

BRYN MAWR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2026

Lenten
Devotional



INTRODUCTION

When I was in high school, I attended a national Presbyterian youth conference, which chose the theme of “living water” to guide our worship, study, and fellowship for the week. Of course, a week like that would not be complete without the inclusion of one of the most iconic stories from the Gospel of John – the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, to whom Jesus offers the gift of living water. The story was interpreted in worship through dance, and I can still vividly remember experiencing the text and, in many ways, Jesus Christ in a new way for the first time, through that powerful and beautiful interpretation. It is, in fact, one of my earliest memories of coming to faith as a follower of Jesus Christ.

This year’s Lenten devotional focuses specifically on stories such as the Woman at the Well, where individuals – men, women, friends, strangers, disciples and critics – are engaging Jesus either for the very first time or in new and powerful ways. What is especially engaging in each of these stories is the dialogue – the back and forth that Jesus has with the faithful and skeptics alike. Whereas in other Gospels, Jesus may come off as curt or clipped in his teachings, in John he lingers and explains in ways that can help us all more meaningfully engage in his message of love, grace, and resurrection.

This year’s devotional book is full of reflections from pastors, staff, and members who themselves have shared their impressions of Jesus in these stories and the ways that encountering Jesus in the Gospel of John gives us insight and encouragement for the Lenten journey.

May we all walk the path towards Holy Week and Easter, willing to encounter Jesus in new ways that we might ourselves be renewed in the process.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca".

The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick

Associate Pastor for Adult Education and Mission

The Testimony of John the Baptist

John 1:19-34

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water.

Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

JOHN 1:19-34 - THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Thursday, February 19

Many years ago, I was involved in a conflict resolution program at Graterford State Prison. Since I was serving on a committee there that included both inmates and outsiders, I was once asked if I would serve as a witness at a Sunday service where some men would be baptized. One thing that hits you when walking down the corridors of a prison is the persistent high noise level. But I was pleased to hear the joyful noise of the assembled congregation of inmates when I walked into the auditorium where the service was to take place. Along with about five other witnesses, we sat on the stage, which had a large walk-in tub sunken into the floor. Every element of the service was followed by loud clapping. Say a prayer; everyone clapped. Sing a hymn; everyone clapped. Listen to a rousing and lengthy sermon; everyone clapped. In fact, some men were so moved by the sermon that when the call to baptism came for the two or three men who had signed up in advance, they were joined by about a dozen other men who came forward for the full-immersion baptism. As each man emerged dripping from the tub and was led backstage to change into dry clothes, I wondered what this act meant to them. Was this just a lark to lighten the boredom of prison life, or was it the start of a meaningful spiritual awakening? Those of us baptized as infants take on the continuous personal responsibility of intentionally reflecting later in life on our own baptism and how it directs our relationship with God and neighbor. Only God can then judge the sincerity of one's baptism.

- Phoebe Sheftel

JOHN 1:19-34 - THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Friday, February 20

John testified as to his purpose: that the Lord should be revealed. John's message is part of his record for eternity. What will my record be? How do I find a truly meaningful purpose? By obeying when God prods by the Holy Spirit.

When we have the courage to obey God, it's not just our individual effort any longer. It's the Holy Spirit of God making fruitfulness - the miracle of fruit-bearing - through our lives. That, I believe, is what God has in store for each one of us if we will yield to the Holy Spirit and obey God.

That will be our record: that we bear much fruit, that we live a productive life that honors and glorifies God, producing by our impact upon other people - producing others who also know and love and abide in the Lord Jesus. Fruitfulness, abiding in Christ, makes us productive.

Too often, I ignore the nudge of the Holy Spirit. I am so busy most days, yet I rarely do any lasting good with my hard work.

"Without me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing." Accomplishment or ineffectiveness - there is no middle ground. If we let God work through us, the results of our lives will remain. John obeyed the One who sent him to baptize with water. That's our authority, too: the One who sent me said.

God has greater things in store for each of us if we just obey when the Holy Spirit speaks to us. People will know that God is real when they touch our lives. I hope that will be my record.

- Stephen McConnell

JOHN 1:19-34 - THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Saturday, February 21

As a child, I believed an expectation that, as soon as I turned 18 and legally an adult, everything would magically fall into place. The life I had imagined for myself growing up would immediately happen, and all the hard work of preparing for that life would pay dividends. Just a decade and a half ago, I dreamed of studying Geography at university, of pursuing a career in commercial aviation, and of staying in England. None of that happened. Here I am, a professional musician working in a PC(USA) congregation in Pennsylvania, USA. This may be almost diametrically opposed to what and who I thought I'd be, just fifteen years ago. And yet, I feel more settled than ever before, more at peace with the life that I have been so gratefully afforded.

In this passage from John's Gospel, we see John the Baptist having a clear sense of who he is, and more importantly, who he is not. Conversely, we see the people around him less sure of who he is ("the voice") than who he is not ("the Messiah").

How often are we sure of who we are, and to that end, how do we manifest that in the world? The older I get, perhaps the less sure I am of who I am, but the surer I am of who I am not. How do we reveal to others who we are if we aren't so sure ourselves? Through our words, deeds, and the relationships we foster along the way, we can more clearly see a picture of who we are.

This Lent, I ask that you lean into both who you are and who you are not, fully embracing the person God created you to be.

- James Kealey, Director of Music and Fine Arts

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT - FEBRUARY 22

Call of the Disciples

John 1:35-51

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸

Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹ And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

JOHN 1:35-51 - CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Monday, February 23

If you go a page back and start reading from the beginning of John, it's easy to be lulled into a rhythm and a sense of timelessness. We start at the Beginning with the Word, in verses that we've heard so many times before; we can't help but hear the story in John's particular cadence, taking us back to Creation from Day 1. We switch our minds to the widest aperture possible – we're in the universal scale at the start of John 1.

Then: The Thunder in the Desert, with John the Baptist, the rumbling words of Isaiah. And then we zoom in, and the pace accelerates. We're into this series of verses that are in the time scale of hours and days. The words even quicken: The “first thing” Andrew does is “immediately” lead Simon to Jesus, in one translation.

Maybe the “this-is-all-happening-a-little-too-fast” sense that we get from reading in this context is how the Disciples also felt. After all, Andrew & John had probably spent many a long day on the banks of the Jordan River with John the Baptist, day in and day out, manning the evangelical post in the wilderness. Even the thrill of the odd confrontation with the Pharisees probably couldn't cover a bit of boredom.

Listening for the call of God is chaotic. And when answering that call, a lot can happen, quickly. Was there trepidation among those Jesus recruited, the Disciples whom we'll spend so much time with in the following chapters? John, the author, seems too caught up to tell us. Nathaniel is skeptical, but after the very first exchange with Jesus, he's in.

