



Judgment

Hope

Lent & Holy Week 2009

Mountain View Lutheran Church

Read & reflect

We hope that you use this collection of devotions as a way to struggle and wrestle with some of the Biblical texts of judgment and hope. At home. At school. At work. Wherever and whenever you can find a moment to reflect or pray.

First, you are encouraged to read the listed Bible passage (or passages) for a particular day. Second, you are encouraged to read the text in this devotional for that particular day. Then, you are encouraged to let the Biblical text, as well as the thoughts, reflections, and prayers of your fellow sisters and brothers in Christ, sink deep into the marrow of your bones—both physical and spiritual. You are encouraged to struggle with the questions that are posed by these writers—of the Biblical passages and of the devotions—and to wrestle with the questions that you yourself pose.

A blessed journey through Lent and Holy Week!

Struggle & pray

Judgment

PSALMS 50.20

- ¹⁹ You sit and speak against your brother;
you slander your own mother's son.
- ²⁰ These things you have done and I have been silent;
you thought that I was one like yourself.
But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.
- ²¹ "Mark this, then, you who forget God,
lest I rend, and there be none to deliver!"
- ²² He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me;
to him who orders his way aright
I will show the salvation of God!"

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

51 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to thy steadfast love;
according to thy abundant
mercy blot out my transgressions.

- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,

⁵ Syr: Heb: Make to hast. ⁶ Or: steadfast.

- ⁷ "Cleanse Me from My Sin"
and done that which is evil in
thy sight,
so that thou art justified in thy
sentence
and blameless in thy judgment.
- ⁸ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- ⁹ Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- ¹⁰ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ¹¹ Fill⁵ me with joy and gladness;
let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.
- ¹² Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹³ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right⁶ spirit
within me.
- ¹⁴ Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
- ¹⁵ Restore to me the joy of thy salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- ¹⁶ Then I will teach transgressors
ways,
and sinners will return to thee.

Hope

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday 25 February 2009

The prophet is called to loudly rebuke the people for their hypocrisy, and to remind them of what is acceptable in His eyes.

It is amazing that so little has changed since Isaiah was told to “lift up your voice like a trumpet” to the people of Israel. He could walk into virtually any church today and deliver the whole Isaiah text word for word all over again. And if he did, the people’s response would sound pretty much the same to him now as it did then.

I’m sure that within a few moments Isaiah would see at least one or two examples of every sin, clothed in piety, which he is told to warn against, every sin of egotism, of greed, of self-aggregation, and of vanity that continually deprive us of a right relationship with God.

Isaiah calls on us to repent and we are also told that the way we treat each other and especially the poor is the heart of true repentance. We are called to serve and reminded of the rewards of living by God’s rules. Not just the rewards that await us in some distant future either but a real sense of joy that we can feel today knowing we are one of God’s faithful people.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, remind me each day of the sin that keeps me from being your true servant. Help me to be the person You have called me to be and give me the strength and grace to live my life in a way that is acceptable in your eyes. Amen.

Isaiah 58:1-12

Janet Bender

First Thursday in Lent

Thursday 26 February 2009

Nakedness - a condition of joy for an infant and mother as she bathes him;

- a source of beauty and wonder in the eyes and hands of a sculptor;
- a source of pleasure and blessing for lovers.

But nakedness also

- may evoke shame and disgust as one looks in the mirror;
- is illegal when displayed in public;
- is a recognition of our sin and disobedience in the light of God's Word and we become afraid of God's judgment.

So we try to hide our nakedness by

- toning the body so it looks better;
- covering our nakedness with our own "loin cloths" of self-images, success, and good deeds;
- not acknowledging our sin before God and others.

And so God's judgment comes as a life of struggle, hardships, and death.

But there is also a promise of judgment against the tempter—ultimate defeat—and therein begins our hope.

And then God gives us a new garment—the righteousness of Christ received in the waters of baptism—not our doing, but God's.

So we do hope and trust in that grace-filled garment.

Lord God, may our confession be as sure as your promise of forgiveness.

Genesis 3:8-21

Jon Petersen

First Friday in Lent

Friday 27 February 2009

God, forgive me. I, like Cain, have killed my brother. I have taken his life. I have destroyed his future.

Place your mark on me and send me to wander the world with all my guilt before me. Confront me with daily reminders of my past. Taunt me with the rewards of my participation in oppression. Place my living sisters and brothers before me that I may always see the pain I cause by my careless abuse of your creation, my thoughtless waste of your handiwork, my compassionless trampling of your children, my heartless hoarding of your gifts, my ungrateful indulgence in your design.

And God, give me hope. Deepen the mark of the cross on me that I might learn to care more constantly for the family you have placed in my path. You are my parent. Teach me to love each of your children—each of my sisters and brothers—without question. Grant me the will and the courage to be my brother's keeper.

Genesis 4:8-15

Kristi Ceder

First Saturday in Lent

Saturday 28 February 2009

“Who is worthy
to open the scroll and break its seals?

Do not weep.

See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,
the Root of David,
has conquered,
so that he can
open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Revelation 5:1-7

First Sunday in Lent

Sunday 01 March 2009

This is a description or story of the Covenant God made with Noah and all his decedents—as well as all living creatures. The sign of the covenant is the Rainbow, which is to remind us of God's covenant with Noah.

We then ask, "What is this covenant?" According to the NIV Study Bible, p. 18, it is an "unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with some natural catastrophe". This Noahic covenant occurred after the Flood as described in Genesis 6:1—8:13.

We often wonder if God is an all loving God who never gets angry. Well, from the readings, it occurred to me that God indeed gets quite angry with His human creation. That's why, at first, God was going to destroy the earth and all living things and start over again. The flood was judgment on creation.

Then God found favor with Noah who was righteous and blameless in his generation. Noah listened to God. He built the ark as God commanded Noah to do and Noah followed God's directions in all he was told to do.

Knowing that God's Covenant with Noah is a permanent Covenant, gives us great hope in trusting God that he means what he says. The Flood happened many centuries ago, and never has a flood happened since that wiped everything, including all creatures, off the face of the earth.

This is a means of hope for all of us—because the Covenant is a permanent Covenant, and therefore will not end. We can therefore make the connection that God is with us and He cares for us, even when we sin. This assures us that He will be with us when we need Him—which is all the time!—just like He was with Noah and all God's creation through the judgment of the flood.

God knows we sin, and that we were born in sin, yet God continues to love and walk with us. What a blessing! Thanks be to God for the Covenant He made with Noah. And keep looking for the Rainbow in the clouds—a reminder of Hope in that Covenant that God made with the earth.

Genesis 9:8-15

Alice Brynestad

First Monday in Lent

Monday 02 March 2009

Any recreational hiker will tell you that it's not easy to climb to the top of a mountain. Switchbacks and loose gravel, periods of unmarked terrain, and rocks that feel like they'll give way just as you're stepping upon them: all mark the strenuous but usually rewarding trip to the top. To imagine Abraham and his beloved son Isaac going on an afternoon hike for fun and adventure is one thing. It's another thing entirely to envision such a hike occurring as a response to Abraham hearing God's command to hand over Isaac as an offering.

