2022 Lenten Devotional BRYN MAWR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke begins with this dedication:

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Scholars have debated the significance of this dedication, questioned the identity of this Theophilus (friend of God), and they even wondered how this opening is related to Luke's identity as a historian or even a physician. My favorite theory is that Luke has written his Gospel as an alternative to the dry or tedious catechisms offered to early believers. His version of the essentials of Christian belief are offered as a thoughtful and connected story of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ written to bring new believers to faith.

In this year's Lenten Devotional, church members, staff and youth wrestle with seven different passages from the Gospel Luke: from a young Jesus intentionally losing himself in the Temple in Jerusalem to the harsh words of the Prodigal Son's older brother; from Jesus' teachings on narrow doors and camels going through the eyes of needles, to his lament over Jerusalem. Each of these challenging passages are connected through Luke's compelling story of the ministry of Christ and interpreted through the stories of our own lives.

The gift of the BMPC Lenten Devotional is having the opportunity to hear how different members of our congregation encounter these passages, how they push back against them, and how they are challenged by them. It is always our hope that just as the Holy Spirit worked within the original Scripture writers to illuminate the promises and expectations of God, that the Spirit also works within our community to speak a new and challenging word to us today through the thoughtful and honest reflections of this year's writers.

May this Devotional and our collective journey through the Season of Lent be dedicated to our own renewed faith in Jesus Christ, to our care and support of one another, and to a challenging world in desperate need of the love and grace of God.

In the Peace of Christ,

Jebecca

The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick Associate Pastor for Adult Education and Mission

ASH WEDNESDAY - MARCH 2

Luke 2:41-52 THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

- ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.
- ³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.
- ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.
- ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.
- ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.
- ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.
- ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."
- ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
- ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them.
- ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.
- $^{\rm 52}$ And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

LUKE 2:41-52

Thursday, March 3

Scanning the crowd outside the Education Building at the Advent workshop, I couldn't see my younger son. Our boys were inevitably going two directions, both at a million miles an hour. While I had my eyes on Charlie, our older son, who was working on a craft, Ollie, our younger son, had wandered away. My heart began to race. But I should have known better, because we always discover our children gravitating toward the Shepherd Statue on the lawn. Which is where I found Ollie - climbing on the sheep, holding onto the shepherd's staff for balance. Out of relief, my heart swelled to see him there. But I certainly know the frustration of Mary and Joseph when my children wander off beyond my vision.

Our boys are drawn to the shepherd statue in much the same way that Jesus was drawn to sit at the feet of the leaders of the Temple. I imagine that his parents felt much the same mixture of terror and amazement that we do when we find that our children have moved beyond the safety of our line-of-sight to discover a place where they find belonging, meaning and connection; where they can learn and play, find stability and balance, and ask the big questions. With racing hearts, Jesus' parents searched for him, and discovered him resting safely in the presence of his people and in the heart of his community's identity. I found Ollie there as well.

Like Charlie and Ollie, may all of us always find refuge and fearless rest at the feet of the Good Shepherd.

~ Abby Pottorff

LUKE 2:41-52

Friday, March 4

This passage from the Gospel of Luke brings three things to mind: disobedient children, anxious parents and forgiveness.

We were all young once and made choices that frustrated our parents. It is almost impossible to avoid. Learning to be obedient requires being disobedient, does it not?

There are a variety of ways one can encourage a child to learn from a bad choice. We all see other parents punishing their children in ways we approve or disapprove of. But in our private lives we also tackle disobedience in ways we wish we had not. Stress at work, being overly tired, a sick family member – these are only a few reasons that result in making regretful decisions in our lives as parents and beyond.

In this scene from Luke, Mary confronts Jesus and explains that she and Joseph had been searching for him "in great anxiety." This approach recalls a vivid conversation with my dad during my high school days. I had made a choice that gave him great anxiety and instead of punishing me we had an intense conversation. A heart-to-heart. It was the first time I saw my dad cry. They were tears of extreme love and intense concern. Seeing this visceral reaction made me want to never disappoint my dad ever again.

Recalling this event in my life brings to light the fact that I was disobedient (leave it to the middle child of three boys!) and caused my dad extreme anxiety. But there was forgiveness – and this forgiveness is what has stuck with me all these years.

~ Edward Landin Senn, Assistant Director, Music

LUKE 2:41-52

Saturday, March 5

"Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Jesus took for granted on that day when Mary and Joseph were worried sick over his whereabouts that his parents would know where he was. He was, of course, where we ourselves are most Sundays: in the house of God. We come to church for many reasons. We come to pray and sing; to worship and reflect; to be among other believers; to find peace and refuge; to learn; and, some of us more regularly than others, like Jesus, to teach.

But it is not only the church building where we meet God in his house. In particular, I encounter God in his house in nature. I see God in his beach house when I watch the sunrise over the ocean. I talk with God in his country house when the first flowers of spring poke their heads through the last snow. I worship in God's house in the mountains where a waterfall thunders over a cliff and meanders through a stand of trees as the beginnings of a river. And I often meditate with God in the comfort of my house, particularly in the twilight space between sleep and wakefulness in the morning and evening. God is everywhere, making the entire world his house.

But let us consider briefly what it would mean to turn Jesus' answer around. "Do you not know my Father's house is in me?" Paul asks us in I Corinthians 6: "...do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...?" So the indwelling God makes his house not only in the world, but also in us. And as Jesus promised in Matthew 28: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus, God-with-us, is with us everywhere, at all times, and in everything we do.

~ Brian Middleton

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 6

Luke 4:1-13

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS

- ⁴Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,
- ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.
- ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."
- ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone."
- ⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.
- ⁶ And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.
- ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."
- ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"
- ⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,
- ¹⁰ for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'
- ¹¹ and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"
- ¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test."
- ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Monday, March 7

The same temptations appear in both Matthew and Luke, but in a different order, and both address the concepts of hedonism, egoism and materialism. For our society in general and, in fact, for me, these tempting shallow life perspectives highlight our exposure to temptation. If read literally, the verses portray a devil who tempts Jesus, nearly starving to death, with the opportunity to satiate his hunger; later he is offered ultimate power to rule this world if he would only bow down to evil. Jesus declines these offers because, first, he has chosen to serve a loving God, and second, he knows that these, in fact all, temptations are false promises that do not bring joy.

When read metaphorically, the passage describes what seem to be far-fetched and bizarre temptations until I watch the news, where I see a refugee family fleeing persecution, a homeless parent with no food for her child or still another Black person treated unfairly. For us, is there a **temptation** to ignore this call to service? Public figures sell their very souls to retain power rather than opting to serve their conscience or constituency. By comparison, my temptations seem less significant, but as I make decisions, am I tempted to follow God's will or my own?

These examples can be ultimate choices for me and you. How will I use my talent and treasure? Just as Jesus made his choices filled with the Holy Spirit, I know that my decisions will be better ones when I am guided by prayer, scripture and the support of like-minded friends.

The Lord's Prayer is our shield against the temptations described in Luke's verses. We trust that God will "Give us this day our daily bread." Asking Him to "Lead us not into **temptation**" addresses our vulnerability. We find an antidote to temptation in praying these divine words. Amen.

