

# **Lenten Meditations**



**The Church of the Holy Spirit  
Lent 2000**

# Holy Week Schedule

## **The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday – April 9**

- 7:30 am The Blessing of the Palms  
and Holy Eucharist I
- 8:45 am The Blessing of the Palms, Procession and Holy Eucharist II  
(Weather permitting, the service begins at the West Entrance.)
- 11:00 am The Blessing of the Palms and Holy Eucharist I

## **Monday in Holy Week – April 10**

- 8:30 am Morning Prayer

## **Tuesday in Holy Week – April 11**

- 8:30 am Morning Prayer

## **Wednesday in Holy Week – April 12**

- 8:30 am Morning Prayer
- 9:30 am Holy Eucharist

## **Maundy Thursday – April 13**

- 8:30 am Morning Prayer
- 7:00 am Holy Eucharist, Foot Washing, and Stripping of the Altar
- 8:30 pm Vigil through the night

## **Good Friday – April 14**

- 8:30 am Morning Prayer
- 12:00 am Johann Sebastian Bach's Passion According to St. Matthew
- 1:30 pm Silent Meditation until 3:00 p.m.
- 7:00 pm Good Friday Liturgy

## **Holy Saturday – April 15**

- 7:00 pm Easter Vigil

## **Sunday of the Resurrection, Easter Day – April 16**

- 7:30 am Holy Eucharist I
- 9:00 am Holy Eucharist II
- 11:00 am Holy Eucharist II

## WEDNESDAY NIGHTS IN LENT



During Lent we invite all the people of The Church of the Holy Spirit to come together on Wednesday nights to grow in faith. That's what the season of Lent is for. It's not so much about seeing how miserable we can be in depriving ourselves of things we like. It's about getting clear about why faith matters to us. We've put together a program to help in that process. We've tried to make it convenient, by including a meal, by offering activities for children and by promising to be done by 8 p.m.

Here's the schedule:

- 5:30 Eucharist in the Church
- 6:00 Dinner in the Parish Hall (main course provided, you bring salad or dessert)
- 6:45 Programs for adults and children
- 7:45 Compline
- 8:00 Go home

Plan to join us for the whole evening, or for any portion of the evening. Feel free to come only for the eucharist, only for the dinner, only for the teaching. Or mix and match. Child care and study hall for children and teenagers makes it possible to include the whole family.

Adults may choose from three offerings:

### **I – The Anatomy of Wholeness: Five steps to Healing and Hope**

*March 8* – “breathe, see, nourish, energize,” a visit with Frances Murchison of *Mindfully Fed* about healing and hope for sound bodies.

*March 15* – “hope and wholeness,” with Joan Merlo, a licensed therapist with the Samaritan Counseling Center, about the healing touch of therapy.

*March 22* – “healing and the power of prayer,” led by the members of the CHS Healing Prayer ministry, a testimony about God's abundant healing grace.

*March 29* – “healing and hope in the church,” a conversation with Marianna Gronek, our seminarian, about the hope and promise of reconciliation in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

*April 5* – “healing the world,” a discussion with Wendy Lane about how God calls us to live out our baptismal covenant by healing the brokenhearted and binding up their wounds (Psalm 147:3).

### **II – When the worship is over, the service begins**

A look at the theology behind Mission and Outreach. Why it's something we do as a community of faith. The rector will lead us through a 5 week discussion on the theology of Christian service, examining pertinent scriptures, the call to service in the Christian tradition, the call to ministry in our world today, and the ways it finds expression at CHS.

### III – Bible 101 or the Bible in Five Easy Lessons

For five weeks during Lent spend your time getting a bird's eye view of the books, the authors, the author's points of view about God, salvation, and history. The accepted canon of the Anglican Communion is made up of sixty-six separate books which include histories, prophecies, poetry, wisdom sayings, stories, Gospels, letters, and apocalypses. There are also 18 Apocryphal Books which are included and given a special status by our tradition that is not quite the same level as the core canon. Each of the contributors has their own special focus which adds to a Biblical world view. Led by David Lucey.



**And for kids: Walk with Jesus** – we'll transport your children to Jesus' time and follow in his footsteps on Wednesdays, March 8, 15 & 22. Our trek begins on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus feeds 5,000 people. Next we'll walk to Jerusalem for his triumphal entry and the last days with his followers. Finally we'll follow Jesus along the stations-of-the-cross and learn how he was crucified and rose again! Each evening, we will make the connection through drama, bible stories, music and crafts. **Registration is required.** Please sign up by March 5 by calling Debbie Stockert at 847-234-7633, ext. 29.

## INTRODUCTION:

An elderly gentleman living in rural Vermont found that he had to spend several weeks in a nursing facility, about an hour's drive from his home. His wife of more than fifty years would spend each day with him, and leave after dinner, driving alone toward home through the dark night, on Vermont's winding roads. They made this pact, made possible by the years they had spent in the church, years in which they had both committed to memory the Psalms, all 150 of them. So as soon as the wife left the hospital room to make the drive home, as soon as she was out of sight of her spouse, she would begin to recite the psalms, starting with Psalm 1. As he watched his wife leave, the husband would begin to recite them too. And they would continue in recitation until the wife got home, picked up the telephone, called her husband and without any greeting simply say: "How far did you get?" A story about a couple's devotion to each other. But also a story about the psalms as a guide in the journey of life.

In that spirit, we turn to the psalms this year, with devotional reflections on the psalms which are designated by the Episcopal Church's lectionary for the season of Lent. These reflections are written by members of our community, and we thank them for this gift. Let the psalms travel with you this season. Let them guide you home.

**Jay Sidebotham**

**Ash Wednesday, March 1**  
**Psalm 103**

*The Lord is full of compassion and mercy... (v. 8)*

As we begin the season of Lent with a day devoted to penitence, it may seem that this day is all about being “more miserable than thou.” Yet the psalm selected for Ash Wednesday calls us to remember that our God is full of compassion and mercy. What does compassion have to do with Lent? Isn't this season really about being taken to the spiritual woodshed, being forced to admit that we have messed up? Karen Armstrong, an author who has written extensively about the major religions of the world, has noted that the central religious virtue is compassion. It literally means suffering along side. As we begin the journey of this season, we are called to remember that we have a God who comes along side, in whose image we are created, who became a human being and gave his life for us, and who comes along side us now in the power of the Spirit. There are challenges in this season, no doubt. But even on this day when we wear the mark of mortality on our foreheads, we can give thanks that the Lord is full of compassion. Spend time today thinking about how that makes a difference in your life.

**Jay Sidebotham**

**Thursday, March 2**  
**Psalm 1**

*They are like trees planted by streams of water... (v. 3)*

Today's psalm reminds me of the cottonwood trees that grow along the creek beds of Eastern Colorado, my home state. It is a parched and dusty land, colored in earthen shades of brown, yellow and red; with the occasional green of the yucca, cacti and cottonwood the only hints of water. In high summer, when the hot dry winds toss tumbleweed against the barbed wire fences, the hard and green wood of the cottonwood tree stands upright, weathering both the drought and the wind, drawing its life from the underground water deep beneath the sandy soil of the creek bed.

The story of the cottonwood tree also reminds me of our call to be followers of Jesus Christ; growing alongside the gospel, gaining nourishment and life from the baptismal waters of our faith. As faithful Christians, we believe that we shall stand upright when the Day of Judgment comes, for we have sought the council of the righteous and have turned away from wickedness and sin. However, can our faith and right belief guarantee that we will never be tempted to sin? Will we never again find ourselves tossed about by the winds of life, seemingly caught up against the fences of adversity or despair?

Being a Christian doesn't mean that we will never again be blown about like chaff in the wind, beset by temptation, living in a parched and dusty land. Rather, we are called to believe that by living out our lives as faithful Christians we seek the true wellspring of life, our Lord Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are called to delight in the law of the Lord and to meditate on his law day and night, to know and believe that we are indeed trees planted by streams of living water.

**Marianna Gronek**

**Friday, March 3**  
**Psalm 51:1-10**

*Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquities. (v. 10)*

I remember times when I was really scared as a child. The times I remember most were when it was really dark late at night and I would wake-up from a bad dream. I can remember sweating and shaking. In the dark the dream sometimes felt like it was still with me, still very real. The thing I can also remember so vividly is the thought coming to me that if I hid under the covers or shut my eyes real tight with my hands pressed over them, then I would be safe. If I couldn't see the bad dream or the monster it produced, then it couldn't see me.