As Isaac and Abraham abandoned the donkey and their companions and began the trek to the top of the mountain, Isaac's looming death sentence from God seemed guaranteed. Every step Abraham took alongside his only son likely heightened the unfairness of it all in Abraham's eyes. I can imagine Abraham's hope diminishing as he ascended the mountain, feeling bewildered when recalling God's earlier words that promised: "Do not be afraid, Abram...your reward shall be very great...you shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations...and your son Isaac, I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him." Despite Abraham's feelings of despair, when Isaac questions his father, somehow Abraham is still able to respond with faith in God, saying "God himself will provide the lamb."

When the altar was constructed, the wood was set in place, and Isaac, panic-stricken and fearful, was bound and laid on top of the wood, all hope appeared to vanish. Not only would Isaac see death, but also Abraham's legacy would be eliminated, and all of God's promises would fail to come to fruition. "How can this be?" I can imagine Abraham pleading, yet Abraham continued to follow God's command faithfully, even to the point of raising the knife to kill his only son.

When the angel intervenes and Abraham responds by saying "Here I am," hope breaks through the darkness covering that mountaintop that day. God judges Abraham as faithful, calls him by name, "Abraham! Abraham!" and provides everything that was needed (the lamb) so that Isaac might live and God's promises might be fulfilled. As the darkness obscures our vision so that it seems impossible to have hope, God calls forth faith from His disciples, both those being acted upon by forces outside of their control (Isaac) and those wielding the knife (Abraham).

Prayer: Faithful God, we trust in You to provide all that we need today. Despite the shadows of the world, strengthen us so that we might live in hope, remembering that even if we are faithless, You remain faithful.

Genesis 22:1-13

Pastor Jen Quanbeck

First Tuesday in Lent

Tuesday 03 March 2009

This passage follows the death of Joseph's beloved father. The brothers who had caused such harm in Joseph's life now have more than sorrow on their hearts. Would Joseph now carry out vengeance on them for the evil they did to him? In fear they send a message begging for forgiveness for the sake of their father.

This breaks Joseph's heart, and he weeps. Have you ever been misunderstood by a loved one, having been put through a painful situation, when you have truly "gotten over it"? Some people do not understand the concept of total and outrageous forgiveness. Many cannot understand the truth of Jesus's forgiveness as well. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Joseph then tells them that although they meant the situation of their selling him into slavery for harm, God intended it for good. We ask how could anything good come from such a horrendous act? Well, we can look at all the lives saved by Joseph being put in charge of the whole kingdom.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God". (Romans 8:28) This as well, seems to be too trite to accept when we see all the heartache and disaster in the world. Are you suffering unjustly because of the act of someone else? Are you suffering the loss of a job, rebellion by a child, or infidelity of a spouse? Or is your heart broken by the loss of a dear one as mine is right now at the sudden death of my beloved Dad? While this beautiful man, who was so proud, handsome, vibrant, strong, and healthy was lying in the hospital suffering the indignities of a major stroke, I asked God, "How could this happen?" I'd memorized Romans 8:28 a long time ago, and it just didn't seem to cut it. But, then, I saw family gathering and supporting each other and becoming close again out of our shared grief. And we had the most wonderful gift of all: my Dad confessing his faith in Jesus Christ while he could still talk. What could be better or more hopeful than that?

In the midst of our pain, brokenness, or rejection if we can just keep our eyes on Jesus, God can turn our suffering and injustice into triumph. How? I have no idea... But I do know that "His grace is sufficient for me." (2 Corinthians 12:9) That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Genesis 50:15-20

Peggy Thurston

Second Wednesday in Lent

Wednesday 04 March 2009

Terror and Glory

Judgment and Hope

I struggle as I read this judgment speech from Isaiah. It is not difficult for me to align my ways, our ways, with those in Israel. Our land is filled with idols yes, and there is no end to the chariots and temples. Every high tower, every beautiful structure, and all prideful people are being warned here.

Yes, I get that. That's me.

But what I struggle with most is finding the hope in these words given to Isaiah. I believe, through faith, that this "day" – this day against all days *will* put an end to the chariots and skyscrapers and soothsayers and liars. But when? And what am I to do in the meantime, waiting for this day? How do I wait for that?

Perhaps the hope is found simply in that very faith God has given. Maybe believing that God will do what He has promised is hope enough. Imagine Isaiah saying, "Amy, don't worry how it will happen – or when that day will occur. Come, let us *walk* in the light of the Lord."

I guess it's time for a walk. Thanks be to God.

Isaiah 2:5-22

Amy Boers

Second Thursday in Lent

Thursday 05 March 2009

Oppression. Slavery. I am a stranger to these as surely as I live a blessed life. Yet there is darkness. There is suffering. There are as many forms of suffering as there are saints in the church. A lost child. A broken relationship. The death of a parent. My own sin of angry self-righteousness. I turn inward, hiding my struggle...but God knows. It blinds me to the suffering around me, consumes me, isolates me...but God knows. I am silent in my suffering, just as I am silent to the sufferings of my brothers and sisters around me. But God knows. We each pass through valleys of darkness, struggles, and trials known only to ourselves. We are silent in our suffering, waiting for God to deliver us through our valleys to the other side. Whom will he send?

“So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites out of Egypt.” *“I will send you.”*

You. Me. As I read this passage I see the love of Jesus Christ in the faces of those around me. I hear the whispered voice of the Holy Spirit in the mouths of my brothers and sisters in this church. Even as we suffer we are sent to care, to care for one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ—not to eliminate the suffering, but to walk the road together, that we might pick one another up when we fall. Whom shall He send? He already has. All we need to do is ask.

Exodus 3:7-10

Dave Ekse

Second Friday in Lent

Friday 06 March 2009

As instructed by God, Moses has come out the wilderness to go to Pharaoh and to tell him that he was to let the people of Israel go out of his land (Exodus 6). Pharaoh asks for proof, a sign, that this is something he must do. Moses does a sign but Pharaoh rejects it and “hardens” his heart. This same scenario occurs a total of ten times. Nine times Pharaoh “hardens” his heart. The tenth time, the Lord visits death upon the first born of Egypt. At this, Pharaoh finally allows the Israelites to leave. However, after they have departed, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened yet again, and he pursues the Israelites.

The Lord allowed an attitude of hope to build up among Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites with the announcement of His presence among them via Moses. That hope becomes a waning one with each of the tests being rejected by Pharaoh’s “hardening” heart. With the successful tenth test and Pharaoh’s order of release, the hope of Israel is again restored. The final judgment that was cast upon Pharaoh, the slaying of the first born of Egypt, was more than he could bear.

Judgments often have a disheartening affect upon us in our daily lives. But if we can base our hope in this life on the promises of God realized in Christ Jesus, we can keep that light of hope burning in our hearts regardless of the challenges, burdens, heartbreaks, disappointments, and ordeals that we will encounter almost daily.

To God alone be the Glory. Amen.