~ Anna May Charrington

Tuesday, March 8

When I was a youth at BMPC, we performed *Celebrate Life*, a musical similar to Jesus Christ Superstar that Jeff Brillhart directed. As we all know there are many more male characters in the life story of Jesus. So in order to create more female roles, Jeff had to get very creative, and boy did he. For example, he added the Three Wise Dudettes to ride alongside the Three Wise Dudes, all dressed like the T-Birds. I was cast in the role of the Temptress (aka the devil), and I was responsible for reciting these words (Luke 4:1-13) to Jesus, played by Andrew Lee.

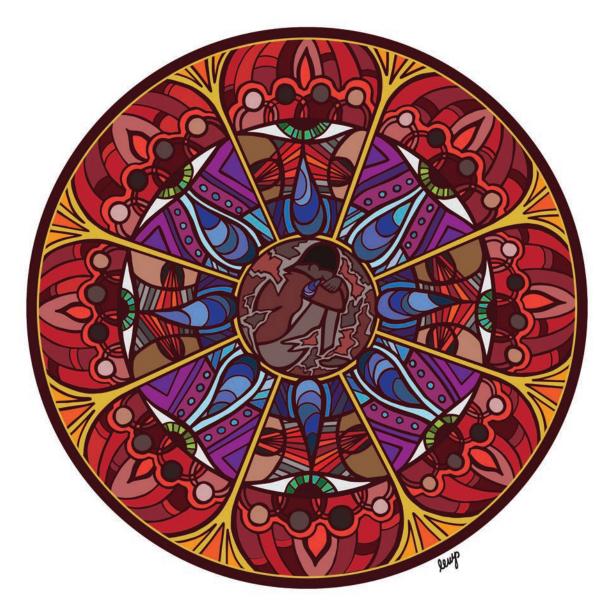
I really don't think any of us, as children, fully understood what was happening in that moment of the story. We did not grasp what it meant for Jesus not to give into temptation. He was King, and with the flick of his finger, he could have changed the world. He could have saved himself and his followers from all that pain and anguish. But he knew that what we needed was a living example to follow, not a hero to save one generation. Jesus was playing the long game!

Every day I am tempted to say, "Me first, my turn to shine, why do I have to give, while countless others take?" Then I remember the lessons we learn from the living, breathing Christ, who could have put himself first, but instead put us first. He, who chose to die for us so that we may live. He, who every day says, "choose my way, not the world's way." He, who asks us to spread love and joy, when all we really want to do is the opposite. He, who encourages us to forgive those who hurt us and let go of the little things that get in the way of us having deep caring relationships.

Can you imagine what the world would look like if we could fulfill his example? Life would not be perfect, and we all would still get hurt from time to time. But if we did not let the selfish notions tempt us and instead focused on the people around us, whether near or far, I think we could begin to find new ways to move forward together. We could be content with the things we have and put more of our resources to good use for others. We could open our eyes to the cultures of others and see their joys and pains, triumphs and contributions. We could find kind words for those who cut us off in traffic and not let that negativity derail our whole day. What if we all were "in it for the long game" too? What kind of example could we set for the next generation? Maybe we could better live out my favorite part of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

~ Meggin R. Capers

Wednesday, March 9



Broken Vessel by Lauren Wright Pittman, Inspired by Psalm 31: 9-16

Thursday, March 10

Every time I read the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, in any of its Gospel versions, I am reminded of Henri Nouwen's classic book, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership.* In it Nouwen reflects specifically on his life and work inside a L'Arche Community where differently abled and able adults live together in community. That experience gave him a new perspective on what it means to be a Christian and a Christian Leader.

He looks at each of these temptations specifically as they relate to our experiences in the church and counters them with Jesus' last words to Peter after the resurrection. The temptation to turn stones into bread is the temptation to be relevant and indispensable to others. Jesus actually calls us simply to love others. The temptation to rule over all the kingdoms of the world is our temptation to be powerful. Jesus calls us to practice humility. The temptation to throw oneself off the top of the temple to allow the angels to catch us is the temptation to be spectacular. Jesus calls us to care for those in need.

During these two years of pandemic and stumbling through being and doing church in a new way, I have found that these same kinds of temptations have reared their ugly heads. The temptation to hold onto power and control when everything around me feels out of control. The temptation to be amazing when pastors and churches are pushing themselves to be phenomenally creative in this moment, which unfortunately can shift the priority away from substance and onto style. And, of course, the temptation to consider myself indispensable when the boundaries around work spaces and work hours all went out the window in March 2020.

This passage is calling me, just as Jesus did, to turn away from the temptations to be whatever I think it is the world expects me to be. Instead, I will strive to love, and to care, and to be humble, knowing that in the end these are the true marks of the Christian life and the true nature of what it means to claim an identity as a follower of Christ.

~ The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick, Associate Pastor for Adult Education and Mission

Friday, March 11

"Jesus... was led by the Spirit in the wilderness." Throughout the whole Christian Bible, the wilderness plays a significant role. In the wilderness, an angel appears to Hagar. In the wilderness, the Israelites wander for 40 years; in the wilderness, the soon-to-be King David flees from Saul; in the wilderness Isaiah claims that God will make a way out of no way. The wilderness symbolizes many things – separation and the unknown, need and deliverance, renewal, and encounter with God.

The pandemic has felt like a wilderness for me. My brain sprinting double time, re-organizing and planning, canceling, and thinking and spinning. I love a yearlong planning calendar, and the pandemic has made that luxury nigh impossible. Things have to be ready to change at the drop of a hat. Adaptability and flexibility are now a requirement for sanity when it comes to programmatic ministry.

I think I forget, both from this passage and my life, that "the Spirit" doesn't just drop Jesus off in the wilderness. The Spirit leads him. The Spirit stays with him. And thankfully, God hasn't just dropped me off either. God is still with me. God is still present even in this obnoxious, seemingly never-ending pandemic.

I have friends who say to me, "God doesn't give you more than you can handle." And while I know they say it in encouragement, all I hear is that if I'm struggling, it's my fault. God thought that I could handle it. God must have created me to be strong, and somehow I've ruined it because I'm not strong enough to handle this pandemic.

Thankfully, I don't quite subscribe to that theology, the idea that God doesn't give me more than I can handle. I think God often gives me more than I can handle and that I was never actually meant to handle any of this on my own. God never created me to be self-sufficient. The point of my faith, of my life, isn't independence and self-reliance, but interdependence and relationship. The Spirit didn't "drop off" Jesus in the wilderness, and the Spirit hasn't dropped us off to solve this pandemic, to fix this suffering world, on our own. No, we are, in fact, led by our Emmanuel, God with us, who will never leave or forsake us.

So in this time of Lent, of self-reflection and examination, in a year that continues to be difficult and complicated, may you know that you are not alone on this journey. God is with you. Your church is with you. And we are enriched and enlivened by sharing the journey of faith together.

~ The Rev. Leigh DeVries, Associate Pastor for Youth and Their Families

Saturday, March 12

Jesus found himself off in the wilderness, just like us, and he was tempted, just like us, but unlike us, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, he did not sin. What are we to make of this? Was he God, and no temptation could be effective, or was he God, so that he could use His divine superpowers to resist all temptation? Either way, he doesn't really seem to have been "tempted as we are."

