks God for her family and Confirmation leaders for guiding her in faith.

Who Do We Follow? Ted Babcock, March 11, 2024

Mark 7:24-37

But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

This passage in Mark comes after Jesus challenges the religious authorities for critiquing His disciples for not following the purity laws handed down by tradition. Citing Isaiah, Jesus says - “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me... And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! (Mark 7:6-9)

The power of human tradition to pervert God’s desires is incredible. We see this when the Syrophenician woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter. As a Syrophenician woman, she was probably from Tyre and a Greek speaker, if not a Greek herself. Also, she probably was not a Jew and therefore not seen as a child of God deserving of God’s mercy. Jesus responds as his Jewish tradition dictates. He rudely rejects her request with an insult. He refers to her as a “dog.” It was a powerful insensitive rejection of her humanity. Her cheeky response that “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (Mark 7:28) stunned Jesus. Her response points out that what He had been teaching earlier in the passage was not how He treated her. He acted like the Pharisees, preferring tradition and its teachings over God.

It is a turning point in the Gospels. From this point forward Jesus is open to accepting all, without qualification. This simple Syrophenician woman changed the course of Jesus’ teaching. Her words resulted in Jesus breaking down historical barriers between Greeks/gentiles and Jews. Her response to Jesus challenges all of us to break down the traditionally taught barriers that we put up to divide humanity. Those artificial institutional barriers reflect our insecurities and institutional needs to exclude. They do not reflect God’s desires. They are not of God, but of humanity. During Lent the question is “who do we follow?” The precepts of human institutions or God?

The Rev. Ted Babcock is an Honorary Priest Associate at St. Paul’s.

Jesus Feeds Four Thousand, Louie Bojarski, March 12, 2024

Mark 8:1-10

“In those days, when there was again a great crowd, 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.’ ”

Louie Bojarski is a Kindergartener at South Fayette Elementary School. He enjoyed being a sheep in the Christmas pageant this year and he attends Sunday School. Additionally, he attended VBS and loved going with his mom and sister, learning all about water in the Bible. Louie also helps to deliver flowers with his family through the ministry at the church.



A full color picture is available on the web version

Signs from God, Lauren Miller, March 13, 2024

Mark 8:11-26

“The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.”

In response to the Pharisees' demands for a sign from heaven, Jesus sighs and leaves. I can almost feel Jesus' frustration and weariness. They want hard evidence that they can see with their own eyes. They ask for concrete proof that Jesus is sent from God. Even though they had previously witnessed miracles by Jesus, they did not believe. Instead of giving them the sign they demand, He turns and leaves, disheartened at their lack of faith.

I have been like the Pharisees at various points in my life. There are moments when I desperately desire a clear, unambiguous sign from God, thinking it will strengthen my faith. Then I read this passage. Scripture informs me that faith is trusting completely *without* understanding the mystery of God, without answers, without “proof.” In order to grow my faith, I must loosen the tight grip with which I hold onto my desire for control, order, and certainty. The more I practice surrender, I begin to see signs from God everywhere - sunlight breaking through gray clouds, a spontaneous embrace from my child, a moment of peace while walking my dog. I try to be open to these signs that often go unrecognized and uncelebrated. These are my signs from God.

Lauren and her family have been worshiping at St. Paul's since 2018, and she was formally received into the Episcopal Church in 2020. Lauren served on the board of St. Paul's Nursery School before becoming a teacher this year. She has been involved in Learning to Pray, the Ignatian Way, and Sacred Ground.

Who Do People Say That I Am?, Kathy Bashaar, March 14, 2024

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?”

The first thing that happens in this section of the Bible is Jesus asking his disciples,

“Who do people say that I am?’ Everyone has a different answer. And the same is true today, two thousand years later. The New Testament presents many aspects of Jesus, which are sometimes contradictory. He's a gentle, patient teacher and healer, but he also warns wrathfully of punishment. Sometimes he admonishes his disciples to tell no one about his miracles. Later, he commissions them to spread the Word to the whole world. There's the suffering Jesus and the triumphant Jesus. It's tempting to pick and choose the Jesus stories we like best and ignore the others. Most of us have had the experience of grappling with someone in our families or at work or even at church who frustrates and challenges us. But, as we stay engaged, we often come to a deeper understanding and respect. I think that's what happens with the contradictory Jesus in the Bible. Maybe we can come to love him best by working through our frustrations with his complexity. Maybe that process of engagement, and not some final understanding, is the whole point. Who do you say that he is?