Exodus 12:29-32

Ken Edmonds

Second Saturday in Lent

Saturday 07 March 2009

Less than a month. Despite witnessing the miracle of God in the Red Sea crossing, less than a month was all it took before the Israelites were grumbling and remembering the good ol' days back in Egypt—those good ol' days as oppressed slaves under Pharaoh. I'm often surprised at the Israelites' short-term memory. Yet, I'm also drawn to examine how quickly I can find myself grumbling in unproductive ways in the midst of my own circumstances. Rather than turning to God in prayer and taking note of all for which I can be thankful in a given situation, it can be tempting to focus instead on all the negative aspects of a particular circumstance and even search out those who will join me in my grumbling.

Continuing with the story, we find out God's response to all of this grumbling of the Israelites. Amazingly, He responded not with harsh words and judgment, but rather, with provision. He responded with another miracle, showering manna from heaven. It is interesting to read that this provision came with specific instructions: the Israelites were to *gather each day*. Gathering an extra amount to hoard away for a month, or even an extra day, was not the way it worked.

As God provided for the Israelites in the desert, so God provides for us. We are God's precious children, and we live in the hope of the promise that God will not render upon us the judgment we deserve. Instead, God sent to us the true Bread of Life through whom we receive the gift of eternal life. Given that God has graced me with this gift in the midst of my grumbings, I am led to ask myself if I am "gathering" this provision of Bread. Am I spending time reading the Bible, conversing with God through prayer, and worshipping with fellow believers? Further, am I receiving this nourishment on a daily basis?

Let us journey, then, in this Lenten season and beyond, trusting that we will be nourished and sustained in the midst of challenging circumstances, even in the midst of our grumbings. Let us come to our Father and gather, for His provisions are perfect and plentiful. In Him, we receive rest for our souls; in Him, we receive life.

Exodus 16:2-4

Christal Hillstead

Second Sunday in Lent

Sunday 08 March 2009

True Judgment Will Lead to Hope

The story starts with the Israelites complaining about their situation, being ungrateful for all that God has given them and speaking against God and their leader Moses. God, in response, sends poisonous snakes against the people. The people suffer and many die from the poison, and then the people admit their sin. They ask Moses to pray to God and ask that the snakes be taken away. Moses does as the people ask, but God does not take away the snakes. Instead, he has Moses make a bronze snake on which the people could look when they were bitten in order to save them from death.

We clearly see God's judgment in this story when the snakes are sent to punish the people, and we find hope fulfilled when God answers Moses's prayer with a way to save the people from death. Without digging any deeper, we see a God full of wrath, one that punishes severely when the people sin and forgives after the sinners repent, not by preventing the punishment from continuing, but by allowing the people to survive the ordeal. I have always had difficulty reconciling this God in the Old Testament with the God of love Jesus speaks of in the New Testament, but as I read this story, a quote from a book came to mind: "...judgment is not about destruction, but about setting things right."*

With this new definition of judgment in mind, it is not too difficult to see the God in this story as a God full of love. When the people chose to sin, God punished them to set things right. In the world today, there are many places where people suffer. The governments where many of these people live do not pass laws for the good of the people, and when they punish people it is not to set things right, it is a power play. The result is millions of people living in nearly hopeless situations in places like Haiti, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this story, when the people repent and have hope that they will be forgiven, God has accomplished his goal to set things right, and so, out of love, he shows mercy by providing a way for the people to survive the consequences of the sins they chose to commit.

*Young, P. (2007). *The Shack*. Los Angeles: Windblow Media. p169

Numbers 21: 5-9

Anna Hagen

Second Monday in Lent

Monday 09 March 2009

As many of you know, my father was a Lutheran pastor. One of the things I would discuss with him was how he prepared a sermon or prepared to deliver a homily. I am sure his answer was a little “tongue-in-cheek” reply. He said, we were taught in seminary to divide every sermon into three parts: “(1) Tell them what you are going to tell them; (2) tell them; and (3) tell them what you told them.”

Sounds foolish, but when you think about it perhaps it is the best way to approach any reading. In Psalm 7, David has written a “lament.” He seems to follow the three theme outline. He begins by putting his trust in God and asking for deliverance from his persecutors. In the middle section he again repeats his plea that his “defense is of God.” Finally, he closes this psalm with “I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high.”

Now repeat the third statement above and re-read Psalm 7. What is God saying to us through Psalm 7? Talk to me, believe in me, thank me. As one of the King James version's annotators wrote: “The complaint or lament has been resolved, and the psalm ends with ‘a note of confidence and trust in God’ .”

Prayer: Dear Lord, grant us the patience we need to read, to understand, and to re-read your scripture. To listen, to hear, and to believe. Amen.

Psalm 7

Art Larson

Second Tuesday in Lent

Tuesday 10 March 2009

I have always thought of Psalm 33 as a Lenten Psalm. The psalmist reminds us that our salvation is not in the power and strength of armies, but rather in “the steadfast love of the Lord” who suffered and died on the cross for us.

May our daily prayer in this Lenten season 2009 be:

*May your constant love be with us Lord,
as we put our hope in you.*

Psalm 33:16-22

Dean Berg

Third Wednesday in Lent

Wednesday 11 March 2009

God's judgment in Isaiah continues as we hear his decree from Israel's lips against those who oppress the marginalized—the widows and orphans. But the same God speaks of a shoot that shall come from the stump of Jesse and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him and he shall not judge by what he sees or hears but with righteousness. How is God's righteousness made manifest in the lives of God's people? How will God judge through righteousness when the people remain unrighteous in their living? How does God, will God, condemn the wicked while indicating the possibility of hope in a new day?

Isaiah 10:1-4, 20-23; 11:1-9

Third Thursday in Lent

Thursday 12 March 2009

That God rises up in judgment to save all the oppressed of the earth is good news to me. I think of neighbors without jobs oppressed by the greed of others. May God rise up to save them. I think of people in foreign lands oppressed by governments, economic systems, social customs, religions, and many other powers. May God rise up to save them. I think of the youth, oppressed by school culture, unfair parental expectations, demands to be more glamorous and extravagant than the neighbor. May God rise up to save them. My heart aches for the oppressed of the earth.

But wait: who and what is God saving all of these oppressed people from? Do I not have a hand in the oppression? Could God be saving them from me? Like the earth that stands still and fears when God rises up, so I too am fearful. If God is saving the oppressed my life will not and cannot be the same. I am among those who squander the gifts given to me. I use time and money not to serve the neighbor in need but to serve myself, my family, and my friends in lavish ways. I revel in the good deals that I find at the store that come delivered on the backs of people who make 1/100th the income that I do. I participate in cheering on the sports icon and the celebrity (secretly longing for a piece of their life) while not investing nearly the same time in the disciple, the sacrificial servant, or the broken & hurting stranger. Such things are not as glamorous or extravagant.

Yes, I stand in silence. For who can stand when the anger of God against such things is roused? Not I O Lord, not I. My heart is burdened for I am oppressed by sin and do not want to change my ways... how dare Christ call me a saint. And judgment comes – the truth is revealed – I am guilty. I have oppressed and I am oppressed. God's judgment is to put an end to that which oppresses me – my sin. His word of judgment is "Forgiven". God says "Forgiven" to the my sinful desire to be unchanged. God says "Forgiven" to the sin that presses me to pursue extravagance instead of discipleship. God says "Forgiven" to the sin of hoarding and squandering that I so often claim as my own. And because of Christ I am set free from this sin. Simultaneously the oppressed of the earth are now set free from me and my selfish ways. No longer restrained by sin I am free to help the neighbor. No longer oppressed by sin I am free to break the expectations of culture. No longer confined in my sin I am free to care for the world in ways that were unimaginable before.