My friends will tell you that I am a very odd person, and one of my most recognizable oddities is that I do not like cake, pie or sweets of any kind. It's not that I am impervious to temptation, and I certainly do not have superhuman willpower. It's just that when I was a child I had bad teeth. If I ate something sweet, my teeth would hurt, quite a lot sometimes. I became conditioned. What if Jesus was not superhumanly impervious to temptation, but just very humanly conscious of the inevitable pain that yielding to temptation would incur.

Maybe Jesus, in His human soul, divinely informed, just sensed the bitter substance behind the delectable façade. It's not that Jesus was beyond temptation or preternaturally proof against temptation; it's just that in the depth of His soul, he really knew, actually felt, the full consequences of that temptation. As delicious as it appeared, and even as sweet to the taste, he sensed the sharp, painful barb at the heart of the apparent treat.

Jesus saw that what was proffered was not so much bonbon as bait. And so, he was in all ways tempted as we are, yet without sin.

~ Bill McKee

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 13

Luke 13:22-30 THE NARROW DOOR

- ²² Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.
- ²³ Someone asked him, 'Lord, will only a few be saved?' He said to them,
- ²⁴ 'Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.
- ²⁵ When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, "Lord, open to us", then in reply he will say to you, "I do not know where you come from."
- ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets."
- ²⁷ But he will say, "I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!"
- ²⁸ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out.
- ²⁹ Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.
- ³⁰Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.'

Monday, March 14

Why does Jesus teach by using parables? Why can't he just plainly tell us what to do in order to be saved? What do we do with Scriptures that confuse us or even bring up painful feelings?

The Narrow Door in Luke is one of those difficult passages for me. I'm more comfortable with the "Good Shepherd" Jesus who calls all to him. I'm less comfortable with the "Winnowing Fork" Jesus who challenges us to make the bold decision(s) allowing ourselves to be pruned and transformed. When I choose to wrestle with instead of skip past these difficult Scriptures, there is so much for me to learn and heal!

Jesus used simple stories we could relate to in order to teach complex lessons. His teaching style is a sophisticated way of teaching people who are at different levels of understanding and who come from different points of view. As I read this passage in Luke, I am invited to look out from the perspective of the owner of the house and those shut out. When I read from this perspective, my own fears of abandonment and disconnection were activated. I am taken back to experiences when I've felt excluded or isolated. When I read from the perspective of the owner, I feel the sting of a one-sided, non-committal relationship. I am confronted with the feelings of waiting for the other person's actions to match their words and waiting, hoping for them to "come around."

Recently, I've moved through a bewildering phase in my life personally. The outer world, with the pandemic and political polarization, also has been a bewildering reminder that "we see the world not as it is, but as we are." People professing the same values can view the same situation and come to drastically different conclusions!

By teaching with parables, Jesus acknowledges that humans are a complex mixed bag of healthy and sick parts with conflicting motivations. We just aren't as rational as we'd like to believe that we are! Part of us wants to be enveloped by a powerful, unconditional love and another part of us just wants to be left alone to do our thing and stay in control. We have been given the power to decide, and yet we are not in charge of the outcomes. We are not entitled to a comfortable certainty. We need to both strive and surrender. When Jesus is asked about salvation in terms of formulas, he truthfully answers that it's going to demand more than performing or gaming the system. We can't just discover the formula so we can rest in certitude that we've made the cut. God wants intimacy, not automatons. To be in an intimate relationship means we are willing to see and be seen.

Loving and challenging God. Thank you for difficult teachings when I ask for the simple lists of rules. You call me to look at parts of myself that I'd rather ignore because you want to heal me and you want to be with me. Continue to clear the lens of my perception so that I may see as You see. Thank you for the power to choose even when it feels scary. Help my faith grow to tolerate the uncertainty, contradictions and turbulence of life in this world. May I feel your loving presence today and always. Amen.

~ Colleen Bertrand

Tuesday, March 15

This passage is both reassuring and challenging. It reassures because no one is pre-selected to enter the Kingdom. Our own actions matter. We should all "strive to enter by the narrow door... people will come from east and west, and from north and south... and some are last who will be first." So, regardless of our background or history, we are all invited to participate and have a chance to succeed. But there is no guarantee or easy success. "Many will try to enter and will not be able."

Entry is not assured by casual familiarity with Jesus – "we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets" – or by our worldly success – "the first will be last."

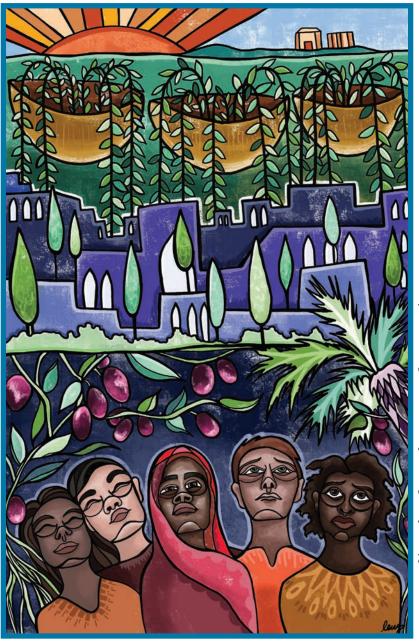
To enter the Kingdom, we are told to "strive to enter by the narrow door." By using the narrow door metaphor, rather than giving a list of commandments, Jesus seems to invite us to ponder what the narrow door is for each of us personally.

For me, the narrow door metaphor evokes an image of a donkey so laden with baggage that he is unable to pass through a narrow gateway. This makes me reflect on the excess baggage, both physical and mental, that often prevents me from navigating life with ease. The physical excess baggage may include unnecessary possessions that bring more worry and distraction than peace of mind. The mental excess baggage can include trying to cram too much into my life, so that busyness and feeling rushed get in the way of being present and grateful for each day's gifts; being excessively judgmental about myself and others; and excess consumption of negative news and negative thoughts that erode the trust needed to experience life as the Kingdom.

I believe that we can all experience the Kingdom in our everyday lives, though such experiences may be brief and transitory. I trust that I have found the narrow door when my way of living brings peace, hope and consolation here and now, as a glimpse of the Kingdom in the hereafter.

~ Patricia Danzon

Wednesday, March 16



New Roots (Encouraging the Israelites in Exile to Plant Gardens & Build Houses) by Lauren Wright Pittman, Graphic Image, Inspired by Jeremiah 29:1-7

Thursday, March 17

The Gospel's statements that "people will come from east and west, from north and south and will eat in God's kingdom" and "some are last who will be first," remind me of Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church's inclusive Communion tables. The chapel's table as a focal point for quiet reflection during the weekly pre-pandemic Sunday services remains ingrained in my memory. A framed photograph of the Sanctuary's communion table, a gift from a spiritual mentor, reminds me of our conversations about faith, church, and the responsibility to serve others. While he died years ago, the picture continues to symbolize our discussions about Lent, his unwavering belief in the resurrection, and his non-judgmental approach to my naïve musings as I learned from his vast knowledge and witness.