Kathy Bashaar has belonged to St. Paul's for almost three years. She has participated in several ministries and activities. She is currently co-teaching the Write Your Life class at St. Paul's with Jill Gordon.

What's Next?, Geoff Childs, March 15, 2024

Mark 9:2-13

“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, 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.”

What's next? What is the next fad, the next promotion at work, or the next holiday or season? More often than not, I find myself, my kids, and my family asking, “what's next?” I think it's natural, most of us do it. It's hard to be in the here and now. When I think about Jesus, his ministry, and what it means to me, I am reminded to be present. To remember each day, each moment is a gift and tomorrow isn't promised.

But here, God is showing Peter, James, and John what's next. Jesus is shown to them as he will be in the Kingdom of God, he is placed in literal context with Elijah and Moses.

As much as Jesus wants us to be present, we are only human, imperfect. We can't help but to look at what's next. Jesus knows this, he knows us. Even though we can't fully comprehend the coming death and resurrection, we are sustained by his promise of the Kingdom of God, as it will be.

It's okay to question, “what's next?” But we cannot live there, many questions are left to be answered and the work is left to be done.

Geoff Childs is an Army officer, he and his family have been stationed in Pittsburgh since 2021. Geoff serves as a Lay Eucharistic Minister and Lector.

Unbelief, Bob Melvin, March 16, 2024

Mark 9:14-29

“Then I believe; help my unbelief!”

This passage has been with me for most of my spiritual life, and over the years it has only grown in resonance and complexity and context. Here is a suffering child, a father at the end of his rope, and around them a chorus of chaos perhaps not entirely focused on the crisis at hand. Jesus cuts through the nonsense when the father says, “If you can do anything...help us!,” to which Jesus replies, “If? There are no ‘ifs’ among believers. Anything can happen.” Which is all the father needs: “Then I believe; help my unbelief!”

I love that he tacked that last bit on there. *Help my unbelief!* He trusted Jesus in his panic and then looked beyond the very present trouble he and his child were experiencing – and in doing so gave us a lesson in living in community. If we look around, we will find ample opportunity to practice helping *each others'* unbelief. Take, for example, when we say the Creed in a worship service. I read once that the practice of communal reading is powerful and necessary because of the simple human fact that not everyone believes all of it all the time. I can deeply relate to that. This father's example leads us onward in community, holding each other in belief and unbelief, together.

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

I Am, Alexis Sheehan, March 17, 2024

John 8:46-59

"I assure you," Jesus replied, "before Abraham was, I Am."

I've never been especially drawn to passages where Jesus is talking with the Pharisees. They seem so conflictual and conflict often stresses me out. Tensions are rife in this passage with the Pharisees saying "You're a Samaritan who is demon-possessed." Yipes!

As I studied this passage, I paid attention to Jesus' response. These accusations do nothing to move Jesus. He knows who he is and tries to explain. He is saying he is the Christ, connected completely with the Father, present throughout time. When nothing really changes, he moves on - deftly avoiding a stoning! - and in the next passage, gets back to work healing a blind man.

I'm working hard in my own life to understand the conflicts I'm drawn into. What part do I play? When it is a distraction and when it is important to speak up? Do I forget who I am during these conflicts? Do I pick up others' beliefs about me or remain steadfast in who God has called me to be?

Conflict is inescapable. But I'll be focusing more on being like Jesus - sure of my identity, able to remain steadfast when things get challenging. And as much as possible, spending time in prayer and community listening to the one who has spoken throughout all of time.

Alexis Sheehan has enjoyed being a part of St. Paul's vibrant community since 2015. She loves sharing Godly Play with the preschoolers and growing in faith with her family.

What do We Fear?, Jean Chess, March 18, 2024

Mark 9:30-41

"They did not understand what Jesus meant and were afraid to ask him about it."

What were they afraid of? Was it the same or different for each of them? Were they afraid that they would look stupid in front of their friends? Did they worry that Jesus would think they were not good enough to be his disciples?

