

OUR LENTEN JOURNEY



A group of priests processing into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem for mass during Lent. This is the site where Jesus is thought to have been crucified and buried. Photo by Ben Lemphers 2019

LENTEN READER 2020

A COMPILATION OF REFLECTIONS ON OUR LENTEN
JOURNEY TOWARDS EASTER FROM MEMBERS OF
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HALIFAX



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

HALIFAX

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Before You Begin

It has been a joy to work on compiling the reflections, prayers, poems, stories and thoughts of this congregation as we journey in our faith together. Lent is a time that causes us to pause and examine ourselves. It is a time to look at our own spiritual practices and see if there are places to be stretched or challenged in, to add a practice or take something away. The 40 days of Lent are modeled after the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert before beginning his public ministry. (Matthew 4:1-11). And if you're doing your counting, you'll notice that Sunday's are not part of the 40 days of Lent as each Sunday is a mini Easter.

During this very intentional 40 days, it is our hope that these reflections from the congregation help to inform and shape your own practice. Thank you to the many individuals in our church who helped to guide us on this journey over these next 40 days. Your honesty, thoughts, images and wonderings are much appreciated. I feel like I have learned a little more about each of you and your personal spiritual life. Whether you choose to use this as a daily devotion in the season of lent or read it though cover to cover, may your faith grow, be challenged, questioned, stumbled over, and strengthened by fellow travellers on the way.

As you use this guide throughout the season of Lent, you will notice that the Scripture references are in sequential order and cover in it's entirety the Gospel of Mark. For just a little more than a year now as a church we have switched from using the Revised Common Lectionary to using the Narrative Lectionary. One of the aspects of the Narrative Lectionary that I love is that we really get to hear the full story, and not just snippets here and there. It is our hope that in reading through this Lent devotion book, you may hear a story that maybe you're not as familiar with or perhaps have a new perspective based on the full reading of Mark's Gospel. Reading through Mark is also something I encourage all the youth who have joined the youth Baptism class to do to have a full understanding of who Jesus is. The reading guide of the division of this Gospel was taken from Rowan Williams' book, "Meeting God in Mark." If you are using this resource electronically, Erick Lee has inserted hyperlinks to the Scripture references, just click on them to read the passages. You will also be able to click in the table of contents to a certain day and jump immediately to that reflection.

Thank you to Warren Hoeg who was tasked with sending me photos that represented a certain theme based on the previous week's Gospel readings, as seen in the Sundays over Lent. Sometimes these images express things words cannot. Thank you also to Lara and Bob Hazelton for editing through the submissions and to Erick Lee for formatting and compiling our stories.

During our journey toward the cross and resurrection as a church community, know that you are not alone in your faith journey. Each one of us has a story to share, and I am grateful for the ones in this book.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Jenny Drewitz

Mark 1:1-3

Reflection provided by David Bourque.

I am honoured to be given the opportunity to reflect on Mark 1:1-3. Here we are at the very beginning of the oldest canonical Gospel! This passage includes the well-known reference to Isaiah 40:3. The NRSV of Mark 1:1-3 reads as follows: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

This is the very first Gospel reference to the good news of our salvation! John the Baptist has arrived to prepare the way of the Lord! Christ has come among us to reconcile us with God in a new covenant! John called for all to repent, which is a prevalent theme for lent. What does repentance really mean? As Christians, we often associate repentance with regretting past sinful behaviour and making amends. The true meaning of repentance is to change direction, to seek atonement (reconciliation) with God.

Ash Wednesday is an invitation to turn away from sin and follow the gospel. Today, we are beginning a period of self-reflection. What obstacles do we have in our lives that may be obstructing the way of the Lord? What changes can we make in our lives to make His paths straight? During Ash Wednesday service, we receive the ashes in the shape of a cross on our foreheads. The ashes are traditionally prepared by burning palm branches left over from the previous Palm Sunday. What is the symbolism involved with this practice? In Old Testament times, people used ashes as an external sign of repentance, and this continued in the Christian Church. We use ashes as an outward expression of our need to repent, to begin again on our faith journey. The ashes are also symbolic of our mortality, as stated in Genesis 3:19 “You are dust and to dust you shall return.”

As we begin our Lenten journey, may we find time every day for reflection and prayer.

Mark 1: 14-28

Reflection provided by Donna Smith Darrell.

I would like to share this Lenten prayer I recently found in one of my late Mother's Bibles. She embraced the Lenten season as a time of self-denial and reflection.