Answering the call in those 48 hours must have been exciting! The Disciples can't wait to tell more people; they must have felt the possibility of “the greater things” of which Jesus speaks. We can relate to them in this moment: just remember a time you've had some news you can't wait to share, an endeavor that you can't wait to start – everything seems to happen so fast. God's call to each of us can land in a moment, and we need to be ready to rapidly respond, so that we, too, can see Heaven open.

- Eddie Higgins

JOHN 1:35-51 - CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Tuesday, February 24

I'm in the business of leadership development. I educate leaders about responsible, effective, impactful, and caring leadership. In a society where achieving high and influencing others has a premium value, my work with leaders and leaders-to-be thrives. In this context, the command of "Follow me" is counter-cultural, uncomfortable, and uncool.

Personally, however, I have not neglected the concept of followership in my lifetime. When I was young, I was an innocent follower like Simon and Philip. I thought I could abandon my personal dreams to follow Jesus without question. As I was growing up, my preference shifted from followership to leadership. Blinded followership felt old-fashioned, risky, and unreasonable. Like Andrew, I became a scoping follower. I was searching for a true leader whom I could follow while keeping my life's goals and dreams intact. As Andrew was hopping from John to Jesus, I vacillated my allegiance from Jesus to global intellects and philosophers. Like Nathanael, I was also a cautious follower. I doubted, questioned, and challenged the messiah-ship of Jesus because I needed more convincing evidence that he is indeed the "Son of God" who is also the "Son of Man."

Three things happened in my lifetime, that helped me commit my followership to Jesus' Lordship. First, Jesus personally acknowledged me as a person who used to stand "under the fig tree" while I was cautiously checking him out. He knew my struggles, doubts, and ambitions to become a great leader like him. He still called me to come and follow. Second, my community of fellow believers at home, church, and workplace kept inviting me back into communion with Jesus. They did not mind even if my faith in Christ was wavering or fading at times. They still called me to come and see. I finally came to accept the truth that Jesus was not calling me to serve him personally and selfishly. Yet he still demanded my followership so that I could learn to become an impactful leader to serve others in Christ's terms. I know that I have been called to both follow and lead for God's saving purpose of humanity.

- Heewon Chang

JOHN 1:35-51 - CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Wednesday, February 25



JOHN 1:35-51 - CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Thursday, February 26

I have often wondered what Jesus would think of modern society if he walked among us today. What would he have to say about the way we live our lives, about what is important to us as individuals and as the wealthiest society on earth? What would he think of our political system, our social norms, our education system, our international relations, and the technology that makes both instantaneous communication and utter destruction possible?

This week's passage gives us the opportunity to turn this question on its head: What would we think of Jesus if he were to walk into the grocery store, the farmer's market, the post office, bank, or church on a Sunday morning? Would we recognize him for who he is? Would we, like Andrew and Simon, drop our bags of groceries and fresh produce, the cash we had just withdrawn, and follow Jesus based on the word of our pastor in the pulpit? Or would we, like Nathanael, scoff, "Can anything good come out of Camden?"

How many of us would look at this hippie in a robe and sandals and proclaim, "Teacher, you are the Son of God"? I doubt that I would. If Jesus walked up to me today and said, "Believe me when I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," I doubt I would stick around to hear anything else he had to say. And I certainly would not give up my admittedly troubled, but overall comfortable, life to follow this crazy man. As much as I might like to see heaven opened, the thought of seraphim and cherubim appearing on Lancaster Avenue is terrifying.

Thank goodness we have the disciples' words to bear witness to who Jesus was and is, so we may believe.

- Brian Middleton

JOHN 1:35-51 - CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Friday, February 27

In the late 1920s, Lev Vygotsky, a Russian educational psychologist, began elaborating on a key classroom observation. He called this theory the “Zone of Proximal Development,” noticing that children learn best when they see a peer or a trusted adult complete a task and have someone accompany them as they explore a new skill or concept. Moreover, the skills grow when the child can then teach another. This shared learning means that we are more likely to gain the skill, master the task, or navigate the concept. Both peers, the knowledgeable one and the learning one, grow in expertise by nature of the experience. I can imagine Vygotsky would have found a kindred spirit in Jesus.

In the passage, Jesus invites the disciples to learn by watching and participating. He doesn’t lecture; he just invites. What they see is so powerful that Andrew immediately invites Simon Peter and Phillip goes on the search for Nathaniel. They teach one another how to be disciples. It is a model that has shaped the church for over two millennia. Of course, we could lecture about faith, we can read books about Christian practice, but we learn how to follow Jesus by watching one another and by teaching others.

I see this kind of discipleship still at play in the church today. It happens in the moments when we invite another to learn alongside us. When a parent leans over and whispers the words to the Lord’s Prayer, when our elementary students help teach the 3 year olds, when an usher welcomes a guest, when we pray together, when we struggle to find the right way to respond to tragedy, when we mourn together, and when we worship together. In each of these instances we are learning from one another and we are teaching in our actions. We are discovering how to follow Jesus, and he leads with the simple invitation, “Come and see.”

- The Rev. Rachel Pedersen, Associate Pastor for Children and Family Ministries

JOHN 1:35-51 - CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Saturday, February 28

I never was a big fan of John's Gospel. Too much lofty language, "high" Christology, not enough of Jesus' humanity. I've always felt more drawn to Mark's bare-bone stories.

But I've never quite known what to do with Mark's account of the calling of Jesus' disciples, where they immediately dropped everything to follow him. That abrupt, all-or-nothing response always felt unattainable to me.

So, I was surprised by John's story. I'm a little embarrassed to say that I don't remember reading or hearing this passage before this Lent. Reflecting on it made me realize I've missed something important by avoiding John. His "call" is mostly not commanding, more like "So-and-so said some really cool things about this Jesus guy. Maybe I should check him out," and their experience leads them to join him. John the Baptist calls Jesus "the Lamb of God." Andrew and another spend an afternoon with Jesus. Based on that, Andrew tells his brother Simon, "We've found the Messiah." Philip invites Nathanael to "come and see."

Notice the pattern: someone experiences Jesus and shares their response with someone else. That person comes to check it out and has their own encounter with Jesus. It's a chain reaction: testimony sparks investigation, investigation leads to commitment. Not by command but by invitation.

Jesus models this approach. With Andrew and his friend, Jesus asks, "What are you looking for?" Inviting their introspection. That question pulls at something in me — following him feels like the way to an answer.

And each disciple also brings their own hopes about who Jesus will be — Lamb of God, Anointed One, Son of God, Israel's King, who Moses and the Prophets wrote about. Two millennia later, we say all these in the same breath. But in the passage, each person names their own sense of what draws them to Jesus.