When I first read Luke 13:22-30, my attention was repeatedly drawn to "[striving] to enter through the narrow door." In my imagination I saw myself trying unsuccessfully to cross the threshold as the door was closing, ignorant of the identities and well-being of anyone that I was pushing out of the way. I then visualized myself desperately pounding on the closed door, angrily blaming others for my exclusion. For weeks, these self-serving images automatically replayed each time I read the verses. Finally, in late Advent, two growth-sustaining insights emerged. Firstly, the people I imagined forcing away from the doorway were friends, family, acquaintances, and strangers whose sufferings I've minimized in my greed. Secondly, I sensed a timely reminder of my guilt and God's grace. These insights have invited me to gratefully rethink my evildoing and recommit to honoring the narrow door through my thoughts, hopes, and actions.

~ Anita Iyengar

Friday, March 18

"What if Jesus really meant what he said?" read the bumper sticker that was thumbtacked to the wall above my cubicle. I was in college, working as a student in the office of Tony Campolo. The room was full of Jesus merchandise: stickers, shirts and signs enshrined from decades of work for Jesus and justice. I never learned the origins of this particular sticker, but it's eight words stuck to me instantly.

When I read Jesus' words, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able," I compulsorily ask, "Did Jesus really mean this?" Will many try and be unable to enter the kingdom of God? Will people who think they are in actually be turned away? Such questions give me pause. Unless Jesus was a liar – and we have good reason to doubt that he was – I am forced to answer, "Yes, Jesus meant every word of it."

Jesus meant that it will be hard to enter the kingdom of God. It will require us, his followers, to live differently in the world, to pay attention to the "narrow door" rather than the grand entrance, to resist the seductive certainty that to be first in this world is to be blessed. Throughout Lent we are invited to live into this "narrow" lifestyle. With Jesus as our guide we are bidden to relinquish our concentration on eternal security in order to follow him with intentionality and humility, knowing that the journey inevitably ends first in death before resurrection.

I believe following Jesus is difficult, costly and toppling. I also believe Jesus chose to lead us this way for a reason. He did indeed mean what he said.

~ The Rev. Brian K. Ballard, Assoicate Pastor for Pastoral Care and Senior Adults

Saturday, March 19

I am not looking for the narrow door.

Jesus' kingdom is not based on chasing salvation through a narrow door but rests in relationship with that second person of the Trinity. He offers us an upended community not rooted in the systems of this world and a grace unseen in our power-hungry 2022 structures. In today's text, we hear a promise that all people can pass through the narrow door, not by chasing exploitive power, control or privilege, but by ceding and saying "yes!" to Jesus' invitation and welcome. Perhaps it is easier than we think. We step out into Christ's "yes" for our lives and witness, the narrow door finding us. We practice saying "yes" when we choose well, respond with a faithful posture, and look for the Spirit's movement.

Six years ago, I placed a call to explore the possibility of seminary and learned that just days later, United Lutheran Seminary was offering a prospective student weekend, which I attended. Saying "yes" opened me to possibility and an uncertain future, to be sure, and also placed me at the threshold of the narrow door. The next three years were challenging, fulfilling, engaging and mind-expanding. They were a gift; I only had to say "yes."

It may seem like the narrow door, or saying "yes," stands before us only around major decisions of transition and life events. Consider, however, that the door also opens to us in ordinary and serendipitous times. This narrow door turns up in everyday encounters, around being present for others, and prioritizing relationship over what the world tells us is important.

Jesus' call in my life reimagines and reinvents the future, allowing for ongoing and faithful exploration even in the midst of life-changing circumstances. I'm grateful for God's grace, an open outlook, and a relationship with God and our own community of saints.

Prayer: Hearer of our hearts, let us be open to the needs of the world that surrounds us, brave enough to cross the threshold, and faithful enough to follow your call in our lives, even in the upended world Christ sets before us. Amen.

~ M. Courtenay Willcox

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 20

Luke 13:31-35 THE LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM

- ³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'
- ³² He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.
- ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem."
- ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!
- ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." '

Monday, March 21

The lament over Jerusalem! How ancient the sorrow; how present the sorrow. My husband and I are scheduled to make the twice-postponed choir tour to the Middle East this summer. Among our preparation was the reading of Yossi Klein Halevi's, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*, in which Halevi attempts to explain the Jewish story to a fictional Islamic, Palestinian neighbor, with the hope of fostering peace through mutual understanding.

As I read through the chapters, discussing them each week with members of both BMPC and Main Line Reform Temple, I gained an even greater appreciation of the complexity of the situation and the deeply-held convictions of two faith traditions that regard Jerusalem as the "Holiest of Cities." Add to the mix our Christian faith, which identifies it as the birthplace of Christianity, one can understand how it has become the center of religious power and political strife for millennia.

Quoting Jesus, Luke says, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing," not willing in the first century, not willing today to embrace all the people and nations of the world as members of God's holy kingdom. The Lament over Jerusalem, indeed, but as I write this just after Christmas, I'm reminded of Agnes' Advent message of hope - hope that God hears our cry and that, through prayer, we will become God's instruments for justice, peace, community and love in Jerusalem and everywhere. Impossible? Perhaps, but in the words of Vaclav Havel, quoted by Agnes on December 5, "Hope is... an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unfavorable and adverse the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper the hope is."

~ Peggy Gregg

Tuesday, March 22

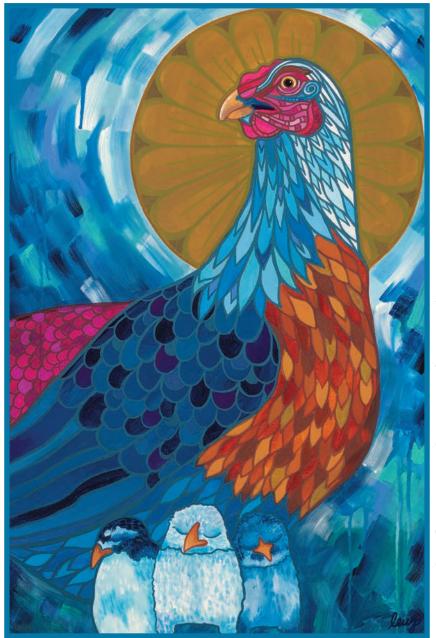
Earlier in Luke (4:14-30) we have heard how Jesus was scorned and driven out of his hometown of Nazareth. From there he embarked on a ministry of healing and driving out evil spirits, ending in an offering of protection and comfort to society's downtrodden in the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20-49). This all culminated in the glory of his transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36).

Here, in this section of Luke, the same themes repeat. The Pharisees try to drive him away either because they are genuinely warning him of Herod's threat, or because they have the ulterior motive of getting Jesus to move into the Galilee where they hold more power to control him. Jerusalem, where the temple stands as the acknowledged home of God and offers protection to the faithful, instead is portrayed as a destroyer of past prophets who came to warn the people against their separation from God. Jesus has now come as the hen to protect his flock from the fox. He warns people that their unwillingness to live in true relationship with God will leave them in a destroyed shell. This may have been a reference to the real destruction Jerusalem had experienced at the start of the Great Jewish Revolt against Roman oppression initiated in 66 CE.