As those who are set free, you and I now stand at the crossroads of either joining in the Psalmist's praise of God or to returning to the state of oppression by picking up that former life again. May that old self be drowned in the waters of baptism again today that we might join in saying, "But You, O Lord, indeed are awesome."

Psalm 76:7-9

Pastor Ben Quanbeck

Third Friday in Lent

Friday 13 March 2009

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!" Thus begins Psalm 130. How often my own voice has uttered these words in fear and pain, hoping God would listen when the rest of the world would not. Yet, the last phrase seems a little arrogant. At the very least, not reverent.

Then the psalmist recalls himself. "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" Indeed! It suddenly occurs to the author that he is not entitled to demand God's attention and he confesses as much immediately.

"But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered." Thankfully, the psalmist remembers his God is loving and forgiving, and, hopefully, not inclined to punish him for his brazen approach.

He then proceeds with "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."

Whatever the psalmist's original supplication was, he has now decided to wait for the Lord; to hope in his word, to wait, and wait, and wait, until God provides an answer, understanding, comfort, relief, whatever it is his soul needs. He no longer demands God's immediate attention and action. Now he will wait.

Enlightened as he has now become, the psalmist now turns to his community and says, "O, Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord, there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities." In four short paragraphs, the psalmist has moved from his individual anguish, to self examination, to a confession of faith in a merciful, loving God, to evangelizing the love and power of God to others. We should all slide through theology so briskly!

I love the Psalms. They are my first destination in fear or sorrow, sadness or joy. They give voice to the pains of life that defy articulation. Wait for the Lord. Rest in the Lord. Trust in the Lord. Find hope in the Lord. Find peace in the Lord. "For with the Lord there is steadfast love and with him is great power to redeem."

God's peace to each of you.

Psalm 130

Charlotte Thompson

Third Saturday in Lent

Saturday 14 March 2009

“Happy are those
whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,

who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;

who executes justice
for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.”

Psalm 146

Third Sunday in Lent

Sunday 15 March 2009

I think I must have triple-checked my bags (yes, there were *several* bags) to ensure that I would not forget anything on my wedding day. The dress and veil seemed easy enough to remember, but all of those meticulously planned details like the 'something old' grandmother's handkerchief to the 'something borrowed' mother's necklace, each were essential to remember in order to celebrate the day, as I desired. Even though I realized that all I *really* needed was my husband-to-be, my family, and certainly that lovely dress, as I left the hotel the morning of my wedding I knew that forgetting anything, especially the special accessories, was to be avoided at all costs!

The prophet Jeremiah seems to understand my earnestness as he says, "Can a girl forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" The answer though unwritten, is undoubtedly, "of course not!" Just as a bride could not fathom forgetting her attire on her wedding day, Jeremiah proclaims that in the same way, the children of Israel could not have possibly forgotten their Lord. However, the impossible has come to pass. Despite the Lord's faithfulness in freeing them from bondage, leading them through the wilderness, and providing manna to nourish and sustain them, the children of Israel have responded with complaint, rebellion, and violence toward one another.

The Lord's message through the prophet is ominous, yet hopeful: "Now I am bringing you to judgment...for the Lord has rejected those in whom you trust and you will not prosper through them." The judgment that comes holds the transgressors accountable for their sin, requiring that Israel "acknowledge her guilt, that she has rebelled against the LORD her God...and has not obeyed my voice, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 13:3). In bringing judgment, the Lord not only holds them accountable for their actions, but also demonstrates His extravagant love by bringing to an end the sin – and the sinner – that entices Israel away from the Lord who remains bound in love, to His creation. In the wake of the Lord's judgment, Jeremiah declares that they "shall be put to shame...[and] will come away with their hands on their heads."

Despite the unsettling words of Jeremiah, the image of the masterpiece of the bride, with her attire and ornaments in place as designed, lingers in our minds. From out of the judgment that the Lord brings exists a promise of restoration, a longed-for reinstatement of relationship, and the hoped-for new creation that comes forth from death. May we be so judged; and so restored by the mercy of the Lord.

Jeremiah 2:29-37

Pastor Jen Quanbeck

Third Monday in Lent

Monday 16 March 2009

“Take warning,
O Jerusalem,

or I shall turn
from you
in disgust,

and make you
a desolation,
an uninhabited land.”

Jeremiah 6:8-14

Third Tuesday in Lent

Tuesday 17 March 2009

LAMENT

I dreamt that the cities of the world were secure, fortified. And the Lord turned their inhabitants into pillars of salt, used their corpses to salt the fields, used their corpses to brine the waters.

The Lord turned the fertile into fallow, turned stone and metal into slurry and rubble.

Baghdad, Ciudad Juárez, Gaza, Kabul, Lhasa, Mogadishu, Sarajevo, NYC.

Somehow, miraculously, I survived.

My sustenance is the gravel scattered over the cracked asphalt of streets and avenues. I mask my nakedness in ashes, smearing them about my form with bleeding hands.

I try to capture my tears as they fall, but am able to merely laugh and lament:

All is gone, these things that the Lord has provided are but a dream, blown away as chaff upon a stiff breeze.

And I wait. And I wait. And I wait.

I wait and remember the goodness of the Lord. The mercy of the Lord. The faithfulness and generosity and grace. The steadfast and sure love.

And I dream of the Lord's care for the sparrows, ever providing seed and grub and clear pool of water, ever providing stable perch and the shelter of green leaves.

I dream that I am a sparrow, flying over the ruins of the cities of the earth.

Baghdad, Ciudad Juárez, Gaza, Kabul, Lhasa, Mogadishu, Sarajevo, NYC.

Lamentations 3:16-26

Troy Kehm-Goins

Fourth Wednesday in Lent

Wednesday 18 March 2009

The sign-act of the prophet Isaiah walking naked demonstrates the displeasure of God with Judah's easy willingness to align with foreign countries (Egypt, Ethiopia) against the will of God. Judah refuses the protection of God and his sovereignty, turning instead to the protection of others, including other deities. God judges Judah in the words and actions of the prophet (30:18), yet continues to wait graciously for Judah's return. What alignments do we readily engage against the calling of God? What "foreign" deities do we embrace against following the will of the Lord?

Isaiah 20:1-6; 30:9-18

Fourth Thursday in Lent

Thursday 19 March 2009

As I read and reflect on this text it seems that Jonah was a reluctant individual. The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Get up (Was he lying down, tired, unwilling, lazy?), go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." Jonah gets a second chance. He went a day's walk into the city, one third into its depths, and then cried out, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Jonah knew what he would say. He would proclaim the message that the Lord told him. So why did it take him a full day to do so? What was he doing all day?

The people of Nineveh believed God, the king believed God. Everyone, great and small, no matter their status, repented and God did not bring calamity upon them.

Jonah, despite his urges, is in the time and place where God wanted him.