Aren't both of these — invitation and noting what draws us — the way we come to discipleship today? They certainly were and are for me. So, John's version of the calling is the one in my back pocket now.

- Paul Burgmayer

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 1

Nicodemus Visits Jesus ***John 3:1-17***

³ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” ³

Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

JOHN 3:1-17 - NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

Monday, March 2

Like Nicodemus, I have struggled to understand Jesus' metaphors about being "born from above" or "born of the Spirit" as necessary conditions for "entering the kingdom of God." I have also found problematic Jesus' explanations of his forthcoming crucifixion, that "God gave his only Son...that the world might be saved through him."

Over time, I have come to understand "being born again" as a metaphor for learning to live less from my separate, egoistical perspective (small self) and more from an awareness of being part of the collective human family and cosmos (True Self). This shifting from individual to communal perspective sometimes just happens, perhaps by grace. More often, it requires conscious effort of both head and heart. But this perspective shift also feels profoundly worthwhile and "right". It brings a sense of peace, connection and mystery that fits Jesus' description of "hearing the wind blow, but you do not know where it comes from." This feeling of connectedness is also my hesitant understanding of the kingdom of God in this earthly life, as "being saved" from the pain and fear that often accompany a disconnected, ego perspective on life.

As for the larger, afterlife question of what Jesus meant in saying that his mission was that we should be "saved" and have "eternal life", that feels beyond my understanding for now. The traditional theory of atonement -- that a loving God needed Jesus to die in order to forgive our sins and grant us eternal life -- has never made sense to me. I find much more compelling the alternative explanation of the crucifixion, summarized by Richard Rohr in the words: "Jesus did not come to change how God sees us, but to change how we see God." Viewing Jesus' death not as a transaction or rescue effort but as ultimate evidence to show us God's unconditional love is a revelation for which I am deeply grateful.

- Patricia Danzon

JOHN 3:1-17 - NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

Tuesday, March 3

Whoever believes in him may have eternal life. It's our belief in God that perseveres and leads us to identify with God who was born from above. It's our ability to believe in God that enables us to be born of the Spirit as we feel the wind around us. We hear it and feel it, but sometimes have no idea where it has come from or is going to. So, it is with God. We feel his presence but know not where he goes or where he has come from. But if we sense this, we are able to follow him on earth, and after our life on earth is complete, we will be able to follow him to the ends of the earth and above into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Music has been my motivation to believe in God for most of my life. My mother introduced me to choral music when I joined a boys' choir at age eight, 64 years ago. I learned how to read music, and I have found solace and support ever since. Every time I sing, whether in rehearsal or performance, I am reminded of my mother, who died 55 years ago, and I am filled with her spirit.

And I feel the Lord's spirit within me every time I have the privilege of singing to the glory of God. And I feel supported, sustained, and satisfied, as it is a joy to be able to sing and feel the spirit of the Lord. Music is so important to me.

Whosoever believes in him (The Lord) may not perish but have eternal life. So, as we all contemplate our birth (of water) on Earth, we are born of the spirit from above if we indeed believe in the Lord and practice that belief. Belief and behavior.

And so it is with my music. I feel it through the rhythm and sense it with the notes, and am comforted knowing that my mother and the Lord continue to oversee it. I am so grateful and thankful and feel so blessed.

- Tony Brown

JOHN 3:1-17 - NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

Wednesday, March 4



JOHN 3:1-17 - NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

Thursday, March 5

At the time of writing this, I have just completed the most stressful part of high school. Amidst finalizing college applications and ensuring grades are sufficient for colleges, I finally feel some relief and, in the end, reward. However, because of the stress I have endured, anxiety and mental health struggles have resulted, which feel as though they hinder my ability to trust God to the fullest. In seeking some ideas on my reflection on Nicodemus' visit to Jesus, I watched the encounter in the TV Series, The Chosen. Nicodemus is portrayed just as I have felt.

Nicodemus approaches Jesus and emphatically states, "I just don't know where to start, I have so many questions." So do I. One of the questions that Nicodemus struggled with was being "born from above." Nicodemus struggles to have faith in something that looks so far off amidst life's challenges. To have faith stems from the knowledge that, if I submit my life to God, then in turn, I will be rewarded with a life spent with Jesus. It was not easy for Nicodemus to fathom this when he was face to face with Jesus, so therefore it may not be immediately easy for us, either. But hold fast.

Jesus shared with Nicodemus that one must believe in God in order to have eternal life. Therefore, Jesus came so we can spend the rest of our lives with God beginning today. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Follow me, and you will see more." Let's go!

Lord, help us to fully put our trust in you, as Nicodemus did. Even in our doubt, help us to come to you with our difficulties and allow you to walk us through our lives, not worrying about the past or the future, but only living in the present moment with you. Grant us the patience to hold fast to faith in you and begin our "eternal life" today. Amen.

- Peter McConnell, Youth Deacon

JOHN 3:1-17 - NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

Friday, March 6

I probably shouldn't admit this, but I had forgotten the original context of our holy book's most publicized line. I am of a particular age where the phenomenon of a person displaying a John 3:16 poster at a sporting event was ubiquitous enough to be parodied, most notably for my middle school self by fans of the professional wrestler "Stone Cold" Steve Austin with their "Austin 3:16" signs.

Isn't it strange, though, that this most apparently self-evident of verses comes after a long back-and-forth between Nicodemus and Jesus and as the culminating line in an arcane monologue, all of which occurs under the cover of night? I cannot help but wonder what was lost when this verse – the gospel in a nutshell, we are told – was dragged into broad daylight and strategically positioned to maximize exposure.

In the case of shame, it's important to remember that bringing our shame into the light, particularly among a trusted community of loved ones, allows us to heal and grow. Usually, the shameful thing we were so afraid to face isn't nearly as bad as we thought. But there is an important place for inward self-reflection as well. It's ok to sneak over to Jesus's house in the middle of the night and work through a tough issue.

I realized in writing this that I hadn't seen those John 3:16 signs for a while. It turns out the man who masterminded them is serving three life sentences in prison. He rejected a plea deal because he thought a jury trial would give him more opportunities to spread the gospel.

This Lent, I'm going to try to remember that it's ok to let something work on me in my own spirit without maximizing it for consumption by others.

- The Rev. Andy Greenhow, Associate Pastor for Youth & Their Families

JOHN 3:1-17 - NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS

Saturday, March 7

For many who spent their early years in an evangelical church, we know this passage well as the basis for the Born Again Movement. As little children, we are taught to recite verse 3:16 almost as soon as we can talk. The irony of that tradition is, and I am not condemning, merely pointing out, that the very iron grip they have on the beginning of the passage leads them to miss the important message in verse 3:17.