Now, when I do something that separates me from God, or Katherine, or one of my children, or a good friend, or a total stranger, I still want to hide from that scary thing. And more than that, I want God to hide from that thing I do. I want God to hide under some blanket or to shut his eyes real tight. I think, just maybe, if God doesn't look at it, it won't be real. But I know deep down. And I don't have to go very deep to know this, that what I did won't just disappear. It won't just go away by pretending. And reading Psalm 51, I get the sense that the Psalmist knows this too.

The pain in this Psalm over the Psalmist's sins is always very real to me. I connect readily with the anguish the Psalmist feels knowing that God really sees him. I remember the child hiding under the covers hoping the monster would go away. I remember the only way that made the scary thing go away was to open my eyes and put things where I could see them.

This psalm reminds me to do the same thing with God, hold that sin where God, and whomever I hurt, and I can see it. Then and only then, when I am no longer scared, but being responsible, can I truly ask God to take away what I did, then and only then can I ask God to blot it out, then and only then will God hide his face and treat me as if I am whole once again.

**David Lucey**

**Saturday, March 4**  
**Psalm 86:1-11**

*...knit my heart to you... (v. 11)*

I have been told that women intimes before us taught spiritual truths through weaving the cloths of their people. They said that when there is a hole in the heart, one must take the stronger parts and weave them together, in time the hole will be healed, and the heart will be stronger than before.

This psalm is asking God to listen 'all the day long', to have mercy, especially in times of trouble, when we are our most scared, our most vulnerable; those times when we are truly powerless; and our faith in God is the only strength we can turn to for help.

As I stood in the hospital corridor gazing at my loved one, all I could do was pray, "Please, God bring him back to us". He is healthy and strong, a young adult at the beginning of his life with you. Yet, his keen mind had been stolen by some poison, some false god that he had mistakenly thought would bring him only what You are able to give him, to give any of us.

With a gaping hole in my heart and a fear I had never known before, I shared my vulnerability. I can still "see" the hands of God reaching in to each and every one of my trusted community's hearts, and magically weaving the strands of love and strength together. In less than moments, I felt heard, held, and cared for. My hole was becoming whole.

The loved one did return, and all is well; by God's grace. Now, more than ever, I know that each moment 'all the day long' is a gift, and is blessed when I ask God to listen. When we stay open to the abundant love in God's universal heart within each of us, we are never alone; and our hurting hearts will heal.

Please God in every moment of the day and night..... "*...knit my heart to you...*"

**Mary Baer**

**Sunday, March 5 – First Sunday in Lent**  
**Psalm 25**

*Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord, point out the right road for me to follow. (v. 4)*

I wasn't expecting to find a treasure as the result of running head-on into a dead-end street in my life. I am convinced that the only thing that prevented me from frantically running off in another direction was that this particular dead-end had a strategically positioned brick wall that I hit as well. Dead-ends and brick walls carry heavenly invitations.

My invitation suggested I uncover my soul to God, to risk an inner inventory which would reveal that I was living a religious life hiding behind pretend. Most shocking was my discovery that the superhighway of cultural religion I had been traveling on for years had not taken me any closer to God! I knew quite a bit about God, I was very busy for God, but I didn't know God. I had too much theology, too much religion which costs me nothing, and too little intimacy with God. I believe God's intention in pulling out all my self-props was so I might begin to ask him the right questions; might pray the crucial prayer. My prayer wasn't as poetic as the Psalmist's prayer; mine was more like a series of loud screeches, but my need was just as great: "*O Lord, point out the right road for me to follow.*" And he did.

I was led onto an unfamiliar side road, then even further down to a little narrow path. On this narrow path, the Spirit and ancient saints began to teach me the intricate steps of following and *staying* on the right path (religious superhighways still have their appeal). By the way, there is theology on this path; there is religion, but it is not "*powerless religion which may put a person through many surfaces changes and leave them exactly what they were before.*" By far, the most wonderful thing on this path is the sweet intimacy with God I have found. For this priceless treasure, I thank him for dead-ends and brick walls.

**Shirley Comer**

**Monday, March 6**  
**Psalm 19:7-14**

*Let the words of my mouth... (v. 14)*

How often did I hear those words from the pulpit just before the sermon? I thought it was a common prayer, written by some medieval theologian (like the rest of Rite D) until I began to pay attention, and then I found that like so many others we use in the liturgy, these words actually came from the Bible!

Eventually, I began to see that this prayer applied not only to homilists in flowing white robes or tall pointy hats, but also to me. And not only in church, but whenever I opened my mouth to talk. As time has gone by, it has been easier to keep those words of my mouth “acceptable” (except when anger overwhelms me and the words of cruel intent come tumbling out almost unbidden). But keeping the meditations of my heart “acceptable” has been an ever so much more difficult chore. Many is the time when my mind leads me astray; planning how to get even with someone who has offended me, planning how to get more than my share, planning how I can escape an unpleasant obligation. I see with growing clearness how this verse relates to ME. I see that I need to pray these lines. And why? Well, enough stumbling and stubbing of toes has convinced me that the assertions in the first part of this psalm are generally true. The psalmist says that the law, the testimony, the judgements, the statutes, the commandments of the Lord are true and more to be desired than “much fine gold”. What gold I managed to lay hold of was never enough to assure peace of mind and the end-runs round the statutes or commandments, even if unpunished, usually left me ill at ease. And so I am left with the same conclusion as the writer of “As A Man Thinketh” (published well over a century ago and still widely read). If I can manage to keep my thoughts and words on the high-road, I stand a chance of making some progress towards the goal of all pilgrims. But as my thoughts and words veer towards the ditch, soon I will surely find myself in unpleasant circumstances spending time and energy trying to extricate myself from undesirable conditions.

“O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

**Steve Parsons**

**Tuesday, March 7**  
**Psalm 34:15-22**

*The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous  
and his ears are attentive to their cry;  
The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in  
spirit  
A righteous man may have many troubles,  
But the Lord delivers him from them all;  
He protects all his bones,  
Not one of them will be broken. (vv. 15, 18-20)*

Hundreds of years after the Psalmist wrote these prophetic words Jesus would hang on the cross, not a bone would be broken, and he would deliver all. But who were the righteous? Does that mean the good, the morally ethically upstanding members of the community? No it turns out it was the murderer next to him on the cross, it was Peter who denied him, his mother and friends who wept at his feet, the poor in spirit, the weak, the brokenhearted. The beauty is that our Lord didn't need to take stock of each life; he knew the heart of his children and he loved them.

We have heard these analyses before but they become more compelling when we own this for ourselves, when we confront our own evil and discover that only God can help us.

The recent movie, *End of the Spear*, tells the famous story of 5 missionaries martyred in Ecuador as they brought the promise of Jesus' love to a tribe intent on killing off one another. I am struck by the naiveté and risk that the men were willing to take, by the willingness of the families to choose God and His calling to their spouses/fathers/friends, and then by the courage to pursue this evangelizing even after the death of their husbands. But even more I was struck by the way this illuminated the early church. This destruction-bent band had no idea of the saving grace of Christ, they like the pagans of Christ's time, had to turn their whole way of life and mind upside down in order to come into relationship with Him. They were the poor in spirit, the troubled, and yet Christ knew them and loved them so much that he used even the most wicked actions to save all. Are we so different in our destruction bent actions in the world? The grace of the Lord will transform and deliver all, we can have faith that he sees our hearts and hears our cry.

**Mimi Murley**

**Wednesday, March 8**  
**Psalm 51:11-18**

*Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. (v. 18)*

I cannot read or hear Psalm 51 without thinking immediately of Gregorio Allegri's masterful "Miserere mei, Deus." Allegri, a 17<sup>th</sup> century singer, composer, and priest, served in the Chapel of Pope Urban VIII for most of his adult life. His "Miserere mei" was sung annually in the Pontifical Chapel during Holy Week. So prized was this particular musical work, that it was to be sung only at the Vatican, and any unauthorized copying of it by those who sang in the choir was to result in excommunication.

Today, the work is sung throughout the world, and it continues to weave its spiritual spell as it has over the centuries. Countless listeners find themselves immediately drawn to its austerity and plaintiveness – to its ability to express the heart of the Psalm through music. But it is a difficult work to sing well, demanding great sensitivity to the text and solid vocal control.

The balancing of heart and head is, I believe, what makes a great work like "Miserere mei" so powerful. As a composer, Allegri worked hard to compose music that captures the spirit of the Psalm text. Those who sing it must likewise understand it and summon their best vocal technique as they sing. Once this loving care has been taken, both singer and listener are drawn to the music's beauty, and, through this same beauty, all are drawn nearer to God.