Was their worry really about what Jesus, or the others, would think or were they afraid of a deeper truth? Did they believe themselves to be unworthy or not smart enough or not good enough to be _____ (fill in the blank)?

What parts of myself do I fear being seen by others or by God? Is there a way I can bring that to God in prayer? If it's too much to articulate, can I perhaps begin by imagining that part of myself being touched by the loving, healing, all-embracing light that emanates from the one who created me?

The Rev. Jean Chess began serving as a deacon at St. Paul's in the Spring of 2020. She really enjoyed last summer's Uke-a-rist.

Creating Peace, Elaine Mycoff, March 19, 2024

Mark 9: 42-50

"...and have peace one with another."

This writing strikes me first as a handbook to live in peace. We cannot have half of ourselves without sin and the other half with sin. Sin drags us down into hell's fire, "the worm that eat never die." Thus, reminding us we will be eaten by worms in hell. Have you ever been in a situation which appeals to you strongly and yet something is just not right and is offensive? That 'just not right' is the sin part. We need to watch what we do. We must cast out the unright offensive part of the situation that dwells among us, and thus allow peace to dwell within us.

This lesson is an easy guide to those who are called to righteousness and peace. Jesus, in this writing from Mark, tells us, as examples, that parts of our body that are in pairs must work together. Peace continues when we ask God for the wisdom and the ability to create peace. It begins with each and everyone of us. May we examine each situation that comes into our lives and purge the part that needs to be done with. Let peace permeate in us. It's a freedom beyond compare as we enter the kingdom of God. Thank you, Jesus, for this teaching. Amen.

When looking for an Episcopal Church in 1988, Elaine Mycoff thought of Trinity Cathedral because she went there on her lunch hour when working in downtown, Pittsburgh. Her husband thought St. Paul's seemed a better choice because it was close to their home. From day one, St. Paul's has been a wonderful place.

Embracing Our Childlike Spirit, **Don Prosser, March 20, 2024**

Mark 10:1-16

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Jesus' message in this passage is clear: humility and openness, like that of a child, are keys to the kingdom of God. Children aren't burdened by ego or prejudice. They trust, embrace, and learn with innocence.

This resonated with me. In our often-complicated lives, we can get lost in worries and assumptions. We build walls that keep us from experiencing the wonder and simplicity Jesus offers. He invites us to shed those burdens, like children at play, and embrace the joy and possibilities around us.

In welcoming the children, Jesus doesn't erase the complexities of adult life. But he reminds us that even amidst trials, we can approach life with openness and trust. Like children learning and growing, we can seek guidance, embrace new experiences, and find joy in the simple things.

So today, let's take a cue from those children. Let's approach life with open hearts, willing to learn, and trusting in the love and possibilities that surround us. It's in this childlike spirit that we find the true essence of the kingdom of God.

Don Prosser and his family have been members of St. Paul's for 10 years. He currently serves on the Worship Commission, as the acolyte coordinator, and recently became a member of the Finance Committee. He lives in Mt. Lebanon with his wife, Christine, and two boys, Logan (11) and Liam (8).

“Come, Follow Me,” **Kathleen Davies, March 21, 2024**

Mark 10:17-31

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.”

As children, we imagine adulthood to be a great and glittering destination. We will be free to stay up as late as we like, to eat what we want, to spend our time as we desire. We do not envision the responsibility or limits, the daily obligations that make up much of adult life.

In this passage, Jesus tries to nudge two different types of believers toward an adult understanding of faith. The first is a man who halts Jesus as he is about to embark on a journey. He begs Jesus to tell him how to win eternal life. When Jesus reminds him of the commandments, the man assures Him, “I have kept all these since my youth.” The man's sense of goodness, of his own worthiness, is rooted in a youthful understanding of virtue and faith. He assures Jesus that he has obeyed the commandments since childhood. His earnestness is almost endearingly naive – after all, the commandments that Jesus recites are prohibitions against things like adultery and murder. Is it really hard for a child to refrain from such acts? Jesus urges the man to do “one thing” (that turns out to be three things): sell his belongings, donate the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus. Mortified, the man refuses and walks away.