A Prayer for Lent

O God in Christ, there is no ground anywhere that is not Holy ground, for in the cool of the evening you have walked upon it, and in the heat of the day, died upon it, and at the coming of the dawn, you have returned and are always and everywhere returning to it and to us who walk on it too, this Holy ground, though heedless of its holiness. O make us whole. Set us free.

You shaped us each in the darkness of the womb to give us life and you know us each by name, and not one is forgotten by you. Everyone is precious in your sight, the ugly with the beautiful, the criminal with the child, the enemy with the friend.

Lord, give us eyes to see each other and ourselves more nearly as you see us, to see beneath each face we meet, and beneath even our own faces, your face.

Help us to know that for each of us, you have died as that one were the only one.

Mark 1: 29-45

Reflection provided by Marilyn Peers.

This passage from the Bible begins by describing Jesus leaving the synagogue where he had been teaching, and going straight to Simon and Andrew's house where Simon's mother is ill in bed with a fever. I find myself identifying with his mother, so ill she is incapacitated in the situation. Had I been her, what a beacon of hope it must have been to see a hand reach out to take mine, help me to my feet, and so restore my health that I am able to welcome the visitors to my home. How full of joy she must have been--no wonder by evening, the whole town gathered at her door.

Why did I identify with her? Then the memory came back. I was a very young student at a university in Northern Spain when I took very ill. I felt so ill, I felt I would soon pass away, miles from my family in Canada. Spanish speaking doctors came and went to my room but could make no diagnosis. Then came a doctor who knew one English sentence--he reached out his hand to me and holding it, asked, "What are your stresses and disturbances?" But he was a beacon of hope, and indeed it turned out to be so. I felt I owed my life to him, and my joy knew no bounds.

Going back to Luke's story, Jesus left Simon's house early the next morning to a quiet place to pray. But people were still looking for him. Seeing Jesus as a beacon of hope, a leper begged for his help and said he knew Jesus could cleanse him. Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and he was immediately made clean. Again another image of a helping hand reaching out to me, came to my mind. Now studying in Germany, I and a few German friends were swimming across a fairly wide river, when I began to lose my strength and realized I could not reach the further shore. I was able to float and as I was being carried down the river by the current, one of my friends looked back and realized what was happening. Suddenly, there was a hand reaching out to me at this critical moment. I understand the joy the leper felt who had been healed. Although Jesus told him to say nothing to anyone, he went out and made the whole story public, spreading it far and wide. Such was his joy.

We have all had the experience of reaching out a hand to help. That is the essence of the teachings of Jesus with his message of love. Such a simple gesture as reaching out can be a life changing beacon of hope for another. As we prepare ourselves during Lent for the celebration of Easter, may our hands be ready to reach out to others with His love.

Mark 2: 1-7

Reflection provided by Joe O'Brien.

THE GREATEST GIFT

In Early January, Rev. Rusty asked us to “Remember your Baptism and be grateful.” He went on to say that in Jesus’ Baptism, as set out in Mark, the heavens were opened and God showed up ‘on the ground’. So long as God is a long way off, so long as God is “up there”, we can make our rules to control God. But Baptism, Rev. Rusty contended, brings God to ground – as witnessed in First Baptist members’ work with refugees, serving breakfast at the Brunswick Street mission, teaching English at the library and many other manifestations of God at work in us. At the end of his sermon, Rev. Rusty asked us to pause and reflect on our Baptism, and in so doing, gave me the opportunity to recognize my greatest gift.

I was baptized as an infant, and grew up with no discussion at home about Baptism or other sacraments. They were simply a given. I never really knew who my parents were – as individual persons – and only came to realize, at this age of 77, that my parents gave me the greatest gift possible in having me baptized as an infant, a baptism which set me on my life’s journey as a practicing Christian – and I am grateful.



Newness

New born duckling, at the Brookfield Marsh, Colchester Co., NS

Photo by Warren Hoeg

Mark 2: 18-28

Reflection provided by Arla Johnson.

As I reflected upon our reading, two themes emerged, transformation and rest.

Lent is the perfect opportunity for us to implement needed changes in our lives, many of us give up a “bad habit” or offer time for community service. Meaningful as our Lenten efforts maybe, are we setting aside the time that is needed to “be still” before God and pounder Jesus teachings and feel Gods love for us.