Surely God receives all that is offered sincerely in worship. But how much more meaningful is the offering when the offerer has invested both heart and mind! In our worship of God, it seems appropriate that we strive always to lift up to God the best that has been given us in the best way we know. Then may we be drawn closer to the heart of God.

"Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise."

**Don Horisberger**

**Thursday, March 9**  
**Psalm 138**

*I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart...(v. 1)*

The opening statement of Psalm 138 is a decisive statement of intent – I will praise you. As I pray and meditate over this section of God’s word, I’m struck by this sentence. Not “I want to praise you” or “I think I’ll praise you” or “If I have some time this afternoon, I’ll give some praise to you” but rather – first and foremost, “I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart.”

What happens when my intent is first and foremost to praise God? My heart and mind are focused on recounting my thanks and tapping into the knowledge of gratefulness. I find myself in a right spot in my relationship with God – just like the angels, praising and rejoicing. And the Holy Spirit is truly palpable in those times when we are in right relationship with God. No matter what life’s circumstances are, no matter what the heaviness of our hearts and minds, for that time when we seek first to praise God, we know the deep sense of joy and rightness. In the long run, nothing else matters but this relationship in just this way.

I wonder what we might all know on a daily basis if we started every day with praising God? Not just praying over the list, or asking for the strength to get through the responsibilities that confront us, but rather, starting first with praise. I believe that we would experience more fully the power of the right relationship and the influence of gratitude in our lives.

**Martha Millar**

**Friday, March 10**  
**Psalm 130**

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. (v. 5)*

So many of us spend our lives waiting for things to happen while others believe they can simply make things happen. Life's many milestones include a long list of achievements that we patiently wait for and systematically check off our proverbial "To Do" lists . . . high school, college, marriage, children, professional success, financial freedom, etc. Finally after all is said and done, we use all of these earthly things as a measure of our happiness and success.

Could it be that we are waiting for all the wrong things in life? Why is it that two of the greatest needs of mankind -- love and redemption -- are so often the most difficult to find? Could it be that we are scared to open our hearts in fear that no one will listen? Or could it be that we have all forgotten our youthful hopes and dreams?

We can all take great comfort to know that God sees everything and listens to all who speak to him. Most important of all, each of us has the opportunity to ask God to forgive us for every wrong doing we have ever committed. By accepting God as our Savior, we open our hearts to him and put hope and trust in the Lord. In return, he gives us his unfailing love and full redemption from our sins. So why is it that we keep waiting and hoping? God is waiting for us!

**Stephanie and Erik Cook**

**Saturday, March 11**  
**Psalm 119:1-8**

*“Happy are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.”*

The opening verses of Psalm 119 are often described as a benediction with some translations substituting the word “blessed” for “happy.” If being blessed by God is truly dependent upon being blameless or in perfect accordance with his law, I am without hope! Despite my desire to please God, my efforts often fail. But, does God, in fact, demand adherence to a harsh set of rules? After all, didn't Jesus chide the Pharisees for their legalistic interpretation of the law? What, then, does it mean to “walk in the law of the Lord?” Instead of a rigid set of standards, the law of the Lord may be broadly interpreted as the overall body of God's “teaching.” His decrees provide the structure for our lives just as his divine plan upholds order in his created world. The law thus viewed is not a burden, but the embodiment of God's grace and guidance.

God loves each of his children and created us to be in a personal relationship with him. It is impossible, however, to have an intimate relationship with someone you do not know. God's law embraces his divine revelation of himself and his purpose, and it reveals what he wants us to be and do. God's love is evident in every facet of my life, and I can only return that love by attempting to do his will. In his statutes he gives us direction in how to show our love for him. Perfection may be the ideal, but God takes pleasure in our feeble efforts to walk in his path. If my love for my own children were dependent upon perfect obedience to my rules, there would be no compassion and no relationship. My love for them encompasses abundant forgiveness, and the same is true with God. He has promised us that “his grace is sufficient” (2 Cor. 12:9). The extent of God's love and forgiveness is beyond our human ability to comprehend.

Since we cannot perfectly obey God's law, we can never be in a right relationship with him based on our observation of the law. Fortunately, through faith in Jesus, we can have a righteous relationship with God apart from the law (Rom. 3:20-21).

I may not be blameless, but because God loves me and gave his Son for me, I do have hope. Thanks be to God.

**Michele Junkin**

**Sunday, March 12 – The Second Sunday in Lent**  
**Psalm 16**

*O Lord, you are my portion and my cup;  
It is you who uphold my lot. (v. 5)*

When I read this verse from the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm, I often think of the chalice we share in the service of Holy Eucharist each week and of the awesome gift of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus gave his life so that we might have new life in him and have it more abundantly.

What are we meant to give in return? Just what is our response to God's love and abundance? I believe we are called to love God in return, to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. (Luke 10:27). Then, I think we're meant to get out of the way and let God do the rest.

Whenever I fail to trust in God's love and care for me, it always turns out badly! When I make my life all about me (and that happens more than I would like to admit), I have failed to trust and to let God "uphold my lot." My friends, we have the blessed assurance of knowing that God will do the caring, and we also have the example of Jesus who knew when to take action and when to leave things up to God. He taught us to work and watch but never to worry, to do gladly whatever we are given to do, and to leave all else with God.

Sounds easy enough, doesn't it? But we all know better. And because we know better, we are called to accountability, and we are called into community. We are meant to share the love, the pain, the grace, and the glory of God. So the next time you approach the predella for Holy Communion, when you reach out your hands for the bread and the cup, be aware the folks on each side of you and remember that they are our companions on the journey. Pray for them and give thanks for the company!

**Wendy D. Lane**

**Monday, March 13**  
**Psalm 79:1-9**

- <sup>1</sup> O God, the heathen have come into your inheritance;  
they have profaned your holy temple; \*  
they have made Jerusalem a heap of rubble.
- <sup>2</sup> They have given the bodies of your servants as food for the  
birds of the air, \*  
and the flesh of your faithful ones to the beasts  
of the field.
- <sup>3</sup> They have shed their blood like water on every side  
of Jerusalem, \*  
and there was no one to bury them.
- <sup>4</sup> We have become a reproach to our neighbors, \*  
an object of scorn and derision to those around us.
- <sup>5</sup> How long will you be angry, O Lord? \*  
will your fury blaze like fire for ever?
- <sup>6</sup> Pour out your wrath upon the heathen who have not  
known you \*  
and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon  
your Name.
- <sup>7</sup> For they have devoured Jacob \*  
and made his dwelling a ruin.
- <sup>8</sup> Remember not our past sins;  
let your compassion be swift to meet us; \*  
for we have been brought very low.
- <sup>9</sup> Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your Name; \*  
deliver us and forgive us our sins, for your Name's sake.

**Tuesday, March 14**  
**Psalm 50:7-15, 22-24**

*I know every bird in the sky... (v. 11)*

For me, these selections from Psalm 50 bring to mind the creation story of Genesis 1:22-25. From the great sea monsters to the winged birds of the air, from cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth to humankind, God saw that it was good and blessed them. Both man and woman were created in God's image, and indeed, it was very good.

Psalm 50:7-15, 22-24 reminds me that God is indeed the creator of all living things, from every bird in the sky, to the creatures in the field, to those created in God's image, humankind. Today's reading further reminds me that God knows all creation, and that we are always in his sight.

But, what does this mean? Does it mean that God is always looking over our shoulder trying to catch us up in transgressions? Does it mean that God is so far above humanity that we must always cower in fear? Are we to offer sacrifices to God just in the hope of appeasing God's wrath? No, I don't believe the Creator God would want his creation to live in constant fear. I think our God wants us to turn to God in faith and trust, in the belief that we will be delivered from our distress.

Our God desires to be in real relationship with us. Not a sacrificial relationship, like Abraham when he believed God was calling him to sacrifice Isaac, but rather a faithful relationship between the created and the creator who blessed them. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good. We are promised that if we honor God with thanksgivings, we shall be shown the salvation of God.

**Marianna Gronck**

**Wednesday, March 15**  
**Psalm 31:9-16**

*But I trust in you, O LORD;  
I say, "You are my God." (v.14)*

The ability to trust another person comes hard for me. It requires surrender - a letting-go of control that feels very uncomfortable. I'm so much more confident when I am in charge – planning events, making decisions, taking over. To trust someone else risks that the job won't be done well. Not trusting presumes that others are not as talented or hard-working or competent as I am. Not trusting has the feel of arrogance.