The passage closes with the prediction of the transfiguring recognition that will come to those who welcome Jesus in their home and heart with the very blessing that is foretold will be given Jesus when he enters Jerusalem for the final time and the people call out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" (John 12:13)

~ Phoebe Sheftel

Wednesday, March 23



Mother Hen by Lauren Wright Pittman, Acrylic on canvas, Inspired by Luke 13:31-35

Thursday, March 24

Jesus receives a dire warning from "some Pharisees," who are the ones usually giving him a hard time. If I were Jesus, I would be suspicious of their motives. Are they telling the truth? Are they actually agents of Herod? Or, are they lying and hoping to scare me away?

In any event, Jesus gives an immediate and very strong response. In my father's day, Jesus' reply would be considered "fightin' words." In fact, in Jesus' day, they would be considered "dying words." To call Herod a "fox" would most likely be considered treason.

This is not the only time in the Gospels that Jesus stands up to the bullies. He regularly takes on the local religious bullies: the Priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees. He also takes on the politically-appointed bullies: Herod Antipas, High Priest Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. And, in this case, he takes on the whole corrupt culture of Jerusalem.

Jesus says that Jerusalem is the one who has, in the past, killed the prophets that God has sent to warn them. He then prophesied against Jerusalem saying, in the Revised Standard Version, "Behold, your house is forsaken." Forsaken? Forsaken by whom? Forsaken by God?

Remember, Jesus' prophesy against the temple and whole city later in Luke 19:41-48. And the city is besieged and the temple totally destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans under Titus. Jesus seems to make it his business to take on the lying, corrupt and arrogant religious and political leaders of his time.

But to the person in need, Jesus is there to offer help.

~ The Rev. Dr. Paul MacMurray

Friday, March 25

I was a new pastor, Bible in hand and absolutely uncertain as I walked into my parishioner's home. The cancer was aggressive; the treatments weren't working; and he knew this disease would kill him. I was there to be his pastor, but before I could say anything, he wanted to discuss a project at the church.

I was ready to wrestle with theology, proclaim hope, and be generally pastoral. I had not expected the need to be administrative. So we ran through a long list of projects, and with the same practical tone, he asked me about planning a funeral. He had strong opinions about what should and shouldn't be included. He wanted to include Psalm 91, where "God shelters us like a mother bird, takes us underwing." There was a pause, and he shared that he didn't know how much longer he would live. He stopped me before I could say anything too "preachy," explaining that he didn't want to waste his last days dying, but living, that he had things to do, people to tend to, projects to complete. So we prayed together, and we both tried to hide the tears as 91st Psalm declared, "When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in times of trouble… with long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation."

Jesus responds to the threat that Herod is after him, that his death is imminent, with a schedule, a list of what needs to be done: demons to cast out, people to heal, a trip to be made. Even as he acknowledges the danger and pain that Jerusalem holds, he offers the deep longing of his heart: to gather the very people who would kill him under his wings to shelter them. After a moment, he pauses before heading out to do the work of living.

~ The Rev. Rachel Pederson, Associate Pastor for Children and Family Ministry

Saturday, March 26

In the final days of his ministry on Earth, indeed until the hour when he faced trial, crucifixion and death, Jesus continued the work he came to do. He was resolute and courageous, referring to Herod as a fox, and refusing to heed warnings from the Pharisees to flee, because Herod wanted to kill him.

His great sorrow was the rejection of Jerusalem from living into the call of God. Jesus laments that God's chosen city kills the prophets and stones those sent by God. (Deut. 12:5; Matt. 23:37) Jesus, who yearned to gather the people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, was rejected. Oh, what tenderness, compassion and protection are expressed in the metaphor of the hen and her chicks.

How telling that the love of God (hen) prevailed over the power of earthly rulers (foxes)!

In this season of Lent, I am reflecting on how often I tend to be intimidated by the foxes of the day, overwhelmed by a pandemic, discouraged by the systemic disparities of racism and poverty, afraid of rising violence. How often am I still and quiet enough to hear God's call on my life, to be thankful in all circumstances, to see others as God sees, and to love unconditionally as God loves?

What messages does this Scripture offer us as individuals and as the Body of Christ at BMPC?

- Do we resist **boldly** the power of "foxes" in our day, neither joining nor running away?
- Do we live **confidently** into the commandment to love our neighbor?
- Do we rest **humbly** under the protection and nurturing of the Lord?
- Would Jesus view our lives with joy or lament?

Looking to Jesus as our model, may we stand firm against oppression, live without fear and show mercy, compassion and love each day.

~ Dottie Bowen

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 27

Luke 15:1-3; 11b-32 PRODIGAL SON

- ¹⁵ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable:
- ¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹ Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Monday, March 28

To many scholars, the father in this parable is a metaphor for God, who always forgives our transgressions and welcomes us into his presence no matter how far afield we have gone. And maybe that is all it is meant to be a lesson about forgiveness. But for me, this story held me hostage for many years as I struggled to come to terms with my own loss, a beloved daughter who abruptly left her family and friends behind without warning. I wanted so much to be like the father in the story, understanding and forgiving, but I was in the middle of so many conflicting emotions.

The circumstances were different: for my child there was no careless spending of an inheritance, and it was a "religious" group that claimed her, not a dissolute lifestyle, but I am quite sure the father in the parable must have reacted the same way that I did. Fear, despair, anger, and overwhelming sadness would consume any parent in such a loss. Jesus tells us how the Prodigal Son was welcomed home after he treated his father so badly, but his parable does not tell us how hard all those years in between must have been for his father.

Did he wake up each day thinking that surely this day his son would return? Did he have trouble sleeping, not knowing if his son was safe? As all those years went by, did he finally realize that he would likely never see his boy again? And then what? Did he find a way to go on with his life, in the same way that grief after a death finally works its way into deeper crevices in your heart but allows it to keep on beating? I realized that he must have, and I tried hard to do the same, with faith that my daughter would return along with acceptance of how long it might take.

Jesus used one of the most terrible events in a parent's life to illustrate how forgiving God is; if a father can go through years of despair and sadness and still be the same loving person he was before his loss, then what an inspiration this parable is for us. But I believe that he struggled for a long time to be able to forgive his son, and that for me is the point of the story. Forgiving can seem impossibly difficult, and it may take years, but it is our job as Christians to work hard at it and be able to celebrate, if not a happy reunion, then a powerful peace in reaching a state of forgiveness.

~ Clare Mackie

Tuesday, March 29

Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them and is judged for it. And the Prodigal Son decides to go home, where he is judged by his brother but not by his father.

The son had really blown it, hadn't he? But he made a mistake, and he acknowledges it. And – this is key – he asks for forgiveness from his father. He knows what he wants and needs, but his expectations are low. He's "no longer worthy." He's humble.

His father runs to embrace him, even before he knows what his son is thinking. Isn't that how God, our Father, loves us – unconditionally? For we too can be forgiven, no matter what. God just wants to be in a relationship with us. All we have to do is humbly "show up" (be present with God in prayer) and take His Word seriously. We can find redemption by turning away from the old and beginning anew, with God's help. **Start the celebration**!

Of course, like the grumbling Pharisees and scribes who judge Jesus' hospitality with the "sinners," the Prodigal Son's elder brother doesn't get it either. He thinks only of himself and what seems fair.