The disciples hear the exchange and perhaps congratulate themselves on showing greater faith (and maybe being more deserving) than the rich man. Peter even says, “we have left everything and followed you.” Still, Jesus addresses his disciples as “children,” suggesting they are no more mature than the rich man. He wants His beloved followers to understand that eternal life is not something that you earn; rather, it is something that you are given, because nothing is impossible for God.

Kathleen Davies has been a member of St. Paul's for more than 20 years. In that time, she has served on the Vestry, sung in the Chancel Choir, taught confirmation class, organized and prepared meals, delivered flowers, read lessons, and benefited from the faith and fellowship of this community.

Being a Servant, Karen Schneider, March 22, 2024

Mark 10: 43-45

“...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ...for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

As Jesus continues his walk from Galilee to Jerusalem, knowing what awaits him, the disciples struggle to understand. They are frightened and fighting among themselves for recognition. Yet Jesus tells them “...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ...for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” [vs 43-45]

This sentiment is often heard, yet deep in my heart I struggle to fully live into servanthood. I like to be recognized. The model of servanthood is not often valued in the secular world. Being a servant takes precedence over individual desires and can even infer being owned by someone. A thought that is repugnant. And yet, we owe all that we have and all that we are to our Lord. Oh, if only to joyfully acknowledge being owned by God.

Yet God is patient and reinforces this practice. If I act as a servant and show our Lord’s love and compassion to someone else, I am the one who benefits by being in communion with God and his love. Is it really so simple? “...whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

Karen Schneider and her husband John Sozansky have been members of St. Paul’s since returning to Pittsburgh in 1992. She has been active in my areas of the church with a focus on Spiritual Growth through EfM (Education for Ministry) and Pastoral Care in Stephen’s Ministry.

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus, H. Wayne Williams, March 23, 2024

Mark 10:46-52

“Go,” Jesus told him, “your faith has made you well.” At once he was able to see and followed Jesus on the road.

Roadside in Jericho, blind Bar (son of) Timaeus hears that “Jesus of Nazareth” (a common reference) is approaching. He calls with loud urgency instead for “Jesus Son of David” (a messianic reference) to grant him mercy with restored sight. Jesus urges him to go, for his faith has restored his sight. Instead, Bartimaeus becomes a disciple following Jesus to Jerusalem, where the Holy Week narrative begins in Chapter 11.

As a young infantry officer in Vietnam, there were early days when fear of terrible things happening to those in my command (or me) would overwhelm me. I knew others could sense this.

Soon, at midnight in the jungle, I was in prayer desperately asking for the fear to end. The next morning, my outlook had miraculously changed. I was still genuinely concerned for our safety but now was able to lead with confidence – aware that God cared for each of us.

I had been blind to God’s presence and needed to call out for God’s mercy and help. Reading scripture and praying daily grew my faith to “see” Jesus and go follow him.

I continue listening for and heeding God’s promptings to go, and to be, wherever God leads.

H. Wayne Williams began attending St. Paul’s in January 2020 and was confirmed here in November 2021. He sings in the choir, serves as a Stephen Minister and Stephen Leader, and has been a frequent participant in Eileen Sharbaugh’s Wednesday evening small group.

Heartbreak, Nicole Starr, March 24, 2024

Luke 19.41-48

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!"

Amid the celebration, Jesus seated alone on a colt catches a glimpse of the Holy City. Despite the joy and anticipation of the crowd around him, Jesus begins to weep. The tears fall slowly at first, but they fall more and more quickly with every one of God's children that he sees. It is only when his skin begins to feel the dampness of his garments that he is awoken from this trance. Then, letting out a big sigh, he says both to no one, yet to everyone, "If you, *even you*," recognized what God was doing for you and you walked in God's ways, things would be different.

No matter how many Palm Sundays I attend, when our liturgy shifts from the celebration of Jesus's triumphal entry to the solemnity of his Passion, my heart breaks. It breaks not just because our fallenness necessitated Jesus's humiliating and excruciating death, but it breaks because I continue to play a part in it when I fail to walk in the way of life and peace. Then, I remember, it is at this same moment that Jesus weeps. He weeps not because we are sinful or even bitterly because he must die for us. He weeps because we are lost and in pain.

He weeps because he loves us.