Self-reliance has been bred into us from childhood - through school, Scouts, our parents, and our jobs. We are encouraged to "be responsible for ourselves", "be prepared", "be ready", "to grab the reins and go." So how can I trust God with my life when I have such a hard time trusting those around me with all the little things?

The lesson for me is in the grief and sorrow that overwhelm me. In the middle of the sadness, when I am paralyzed with loss, it comes to me that I am not "in charge", that I am not "taking care of it", that I am not "in control". And I pray to God for delivery from my pain. And right there – when I am alone and in trouble – is where I find God. I realize that God has been waiting for me to let go. And I become aware that the trusting, which begins as a necessity, is a relief. It feels like exhaling – it feels soothing. It's allowing God to hold me and comfort me, and the letting-go gives me peace.

And I am reminded that I am never fully in control and trusting God works all the time.

**Susan Ross**

**Thursday, March 16**  
**Psalm 1**

*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; . . . (v. 1)*

I am always pleased as punch when I discover that I do not fall into one of those “you’re in trouble” categories in The Bible. So as I read Psalm 1, I am delighted to learn that happiness is mine if I do not “follow the advice of the wicked.” Well, that seems to be a no brainer. I can do that. I try to take advice from non-wicked people only. “The wicked” sounds like an extremist group I would never invite over for coffee and advice. So, on my happiness score card, I can safely check off that pitfall.

Let me move on to the next warning, as outlined in Psalm 1, which is I should not “take the path that sinners tread.” Well, this category is not quite so black and white, since I am a sinner (falling somewhere in the light grey zone, I hope). Maybe I can take comfort in the fact that I do not seem to be on an obvious “path that sinners tread.” I picture that path as a road full of “You are sinning!” billboards that one either sails blithely by or trudges shamefully past. At the moment, I do not think I am on a particularly sinful path, so I will give myself a temporary pass. It is only a temporary pass, though. As a sinner, I have the potential to duck down a murky path at a moment’s notice.

Now we get to the phrase in the Psalm that brings me up short because – yikes – it contains a “you’re in trouble” category that fits me perfectly! God promises happiness to those who do not “sit in the seat of scoffers.” Busted! I sit in the seat of the scoffers. As a matter of fact, I could chair the annual meeting of scoffers from my seat because I am such an expert at scoffing. According to the *Oxford American Dictionary* (fortunately, my face was not pictured next to the definition), to scoff is “to jeer” or “to speak contemptuously.” Well, I am a scoffer. I might not jeer in a crowd or speak contemptuously to someone’s face, but I can be cynical and negative and critical and doubting. And when I am in that scoff mode, can I also be happy? I mean really, truly, joyfully happy? Psalm 1 says I can not and I would have to agree.

In this Psalm, God gives us a recipe for happiness by illustrating the loss of grace when one is in error. The error may be grave (wickedness and sin). The error may be minor (negativity and disrespect). Regardless, the result is a life lived in disharmony – disharmony with God. Psalm 1 teaches us that happiness is harmony with oneself, with one another, and with God. And that is nothing to scoff at.

**April Barron Cohen**

**Friday, March 17**  
**Psalm 105:16-22**

*Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore. (v. 4)*

Seek – a four letter word meaning among other things to go in search of; attempt to discover; and ask for. Our Christian faith teaches that God is always seeking us. My personal challenge is that I do not always reciprocate by following the simple yet powerful instruction of this Psalm verse. “*Seek God . . .*” In contemplating what seeking God meant to me I thought first of faith. At Christmas we sing “*O come, all ye faithful . . .*” Is this hymn phrase not God calling his faithful to seek the Lord, to seek trust in him, to seek his strength? I trust there are many ways to seek God. Through conversations with God I am often searching for, attempting to discover and asking for God’s unconditional compassion, the power of his grace and protection. When placing others before myself through service God certainly appears closer at hand. Through the spoken word of everyday conversation with others God, at times, appears to reveal himself. Personally, seeking God can be challenging. My search often raises questions for which I have no answers. Yet, I know seeking God is an imperative element of my spiritual journey. “[*Seek his face evermore.*” Seeking God through seeing his effect upon others is for me the easiest search. One need only spend time at CHS to find God’s face everywhere. From a young St. Gregory’s chorister singing a Sunday solo to one of the “Old Dogs” administering the communion sacraments; from CHS’s mission and outreach to its fellowship within and outside the parish, I have found the face of God. For this I am thankful.

**David Martin**

**Saturday, March 18**  
**Psalm 103:1-12**

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. (v. 2)*

Beautiful words of comfort and joy for despite our sins, known and unknown, God loves us and forgives us. Can this be true? Yes! The psalmist says “He forgives all our sins.” God cares for us as a father cares for his children. He loves us so much that He sent His only Son to suffer and die for us on a cross, to give His life for ours. So rejoice in these words and bless the Lord with our entire being, in all we do and say, for God loves us and cares for us beyond all human understanding.

**Kay Ford**  
**Sunday, March 19 – The Third Sunday in Lent**  
**Psalm 19:7-14**

*The law of the Lord is perfect... (v. 7)*

The idea that God's law and will for creation is life-giving echoes the Mosaic exhortation to the wilderness community to: Choose Life!

Moses, this psalmist, the church and my heart all testify to this truth: to choose for God is to choose life. Yet, like Eve in the Garden, I am often seduced by the insinuation of doubt which erodes my will, my spirit, my heart and which causes my mind to entertain the darkness, to wrestle with grim, faithless scenarios, to polish resentments, to ignore the beggar, to refuse to give or receive comfort, to become petty and righteous simultaneously, to be dominated by presumptuous sins.

Then, by some small quiet inkling of grace, I am called back to God; and through God able to choose life; to negate doubt; to appropriate faith. I am startled by the wonder of divine love. I am soothed, comforted and nurtured by God's path...the requisite prayer, worship and disciplined acts of virtue. My heart expands and I rejoice.

When I live by God's design and not by my assessments or calculations, nor by those of the secular culture, I am ALIVE! When I am governed and guided only by my perceptions, unaided by God, I am suspicious, easily wounded, constricted by a self conscious calculus: *did I do OK in that endeavor? Am I enough? Do I have enough?*

When I allow *the devices and desires of my heart* to be quieted by a firm commitment to follow God's path, I am enlivened, generous of spirit, compassionate. And I feel quite secure in the sense of harmony, integrity and good will which accompanies such an alignment with God. I feel secure in the sense of being in right relation to creation.

Why then, do I not live this out more often? More fully? Why do I seemingly so easily allow (court –even) the domination of presumptuous sin? Perhaps because I do not fortify these graced epiphanies by following God's laws, statutes, ordinances in a disciplined and habitual fashion? Or perhaps because I do not quite comprehend that the exhortation: Choose Life! is not an invitation; but an accurate description of cause & effect. Perhaps I need to grasp fully the psalmist's claim that obedience and loving service are ANIMATING, hence life giving, not just life enhancing; not optional.

**Max (Smith) Baffico**

**Monday, March 20**  
**Psalm 89:1-29**

*I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever ... (v. 1)*

This long psalm emphasizes God's steadfast love and faithfulness to all generations. We are told that God's covenant with David and his descendants, including us, will stand firm "as long as the heavens endure". This reality of God's stance towards us is repeated in seven of the verses. We cannot fail to note the importance placed on the way God sees us but can we really accept it?

If I were to believe that God's love for me is unshakable and unending how would that change my thoughts and actions? Could such a magnificent gift empower me to love some or all of those God puts in my daily life? Knowing of God's faith in me might I have the happiness of those who walk "in the light of your countenance" to share? How would my life change if I could believe in such love, letting it shine through my work and relationships? In the quiet of this Lenten season I pray for the courage to accept God's radical love and faith, opening my entire being to live in God's covenant. No lesser response could be worthy of such a gift.

**Anne Bent**

**Tuesday, March 21**  
**Psalm 25:3-10**

*"... remember me in thy unfailing love."(v. 7)*

This psalm is a plea from a sinner like me who is seeking the love and forgiveness of our God and asking to be shown the way. We know that God is always with us and is guiding us "... in doing right", but we just can not seem to believe it every minute of every day. There is not enough humility and perspective in us to comprehend the infinite truth of the words "unfailing love". Praying with this psalm helps towards my desire to be more in communion with Him and work towards my being a humble man who can receive his love and keep his covenant. In God I trust.