But we all can be guilty of this, right? We find a passage or story that fits a need or helps us justify our own already preconceived notions. I wish as a child I was required to memorize 3:17 instead. I think then I would have learned much sooner not to judge others.

It gets pretty simple: if we are called to live like Jesus did, then we are not called to condemn one another, but to help one another.

There is a lot going on in the world today, and it can often feel like there is nothing we can do to help. People use their version of religion to justify everything from bigotry to full-on genocide. So, what are we called to do in the face of so much judgment and condemnation?

To love and not judge. Easier said than done, when someone shows up to church in khakis, or God forbid, jeans. Easier said than done when a visiting family keeps their baby with them, gurgling next to you through the sermon. Easier said than done when your political beliefs are different than your cousins and “If they would just listen to reason, Easter Dinner would be a lot less complicated.”

Regardless of how good we think we are doing at following the teachings of Jesus, we have a natural inclination to judge everyone and everything around us, and that includes ourselves.

So, as we wrestle with these passages this Lenten season, I ask you to look at what you judge and condemn vs love. To resist the temptation to judge and look for ways to show compassion, kindness, and forgiveness instead. My hope is that while we are just one small part of this big, wide, and hurting world we can flow with the spirit of God and send a refreshing breeze of love over our community and world.

- Meggin Capers

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 8

The Woman at the Well **John 4:5-42**

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water

gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things

Next Page Cont.

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 8

to us.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.”³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’

³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did

not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

JOHN 4:5-42 - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Monday, March 9

The Woman at the Well is the person with whom Jesus has the longest conversation recorded in the New Testament, and she is the first believer in any of the Gospels to become an evangelist.

Yet she is “The Other.” An Alien. A Heretic. A Stranger. A Foreigner.

- (1) Ethnicity/Race. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans in ancient times was entrenched and bitter, embodied and real. In our time, who is “The Other”: immigrants from Central America or Africa, for example?
- (2) Gender. Women were devalued in society in the Samaritan woman’s time, demeaned, disregarded, and unnoticed, with no standing. In our time, who is “The Other”: LGBTQIA+ individuals, for example?
- (3) History. She had a questionable past. In our time, who is “The Other”: those with histories of addictions, drug use, mental health issues, or homelessness, for example?

Who is “The Other” for you?

In His interaction with the Samaritan woman, Jesus invites us to look at her as a sister and an apostle, and not as “The Other:” a harlot, a heretic, an alien, a stranger, a foreigner, or a threat. During this Lenten period of prayer, penitence, and fasting, I believe that Jesus would call us to surrender the stereotypes we carry and release the prejudices we nurse. May we live into the truth that people are more than the sum of their national, gender, historical, cultural, racial, religious, political, or economic identities.

My prayer is that we have ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to drink in the Good News found even in the most unlikely places from unexpected voices, such as from “The Other”, which might otherwise remain disempowered and overlooked, dismissed and invisible.

Amen.

- Judith Ehrman

JOHN 4:5-42 - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Tuesday, March 10

Every time I read the story of the Woman at the Well, I am reminded of how many people we cross paths with every single day. We see them in the grocery store, on the train, at work, at the gas pump, faces we may never notice, names we may never learn. And yet, each one is a soul deeply loved by God. In the rhythm of our busy lives, it becomes easy to stay in our own headspace, to look down, move faster, and avoid the interruptions that come in the form of human need.

As Christians, our hearts say we want to help others. We want to live lives that reflect Christ's compassion, inclusivity, and grace. But the truth is, doing so is often difficult. The world feels unsafe. The news feeds our fears. We are taught to protect ourselves, to keep our distance, to assume the worst before offering the best. And so, like the disciples in John 4, we may pass by the very moment when God invites us into holy conversation.

The Samaritan woman didn't look like someone Jesus "should" be talking to. She was a woman, a Samaritan, an outsider with a past, and still, Jesus met her with dignity and love. He listened. He spoke life. He offered living water. He saw beyond her circumstances and into her soul.

There's a pop song that asks, "What if God was one of us...just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home?" What if He was? What if He has already been in the form of that homeless man outside the store, the co-worker who looks defeated, the cashier who seems overlooked, the neighbor whose name we've never bothered to learn?

Jesus tells the woman, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink." What if the "stranger" we ignore is the very person God sent to teach us, soften us, or allow us to show His love?

Today, may we slow down. May we see the people in front of us. May we listen with compassion, respond with grace, and remember: Sometimes the person we avoid is the person Jesus would sit beside.

Reflection Question: Who is God inviting you to notice today?

- Lawana Scales

JOHN 4:5-42 - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Wednesday, March 11



JOHN 4:5-42 - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Thursday, March 12

As Jesus was sitting by the well, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. It was noon, probably very hot, and not a usual time to come to the well. Maybe the woman came at this hour because she was considered promiscuous and an outcast, as she had five husbands. She wanted to avoid being shamed by others. Though customarily Jews did not associate with Samaritans, Jesus struck up a conversation with her and symbolically offered her “living water”. He knew everything about her. For the very first time, Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah! The woman was amazed and returned to the city to spread the word about the man she had just met.

The story tells me that Jesus accepts us as we are, no matter our sins and flaws. He accepted a Samaritan woman who was a stranger with an “unsavory” past. He understood her suffering. Jesus wants us to do the same- welcome the stranger, honor all people without judgment, accept differences. Love one another!

There is a painting at The Barnes Foundation by the African American artist Horace Pippin (1888-1946), titled “Christ and the Woman of Samaria” (1940). Pippin was self-taught, and his paintings often depicted the ordinary lives of black families that were mostly unknown to whites. His work addressed the history of slavery and racial segregation in the United States. His work also depicted biblical subjects. I love the simplicity of the painting with its darkness and light, the purple of Jesus’ cloak, the bright white of the woman’s dress, and the dramatic sky. The woman holds her jug. She and Jesus are peacefully speaking. I keep a postcard of this painting on my bookshelf. I often wonder why Pippin chose this story to paint. Could it be that he believed and knew the “living water” freely given to all by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Maybe this painting was his way of telling us.

- Susan Thorkelson

JOHN 4:5-42 - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Friday, March 13

What do you think about the fact that Jesus, the son of God, asks another person for help? The text tells us that Jesus is tired after his journey, and thus he asks for a drink of water. But if Jesus miraculously turned water into wine, couldn't he miraculously draw up water from the well -- without anyone's help (or even a bucket)? Yet Jesus does ask for help.

As always with Jesus, more is going on in the story than a simple drink. Jesus appears to be bridging a divide: this person is a Samaritan (with whom Jews did not associate), and she is a woman (with whom men did not associate in casual ways). He is also bridging a divide between the reality of who he is (the son of God) and the fact that she is unaware of who he is (the one who can give her living water). In bridging these divides, he invites her to the life of faith. He sees her as a human being with whom he might share a cool drink on a hot day -- rather than an outsider to be avoided or feared. As a result, Jesus and the woman connect, and the woman's faith is not only born but starts to grow.