Am I? Is my heart open to trust God in all things?

Jonah 3

Skip Harrison

Fourth Friday in Lent

Friday 20 March 2009

Israel was steeped in sin. God called forth a prophet and showed the prophet how He was going to punish Israel for her sins. The prophet begged for mercy and the Sovereign Lord “relented.”

Judgment and hope: irreconcilable differences or necessary companions?

I say necessary companions.

How can one hope for a desired outcome if another, less desirable outcome, is not also a distinct possibility? Conversely, one does not hope for the absolutely impossible—like jumping off a high place and hoping gravity doesn’t work.

Place your hope in the Sovereign Lord and in His relenting.

Amos 7:1-6

Michael Brauhn

Fourth Saturday in Lent

Saturday 21 March 2009

For several months, we have been inundated with messages reflecting the panic that exists today in our world economy. We hear about stimulus packages designed to help this nation to pull itself out of the economic recession. And we also hear statements from others suggesting that other strategies should be implemented. These economic dynamics are impacting Jan and I. Like me, I think most of us feel quite helpless now. We struggle with the questions: What actions can we take to protect ourselves? Are there any actions we can take? How long will this recession last? Will I have enough during my retirement years? Is there time for me to recover from the recession? As for me, I simply do not know.

God speaks to us through scripture. In today's text from Matthew, Jesus had ascended a mountain in Galilee—a beautiful and very peaceful location from which you can overlook the Sea of Galilee. Not really a mountain, but a large hill. From this location, Christ preached to the crowds that had followed. This is the Sermon on the Mount. Today's text from Matthew, Chapter 6 speaks to us at this time when we find ourselves in a "panicky economy" as described above. The text describes who and what we are as Christians. It is about giving; it is about sacrificial giving, about prayer and the privacy of these actions. Jesus tells us not to flaunt our piety before others. Our prayers, our sacrifices and our giving are between us and God; not for public exhibition.

Jesus speaks to us with these words: "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."

Jan and I have found this to be very comforting. Some of our children and grandchildren continue to need our help. And our neighbors need help. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. Yes, times like these test our faith. And these are times when our giving becomes even more important than our gifts during good times. It is in these times when we must realize how little control we have over our world. It is with God that we must have trust. It is my hope that as a congregation we will continue to give generously to the neighbor during these difficult times.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Let us pray: Father, we thank you for the many blessings you have brought to each of us. We thank you for the blessings you have brought to the community of MVLC. We ask that the spirit be in us to share from what we have with a generous heart, to love God and to love the neighbor. Amen.

Peace.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Bruce Sisco

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sunday 22 March 2009

Darkness

Here I am hidden.

Here I am safe from their watchful eyes.

Here I can do what I want with no consequences.

Here I live for myself.

I have fooled them all.

If this is good: Why am I tormented?

Why am I questioning my freedom?

Why am I looking for direction?

It is cold. It is lonely.

I feel forgotten. I feel alone. I feel afraid.

I am trapped.

I see a light. I see a hand. I see a scar.

I see a face of one who loves me.

I see a way out.

His hands are extended.

His arms are open.

He has come to save not condemn.

Light

Here I am free.

Here I am safe under their watchful eyes.

Here I understand grace. Here I am lead by truth.

Here I live for others.

I will no longer be fooled.

John 3:17-21

Jesie Holden

Fourth Monday in Lent

Monday 23 March 2009

“Here is your king,” Pontius Pilate said to the Jews. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God,” the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:19). And Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

We cannot, as disciples of Jesus Christ, escape the divine royalty of Jesus made known as a suffering servant destined to die. Pilate ironically announces it, Paul elaborates on the mystery of it, and Jesus tells his followers there is no other way to be my disciple but to take up your cross and follow me.

“So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him.” We, and by we I mean we in the church, have done much to distance ourselves from the crucified God. Maybe like Peter long ago, we seek to deny the Christ of God out of fear of the implications in our own lives. If the One we call King, Messiah, Lord suffers betrayal, woundedness, and death, then what of his followers? “For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies.” (2 Corinthians 4:11)

Here is our King—crucified. Do you still wish to follow?

John 19:14-19

Pastor John Vaswig

Fourth Tuesday in Lent

Tuesday 24 March 2009

The very first thing that popped into my head when I read this text was that playground taunt, "It takes one to know one." You remember, when someone called you a baby, you could swiftly reply, "It takes one to know one", suggesting that to recognize infantile behavior in another individual requires one to also be intimately familiar with those same childish characteristics in oneself. In this text, we (and yes, I mean we) call out to the other, "You are a sinner," and God, knowing our very hearts, replies, "It takes one to know one."

The King James Bible begins this text with the words, "Thou art inexcusable, O man." There is no excuse for this kind of behavior and the text declares that; "the judgment of God rightly falls" upon those who join in the finger pointing when they are actually guilty of the very same things. Judging others is really just a diversion, a covering up of our own faults, sins, and failures. But we aren't fooling anyone let alone our God who knows our innermost being and calls us by name.

God's principals of judgment are clear. Only he can be the final judge, not you, not me. By passing judgment on others for the very things we do, we have basically condemned ourselves as well. Where does this leave us? Caught red handed? Yes. Guilty as charged? Yes. Open to judgment? Most assuredly. It also leaves us with verse 4b. "Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" In loving kindness, God leaves us with an opportunity for change, for repentance, for turning from our sin and turning toward God. God's loving kindness is meant to lead us to the place where we can hear the words heard in a recent Wednesday Night Live homily, "I judge you forgiven." That is our hope.

Romans 2:1-4

Lynn Wadnizak

Fifth Wednesday in Lent

Wednesday 25 March 2009

In this text we hear about the carpenter who takes a cedar tree and fashions an idol with half of the wood and then uses the other half to make a fire to bake bread, roast his meat, and keep himself warm. He then worships his idol. “He cannot save himself or say is not this thing in my hand a fraud?”

As I was reading this text, I suspect the spirit prompted me to look up and admire my wonderful timber frame house on Puget Sound. I began to realize that my reflections on this text plus the fact that I found myself thinking, “I worked hard for this house and deserve this reward,” make the house my idol! I then thought of the carpenter in the story who forgot who made the tree grow that provided him with food and warmth. I was quickly reminded that I was not responsible for the huge yellow cedar tree that provided the logs from which came the beams, or the skills that crafted the beams, or the talent of my son whose design made it possible. These were all gifts from our Lord.

Returning to the “Judgment and Hope” theme, I believe we receive *Judgment* when we worship the idols we create or put ourselves at the center of our lives. Fortunately, we always have the *Hope* that God will turn us from our idols and the assurance that God will provide abundantly.

Isaiah 44:9-23

Don Mott

Fifth Thursday in Lent

Thursday 26 March 2009

We are judged by others and especially by God in all that we do and say here on earth, and there are even times when we are guilty of passing judgment on others, either rightly or wrongly. How many times have you thought that you could pass judgment, even upon God? Seems rather harsh, doesn't it? God passed judgment on the Israelites many times for not following the ways He put before them. God has judged all of us although we may not have knowledge of it, or readily admit it.