**Monte Craig**

**Wednesday, March 22**  
**Psalm 78:1-6**

*That which we have heard and known,  
and what our forefathers have told us,  
we will not hide from their children.  
We will recount to generations to come  
the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the LORD,  
and the wonderful works he has done. (vv. 3-4)*

“Who me?” That’s what I remember thinking about 20 years ago, sitting in a pew during announcements. It was August and the rector had just asked for volunteers to teach. The church school was short about 10 teachers for the coming school year. Although I had been raised in the church, as an adult I hadn’t really explored my thoughts or beliefs about God. Surely, I wasn’t qualified to answer this call.

That request was a crossroads in my journey. It sent me searching for more knowledge of God. It sent me to Lenten study programs, bible studies, EFM, and recently back to school. It sent me searching for the language to share my faith.

But in the back of my mind the question still remains, who am I to teach? For all that I know of God, there is so much more that remains mystery. For all that I am able to live a Christian life, it is all too clear that I fail more often. And yet we are all called (including me), as the psalmist reminds us, to spread the Good News, to tell others of the love of God. And specifically we are called to teach the children of our community about our faith.

Well, I did end up teaching that year -- first grade. I remember clinging closely to the curriculum, hesitant to deviate from it or to share from my own experiences. I’m not sure what the children learned, but I know that I came to see that in order to grow in my faith I need to set aside time for study. I discovered that when God seems to be asking the impossible of me, amazing changes are about to happen. And I learned that with God’s help I can do the unexpected. Maybe God calls us to teach, not only to share what we know, but to encourage us to seek Him and to grow in our own love of the Lord.

**Jean Larson**

**Thursday, March 23**  
**Psalm 95:6-11**

*For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.*

*O that today you would hearken to his voice! (v.7)*

The rector tells me that Psalm 95 is said to be the first psalm read at matins. Matins was the first service of the day, most often held before dawn, in the dark. That tradition continues, as we read this psalm everyday in Morning Prayer.

What a beautiful daily reminder that we are loved by the Creator of the Cosmos, in whose "hand are the caverns of the earth ...the hills, the sea ...[and] the dry land." (v. 5)

Not only loved, but called as "people" to be a community, like sheep who need a shepherd.

God has named and claimed us just as shepherds lovingly and patiently watch their sheep. The sheep are perhaps the only possession the shepherd owns. How attentive and careful the shepherd must be. Not a single sheep can be lost. It is an all-hands-on-deck, 24/7 job.

This is my image of God. Infinite, Almighty, yet personal enough to hold us in gentle, loving, big hands. Hands large enough to tend to and care for each one of us. Day in and day out. No matter what. No matter what we look like, what we think, how we vote, or even our theology. We are beloved as sheep are to the shepherd.

Being God's people, secure in God's pasture, ushers forth an invitation, an unconditional welcome. And our response to that invitation? The Psalmist urges us to listen, to pay attention to God's voice. That voice that promises abundant love, acceptance and care - as the shepherd beholds the tender flock.

**Frances Murchison**

**Friday, March 24**  
**Psalm 81:8-14**

*"I gave them over to their stubborn hearts." (v.12)*

Our Lenten passage each year, which prepares us for the glorious light of Easter, should remind us to give up our stubborn ways. And yet each year we slip back in those stubborn ways. How wonderful that we have a forgiving God who realizes our shortcomings. I am on a constant journey in search of the way to eliminate my stubbornness and it is still with me. Are we so weak and short-sighted that we cannot evolve or is God seeking a perfection in us we cannot attain? It is His belief and hope in us that renews our spirit and keeps us on the journey. Use this time in Lent to reflect on that journey and the brightness of each day that gives us God's eternal forgiveness and hope.

**Claudia Hoogasian**

**Saturday, March 25**  
**Psalm 40:1-11**

*“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”...(v. 3)*

It’s actually more like hundreds of new songs. Music, one of God’s most sublime gifts to us, is an amazing amalgam of poetry and math, passion and precision, and nowhere is that more evident than in the hymns, anthems, and chanted psalms of the Anglican Church. It has been ten years since I first found my way to the Senior Choir rehearsal room one Thursday evening, a move that, in hindsight, must have been through the grace of God because I never would have had the courage to do such a thing on my own. In those ten years, I have learned much, found wonderful friends, and continue to be thrilled by the work we do.

It is work. Every week is a challenge. Indeed, some weeks are a greater challenge than others. However, there is a well known phenomenon at work here, which sounds like God’s grace to me: it seems those things which pose the greatest challenges also offer the greatest rewards. Certainly, singing with the Senior Choir has brought many rewards.

Within the virtual treasure trove of fine music that we have sung, some of the brightest gems are Faure’s *Requiem*, Bach’s *St. John Passion*, and Harris’s *Bring Us, O Lord God*. The Harris piece is on our CD, so when I’m racked by doubts about everything from the state of my voice to the state of the world, listening to that recording can realign my sense of what’s important and offer tangible proof that we really do sing exquisite music.

Our trips to Wells and Ely were also incredibly challenging and rewarding experiences where the sense of history was as powerful as the music. Each remarkable journey was both humbling and awe-inspiring.

Still, there are times when it can seem overwhelmingly difficult to do it well enough, let alone exactly right. And when frustration with my own inadequacies drives me to tears, it helps to focus on the notion that it is through God’s grace that I have the pleasure and honor to be part of this choir. It is amazing, this Grace.

**Mary Driver**

**Sunday, March 26 – The Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**Psalm 122**

*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.  
Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. (vv. 1-2)*

When I read the words of this song and think about David and his companions finally coming into Jerusalem, I feel their unconditional joy over finally coming home. Returning to their center, the nexus of their spiritual world, with all the possibilities of a big bright future for their church before them. They must have been filled with a great elation but also sobered slightly by the weight of all that responsibility.

And I read on...

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.  
Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.  
For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within  
thee. (vv. 6-8)*

This impresses me as a song that we should hold on to as we seek guidance in navigating our own journey towards reconciliation of the rifts that challenge our church family today. We must pray for peace.

And we must pray for Jerusalem, the city so small and vulnerable yet so significant to the world. At the risk of seeming primitive, Jerusalem somehow reminds me of the tiny crab that lives in my aquarium – fighting off the suckerfish, red-tailed shark and others for her place in the tank. She protects herself with armor and has threatening claws and while the others may threaten, they are all ultimately afraid of her. But I must ask... is it time for Jerusalem to shed her metaphorical shell so that she might grow? Do the walls and armaments of this city really serve to protect her or do they now simply restrict her growth and integration within the world?

And peace, what will help to bring peace?

Perhaps one simple answer to this question is described in the wonderful children's book by Douglas Wood, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* – peace will come when all of humanity learns that while “**We**” are loved --- **so are “THEY”**. Thanks be to God.

**Ellen Humphrey**

**Monday, March 27**  
**Psalm 30:1-6, 11-13**

*You have turned my wailing into dancing;  
you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy. (v. 12)*

This verse talks about how the Lord will turn us around when we are sad and filled with grief, and how He will take away our fear, anger and hate and fill us with joy and happiness. This is who the Lord is. He wants His people to be happy and love one another, and when they argue and fight He is filled with grief. I know in my life that when I do something not worthy of the Lord's love, that He continues to love me, to help me, and to show me the way so that I may follow Him. The Lord does not wish to lose a lamb in His flock even if that lamb has bitten Him, He continues to show that lamb the right way and He continues caring for that lamb as any other. GOD is also like the loving owner of a dog. That dog may snap and growl at Him, but the loving owner (GOD) will continue to care and nurture that animal (us humans). And when that dog grows sick, that owner will treat that dog with all the love and compassion in his heart. The loving owner will teach that dog how to act and how to love the owner in return, and how to follow his owner wherever he may go.

I know that I have led such a joyous life and have been fortunate to have had so many opportunities that I truly believe that the Lord has been watching over me and guiding me. When I think about my family, friends, school and church I realize that I am truly blessed in many ways. Then I read about hurricane Katrina, the Earthquake in India, the war waging in Iraq and the tsunami across the ocean, and I wonder why I have been so lucky. At these times when I realize how much I have been given, I understand how I may be able to give back and help all those who are much less fortunate than I.

**Dan Patterson**

**Tuesday, March 28**  
**Psalm 46:1-8**

*God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. (v. 1)*

This relates to my life because I know that God is always there to help us in times that are good or bad. God is like our shelter even though he is not a house, but he can be our shelter in other ways. For example, he can be our shelter by protecting us in hard times, making us stand up for ourselves, and cheering us on even though you can't actually see him. God is our strength because he can, once again, help us in hard times when we are in trouble. He also helps us realize that we all have responsibilities in life.