If you're like me, you grew up in a culture that taught you to do for yourself rather than ask for help. However, what I have learned is that when we ask another person to help us, we ask them to connect. Would you describe yourself as someone who is comfortable asking others for help? Jesus teaches many things in this story, one of which is the importance of asking for help. I wonder, is there something you need right now, for which you could ask someone else, or ask God, to help you?

- The Rev. Melanie Hardison, Associate Pastor for Congregational Care

JOHN 4:5-42 - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Saturday, March 14

Two tenets of my faith: Remembering that I am already known by God; and knowing that I have been given the gift of eternal life. The Samaritan woman experiences both in John 4. To read afresh the familiar encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, I am approaching the story differently, putting myself in her place

As I kneel by the village, well filling my bucket, a stranger asks me for a cup of water. I am surprised, because a Jew would not normally interact with a Samaritan. As we talk, I discover that he already knows all about me, my marriages, and my current status. Who is this man? Shifting from actual water, he describes “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” His words tell me that I am in the presence of a prophet! Owning up to my past, I ask, “Give me this water.” I say I know that the Messiah is coming. Impressed that I believe, though I am not among the Jews promised salvation, he commends me, saying, “You worship what you do not know.” Accepting me with my transgressions, he has offered me eternal life!

This scene dramatizes the Good News: Jesus, the Son of God, offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe in Him. The narrative is a personal account of a mortal (like us) physically present with Jesus. The natural, everyday-ness of the story is beautifully profound in its simplicity. The unnamed woman represents us all. What unspeakable joy to hear the gift of eternal life promised to her - and to us! Like this woman, we are known for all we have ever done and yet are forgiven, the essence of the Gospel in one brief encounter. As we continue on our spiritual journey, our faith can evolve into a peaceful knowingness.

- Anna May Charrington

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 15

Man Born Blind ***John 9:1-41***

⁹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud,

spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he

Next Page Cont.

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 15

was born blind,²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”

²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he

opened my eyes.³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

JOHN 9:1-41 - MAN BORN BLIND

Monday, March 16

One of the most magnificent truths of our Holy Scripture is that it consistently meets us where we are... all of us are, regardless of the circumstances. While it is our human frailty that causes us to point blame, Jesus brilliantly responds, “neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so God’s works might be revealed in him.” It is all about our great God. We are all blind, and we are all able to relate. It is the Spirit of the Living Christ who opens our eyes to “behold God’s grace and glory.”

But “look again.” Is it just our inability to “see?” Jesus also recognizes our inability to listen and speak. We don’t listen when others desperately need to be heard; we speak when we should be silent. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus heals a deaf and mute man by looking to heaven, sighing, and healing him from within, demonstrating that true healing and restoration come from God and from a change of heart.

We are blind; we cannot hear, and we cannot speak. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, neither can we walk. Jesus specifically heals the paralyzed man in the well-known story as friends of Jesus lower the man through the roof. Jesus first and foremost forgives the man’s sins. He then commands him to “Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.”

In every instance, Jesus is calling us to action! Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva, and said to the blind man, go wash in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed, “I don’t know what happened,” he said. What I know is “once I was blind, and now, I see.” Jesus commands the paralyzed man to “pick up his mat and walk.”

And one more. Scripture tells us time and time again, “don’t be frightened,” “don’t be anxious,” “fear not.” Jesus tells us he will be with us “even to the end of time.” And Saint Paul calls us to action again, “to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward one another, mirroring the forgiveness they have received from God through Christ.” Paul calls for replacing the negative: bitterness, wrath, and anger with a generous, compassionate, and merciful attitude. The motivation for this behavior is rooted in God’s free and complete forgiveness of our own sins.

We are called to respond to the incredible and sufficient grace provided to us. Get up and walk, open your eyes, don’t be frightened. Always with Thanksgiving and Praise to our great King of the Universe.

- Rob Bickhart

JOHN 9:1-41 - MAN BORN BLIND

Tuesday, March 17

Reading this passage, I wonder: Can we look inside ourselves and uncover our own blindness? I recall my own childhood when my parents sheltered me from the realities of life. I was fortunate to be born into a loving family. We lived in a rural area, yet our Church home was in downtown Harrisburg. While driving through some worn-down parts of the city, we often encountered people who were living on the margins of life. My dad and mother would sometimes make observations about them. Even though I saw compassion in my parents, I saw their fear of cities when I decided to go to nursing school in the city, living in West Philadelphia.

Moving to the Philadelphia area helped cure my own blindness to the realities of the world. Becoming a nurse provided me with varied opportunities to work in many settings. Now there was no car window to separate me from the realities of urban life. Along my journey, I was grateful to work with and care for people with varied religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. I cared for many Muslim women and their families, and learning about their lifestyle practices was enlightening. As a homecare nurse, I especially recall one young Latina mother living in a rundown apartment in North Philadelphia. She was a welfare recipient and was struggling to survive. When we approached her baby's crib, I was appalled to see bugs crawling on the sheet next to the child. I refrained from making a judgment and got busy teaching this mother about hygiene. She taught me that she loved her child as much as I loved mine.

Being active in this Church, where we hear and study God's word- where we can take advantage of many ways to serve and learn from our neighbors near and far in the urban/suburban divide- where we practice how to show God's love - has been life-changing. I am deeply grateful for these opportunities to grow.

As Christians, God is calling us to listen, observe, and respond... to deeply "see." The words of this hymn play over and over in my head: "Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me, Place in my hands the wonderful key, that will unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for thee, ready my god thy will to see... open my eyes, illumine me... Spirit Divine."

- Kathy Kreider

JOHN 9:1-41 - MAN BORN BLIND

Wednesday, March 18



JOHN 9:1-41 - MAN BORN BLIND

Thursday, March 19

The story of the man born blind has a rich cast of characters and includes Jesus revealing considerably more about himself than he usually does. But rather than focusing on those revelations, I'd like to examine the changes that the blind man experiences. Initially, picture him abjectly sitting at the side of a dusty path - unseeing, hot, thirsty, probably hungry, and feeling every ounce of the pity exuding from each passer-by. His spirits and self-esteem are down in the depths.

Now picture him after he has washed in the pool of Siloam. First of all, he can see where he's going. What a huge change that is! Secondly, he seems to have acquired some feistiness and self-esteem. The blind man surely would not have sassed the Pharisees. But the seeing man can speak to them forthrightly, calling into question their lack of attention to what he has told them about recovering his sight. He even deigns to preach to them a little.