Nicole Starr is a Candidate for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church. She currently serves as a Lector and LEM and enjoys participating in the Wednesday night small group.

Wonderings, Molly Sheehan, March 25, 2024 **Mark 11:12-25**

"So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received ^{it}, and it will be yours."

Mom told me to wonder about this story. So I wondered, "*Why on Earth would Jesus just curse a fig tree for basically no reason at all, except that it didn't have fruit in it when it wasn't the season for figs?*"

So I continued reading the passage. I reached the bit where Peter said, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Then Jesus talked about how if you believe, things will happen. Now, in between this, Jesus and his disciples had entered a temple. And in the TEMPLE, for Pete's sake, people were selling and buying in the holy place. Now I kind of understand what Jesus did next. He entered the temple and drove out the buyers and sellers, and overturned the tables and seats of those who sold doves. Which I understand. Because doves are holy, and this is a temple, and there should be holy things happening, not buying and selling. Then Jesus said,

"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."

Molly Sheehan is a 10-year-old who has been at St. Paul's for 8 years. She now is an acolyte and active in Sunday School.

Questions, Questions, Questions, Rich Creehan, March 26, 2024

Mark 11:27-33

“Jesus said, ‘I will ask you one question...’”

It's said that the Irish always answer a question with a question. So, what did an Irish acquaintance say when I asked if that was true? He replied, “Well, do we?”

In today's reading, Jesus answers the chief priests with his own question. They cannot find an adequate answer. As a result, Jesus turns the tables on their claim of authority. So what is it about questions that give them power, even when answers are not readily available?

Could it be that questions help move us from one place to another? Doesn't just asking “how” engage our curiosity and lead to a deeper understanding? Do we allow ourselves to ask “what if...” to tap into our creativity and produce something new? And when we grapple with life's profound questions such as “why did this happen?” or “what do I really believe?” aren't we hoping to cut through the clutter to the core, where we find what is essential and what is not, what is true and what is not, and what it is that God is really asking of us?

As St. Paul's verger, Rich Creehan coordinates the logistics of our worship services. He is the proud grandson of an Irish immigrant.

A Parent, Ginny Barnicoat, March 27, 2024

Mark 12:1-11

“He had one left to send, his son whom he loved.”

Sometimes, procrastination pays off. I received my devotional assignment on December 6. I read the passage, then put off writing about it for over a month. Fortunately, this lapse in time allowed me to read the passage a number of times, look up some commentary, think about it while walking my dogs, and talk to a few friends.

The parable seems pretty clear, even to a novice like me. This takes place only a day or so after Jesus was in the temple chastising the moneychangers, and just prior to his being crucified. He is pointedly speaking in front of the chief priests and elders whom he knows are having private discussions about how and when to kill him. In the parable, it is apparent that the landowner, the one who has made this amazing vineyard and leased it out to tenants, is God. Servants (the prophets) are sent by this generous landowner to go to the vineyard and ask for some of the fruit. The tenants (those who rejected the prophets, and then killed Jesus) cruelly beat and murder servant after servant. Finally, the landowner decides to send his “beloved son” who is also beaten and killed.

At first glance, this parable does not seem to require much deep thinking or reflection. However, after 4 weeks of asking where I see myself in this story, I became intrigued by questioning what kind of parent would send their son back to those greedy, murderous people, knowing what was most likely going to happen??

Answer: A parent who had infinite love and forgiveness for all mankind. I believe this illustrates the powerful, unconditional love that our God has for each of us. Apparently, no matter how badly or how often we mess up, how frequently we reject the love being cultivated in the vineyard, failing to live as Jesus taught us, God continually shows up for us, loves us, and forgives us.

Ginny Barnicoat is a long time member of St. Paul's. Currently she serves on the Outreach, Children & Youth, and Worship Commissions. She eagerly awaits discussions of Genesis with her 7AM Tuesday Good Book Club.

Maundy Thursday, Ken Matheny, March 28, 2024

"Truly, I say to you one of you will betray me." Mark 14:18.