**Piper Ventling**

This verse reminds me of many times when I was in trouble. Every time, even if I wasn't in danger of being hurt, I always came out alright. This verse of the psalm, "God is with us", in particular, reminds me of when my family and my grandparents went to Weakapog in the summer. We rented a boat there and my parents, my older brother and I went out in it. My Dad was planning to go in the narrow passage (which led to the ocean) and turn around before we went all the way through. However, we couldn't and we got into the ocean. God helped us get back to shore without getting hurt.

**Annie Imbrie-Moore**

This verse tells me that you don't have to be scared or worried because God is always there for anyone who needs his help. He isn't just our shelter and strength, he is everything good in the world. He has helped me get through the hard times in my life and I'm very thankful for the help that he gave me. During the times that I move, he is there for me.

I know that God will always be there for me.

**Michelle La Fortune**

*“Also so we will not be afraid;  
even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths” (v. 2)*

We have to stand tall and strong because we have responsibilities to live up to. When times are rough we have to see the light that shines forward. In 5 billion or 500 billion years the earth will be changed and we have to make the changes good. When you are sick and you have school, dance, football, baseball, gymnastics, pom, church, camp, you can't let your friends, family or whoever you have be strong. This reminds me when I didn't want to go to gymnastics but my Dad made me and then I went and I came home and I did fine. I learned that you have to push through things even if you don't want to do something. When you go into something, you have to keep going.

### **Eina Karstens**

This reminds me of when I was at camp. I went on a hike. On the hike, rocks kept falling off the mountains, but my counselor made us keep on going. It was really cool! We knew God would help us, so we weren't scared.

### **Tommy Merritt**

We won't be afraid when we see an avalanche. We ski down the mountain without being scared. The mountain is white and the trees are green. You feel the fresh air on your face when you ski down the powdery snow. Then you go to the bottom of the mountain and take off your skis. You go to your room and change into your bathing suit, sit in the hot tub and relax! You should have fun with what you are doing and have fun with your life!

### **Olivia Merlin**

Sometimes I get scared. For example, my family goes skiing every year at Spring break. I am pretty good at skiing, but I get scared easily on some of the black and double black runs. If I get scared, I will stop, calm down and pray for a split second and then continue.

### **Mitchell Gregory**

**Wednesday, March 29**  
**Psalm 145:8-19**

*The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.  
(v.18)*

Having been reared in southern Illinois, I remember living through numerous tornado warnings and storms during the Spring of each year. The sky would turn a strange color of greenish gray before the winds began to swirl through our small town. I was only six or seven years old during one of the first of these storms. Yet, I vividly remember the terror in my heart as I observed the strange sky and eerie view from my bedroom window.

When my father came into the room to take me down to the safety of our basement, he asked what I was thinking. In my childlike way I expressed my fear of the storm. I remember him picking me up, folding me in the safety of his warm embrace and settling down in the chair next to my window. He calmly reminded me that I only needed to have faith in God and know that He would be with me throughout the tornado. Daddy also helped me recall the story of Noah's Ark and the promise of the rainbow after the storm.

By this time, the sky had darkened and the wind was beginning to blow stronger. I could see tall trees bending over almost touching the ground and bright green spring leaves blowing through the sky. About that time a robin landed on the small bush outside my window. Daddy asked me if I thought the bird looked frightened. I will never forget how calm that bird looked. I responded by saying the bird seemed to know he was safe. My dad hugged me close to his chest and said, "Marty, don't you think if God is protecting all the birds in the sky that he will also protect you?" In that moment I knew God held me in the palm of his hand. Now many years later, I frequently marvel when before, during or after a storm I so often see a bird. That bird always reminds me "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

**Marty Preiss**

**Thursday, March 30**  
**Psalm 46:1-8**

*There is a river that brings joy to the city of God, ... (v. 4)*

This verse reminds me of things that bring joy to me like certain sports or other things. My river lies in many places, like home. I feel the presence of God at home and in many other places. Joy is not very specific to one feeling, but to many feelings of happiness.

**Fritz Arnson**

*God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; ... (v. 5)*

God is in the city that will never be destroyed. He will not be afraid. He stops wars, breaks bows, destroys spears, and sets shields on fire. He is supreme over the world.

**Devin Gregory**

Verses 1-7 remind me of the hurricanes that happened last year. The verses say, "even if the hills are shaken by the violence" which is like the hurricanes. The verses also say that no matter what, God is there for us, which he is. Some people in New Orleans and other places affected by hurricanes may be upset with God, but they have to remember that God is always there "even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence" (verse 3). The psalm also says that places are terrified, but God is with us. In verse 5 it says, "God is in that city, and it will never be destroyed." It says that because there may be hurricanes, but the whole world will never be destroyed, because God is there. Even when cities are destroyed, it is not terrible because God is there.

**Grace Robinson**

**Friday, March 31**  
**Psalm 34:15-22**

*The Lord is near the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (v.18)*

Brandt says of Psalm 34 in his paraphrase: "He is very near to those who suffer and reaches out to help those who are battered down with despair."

Peterson says in *The Message*: "If your heart is broken, you'll find God right there. If you're kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch your breath."

I ran my finger down the page and chose Psalm 34 randomly. Verse 18 stood out as I, like many others, have lived it.

The rub is this, when I was completely brokenhearted, it was awfully hard to believe my spirit would ever return. What I am grateful for is the knowledge that my spirit would return. I held on because a long time ago I came to believe what God says. So when I could feel nothing, I held on to his word for dear life.

Being inconsolably numb, in the "black hole", the void, hearing happy life chatter and it having no meaning, I wondered, will I laugh again? Maybe you've spent time here. If you have or you are now, you know what I mean. For me it was grief accumulated by death of my loved ones and the bottomless hollow ache of missing their touch, their voices. Your pain may be a broken cherished relationship, loss of a life long dream or career, desire for a family/child, the heaviness of caring for someone with an ongoing grave illness or addiction... Sounds pretty bleak, huh? It is, but wait, here is the good part.

We don't have to go by our feelings because we have his promise. He is faithful. God is there day in and day out. He is there when making one decision is one decision too many. Time and again, singer, Amy Grant's words have reminded me that God loves me. "Raise my hands, so you can pick me up." God does that for us. When we are like a toddler with no reserves left, limp on the floor, completely spent- when the light of our spirit is out, he picks us up and holds us. He holds us until we are renewed again.

If you are brokenhearted now, even if you cannot feel a thing, he is there because he said he would be there. Healing can take a lot of time. Receive. Accept the prayers of those who God puts on your path, they are here in this place and want to help. God has all the time in the world for you! You will welcome joy again. And when you do, it will be like embracing a gentle dear old friend. I for one am praying for you. Amen.

**Robin Karstens**

**Saturday, April 1**  
**Psalm 7:6-11**

*God is a righteous judge ... (v. 11)*

There are many images of God in the Psalms. In this passage “God is a righteous judge”. In the psalms he is also referred to as a shield, a protector, and a defender. God is also seen as “creator”, a “rock/fortress in whom I take refuge”, a safe place. He is also an avenger, a landlord, a teacher, a warrior, a redeemer, a father, a mother bird, and a king. And he is our “Saviour”.

Using this imagery takes the poetry of the psalms and makes it personal; so that every reader who spends time in the words will see a God that is easier to understand, to worship, to believe in and to make personal in their life.

Whatever mood you are in or whatever immediate need, one of the psalms will speak to you if you meditate on the imagery.

In this reading it is a comfort to know that God is fair. That is what a judge is, someone who will look at you fairly and “protect those who are upright” and “make them secure” and who will seek to end violence. It says that God will search our heart and mind for what is good and just.

I believe this is a God that I can put my trust in. Can you?

**Mimi Crabtree**

**Sunday, April 2 – The Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
**Psalm 51**

*Create in me a clean heart...(v.10)*

As an Old Choir Director who has not yet, in his opinion, faded away, I spotted verses 11-13 as the texts of three pieces for mixed voices by Johannes Brahms. After reading and thinking about the psalm as a whole it seemed to me that the three formed a kind of keystone that, in a sense, holds together the verses that precede and follow it.

Verses 1-10 speak of cleansing as external matter while verse 11 takes us within ourselves. "Create in me clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me." In a lovely, quiet setting Brahms enhances the request that the heart be cleansed of envy, impatience, unkindness, despair and like distractions that plague us and interfere with our trying to do as we have been bidden: to love the Lord with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. With or without Brahms, verse 11 provides a welcome sense of preparation for the challenges of the day.