Jesus wants us to realize that the path to righteousness isn't paved with jealousy or spite. Compassion is what matters. We are to share love and forgiveness and hospitality with everyone, just as God loves and forgives and welcomes a relationship with (all of) us, no matter what.

So, we learn, put away any grudges or harsh judgments. Stop dwelling on past grievances or mistakes. Don't be "lost," be "found" through a relationship with our loving God. Rejoice in it. And be inspired by God's Son, who teaches us to be more caring, kind and giving. That's how God wants us to be!

~ Donna Barrickman

Wednesday, March 30



Prodigal Grace by Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Charcoal on paper, Inspired by Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Thursday, March 31

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the younger son runs away and then comes back home after losing all of his money. The father in the story shows a lot of love for his son when he returns home. My parents give me a similar kind of unconditional love. Whenever I need my parents' help, they are there for me, and I think the lesson the parable teaches us is that people will be there for us when we need assistance.

During the summer when I was working on all my college application materials, my parents always made sure I was "on top" of all of it. Even now, they continue to make sure I am performing at my highest level; this may be reminding me about my swim practices, encouraging me to keep my grades up, or reminding me to do the right thing in a certain situation.

The father in the parable is super caring to his son because he ran away and then came back home. One of the phrases that I really enjoy is when the father says, "He was lost and is found" because it shows how much love he has for his son even after his son spends all his money.

The most important lesson I have learned, especially as a Deacon, is that we all have to care for one another. That lesson is taught really well in this parable, and I think we all should try to follow in the father's footsteps and express gratitude to people.

~ Paul McConnell, Youth Deacon

Friday, April 1

"There was a man who had two sons." From the very first line, Jesus wants us to know this is a story about a family and how people who are related to one another choose to relate to one another. And while we have come to know this story as the one about the "Prodigal Son," it is not a son who is initially introduced. It's worth noting that Jesus doesn't introduce the story by saying, "There were once two brothers..." By way of parable, Jesus invites us to pay attention to the actions of the father. But the connection between these two boys is of course deeply important.

Beginning with Cain and Abel, the stories of siblings – their strife, jealousy, love, hate and mutuality – are woven throughout the Scriptures. Those same dynamics are found here with this family. A father's two sons present two radically different ways of living in the world. While the story can be unpacked in hundreds of ways, from the perspectives of each character, it is the actions of the father to which I cling. What does he do?

First, he somewhat foolishly gives his sons their inheritance early. I would have at least established a trust and gotten a few estate lawyers involved, and then I still would have waited to give them anything until I was dead. But no, he lavishly shares what he has with them while he's still around to enjoy them having it. And then, as the father may have suspected, the elder son puts all his funds into a Roth IRA while the younger son cashes out and heads to Atlantic City. Eventually the younger son comes to his senses and heads back home very hungry and without a penny to his name. But the perspicacious elder brother is unmoved by any gesture of repentance by his younger brother. Nevertheless, the father can't wait to kiss the neck of his reckless younger son and throw him a homecoming party. What do we do with this story? What does the Kingdom of God look like here?

Perhaps the Kingdom of God in this story is not a single character or their actions, but the ending, where a great feast is held for a reunited family, and the whole town is invited to celebrate. Perhaps the Kingdom of God is the final conversation with the understandably frustrated and rule-following brother, and the father who throws open the gates of mercy.

As the father of two boys myself, perhaps the Kingdom of God looks like a beleaguered dad who throws his arms around both of his sons, who are as different as night and day, and says to them, "Celebrate and rejoice in this moment, for now our home is complete again."

[~] The Rev. Franklyn C. Pottorff, Associate Pastor for Congregational Life and Stewardship

Saturday, April 2

My first born follows the rules, and my second born makes up her own. It feels like they have been this way from birth, but it is likely that nurture has as much to do with it as nature does. The time that I found my second born standing on the dining room table shortly after she started walking was a shock to me because my first born never did anything like that. I also never would have had my back turned from my first born at that age long enough for her to end up on the table.

These tendencies can be strengths or weaknesses for my children, depending on the situation they are in. I wish they could see how the other's tendencies serve them well in various settings. I wish for them less rigidity in their approaches and more understanding of one another. At times, I am sure they both feel misunderstood by me and alienated from me, and each other.

The first born son in the parable of the Prodigal Son feels more than misunderstood and alienated; he is angry. Do the brothers reconcile and come to understand that both have a place in their father's household – the loyal and the forgiven? While I am not equating my children to the sons in the parable as neither are as equally righteous or rebellious, the differences between the sons resonates with me as a parent. This redemption parable is more than a reminder of God's love of all, his ability to forgive and his desire for us to be together. It is a reminder that we are called as God's people to accept one another, make room for one another, and work to understand one another. We are not all alike, but we are all important in God's eyes.

~ Jean Reynolds

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT - APRIL 3

Luke 18:18-30 THE RICH YOUNG RULER

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

²⁰ You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.'"

²¹ He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth."

- ²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."
- ²³ But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich.
- ²⁴Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!
- ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
- ²⁶ Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"
- ²⁷ He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."
- ²⁸ Then Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you."
- ²⁹ And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,
- ³⁰ who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

Monday, April 4

Matthew, Mark and Luke all describe Jesus' meeting with this young man whom we have come to know as the "rich young ruler." The description of the rich ruler sounds much like many of us and our congregation – financially comfortable, community leaders, adherents to good moral and ethical codes, hardworking, responsible, and socially conscious volunteers in church and community endeavors. Like us, the man is sincere in his pursuit of righteousness, yet there is a sense of emptiness in his life. By telling the ruler to sell what he owns and distribute the money to the poor and that he will then have treasure in heaven, Jesus strikes at the core of what the ruler truly worships and challenges the ruler to seek the treasure of eternal life. We hear these words and we too squirm, individually and perhaps even as a congregation.

The ruler's encounter with Jesus reminds us that there is no formula (the law) to inherit eternal life because our own efforts cannot earn God's salvation which is freely and generously given. We should not place our trust in our goods or our goodness but place our trust in God; we cannot earn eternal life through money or good deeds as the treasure of eternal life comes to those who follow Christ. Our material wealth is to be enjoyed and used for good, but not worshipped. Jesus uses the ruler's love of his wealth and status to show how we fall short. Are we like the ruler who loves himself and his wealth more than the call to commitment and the freed life that Jesus promises? Can we see Jesus and God's grace as the life-saving treasure rather than money and the power and pleasures that money offers?

~ Lindsay Johnson

Tuesday, April 5



A Choice by Lauren Wright Pittman, Inspired by Mark 8: 31-38

Wednesday, April 6

I struggle with this biblical passage. The rich ruler seems to be such a successful, nice young man who honors all the commandments. He has good intentions. His one major flaw, ultimately leaving him sad and disheartened, is an unwillingness to trade all his earthly treasures for an opportunity to follow Jesus and gain eternal life. He worships materialism over a spiritual life.

Would you make the same decision? It is an extremely difficult one. We are all seduced by the trappings of money, even though our songs say: "The moon belongs to everyone," "The best things in life are free," and "Money can't buy you love."

My father lived through the Great Depression. He remembered putting cardboard in his shoes. Although he was a faithful and generous Christian, and my hero, he believed financial success was a reflection of a secure and fulfilling life.