They don't like this at all and drive him from the company of the synagogue. But compassionate Jesus seeks out the now-seeing man and asks him if he believes in the Son of man. With great humility, the formerly blind man inquires about the Son of man, believes what Jesus tells him, and worships him - joining the ranks of believers.

After a few more comments and responding to a question from the Pharisees, Jesus tells the inquiring Pharisees that they are indeed sinners.

May we all be more attuned to our blind spots and seek to minimize their effect.

- Steve Mygatt

JOHN 9:1-41 - MAN BORN BLIND

Friday, March 20

When I read the stories of Jesus' miracles, like this one, I try to remember that they are not just displays of His prowess to heal all sorts of infirmities, but lessons to learn about God himself and how to live the Christian life. So, what insights might God have for us to learn from this story?

The story opens with a beggar who, apparently, asks Jesus for a handout. But Jesus, without giving him what he begs for, bestows on him a benefit much more worthwhile than money—his sight. Like this beggar, I, too, ask God to intervene in my world, begging Him to heal my friends of cancer and to soften the hearts of political leaders who wage war and who oppress immigrants, Palestinians, and the poor. Perhaps I miss Jesus' lesson here. Perhaps I, and we, rather than despairing over “unanswered” prayers, ought to focus on all the other “displays of God's works,” all the unrequested (and undeserved) benefits we enjoy—the love of family and friends, the community of this Church, and all the expressions of His love that surround us. It's far too easy to overlook all those benefits for which we never even asked --- and for which we ought to thank Him.

Confronting this pesky beggar, Jesus' disciples, rather smugly, attribute the beggar's blindness from birth to his own fault—his own sin or even his choice of parents! Jesus rebuts their presumptions that the beggar somehow deserved his affliction. How careful we must be not to blame “illegal” immigrants fleeing poverty or persecution, Palestinians trapped in Gaza or the West Bank, or those suffering with alcohol or drug addiction for their own afflictions or circumstances. If Christ doesn't blame them, how can we?

Finally, it seems unfair that God would cause the beggar to be blind just so Jesus could display his medical prowess. But that loses sight of the important lesson Jesus teaches his disciples, and us, that there are God's works of compassion and generosity we ought to perform while we still can, before it's too late!

- Kent Walker

JOHN 9:1-41 - MAN BORN BLIND

Saturday, March 21

In this passage, Jesus reveals to the people the concept of spiritual blindness—the idea that many people will worship God in his presence but fail to carry out his word. The blind man represents someone who has never been introduced to faith due to his lowly status. The people look down upon him because they believe his blindness is due to sin, but in fact, Jesus reveals that he is meant to be healed to exemplify God's everlasting power. This brings about confusion in the community, as they are unsure whether God listens to sinners. But Jesus tells them that by exiling him from their community, they willingly go against God's word.

In my life, I applied this to the idea of stereotypes and social groups. Humans are inclined to draw conclusions about people in order to make sense of their identity. Often, these stereotypes are associated with one's outward appearance, which is dictated by uncontrollable factors like race or economic standing, or the people they surround themselves with. People struggle to move past these identifying factors and are surprised to discover that the personality of whom they generalized is nothing like what they thought. Personally, I try to move past these biases and commit myself to getting to know people better, because just like the blind man and Jesus in the story, people are so much more than just a label. By taking some time to communicate, we can understand better where people come from and their unique character. In turn, this will inspire a more collaborative community built on understanding, and with understanding can come both deeper, truer conversations about each other's journeys in faith and a more inviting and vibrant church environment.

- Andrew Quigley, Youth Deacon

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 22

The Raising of Lazarus **John 11:1-45**

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them.” ¹¹ After saying this, he told them,

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” ¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the

Next Page Cont.

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 22

resurrection on the last day.”²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus began to weep.³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.”

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

JOHN 11:1-45 - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Monday, March 23

Luke's Knowing that the theme for our Lenten Devotional is meeting or encountering Jesus for the first time, one might initially wonder why the story of the raising of Lazarus is included. After all, Martha and Mary had met Jesus before. Luke 10:38-42 tells us he had been a guest in their home and was likely well known within their community.

We, too, often feel we know Jesus well: we study the Gospels, we pray, we claim a relationship. Yet aren't there moments when we encounter him in a new way — different from our expectation or hope? Martha and Mary certainly did. When Jesus arrived, they lamented that he had not come sooner to save their brother. They knew him as a friend and healer, but were limited in the fuller understanding of who he truly was.

Last summer, we lost my husband's younger brother to a rare and aggressive thyroid cancer. It was quick and unforgiving. We prayed constantly. Like Martha and Mary, our prayers focused on healing, but much like Mary, we instead found Jesus present in our sorrow — grieving with us, offering comfort and strength in our darkest moments.

Around that same time, a close friend lost her husband of nearly 60 years after a rapid decline. Though once deeply involved in the church, they had become disengaged after moving out of state. Yet in describing the time leading up to her husband's death, my friend wrote that she had felt God's presence in many big and small ways. "I had a nudge (from God, I think) to get our scattered family together." And they did — celebrating their anniversary a month early, before there was a sign of how quickly her husband's health would fail. She concluded that she felt God's blessings and was being sustained by love and many prayers.

Isn't that how it often is for us? No stone rolled away, no big dramatic moment — just God's presence meeting us in our human need - moments when we find ourselves encountering a power that offers hope when we feel only loss; moments when we realize that Christ overcomes sorrow, and even death, with love.

- Peggy Gregg

JOHN 11:1-45 - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Tuesday, March 24

Trust in God's timing. Sigh. Trust. Let go. Pray for patience and faith. What a tall order.

For one who wrestles with clocks and control, this Gospel text stirs my anxiety. My mind races over deadlines, lateness, missed chances, and futile "could-haves, should-haves, would-haves." Outwardly, I'm a mix of procrastination and urgency: the teacher avoiding essays to grade, yet the gardener weeding at dusk in pajamas. My mantras echo: Early is on time. Progress must have metrics. Tick tock. Always rushing — or clinging to what I wish would last.

The story of Lazarus reminds me that God's delays are not denials. Jesus lingers: two days' wait, two miles' distance, four days in the tomb. My own impatience mirrors Martha and Mary's. I want prevention, not resurrection; control, not trust. Yet even before his miracle, Jesus pauses. "Jesus wept." The shortest verse is the longest comfort. No stopwatch, no spreadsheet — just tears. I see divine patience and human empathy entwined in a simple subject and verb. The moment is beautifully suspended, limitless, and abiding.

I confess I want God to act like a project manager: on schedule, under budget, measurable results. But the Lord seems more like a composer, leaving rests between notes so the melody can breathe. God, the maestro, adds room for grace.

Sometimes I feel trapped in the waiting room of eternity, haunted by Sisyphean tasks, worried that effort without outcome equals failure. But then I remember: maybe delay is mercy. Maybe slowness is sacred.