In verse 13 the psalmist prays that our efforts may be supported.

"With Thine infinite love uphold Thou me." Brahms concludes with an exultant affirmation that this will be so.

Watch *The Witness*. Create in me.... may be sung as an anthem during Lent.

**Vin Allison**

**Monday, April 3**  
**Psalm 23**

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (v. 1)*

I enjoy reading different versions of the Bible. Many times I'm given a new perspective on a familiar verse. Such was the case when I came across an interpretation of this verse that read: "The Lord is my shepherd, I don't need a thing!"

This verse has become a mantra for me. When I'm feeling overwhelmed on the job or at home I often go to a quiet place – the nave or my bedroom. I close my eyes, take several deep breaths and repeat those words over and over. As I do so I can just feel a calmness wash over me. It's like Harry Potter's magic cloak. I'm safe, the things that are frustrating me cannot find me! As I lean on those arms of love, feeling the comfort of the One who knows me best and still loves me most, I feel my energy returning and things gradually getting back into the proper perspective.

I know that with the Lord at my side I can accomplish the tasks that need to be done. I can deal with the situation that awhile ago seemed unbearable. What a comfort and stronghold our Lord can be if we but acknowledge our need for his strength and presence.

**Pam Seremak**

**Tuesday, April 4**  
**Psalm 102:15-22**

*... the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners,  
to set free those who were doomed to die;... (vv. 19-20)*

Whenever a Christian suffers despite doing what is good, he or she becomes a companion of Jesus, who also suffered despite doing nothing but good!

As believers, we can be sure that God is actively involved in our lives, permitting injustice and suffering for a good purpose of His own. We may not understand that purpose, but looking at the wondrous good God accomplished through the suffering of our Lord and His glorification, we can be sure that when we suffer, as Christians, both good and glory will result!

**Jana Cathcart**

**Wednesday, April 5**  
**Psalm 17:1-8**

*Keep me as the apple of your eye... (v. 8)*

Study-Bible footnotes sometimes clarify, sometimes obfuscate. I want to bypass the possible ophthalmological interpretation that the “apple” was literally the pupil of God’s eye, in favor of the more poetic simile.

I know a parishioner who prays the Lord’s Prayer to Our Grandfather, rather than to Our Father. To imagine myself as the apple of God’s eye, that grandfather context works for me. My “Grampy” delighted in me, made up stories about me, gave me permission--at his formal Boston dinner table--to lick the plate, after homemade blueberry pie. His delight affirmed me, helped to grow into more than I’d known I was.

“Keep me” means I’m already there, already loved as God’s unique and precious creation, already the apple of His eye--if I will but accept that. It’s what I call Original Blessing.

A control-issues-type joke going around lately: Q: What’s the difference between you and God? A: God never wanted to be you.

But God DOES want to be you! God-filled-ness (literally, “enthusiasm”) in you and me lets us 1) accept that we are the apple of God’s eye, and 2) pray for the grace to show that forth (“manifest” it) in affirming others--loving our neighbors as ourselves, and 3) choose Faith over Fear daily. These days when Fear is the currency of the airwaves (“Will there be a tsunami tonight? Tune in at 10!”) and the dangerous dynamic of political rhetoric, it’s important for me to remember the recent (January 20) “Forward” stating that “Fear not” or “Don't be afraid” occurs 365 times in the Bible.

That’s rather like an apple a day.

**Lynne Atherton**

**Thursday, April 6**  
**Psalm 105:4-11**

*He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, (v 8.)*

These passages remind us once and for all who were our spiritual founding fathers, who were those who originally arrived at the conviction of who and/or what as the basic force and influence of the one and true abstract that we have learned to call GOD, who it was but the ancient Hebrews. (Israelites)

After all, Jesus (our Christ) was a Jew. These pronouncements should put to rest the legitimacy of the Hebrews as the foundation of our Christian faith and dispel for all time the idiocy of the Hebrew blame for the demise of our Lord, Christ Jesus!

**Herb Neale**

**Friday, April 7**  
**Psalm 18:1-7**

*I love you, O LORD, my strength. (v. 1)*

These are personal, loving words offered by David to a God he knew intimately. Throughout his fantastic life of accomplishment and personal tragedy, David knew to look to God for forgiveness, guidance and solace. Martin Luther said, "One cannot believe what a powerful assistance such praise of God is in pressing danger. For the moment thou wilt begin to praise God, the evil will begin to abate, the consoled heart will grow strong, and then will follow calling on God with confidence."

I love the phrase, "a consoled heart." I can personally attest that the consoled heart does indeed grow strong, and that calling on God with confidence is truly a result of simple praise and worship offered in hours of need. If you are like me, the "right words" often won't form in my troubled mind. What a marvelous gift David has passed on to us with this opening line, "I love you, O LORD, my strength."

**Janine Longoria**

**Saturday, April 8**  
**Psalm 85:1-7**

- <sup>1</sup> You have been gracious to your land, O Lord, \*  
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
- <sup>2</sup> You have forgiven the iniquity of your people \*  
and blotted out all their sins.
- <sup>3</sup> You have withdrawn all your fury \*  
and turned yourself from your wrathful indignation.
- <sup>4</sup> Restore us then, O God our Savior; \*  
let your anger depart from us.
- <sup>5</sup> Will you be displeased with us for ever? \*  
will you prolong your anger from age to age?
- <sup>6</sup> Will you not give us life again, \*  
that your people may rejoice in you?
- <sup>7</sup> Show us your mercy, O Lord, \*  
and grant us your salvation.

**Sunday, April 9 – Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday**  
**Psalm 118:19-29**

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his mercy endures for ever. (v. 29)*

The psalms do a fairly good job of covering the full range of human emotions. The emotions portrayed in the psalms run the gamut from despair, to anguish, to triumph, to joy. Sometimes I pick up the psalms and read two or three in a row just to see what expressions of our humanity are captured in that group.

One of my favorite set of Books is J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. I have read or listened to the book so many times that I could easily look ahead to all the good stuff at the end. But the story can still catch me surprised by the things I have forgotten and I rejoice in the triumph of its characters mixed with the sadness of things lost along the way. In that story I can still live in the moment.

The story of Jesus and the remembrances of Holy Week, the week of the passion, ask us not to rush along to the end too quickly. Rather, the story begs us to live in the moment, to be caught by surprises of things forgotten. The triumph of the entry into Jerusalem was temporary and tempered by other events.

But given this psalm and today's celebration, I can feel the connection of this song of triumph to the events concerning Jesus' entry in Jerusalem. It was for the participants a moment to proclaim the enduring nature of God's mercy, God's willingness to love us because it is in God's nature to choose to love us. That knowledge and that triumph of God's mercy is something for which to rejoice. It is something for which we should pull out all the rhetorical and musical exuberances, just as the psalmist did in this record of the LORD's triumph.

**David Lucey**

**Monday, April 10**  
**Psalm 36:5-10**

- <sup>5</sup> Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, \*  
and your faithfulness to the clouds.
- <sup>6</sup> Your righteousness is like the strong mountains,  
your justice like the great deep; \*  
you save both man and beast, O Lord.
- <sup>7</sup> How priceless is your love, O God! \*  
your people take refuge under the  
shadow of your wings.
- <sup>8</sup> They feast upon the abundance of your house; \*  
you give them drink from the river of your delights.
- <sup>9</sup> For with you is the well of life, \*  
and in your light we see light.
- <sup>10</sup> Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, \*  
and your favor to those who are true of heart.

**Collect for Monday in Holy Week**

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Tuesday, April 11**  
**Psalm 71:1-12**

*“In your righteousness deliver me, and rescue me; incline your ear to me  
and save me.*

*Be to me a rock of habitation, to which I may continually come;  
you have given commandment to save me, for you are my rock and my  
fortress” (verses 2,3).*

In a post-nuclear age, the imagery may seem archaic, but the message remains clear and comforting: despite anxiety, uncertainty and rapid change, God remains our rock and our fortress, as long as we choose to make God our “place of habitation,” re-phrased in Ps. 90:1 as our “dwelling place” or “refuge” and similarly in Ps.91:1 as our “shelter.”