We live in a materialistic society based on overconsumption. We judge others and evaluate ourselves by the stuff we own, including our houses and where we live, and the cars we drive. These temptations seduce us from pursuing a truly meaningful and rewarding life. The joy of receiving excessive earthly blessings distracts us from the greater joy of being a blessing.

When Jesus was asked which commandments were the most important, his response in the Gospel of Matthew was: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no room for materialism in this guidance.

Jesus led a modest life dedicated to the service of others. He should be our role model for achieving true long-lasting happiness and eternal life.

~ Judy Sherry

Thursday, April 7

Jesus teaches and models a radical approach to advance spiritually. We are to drop our ego, shed false idols and attachments. These powerful instructions he gives the ruler, who though a sincere seeker, finds it impossible to fulfill.

Can we rise to the standards Jesus sets for us? Perhaps our journey is an aspirational one, inching toward a God-focused life, even if it's not always forward motion. We zig zag as we aspire to live and move and have our being in God.

Our challenge is enormous as life points us in the opposite direction. We're encouraged to develop a strong ego, accumulate and be proud of "attachments," including relationships, jobs, accomplishments, things, etc.

Success and the dollar bill are idolized. Our education and sports systems rate, grade and organize us into groups of who is supposedly smarter and more talented. We love promotions. We believe through hard work, knowing the right people and getting into the "right" schools that we are the master of our own universe... until we realize we are not. Life's challenges (aka God's grace) humble us as we realize we are spiritually empty.

What if we didn't seek the pat on the back, knowing God alone is good? What if success at work, hobbies and family were opportunities to give thanks for the blessings – no ego?

We love idols. "My doctor/hair stylist/plumber... is the best," we say, putting our faith in people. Of course, we need each other (I recall the burst pipes in my apartment), but what if we acknowledged that God's grace is coming through the doctor, plumber, etc.?

Does Jesus want us to walk away from family and possessions? I think not. If we regard these as gifts we've been given, we liberate ourselves from overattachment, allowing us to live ever closer to God.

I imagine Jesus' challenge to stay egoless as his followers increased and put him on a pedestal. Jesus regularly sought solitude and communed with his Father to keep in the flow of God's grace. Thank you, Jesus, for another important lesson.

~ Terry Charlton

Friday, April 8

I'm not sure that I'd want to be at a dinner party with Jesus, a man who is relentlessly focused on messages of truth, delivered without moderation. Jesus encounters a rich young man who believes he has done all he needs to do to be considered a good person. Yet he is greeted immediately with, "Why do you call me good?" Jesus quotes the five commandments that pertain to how we relate to other human beings and then says, "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor... come, follow me." The young man expected one kind of answer to his desire for eternal life and is met with Christ's response about what brings true happiness: make God his one true possession and treasure.

As a movie lover, I'm struck by the huge number of films and television series that address the woes of rich people. In movies such as "Billions," "The Big Short," "Empire" and "Wall Street," the message is that the more money you have, the happier you'll be. (What we see instead is countless scenes of human misery.) While I don't believe the young man in our story is nearly the bad guy that Bobby Axelrod is in "Billions," he does not comprehend the dilemma he is in. Despite following at least five of the commandments in his young life, Jesus challenged the young man because he was afraid to give to others for fear that he would lose what he had gained.

Christ is not against us for being rich but feeling rich. He is not against our enjoyment of wealth, but our entitlement to wealth. Being rich does not depend on having more and more, but needing less and less. What are you grasping firmly to that Jesus is calling you to give up and surrender to him?

~ Jeffrey Brillhart, Director, Music and Fine Arts

Saturday, April 9

I grew up a believer, always going to church, attending a Christian college, studying theology, and now I work in a church. Over the years I have encountered this Scripture what feels like thousands of times. Every time I come across it, I always get stuck on one particular line from Jesus: *"Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* This line provokes so many thoughts for me, in which I am always left questioning Jesus' message. Would Jesus say the same thing to someone in today's world? Is money truly the root of concern from Jesus? What about good and generous people who work tirelessly to earn what they have? It is one lesson from Jesus that continues to baffle me.

All I can think is that Jesus is not only concerned about the ruler's wealth. I believe that Jesus was concerned with the ruler's heart, and that he (the ruler) was more focused on making and having money than serving God. If Jesus were talking to the same type of person who only had \$10 to their name, I believe he would tell them the same things. To me, it seems like it is less about the money, and more about the ruler's heart, and how much value and importance money has in his life. As we look at this Scripture passage, we need to ask ourselves: What parts of my life am I unwilling to give to God? Or what parts of my life am I putting more value in than my relationship with Jesus? Jesus tells the ruler to give up all his wealth and belongings to the poor, as they hold more importance than serving God.

~ Jack Liskey, Youth Director

PALM SUNDAY - APRIL 10

Luke 19:28-40 ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

- ²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.
- ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples,
- ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.
- ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"
- ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them.
- ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it."
- ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.
- ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.
- ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,
- ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"
- ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop."
- ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Monday, April 11

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." - Luke 19:39

What's with the Pharisees? They follow Jesus everywhere. In first-century Palestine, there weren't that many Pharisees; Josephus estimated 6,000 of them among six million Jews. But in the Gospels, wherever Jesus is, you'll likely find Pharisees skeptically observing, commenting, and often scolding him.

Honestly, my fundamentalist/evangelical self feels a kinship with them. Pharisee means "set apart." And while the Gospels link them with the ruling Sadducees, they were, in fact, very much in opposition, of different class, status and beliefs. The more-popular Pharisees appealed to the lower classes with a meticulous observance of written Torah, belief in the afterlife, and promotion of a new idea – the oral Torah – that God's Word encompassed more than written Scriptures. If I were a first-century Jew, I think I'd say "yes" to much of this.

And their words, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples" resonate with my "decently-in-order" Presbyterian self. I imagine they reflexively feared the open talk of kingship would trigger a harsh response from the Romans. But as "set apart," I wonder if they also were embarrassed by the parade-like atmosphere and disciples' exclamations. I admit to sometimes feeling something like that with all the hullabaloo on Palm Sunday.

But my embarrassment, imagined and experienced, gives me pause. Doesn't the promise of "abundant life" include outward expressions of joy? Is my dis-ease on Palm Sunday reflecting a reluctance to experience joy the rest of the year? Why is my faith so serious? Why not a noisy parade with yelling and expressions of joy and wonder for God's gift to us?

Prayer: God, help us experience and express the joy of Your life in ours through the gift of your Son to us. Amen.

~ Paul Burgmayer

Tuesday, April 12

Traditions. We all have them. In weddings, for example, the groom is not supposed to see the bride in her dress. The bride and groom eat the first slice of cake. The bride's dress is white. Yet, like all traditions, some are broken. For example, if I were to ever get married, I would rather have my mother walk me down the aisle instead of my dad. Some brides may prefer to wear a black dress instead of a traditional white one. And some forgo the idea that only a woman and a man can get married.