In the verses of Romans 5 that precedes today's text, we are given "the hope that does not disappoint us." (verse 5) We have been given that assurance and hope that we are joined with God by the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Blessed Hope!

Romans 5:6-11

Lindy Nelson

Fifth Friday in Lent

Friday 27 March 2009

“Do you not know
that wrongdoers will not
inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived!”

1 Corinthians 5:12b–6:10

Fifth Saturday in Lent

Saturday 28 March 2009

With Christ, death may win the battle, but death loses the war. Human life is in constant battle with death, which ends in the grave. To be born one day means to die someday. With Adam birth is followed by death; with Christ there is a second birth followed by life. In the meantime we are baptized into Christ's death so that we might rise with Him.

For the apostle Paul, the most significant aspect about Jesus was not just that He was a great man who was a victim of injustice, but, as one crucified, He rose from the dead. It was the confrontation with the resurrected Jesus, beginning on the road to Damascus, which validated for Paul that with Jesus there is life after death. Trusting the testimony of Paul and confirmed by experiences in my own life's journey, I believe that with Christ as Lord and Savior there is life after death.

When I was child the most significant holy day was Christmas; in my second childhood it has become Easter. I used to look forward expectantly to the pre-Christmas season. Do I now look forward to Lent with heightened expectation? Does going to church more often and getting serious turn me on?

Lent comes from an Anglo-Saxon word that means Spring. As in springtime when darkness succumbs to light and life emerges, it is a time to cultivate; so with Lent it is a time to cultivate a mindset and lifestyle that consider the significant event of Jesus' resurrection. Without death there is no resurrection as without Good Friday there is no Easter. The old Adam is crucified so that in Christ we might be resurrected to the new life. Lent for me is not religiosity per se, but a time to get real about the stark but glorious reality that with Jesus' death and resurrection there is for us life after death.

1 Corinthians 15:16-26

Al Carlson

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sunday 29 March 2009

This was a psalm of David after the prophet Nathan came to him following his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. In this psalm, David begs for forgiveness from God and for His mercy, asking God to wash away all his iniquity and to cleanse him from his sins.

During the winter months of 2008 and into 2009, we enjoyed the beauty and peace of an abundance of white snow. Have you noticed the peace one feels and how the world appears to be pure during such times? Don't we wish that we felt such peace and purity of heart and mind as on a day in which snow has fallen?

In Psalm 51, David begs for the Holy Spirit to restore him to purity following his transgressions with Bathsheba. Words such as "wash away", "cleanse", "create in me a pure heart" and "restore" all speak of turning from sin and returning to a pure heart.

In verse 3, David says his sin is always before him, and isn't that true for each of us too? It is hard to face or see our own sins, even when they are right in front of us. These sins have consequences in our daily lives as we realize that we reap what we sow. I suspect that our judgment of others plays into that sinful thought, word, or deed.

Fortunately, our God is a loving, merciful and forgiving Lord. We live in hope regarding God's divine judgment because of his divine mercy. It is in His loving act of sending Christ for us that we know this mercy and may be given a pure heart.

Psalm 51 describes David's broken and contrite heart. It also speaks of his hope in God's loving mercy to restore him to the joy of His salvation. It is in this hope that we need not fear facing our own sins, no matter how ugly they may be, for God is merciful.

When you enjoy another day with snowfall, drink in the peace and purity and ask God for a pure heart.

Psalm 51

Tracy Becht

Fifth Monday in Lent

Monday 30 March 2009

When I read this scripture I ponder what judgment is and what it means. Is there a final judgment? Are we all being judged each day right now? Is judgment bad or good? Who is the judge?

According to N. T. Wright "There will indeed *be* a judgment in which the creator God will set the world right once and for all". He also says "God's coming judgment is a good thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, yearned over".

I have always believed that there will be a final judgment; this may very well come from my confirmation days. However, not everyone believes a final judgment will occur. Some believe we are saved by Grace through Faith and we are forgiven and there will not be a final judgment. Yet, most scripture supports the belief that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead as we confess in the Nicene Creed.

In a recent bible study class Pastor Jen clarified this in a very simple way. When we are baptized on account of Christ we are judged Holy and Righteous. We then live our lives and are judged each day by what we do as disciples on this earth, and judged and punished under earthly law. Could a final judgment very well include our works on earth? This question brings us back to Ephesians 2: "We are saved by Grace through Faith to do Good Works".

We do not have authority to judge others. God only has this authority. All our sins are equal in God's eyes and we all fall short of the Glory of God. What judgment really means is a mystery. The final judgment whether for good or evil is the ultimate decision of God. On this earth we need to fear the Lord and do what is right in our conscience.

Thanks be to God.

2 Corinthians 5:10-11

Diane Nelson

Fifth Tuesday in Lent

Tuesday 31 March 2009

“Christ died for all,

so that those who live might live no longer
for themselves, but for him who died and

was raised for them.”

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Sixth Wednesday in Lent

Wednesday 01 April 2009

As much as God loves us, indeed, because of such wondrous love as this, God's spirit deeply grieves when we rebel against him. Think about it: every time we rebel, turning against the will and way of God, God is actually affected. Like a parent grieving a wayward child, God's spirit is downcast and the divine being experiences disappointment and sorrow in the choices and false lives of his children.

In the midst of such divine grieving, God will, at least temporarily, become the enemy of his own chosen. God will enact judgment on a people who have forgotten or neglected the divine ways. God, the One who shows great favor to the house of Israel—God, the One who has redeemed us in Jesus the Christ, in a grace made known—will also do what it takes to cause his beloved to remember. To remember the mercy and steadfast love he has shown. To remember God's gracious deeds and praiseworthy acts.

During this Lenten season, we repent yet again before God as we acknowledge our self-justifying tendencies and our failure to consider first the kingdom of heaven. We dare to thank God for the times when his judgment has brought us to our knees that we might remember all over again a divine mercy and love given.

Isaiah 63:7-14

Pastor John Vaswig

Sixth Thursday in Lent

Thursday 02 April 2009

This knowledge of Christ and most delightful comfort, that Christ became a curse for us to set us free from the curse of the Law—of this the sophists deprive us when they segregate Christ from sins and from sinners and set Him forth to us only as an example to be imitated. In this way they make Christ not only useless to us but also a judge and a tyrant who is angry because of our sins and who damns sinners. But just as Christ is wrapped up in our flesh and blood, so we must wrap Him and know Him to be wrapped up in our sins, our curse, our death, and everything evil.

“But it is highly absurd and insulting to call the Son of God a sinner and a curse!” If you want to deny that He is a sinner and a curse, then deny also that He suffered, was crucified, and died. For it is no less absurd to say, as our Creed confesses and prays, that the Son of God was crucified and underwent the torments of sin and death than it is to say that He is a sinner or a curse. But if it is not absurd to confess and believe that Christ was crucified among thieves, then it is not absurd to say as well that He was a curse and a sinner of sinners. Surely these words of Paul are not without purpose: “Christ became a curse for us” and “For our sake God made Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Isaiah 53:6 speaks the same way about Christ. It says: “God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” These words must not be diluted but must be left in their precise and serious sense.