Lent is a time for examination of conscience, a time to investigate the darker regions of one's soul and to acknowledge one's failures. In Mark's dramatic account of the Last Supper, Jesus knows that Judas is about to betray him. We don't know why Judas betrays Jesus. Perhaps Judas expected a Messiah that would destroy the Romans and was disappointed that Jesus preached peace, not war. Whatever his motives, Judas' name has become synonymous with treachery and betrayal.

As I pondered Mark's account of the Last Supper, Jesus' statement that "one of you will betray me" were the words that stood out for me. I have betrayed Jesus many times. Whenever I saw suffering and did nothing, whenever I saw poverty and gave nothing, whenever I witnessed bullying and failed to stop it, I have betrayed Jesus.

Some of my most painful memories are from my high school days. I saw kids that were bullied cruelly, and I never intervened. Bullying kids who were "different" occurred almost every day; I just ignored the bullying because I was a coward. I could have intervened, but I was afraid that I too would then become a victim of bullying. By failing to do what I should have done, I betrayed Jesus. Yes, Judas betrayed Jesus, but so have I. This meditation is a confession.

There are many times when I failed to do what I should have done, but God is merciful to Judases. God's love is greater than my sins.

Ken Matheny is a Stephen Minister, a part of the prisoner pen pal ministry, and also part of a community that meets on Saturdays for centering prayer.

Hurf, Gerry Dugan, March 29, 2024

John 13:36-38

'In all truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

Here we are on day 45 of our Lenten journey reflections together; it is a lot to process for sure. But, who would have seen THIS coming? Jesus states that not only is he leaving but that I can't come with him. I will disown him - my friend that I said I would lay down my life for - three times nonetheless! Despite that, He states that He will be back to get me. Three times and He will still lay down His life for me. Some friend I am! I think that is a lot to accomplish in one lifetime. My lifetime. Obviously Jesus does not think so.

Some of us, maybe many, have felt the personal pain of being hurt. It does not matter by whom. Hurt is hurt. The challenge is how we process the hurtful comment or action, still relate to the person or incident that initiated it, resolve it, and move forward.

If you are looking for one answer, (spoiler alert) you are not going to find it here. How we resolve the disappointment, pain and challenges are as diverse as all of us. We have the tools. Besides, who doesn't like a good challenge? Who doesn't want to say "I'm b-a-a-c-k" bigger and better?

Gerry Dugan is involved with the Outreach Commission, Fish Fries, is an Usher/Greeter, coordinates St. Paul's Red Cross blood drives, and facilitates NAMI mental health family support group meetings

The Flesh, Catherine Munz, March 30, 2024

Romans 8:1-11

“He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

This passage challenges many of our passive allowances of sin, calls us to a different way of being, and to live by the Spirit.

About thirty-five years ago, I was asked to participate as a presenter at a four day weekend retreat. I immediately went to my boss and gave her 6 months advance notice of my need for two of those days off. The week before the retreat, she came to me and told me that I couldn't have the time off because we were too busy and no one knew my job. “But you had 6 months to work this out,” I said. I told her that I was willing to use vacation days, or paid time off, but I was not willing to miss this retreat that I had been working hard to prepare for. She whispered “just call in sick.” I told her I would not lie, and besides, everyone had heard what I was doing.

The day of the retreat came. I called to tell the office that I was not going to be there. The person taking the call asked if I would like them to know how sick I was. I declined the offer and told the truth. Same thing the next day. The weekend was amazing and I saw Christ hard at work changing people's lives.

Needless to say, I was a little nervous about returning to work. All my colleagues knew about the disagreement with my boss. Just after lunch I was escorted into another room for the formal reprimand and possible dismissal. All the managers were in the room looking dour. When asked to sign a paper saying I was wrong, I refused, but instead wrote “I saw God at work” and signed under that. They all looked at each other, then one of them said, “We did our job. But, now we want you to know that we have learned a lot from your faith.” Although this story is somewhat simplistic, it could have ended very differently. Afterward, many of my colleagues thought I had “showed them.” This was not my intention. I believe we were all guided by the Spirit.

The Rev. Catherine Munz is a Priest Associate at St. Paul's. She retired from being the rector of a church in Northampton, MA where she served for 11 years. She has been a member of St. Paul's for approximately four years.