The security of a dwelling place was highly prized by an ancient, quasi-nomadic society dealing daily with a different set of variables from ours. The fact of God’s own dwelling among his people through the Shekinah glory was a source of inestimable comfort. But St. John tells us that when the Word became flesh in Jesus, he made his dwelling place among us permanently (John 1:14). And the Holy Spirit, assuming a dwelling place within our hearts, becomes our Paraclete, literally the one “called alongside to help us” in our deepest needs (John 14:26).

Charles Spurgeon wrote about this Psalm: “Happy are those who can use the personal pronoun ‘my’ not only once, but as many times as the many aspects of the Lord may render desirable. Is he a strong habitation? I will call him ‘*my* strong habitation,’ and he shall be *my* rock, *my* fortress, *my* God (Ps 71:4), *my* hope, *my* trust (Ps 71:5), *my* praise (Ps 71:6). All mine shall be his, all his shall be mine.”

Psalm 71 was written by an old man as a prayer for deliverance in his advanced years. Acknowledging the special vulnerability felt by the elderly, he rests secure in the fact that God’s salvation springs from his character as a righteous God, and that God himself has taken the initiative through his commandment that we should be saved. His prayerful petition may also be ours, as we embrace Jesus’ assurances that God wishes to hear our prayers and in St. Paul’s assurance that the Holy Spirit will come to our aid when we find ourselves wholly unable to find the right words (Romans 8:26). Truly God is *my* refuge, *my* shelter, *my* dwelling place. What greater comfort can we find?

**Alan Heatherington**

**Wednesday, April 12**  
**Psalm 69:7-15, 22-23**

*But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.  
At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love,  
answer me.  
With your faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire. (vv. 13-14)*

This psalm is a prayer seeking deliverance from one's personal enemies, from the "mire." The psalmist laments with strong metaphors how he feels reproached by his enemies and overcome with problems, "the deep waters." It struck me that although the writer of this psalm is begging God for help and crying out to be rescued, that he is doing so patiently. He is asking for help "at an acceptable time" or rather when the Lord deems appropriate and in the Lord's time. He humbly asks God to help him because he knows God loves him as he refers to His abundant and steadfast love.

How many times have I begged for God's help! My prayers contain a lifetime of petitions. I know God loves me with an abundance that is beyond my comprehension. I need, however, to be reminded to have patience when I ask for His help. I need to remember that He will help me in His time. Our world of instant gratification, which is without humility, cannot apply to the Lord's work.

In further reflection, I have tried to identify who and what are my personal enemies, my personal "mire" from which I have asked God to deliver me. Some of my enemies are of my own doing, my own poor judgment or sins. I also know that some of my enemies come from trying to do the Lord's work, opposition to what I believe is right according to Him. The psalm writer refers to his own "zeal for your (God's) house" resulting in his misery. It is appropriate in Holy Week to contemplate the horrendous opposition and consequent suffering Jesus experienced in His doing of God's work. We are reminded how Jesus spoke and prayed to His Father about His enemies.

To me, the heart of this psalm is another lesson to trust in the Lord. I pray to trust so that I may receive His deliverance in His time. Amen.

**Noni Gardner**

**Thursday, April 13 – Maundy Thursday**  
**Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25**

*“So mortals ate the bread of angels; he provided them food enough. (v. 25)*

How often I worry needlessly. This psalm clearly demonstrates that God always provides, maybe not always what I think I *want*, but always, always, exactly what I need. Although I live in the most economically blessed country in the world, during times of challenge, I am quite sure I will be homeless. None of this rumination is based in fact, of course, but in fear which is fueled by the media playing up organizational down-sizing, health crises, reduction in benefits, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, etc., etc., etc.,

I so easily slip into the mindset of our culture; daily I am barraged by messages of consumerism. I am assured that by purchasing and consuming the right product, I will be forever secure, young, healthy, and thin. Furthermore, all my worries and fears will go away. Yippee!! But is that what is truly important and gives real meaning to life? If indeed I am made in the image and likeness of God, what I look like, where I live and how much I may have materially matters not at all. What truly matters is utter trust and reliance on God to provide for all my needs. And God does in so many ways.

As I look back over my life, I see clearly how this mortal has truly eaten the “bread of angels; that he provided them (me) food enough.” God has graciously given me opportunities to be part of a community of compassionate caring people, gratifying work, a loving marriage, shelter, and more blessings than I can easily articulate.

Like the Israelites, there have been times in the desert, of not knowing where or what was next, but also, like our ancestors, God has and will be there as long as I take the time to express my gratitude and offer praise for God’s ongoing interest and presence in my life.

**Liz Richmond**

**Friday, April 14 – Good Friday**  
**Psalm 22:1-21**

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (v. 1)*

On Good Friday, these words have special poignancy because Jesus speaks them from the cross, hurls them at God, his loving parent. Where was God on Good Friday, the day the world killed Jesus?

Was it God's will that Jesus suffer such a painful and humiliating death, that he feel so cast adrift from his Father's love that he should cry out in agony? These are difficult questions for persons of faith.

According to two of the gospels, Jesus believed he had been forsaken by heaven as well as earth. Where was God? Renowned preacher Barbara Brown Taylor asks, "Couldn't God have spared one angel there at the end? Couldn't God have whispered just one comforting word in Jesus' ear, just to help him get through those last awful, parched hours? It happened at his baptism in the River Jordan, it happened at the Transfiguration with Peter, James and John. 'This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Where was that same voice at the end, when the beloved was panting his last few breaths?"

Who of us hasn't cried out those same words in our own times of suffering and despair, willing God to come to our rescue, begging for blessed release from whatever the world has handed us.

Where do we go when our hope dies? Those of us who are grounded in faith seek God, hold on through the storm, and cry out in despair, asking God to be present, even though God may not choose to answer.

How do we know that God is there during those dark nights of the soul? We know because there is an Easter, that Good Friday is not the last word, that Jesus Christ embodied faith in the Divine and God raised him from the dead. God will do the same for you and me if we can just hold on, keep loving God, keep talking to God, even though God may not choose to answer. That is what Good Friday is all about.

**Wendy D. Lane**

**Saturday, April 15 – Holy Saturday**  
**Psalm 130**

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning. (vv. 5-6)*

Time is a funny thing. It can fly, and it can drag. When you're waiting ... expectant ... anxious, it can really drag.

That's what this Psalm feels like. The Psalmist seems to be having a conversation with himself and with "the Lord" alternately. He's waiting and talking to himself while he waits. It sounds like he talks to himself because the Lord is far away, yet he reassures himself because he is confident that the Lord is there—somewhere. He reassures himself that the Lord redeems and forgives. And he waits, and hopes.

I've heard people use that comparison "It's like watching paint dry." Now *that's* some waiting. Verse 6 struck me as having some of that same feeling. "My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning." I've seen people who are "watchmen," security people whose job it is to "watch." I'll bet there are arts to that job and that there are tricks that make the time go more quickly, as you are watching. Watching night turn into day is better than watching paint dry, but it's got to be slow. And in this Psalm, there's that component of expectation and anxiety mixed in with the waiting. There's also longing.

That's what this Saturday is like—until the waiting is over. I can imagine being one of the friends of Jesus, feeling like everything had gone wrong, feeling like it hadn't turned out like it was supposed to. The "waiting" when it felt like everything went wrong must have felt horrible, because they had no guarantee of the resurrection, no signed contract. If they could have read this Psalm, maybe it would have been somewhat comforting. Maybe some of the comfort would come from knowing someone had been there before, "waiting."

**Elise Womack**

**Sunday, April 16 – Easter Day**  
**Psalm 114**

*Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,  
who turned the hard rock into a pool of water, and flint-stone into a flowing spring. (vv. 7-8)*

Today we celebrate the power of our God to turn a dead end into a threshold, the power of God to bring resurrection out of crucifixion. That power referred to in this psalm refers to the deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, a new nation formed out of a hopeless situation. That story became formative for the early church, as they saw in the story of Jesus the power of God to bring new life, even out of the grave. And in the Christian community, we claim that power is still at work. A favorite author, Jonathan Kozol, has written a book called *Ordinary Resurrections*. It describes the ministry of an Episcopal Church among some of the poorest children in our nation, living in the South Bronx. It is a wonderfully hopeful book, as it attests to resurrections that happen in their lives each day. Ordinary resurrections. That setting may seem far removed from our own community, but in each of our lives, there are moments when we see the power of resurrection at work here at The Church of the Holy Spirit, as doors are opened for new life, as we grow in welcome and faith and service. Celebrate today the good news that we worship a God who can turn hard rock into a pool of water. Claim that power wherever it is needed in your own life. Alleluia. Christ is Risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

**Jay Sidebotham**