Therefore Christ not only was crucified and died, but by divine love sin was laid upon Him. When sin was laid upon Him, the Law came and said: “Let every sinner die! And therefore, Christ, if You want to reply that You are guilty and that You bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well.” Therefore Paul correctly applies to Christ this general Law from Moses: “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.” Christ hung on a tree; therefore Christ is a curse of God.

And this is our highest comfort, to clothe and wrap Christ this way in my sins, your sins, and the sins of the entire world, and in this way to behold Him bearing all our sins.

He could neither have become a curse nor have died, since the cause of the curse and of death is sin, of which He was innocent. But because He took upon Himself our sins... it was right for Him to bear the punishment and wrath of God—not for his own person, which was righteous and invincible and therefore could not become guilty, but for our person.

By this fortunate exchange with us He took upon Himself our sinful person and granted us His innocent and victorious person. Clothed and dressed in this, we are freed from the curse of the Law.

Galatians 3:11-14

Martin Luther

Sixth Friday in Lent

Friday 03 April 2009

This scripture in “The Message” by Eugene Petersen states, “It’s in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation) found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what’s coming, a reminder that we’ll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.”

When I read this version, the words “signed, sealed, and delivered” caught my attention. It reminded me of the song, “Signed, sealed, delivered, I’m yours.” But, in conflict with the lyrics, “I’m yours”, God instead is saying, “You are mine”. It is difficult for me to fathom that long before we heard of Christ, he had already chosen us and had a plan for our life. He sealed this plan in our baptism. We are the first to hope in Christ and praise in his glory.

What is clear to me is the responsibility we have to answer our call of discipleship and to live out the plan that God has for us. I don’t know about you, but I struggle on a daily basis to listen and, more importantly, to respond to the plan that God has for me and to continually praise a glorious life. There are days where my life doesn’t feel very glorious. With the struggles that we all experience, it is difficult to find the hope described in this reading. In fact, we may more likely say, “Plan? What plan? I can’t see where God is present in my life. I don’t see where he is leading me. In fact, I think he has checked out. How can he be present in this time of struggle in the world? Praise and glory? Come on? It’s not realistic. Life, right now, in the current culture and climate, pretty much stinks.”

But the reality is, God is present in our lives and he does have a plan for us. This amazing message once again humbled me. What a glorious and wonderful gift we have of God choosing us and providing liberation. We are “home free.” It is our sinful nature that weighs down the freedom offered in this hope. It is our sinful nature that denies and disrupts the plan that God has for us.

I pray that during this time of Lent you take time to discern how each of us, through sin, denies the hope that is offered in this glorious gift offered in Christ, and, ultimately, how each of us denies our call to discipleship. I pray that you take the time to examine your discipleship and ponder the plan that God has for you. God’s peace and hope to you in this Lenten season.

Ephesians 1:11-14

Julie Williams

Sixth Saturday in Lent

Saturday 04 April 2009

What a helpful, encouraging message! The Colossians must have been filled with gratitude that they and their fruits were being lifted up in prayers of thanks by Paul. What a gift. What a liberating relief. Giving thanks frees us to press on with the assumption that we are on the right track.

How do we always give thanks for our fellow believers? It precludes operating with critical attitudes, nit-picking at how a church member is doing a task, or lobbing verbal stones at whole denominations of Christian believers who do not share our precise theology.

The starting point is humility and gratitude for all God has done for us. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can move to a grace-filled, thankful attitude toward others, and, then, like Paul, uphold one another in prayer.

As the song goes:

*Brother, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace to
let you be my servant too.*

*We are pilgrims on a journey,
we are sisters on the road.
We are here to help each other
walk a mile and bear the load.*

Colossians 1:3-6

Carolee Berntsen

Palm Sunday

Sunday 05 April 2009

To say nothing about the strengthened hearts, the first part of this wish-prayer about comfort and hope has been mine for the last month—even though over the last several months, many companies have made the decision to cut jobs to reduce costs, I had felt safe. Now, I find myself part of the uncertainty, looking everywhere for the comfort and hope that I won't have to look for a new job or depend on the government to get food for my body and a roof over my head. I keep checking the company's website looking for a press announcement that the cut positions have been announced and that my department was spared, but with nothing new there, I am forced to hold fast to my hope.

Since the second letter from Paul to the Thessalonians is full of encouragement (and instruction), we get a sense that the Thessalonians, like us, may be feeling defeated and hopeless with their circumstances. The Thessalonians weren't dealing with a new President or massive job cuts, but they were definitely living with a lot of uncertainty: Jesus was gone, supposed to be coming back *sometime*, and the majority was wondering why this Jesus character was so special (and probably casting doubt on the Thessalonians' professed way of life)!

The Thessalonians were a community both apart from and in the world, much like Mountain View. As members and visitors, we pass through the campus's sacred space, gathering hope, comfort, and strength around us like a quilt or protective bubble and as we interact with the larger global community that often doesn't understand, we fight to keep our faith intact. Yet even with comfort and good hope, we cannot forget the strength to continue in the world. In this time of uncertainty and doubt, what does it mean to have a heart strengthened in good works and words? Does it mean that we should be immune to the world's anxiety or lock ourselves away from it? What makes your heart strong? Where and how do comfort and hope fit with strength?

"May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ."
2 Thessalonians 3:5

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Malena Hansen

Monday in Holy Week

Monday 06 April 2009

This is a word not often heard in the church. It is a dangerous word. Such a word left by itself can bring each of us to the place where we question the salvation promises given to us in baptism. Therefore, as a pastor of this church I encourage you to read all of Chapter 10 in Hebrews and be reminded of the good news of Christ and the hope that we share.

What did this reading from above do to you? Did it make you fearful? Did it cause you to consider the ways that you persist in sin? Did it bring you to the place where you could announce with the writer “It IS a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” I found all of these things happening inside of me as I read the text. Such responses are intended. This threat comes to us with the intention that we will turn to God for mercy.

Yet, this is not a false threat. “The Lord will judge his people.” God does have something to say about our willfully persistent sin. God demands that we love and serve the neighbor. I believe the anger of God is kindled by the way we treat each other, the neighbor, and the world. As we confess in the Apostle’s Creed: God will judge the living and the dead. God’s judgment is real.

Simultaneously we hold this word in tension with the mercy of God made known in Christ Jesus. We cling to the promise that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8). We have heard the good news proclaimed and trust that the promise that we are indeed children of God is true. God’s mercy is real.

God’s judgment is real—God’s mercy is real—at the intersection of these two things is faith.

Hebrews 10:26-31

Pastor Ben Quanbeck

Tuesday in Holy Week

Tuesday 07 April 2009

Let's raise our voices and shout with joy! In his great mercy, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a Living Hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For those who believe, that means a new life and everything to live for, including a future in heaven. But, our Hope isn't only for the future, eternal life begins when we trust Christ and join God's family.

Remember, as we await Christ's return, we will face grief and suffering of all kinds. These come so our faith proves genuine, resulting in praise and honor when Christ is revealed. God will help us remain true to our faith throughout all the difficulties we must face. Recollect the words Jesus uttered to Thomas: *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."* John 20:29

In the meantime, we are called to remain faithful to God by serving him in a variety of ways. Whether at church, home, school, or in the community, our help is needed. Pray about it and listen for God's direction. *He's there to guide us every step of the way!*

Thanks be to God for giving us the Spiritual Gift of Hope!