Easter Sunday, Noah Evans, March 31, 2024

John 1:1-18

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher)

Mary had gone to the garden in order to find Jesus' body. A man approached her, and in her sadness and grief she did not recognize him. And when he called her name, her eyes were opened, and she could see. It was her friend Jesus.

Have you ever been in a situation like that? When you were so anxious, or sad, or lost, or things had been so topsy-turvy that you could not see straight. I remember a time when I was a young adult when it felt like the bottom had fallen out of my world; several people close to me had recently died, what I should do with my life did not seem clear, and I wondered whether anything really mattered. I was sitting on the front steps of the place I was living at the time in a state of despair. And a friend Nick drove by, stopped his car, and said, “hey Noah...want a sandwich?” while waving a plastic bag out the window. It was strange. And, it suddenly knocked me out of my slump. It was a moment I felt “seen.” And, I needed a sandwich. And friendship. And almost suddenly it seemed like all of the darkness I felt around me would not smother me. I knew hope.

Jesus calls to Mary; calls to her by name. She knows that she is “seen” by her friend and knocked out of her slump. She knew hope. From there she goes on to be the first Apostle, the first to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection, and ultimately to change the world.

Christian community is a place where we can be “seen,” and also can “see” others. It is through a community of relationships, and together we can know hope, even when it is hard to see. Together, we can know the hope already promised to us in Jesus' resurrection. The Hope that still unfolds from that first Easter morning. The hope that God is working in the world, and you and I are invited to be a part of it. And you and I are invited to help others know that same hope as well.

The Rev. Noah Evans is the Rector of St. Paul's.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

FOR FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS

IN THE MORNING

Psalm 51

Open my lips, O Lord, *
and my mouth shall
proclaim your praise.
Create in me a clean
heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit
within me.
Cast me not away from
your presence *
and take not your holy
Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your
saving help again * and
sustain me with your
bountiful Spirit.
Glory to the Father, and
to the Son, and to the Holy
Spirit: * as it was in the
beginning, is now, and
will be for ever. Amen.

Reading of the Day Daily devotion

1 Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and
Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ! By his great mercy
we have been born anew
to a living hope through
the resurrection of Jesus
Christ from the dead.

Silence

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the
Father almighty, creator of
heaven and earth; I
believe in Jesus Christ, his
only Son, our Lord. He
was conceived by the
power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin
Mary. He suffered under
Pontius Pilate, was

crucified, died, and was
buried. He descended to
the dead. On the third day
he rose again. He
ascended into heaven and
is seated at the right hand
of the Father. He will come
again to judge the living
and the dead. I believe in
the Holy Spirit, the holy
catholic Church, the
communion of saints, the
forgiveness of sins, the
resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayers may be offered for ourselves and others.

The Lord's Prayer

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The Collect

Lord God, almighty and
everlasting Father, you
have brought us in safety
to this new day: Preserve
us with your mighty power,
that we may not fall into
sin, nor be overcome by
adversity; and in all we do,
direct us to the fulfilling of
your purpose; through
Jesus Christ our
Lord. *Amen.*

AT THE CLOSE OF DAY

Psalm 134

Behold now, bless the
LORD, all you servants of
the LORD, *
you that stand by night in
the house of the LORD.
Lift up your hands in the
holy place and bless the
LORD; *
the LORD who made
heaven and earth bless
you out of Zion.

Reading of the Day Daily devotion

Lord, you are in the midst of
us and we are called by
your Name: Do not forsake
us, O Lord our
God. *Jeremiah 14:9,22*

Lord, you now have set
your servant free to go in
peace as you have
promised; For these eyes of
mine have seen the Savior,
whom you have prepared
for all the world to see; A
Light to enlighten the
nations, and the glory of
your people Israel.

**Prayers for ourselves and
others may follow. It is
appropriate that prayers
of thanksgiving for the
blessings of the day, and
penitence for our sins, be
included.**

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect

Visit this place, O Lord, and
drive far from it all snares of
the enemy; let your holy
angels dwell with us to
preserve us in peace; and
let your blessing be upon us
always; through Jesus
Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The almighty and merciful
Lord, Father, Son, and Holy
Spirit, bless us and keep
us. *Amen.*

You can also find this format for prayer in the
Book of Common Prayer 1979 pgs. 136-140

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1066 Washington Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15228
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