In the silence between what's lost and what's coming, there's faith. A pregnant pause. In that stillness, I find something better than control: the quiet miracle of being on God's time. He is already at work. Waiting is not wasting.

Lazarus, come out! And God, help us know you act in perfect timing.

- Seth Thayer Pidot

JOHN 11:1-45 - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Wednesday, March 25



JOHN 11:1-45 - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Thursday, March 26

This miracle is considered by many to be the greatest sign of Jesus's public ministry, dramatically demonstrating his power to overcome death. Jesus deliberately waited four days before restoring life to a putrefying corpse so as to impress the onlookers and to add credibility to his claim to be the son of God. As a physician, this part of the passage, with a triumph over physical death, is a challenge for me to believe. However, I don't need the "shock and awe" to move on to, and believe in, what for me is the heart of the passage, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." This promise of eternal life is very meaningful to me and has comforted me at the time of the death of loved ones and in thinking of future deaths, including my own. Although the story of the raising of Lazarus challenges my scientific mind, it can be interpreted as a metaphor for the awesome power of God. It encourages me to believe that, despite the death of the flesh, there will be eternal life of the soul. I do find it useful in my daily life in helping me to hold onto my strong belief and faith that no matter what happens in life, God never gives up on us and that all things, no matter how incredulous, are possible with God.

- Linda Griska

JOHN 11:1-45 - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Friday, March 27

The Lazarus story has been a tough one for me. I have always felt the urgency of the sisters sending a message to Jesus about their brother's illness. I imagine how hard it would be to send up the SOS, and then just wait. I would be searching for the rescue, waiting for the dramatic airdrop, and looking for the climactic conclusion with the hero racing in to save the day. That's not how things worked out. Time passed, their brother worsened, and he then died. Jesus did not respond with urgency; he stayed where he was for two days. Then, after Lazarus has died, Jesus traveled to the sisters and to Lazarus. In a heartfelt outpouring of love and compassion, Jesus grieved with Martha and Mary; he wept openly for the friend he loved. Jesus wept for Jerusalem, for humankind, and for our wandering around, lost without a shepherd. After the stone is rolled away from the opening of the tomb, Jesus called out to Lazarus by name, he called him back from death and into life. Jesus triumphed over death; he will do so again after his crucifixion. Jesus still calls us all into a life – into a living relationship with him and into the presence of God and life everlasting. We cannot have a resurrection without death. We cannot accept a new life in Christ without our old life dying. At different times, we suffer in tombs that are constructed around us and wait – sometimes for days in the smelly places of our lost ways – until we hear Jesus calling us. When we hear our name, we can go to him in the faith and understanding of life eternal and to the glory of God.

- Kiki McKendrick, Director of the Middleton Center

JOHN 11:1-45 - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Saturday, March 28

The story of the raising of Lazarus is both the culmination of the first part of the Gospel of John and a lead-in to the second part. The first part of the gospel focuses on Jesus' miracles, which are sometimes called "signs." The second part focuses on Jesus' death and resurrection. On the one hand, the raising of Lazarus is the most dramatic and impressive of Jesus' signs. On the other hand, the miracle triggers a chain of events that eventuates in the Sanhedrin (the council in nearby Jerusalem) planning to put Jesus to death (11:53), an important first step in John's account of the Passion.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus does not pray desperately in the garden of Gethsemane prior to his arrest. He is in full control of himself and the situation. Here, however, confronted with the death of his friend Lazarus, Jesus weeps, prompting the onlookers to say, "See how he loved him" (11:36). He joins in weeping with Mary and with those who accompany her from the house to meet Jesus, referred to collectively as "the Jews" (11:31, 33, 36). The grief in this episode contrasts with the joyful occasion of Jesus' first miracle, at the wedding in Cana. In both cases, Jesus enters into the life and emotions of his people — the joy of celebrating life as well as the sadness of mourning a death.

He weeps in solidarity with Mary and Martha, along with "the Jews." "The Jews" are often portrayed as adversaries of Jesus in the Gospel of John, in a way that obscures the fact that Jesus, his disciples, and his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are all to be counted among the Jews. According to the Gospel of John, many of "the Jews" believed in Jesus when they saw what Jesus did for Lazarus (11:45). Indeed, it is the attraction of so many to Jesus that leads the Sanhedrin to decide Jesus had to die.

Before moving forward to the Passion narrative, where John emphasizes the complicity of "the Jews" in Jesus' death at the hands of the Romans, it is good to pause here and appreciate this scene depicting Jews — Jesus, Mary, Martha and others — joining together to bewail their loss of a brother, a friend, a kinsman, a fellow Israelite. Jesus knows the plans he has for Lazarus, and yet he takes time to join the mourners. God knows the plans God has for us, and yet God grieves with us when we mourn our losses.

- Joshua Yoder

PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 29

The Entry into Jerusalem

John 12:12-19

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord —
the King of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸ It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

JOHN 12:12-19 - THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Monday, March 30

This is not Jesus' first donkey ride: there was a long ride on a cold winter's night, tucked into Mary's womb as a babe about to be born. It was a journey to a humble stable, where God became incarnate and entered the world... to be the Messiah.

Now we see him entering Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey, a sign known to the great crowd gathering that the Messiah was approaching. They knew the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 — Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The people honored Jesus with the traditional greeting to pilgrims coming for feast days: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel." If they had paid closer attention to Zechariah's message, they would have noticed the phrase "gentle and riding on a donkey," the known sign of the Messiah, rather than expecting a warring king to save them.

Scripture does not record what was in Jesus' mind in those moments. Was he having flashbacks to earlier pilgrimages to Jerusalem through his childhood and ministry? The priests of the Temple marveling at his knowledge as a 12-year-old? Was he having a moment of honor, and even comfort, before heading into what he knew was coming? Regardless, his message to the people was "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion."

Scripture does record that the Pharisees were worried that they could do nothing because "the world has gone after him!" It was a dangerous time politically. The message in John 12 that "jumps off the page" to me is "Do not be afraid." We see it many times, threading through the Scriptures.

The assurance of God's presence became very personal last summer, when my beloved husband Frank had a sudden illness and died. Although this loss was unexpected and shocking, I was comforted by a new, somehow deeper sense of the peace of Christ, and I was not afraid. After a few days, I began to wonder if this deep peace would continue. Thankfully, through continued prayer and the care and support of pastors, Connection Group, family, and friends, I am reminded that God is there and there is no reason to fear.

May the peace of Christ sustain you in this Lenten journey and beyond.