Just as people choose to break longstanding traditions, Jesus spent his life breaking traditions. He fought against the hierarchies that cut people off from one another. He set ablaze the traditions that separated whole from broken, pure from impure. Jesus tore apart the status quo and said, No, this isn't the way to love people, this is how you do it. Truly, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Traditionally, the stones wouldn't shout out. Traditionally, the crowds wouldn't have been yelling hosanna for a king when they already had the rule of the Roman empire. His words were so powerful that not even silence could contain them. When reading this story of Jesus I was drawn again and again to the idea of "the stones crying out." The Pharisees ask Jesus to tell the crowds to be silent, and Jesus responds, "If these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Jesus' identity as the Messiah is so real that even the stones would cry out. It's like gravity, something that's always there, that's always true, without which we might float off into space. In his life Jesus showed us that love was more important than tradition. In his death he gave the ultimate sacrifice so that we might have life, and life abundant. Although the resurrection of Easter Sunday is still weeks away, we know that through his resurrection it is love that will become tradition.

~ Olivia Blusiewicz, Youth Elder

Wednesday, April 13



You, Too, Must by Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Digital painting with collage, Inspired by John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Thursday, April 14

What an ironic scene! A mighty and heralded royal entry by a reluctant and passive king, one who weeps for Jerusalem instead of taking a victory lap. The crowd is there, and they are ready for their vision of Jesus – of justice – of salvation. They have expectations of what a reigning king would do to their oppressors, to the way the world is run in Jerusalem.

The Pharisees are there and recognize the claims of the crowd – that Jesus is the Messiah. They ask the chanting to stop. Do they believe the chants? Is it blasphemy? Is it dangerous? Is it because the risk of following is too high? Is it because it takes too much faith to believe this meek man on a donkey could be a king strong enough to challenge the world order?

Where are you in this story? Where am I? I fear the crowd. The crowd that sings Jesus' coming and proclaims him Lord will be a similar crowd that calls for his crucifixion. I don't trust the crowd and the mercurial nature of the mass of people. It scares me. I am too afraid to follow. I want to remain in the countryside with Jesus, listening, learning, fishing, and following. I do not want to come into the city. I recognize that once started, the momentum of this week is inevitable. That the stones will shout if the people do not. It feels like being on the roller coaster with the bar coming down across my lap. It has begun. I cannot get off now. Now we follow into Jerusalem with Jesus.

With the hindsight of history, we too weep when they celebrate their king. We know it will end in glory at an empty tomb, but we will have to make it through the week, through Friday and the long wait on Saturday. We know this week will be tough. I enter with Jesus and with caution. I trust Jesus every day, and I pray for peace and courage, even as I face the long week ahead.

~ Kiki McKendrick, Director, Middleton Counseling Center

Friday, April 15

The congregation I was called to serve shortly after Larry and I were married in Decatur, Georgia, was an ideal size to raise our young children. We were quite a distance from our extended family in Virginia and West Virginia, and members of that church were like aunts, uncles and grandparent figures to James and Winston, born and baptized among them during the first years of my ministry there.

The Palm Sunday I most remember was when James was not quite three. He had this precious little suit of blue shorts and blazer with Peter Rabbit embroidered on the lapel. The plan for the Palm Sunday worship was like ours at BMPC: the choir led the procession, followed by children and their teachers, with worship leaders last. Since it was his first Palm Sunday procession, I had the lovely idea that James and I could process holding hands and waving our branches together. Well, it was overwhelming for him – all the fuss, the loud organ and singing, the unusual commotion in a Sanctuary typically staid and quiet. James started crying loudly until his beloved teacher Jack Kittle scooped him up and carried him out the side aisle.

Every Palm Sunday since I reflect upon that moment when my own little family enacted the joy and tears that is the always the moody mix of the day. Luke tells us the crowds praise God joyfully, and yet the religious leaders become uneasy asking Jesus to stop it. "If these were silent, the stones would shout out." Many translations say "cry out." Joyous praise and crying shouts describe the mercurial emotions of the day. The short-term view is a week of conflict, denial, suffering and death, and yet the praise of God will not be stopped.

~ The Rev. Dr. Agnes W. Norfleet, Pastor & Head of Staff

Saturday, April 16

I never thought something so exciting would happen near my small village of Bethany. But this man named Jesus has been teaching in this area and performing many miracles. All my neighbors have been talking about him. He even raised my neighbor Lazarus from the dead! Imagine! Jesus has been teaching about God's love and our need to care for one another. Our religious leaders talk about God's wrath and our need to follow rules.

When I heard Jesus would be entering Jerusalem for Passover, I had to go see for myself. The crowd was large and noisy. I wondered if I would be able to get close enough to see Jesus. Then suddenly, there he was! How serene he seemed.

Some of his followers had brought him a colt that belonged to another of my neighbors. I knew the colt had never been ridden by anyone and was skittish. But Jesus spoke quietly to the colt, then sat upon him with no problem. Imagine! The crowd started singing words of praise and throwing their coats upon the path. I saw one of my uncles, a Pharisee, in the crowd. I know my uncle to be a kind man, but I also know he likes to be in charge. Jesus was disturbing his sense of order. My uncle was angry and frightened and shouted to Jesus, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

God's love cannot be stifled! Imagine! I am trying to understand it all. Jesus could do anything and those in the crowd wanted him to be their king. But Jesus seemed to say he was a new kind of king, one who would enter into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt. Just imagine!

~ Karen Dunkman

Sanctified Cirt

The art selected for this year's Lenten Devotional comes from a group called A Sanctified Art, a team of artists who use their collective talents and call to ministry to support the life and worship of congregations. You can see more of their art at *www.sanctifiedart.org*.

In their own words:

We are trained theologians and pastors in addition to being artists and creators. We are called to be artists just as much as ministers; in order to faithfully offer our gifts to the Church and world, we cannot set our creativity aside. We offer our creative gifts to resource, provoke, guide, facilitate and enrich the spiritual lives of worshipers around the world. Our core values:

- The unique creativity of all people. Created in the image of the Divine Artist, every person contains the capacity for creativity and imagination.
- The inherent goodness of all humans, regardless of identity, race, nationality, sexuality, status or gender expression.
- The good news of the Gospel that calls us to work toward liberation and wholeness for all of creation.
- Worship that welcomes all of who we are, engaging body, mind, heart and soul.

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Ash Wednesday, March 2

5:30 р.м. Family Service with Imposition of Ashes, Chapel 7:30 р.м. Service with Imposition of Ashes, Chapel

Palm Sunday, April 10

10:00 A.M. Worship Service, Sanctuary and Livestreamed

Maundy Thursday, April 14

8:00 а.м. – 8:00 р.м. Labyrinth Walk, Congregational Hall
5:30 р.м. Family Service with Communion, Chapel
7:30 р.м. Worship with Communion, Sanctuary and Livestreamed

Good Friday, April 15

8:00 а.м. – 12:00 NOON Labyrinth Walk, Congregational Hall
12:00 NOON Service led by BMPC Youth, Sanctuary
7:30 р.м. In observance of Good Friday, the Sanctuary Choir will present the Philadelphia region's premiere of Allan Bevan's "Nou Goth Sonne Under Wode," Sanctuary and Livestreamed

Easter Sunday, April 17

6:30 а.м. – Sunrise Service, Front Lawn
9:30 а.м. – Worship Service, Sanctuary and Livestreamed
11:00 а.м. – Worship Service, Sanctuary

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church 625 Montgomery Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010 | 610-525-2821 | www.bmpc.org