1 Peter 1:3-9

Karen Aaserud

Wednesday in Holy Week

Wednesday 08 April 2009

Many of the churches to whom John writes experienced persecution. Life was generally pretty rough for Christians in the first century. Some were publicly humiliated, others were cast out of communities, and some were even killed. However, the problem at Laodicea is not that life is so bad but that life is so good. The people admit that they live a comfortable life: "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing"—and so they live in such a way that is neither hot nor cold. For the sake of maintaining their status and position in society the Laodiceans choose conformity rather than the radicality of the gospel.

Living in the suburbs, I don't experience the "needs" that many of the people of the world experience. We have a roof over our head, food in the refrigerator, and a heater that keeps us comfortable. I am educated, have a good job, and I have people around me who love and support me. When the gift giving holidays come each year I find myself repeating that phrase of the Laodiceans "I need nothing". Sure, I have wish lists but it is often really just for the accumulation of more stuff that will add to my comfort.

This text hits me square between the eyes: "Because you are lukewarm...I am about to spit you out of my mouth...Be earnest, therefore, and repent." God's judgment comes in the form of a warning: "I am ABOUT to spit you out". The judgment calls for a dramatic change in my life - repentance. Judgment also tells the truth: "You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." Despite all our efforts to prove otherwise, God knows and announces the truth about us. Yet there is hope in this. God could have allowed the Laodiceans, you, and me to continue on our merry way in disillusionment, yet God chose instead to call us to repentance and a new life. God offers the things that we truly need and draws us to God's self, reminding us that this word of warning and discipline comes out of love.

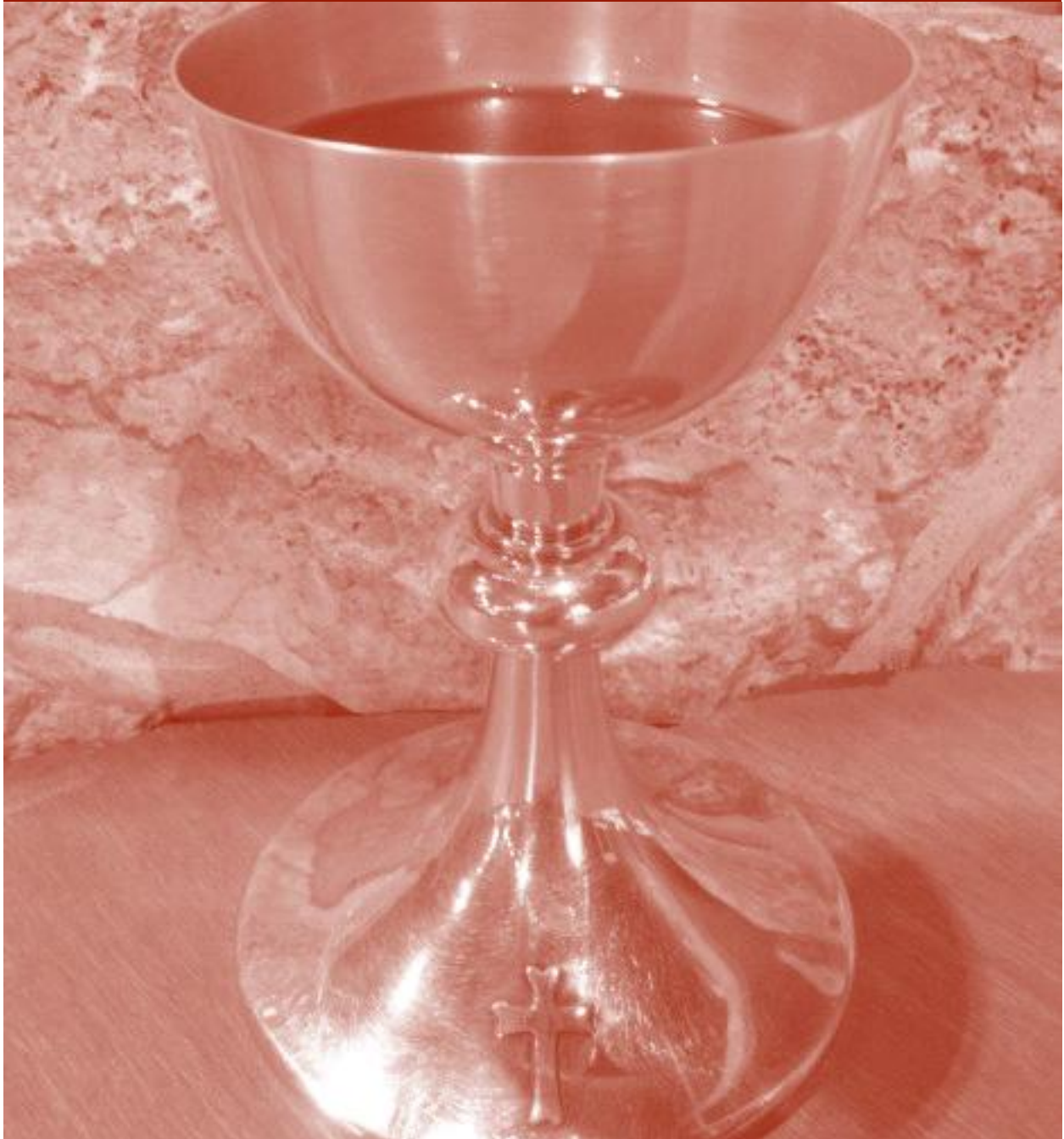
Thanks be to God.

Revelation 3:14-20

Pastor Ben Quanbeck

Maundy Thursday

Thursday 09 April 2009



**Exodus 12:1-14 • Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 • John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

Good Friday

Friday 10 April 2009



**Isaiah 52:13—53:12 • Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16-25 • John 18:1—19:42**

Easter Vigil

Saturday 11 April 2009



Romans 6:3-11 • John 20:1-18

Easter Sunday

Sunday 12 April 2009



**Acts 10:34-43 • Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:1-11 • Mark 16:1-8**

Thanksgiving

Thank you to all of the members of the congregation of Mountain View Lutheran Church who struggled and wrestled with some of the Biblical passages of judgment and hope, and then wrote a devotion.

Thank you for your willingness to commit your thoughts and reflections to print.

Thank you for your bold courage. Thank you for your questions. Thank you for your faithfulness.

Lent & Holy Week

LENTEN MIDWEEKS

Soup & bread dinners at 6:00 p.m.

Worship at 7:00 p.m.

Wednesdays in February, March, & April 2009

Ash Wednesday • Wednesday 25 February 2009

Wednesdays 04, 11, 18 & 25 March 2009

Wednesday 01 April 2009



HOLY WEEK WORSHIP

Maundy Thursday • Thursday 09 April 2009 • 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday • Friday 10 April 2009 • 7:00 p.m.

Easter Vigil • Saturday 11 April 2009 • 7:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday • Sunday 12 April 2009 • 8:15 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.

Mountain View Lutheran Church