- Dottie Bowen

JOHN 12:12-19 - THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Tuesday, March 31

The description of the crowd meeting Jesus is evocative of images and sounds. During the first several readings of the passage, I pictured myself in the scene, with people waving branches and shouting “Hosanna.” Never completely comfortable in crowds, I envisioned myself quietly and cautiously waving a branch, while looking for an exit to a quiet place. The excitement of the events was lost to my preoccupation with escaping. I unknowingly ignored the Pharisees “sa[ying] to one another, ‘...you can do nothing... the world has gone after him!’” After repeated readings of the verses, I was given the beginnings of a new perspective. This view included a diminished focus on escape and an increased awareness of the Pharisees’ statement. In the future, I hope to better understand the significance of this statement and of the other elements that I initially missed.

The story evokes memories of Palm Sunday and beyond. I remember the sensation of ashes being applied to my forehead each Ash Wednesday with the reminder that I am dust and to dust I will return. I think of the Palm Sunday hymns we sing, with their foreshadowing of the betrayal, pain, and loss that are soon to come. I reflect on conversations with a friend from this congregation, about Jesus’s ride into Jerusalem and the Lord’s Supper in the present time. A photograph the friend provided before his death reminds me of his steadfast belief in the empty tomb. The picture is of the prepared Communion table in the sanctuary. The image of the table and my friend’s faithful example are sustaining. For this sustenance, I am grateful.

- Anita Iyengar

JOHN 12:12-19 - THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Wednesday, April 1



JOHN 12:12-19 - THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Thursday, April 2

In reflecting on the Entry into Jerusalem, line 16 stands out for how it depicts the disciples' inability to realize Jesus' true impact until he was gone."

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

The disciples did not truly understand, in the moment, the lengths to which Jesus had gone for them. This delayed gratitude for all God does for us is something I can relate to. I often find myself ignoring the gifts God leaves me every day, only to realize later that they are God's doing. When thanking God for all he does for me, I often fixate on the moments when I feel his presence, much like the crowd shouting "Hosanna!" The people cheering did not know the true purpose of Jesus, having an incomplete view of him, similar to our fixation on God's work in the high points and neglect of his work in the low ones. They only realized after Jesus was gone what his true purpose was and his impact, similar to the failure to trust God beyond logic. What I have realized is that proper recognition of God's greatness comes in the moments where we feel most as if he has abandoned us. The lowest lows are the moments where God is with you the most, even though you may feel as if God is absent in your life. God works in mysterious ways, and there have been many times in life when I have questioned whether or not God was with me. God's logic is too advanced for us to even begin to understand, and true faith in God requires the recognition that you may not always see the logic in the moves that God makes, but God always has your back. Reach out to God in times of trouble and reflect on the delayed gratitude you have eventually found.

- William Armstrong, Youth Elder

JOHN 12:12-19 - THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Friday, April 3

I have often felt sorry for Jesus' first disciples. To be sure, those twelve men had the only front-row seat to his teaching moments and miracles. They uniquely witnessed the consistent way he included those whom society had pushed aside and how the crowds responded. And they alone could reflect with and ask questions of him as each day ended. What an incredible opportunity!

Still, the reason I have great empathy for the Twelve is because of those frequent occasions when they clearly didn't understand what was happening. The gospel narratives are unflinching in recalling times when those men said something foolish or naïve, selfish or petty, a record that could leave us to wonder why they did not grasp the truth sooner. I've had moments like that, too. Yet for the most part, I give them a break.

They were following one unlike any who had walked the earth before. They consistently heard Jesus articulate a perspective that built on their Jewish roots but frequently went into an entirely new direction. Sometimes they grasped what he meant. Oftentimes, they did not.

Given that pattern, I am grateful for John's comment after his record from the moment we call Palm Sunday. The Twelve waved palm branches with the crowd and joined in the shouts of "Hosanna!" Yet after the gospel writer connected those events to ancient prophecies, John added, "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, they then remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him."

I'm grateful for that expression of their humanity. Don't be surprised if your experience of this Holy Week (and beyond) feels quite similar.

- The Rev. Dr. John M. Willingham, Interim Senior Pastor and Head of Staff

JOHN 12:12-19 - THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Saturday, April 4

Jesus comes to Jerusalem and is treated like a rock star. The palms are waved; he is addressed as King. Word got out that he raised Lazarus from the dead, so a large crowd gathered. The Jews were expecting a political savior, but what they got instead was someone who would willingly die for their sins.

Jesus consciously chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, humbling himself in an overt way. How often do we consciously choose to humble ourselves?

Jesus' humility underscored his message of love, justice, and salvation, conveying that God's kingdom wasn't about earthly power.

His humility was radical and courageous, knowing his life would end. He emptied himself of all ego needs.

Many things can humble us. I think it's part of the divine design for humiliations to polish the soul - if we allow it. Aging can be humbling as bodies change, and limitations emerge. The unpredictability of life, losing loved ones, unexpected sorrows, and rapid change can humble us.

Accidents can be humbling. Shortly after I moved to Bryn Mawr, I stepped into a hole in the ground, tearing ankle tendons that kept me on the couch (icing/elevating) for weeks. Desperate, I asked God what I was to learn from this? I came away with increased empathy for others and deep gratitude for the kindness of strangers.

In our society, a humble person can be regarded as a loser. How would Jesus be regarded if he walked the earth today?

During the Assurance of Pardon on Sunday services, we quietly reflect on our sins, allowing us to humble ourselves before God.

When we contemplate God's creation — the vastness, eternalness, and enormity — we realize we are very small indeed.

Let's be grateful that Jesus showed us the way that day in Jerusalem.

- Terry Charlton



HOLY WEEK 2026

Mar. 29 - Palm Sunday

- 8:00 a.m.** Worship with Communion, Chapel
9:45 a.m. Children ages 2 - kindergarten meet in classrooms and children grades 1-5 meet in Chapel for Palm Sunday Procession
10:00 a.m. Worship with Children's Palm Procession, Sanctuary & Livestreamed. The Rev. Dr. John M. Willingham preaching.

Apr. 2 - Maundy Thursday

- 5:30 p.m.** Family Service with Communion, Education Building Hall
5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Simple Supper, Congregational Hall. Free-will offering.
7:00 p.m. Worship with Communion, Sanctuary & Livestreamed. The Rev. Andy Greenhow preaching.

Apr. 3 - Good Friday

- 12:00 p.m.** Worship led by BMPC Youth, Sanctuary
7:30 p.m. Worship with the Bryn Mawr Chamber Singers, Sanctuary

Apr. 5 - Easter Sunday

- 6:30 a.m.** Sunrise Service, Front Lawn. The Rev. Rachel Pedersen preaching.
7:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast, Education Building
9:00 & 11:00 a.m. Worship with Choir and Easter Brass, Sanctuary.
9:00 a.m. Service Livestreamed. The Rev. Dr. John M. Willingham preaching.