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins”

As we ponder this verse we can believe it to be instructing us to be transformed and made anew be our Lord’s teachings. By receiving God’s words for living and by following the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit, we have the capacity to be transformed and made anew.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”

I love the fact, that in all of creation God made Sabbath for us! God not only calls us to rest, he commands it, and in our busy days / weeks, how many of us actually do this? I remember in a class I was attending, we read how Jürgen Moltmann, a German Theologian, described the concept of Sabbath. For Moltmann, Sabbath is our allocated time to sit in the presence of God. Sabbath is our designated time “to be still” before God and feel Gods closeness, to be held by God and allow our love to deepen. During times of Sabbath we have the opportunity to see and feel God’s loving presence. I equate this feeling to being in the presence of a loved one, gazing at them and seeing and feeling their gaze back at us, feeling in the stillness and silence this pure love unspoken...This is what Sabbath calls us to experience with God; to feel God’s love for us and to be held by God, this is God’s gift of Sabbath.

I pray that during this sacred time of year, you may be transformed in some way, and take God’s gift of Sabbath to feel Gods love for you.

Mark 3: 1-12

Reflection provided by Brian Ashton.

In this passage Jesus performs the miracle of healing a man with a “withered” hand on the Sabbath. There are Pharisees there who are both mortified and secretly pleased that Jesus performed this act of healing on the sacred day of rest. It is another piece of evidence that they will bring to the authorities against this rabble-rousing law-breaker.

The lesson in this story is straight-forward enough. Sometimes the greater good is done by not slavishly following rules. The Pharisees are the rigid-thinking bad guys and Jesus is our favourite rebel with an unparalleled cause. But are we so different from the Pharisees?

Every society needs rules. There are rules against stealing or hurting others that are obviously good. There are other rules where the benefit is not seen immediately (paying taxes, going to school). Good people follow rules because they can either see the good or have faith that good comes from them, eventually. And who are we Christians if not people who strive to do good and have faith?

The faith of the Pharisees was in the laws handed down for countless generations. In their tradition, these rules came from the hand of the Almighty and were eternal and unchangeable. When Jesus healed the hand of the man on the Sabbath, it could not be seen by these law-followers as a minor infraction. The Pharisees did not know who Jesus was or his greater plan that trumped all rules.

We all have feelings about rule-breakers. It is common fodder for news reports and water-cooler talk. Often our judgements are made on incomplete information and based on our narrow experience and biases. I hope that I could recognize the great goodness of Jesus Christ, the rule breaker, if he were here in our midst today. But I should pray for the wisdom to be aware of the judgements that I pass on others, on a daily basis, and to consider ‘the rules’ which may encrust my mind and heart.

Mark 3: 13-35

Reflection and photos provided by the Currie Family—Mike, Shelly, Hudson and Wesley.

Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him and he would send them out to preach (Mark 3:14).

As part of Jesus' family we are all called to "go out and preach" so to speak. The baton has been passed to us to help others in our community by using our special gifts and talents. As parents, we reflect upon this often, as we want our boys to develop this nature as they grow. We want to be positive role models in this respect, and also encourage any and all opportunities that would allow the boys to give back.

For the last 2 years our oldest son Hudson has had the distinct pleasure to be involved with a local group called The Sandwich Club. This group was started by a young person who noticed that there weren't a lot of opportunities for kids and youth to help with persons who are homeless or experiencing precarious housing in our city. At Sandwich Club Hudson can use his sandwich making talents; but more than that, he uses his natural leadership and inspirational abilities to spread the word about Sandwich Club and is always encouraging his friends to come along with him.

In February 2018 Hudson had the opportunity to promote the good work of the Sandwich Club during a local 100 Kids Who Care Event at Sacred Heart School of Halifax. He wrote a speech and "pitched" to the kids who were present at the meeting in hopes of winning money for the Sandwich Club. His pitch won second prize and he secured \$50 for the Sandwich Club that evening, and more importantly, he raised awareness amongst his peers about the Sandwich Club and inspired others to join! We are proud to see Hudson using his natural gifts to "go out and preach" in his community and amongst his peers; we hope to see him continue to do this as he moves into his adolescent and adult years.

Here is Hudson's pitch:

Hey my name is Hudson Currie and tonight I'm pitching for Sandwich Club Nova Scotia. I know most of you probably had a sandwich in your lunch or some bread related product today! But for some people in Halifax who are homeless they might not even had lunch today or yesterday and maybe tomorrow.

A few months ago my mom read about a Sandwich Club in the newspaper. At first I said, "nope not doing it" without even thinking. Then my mom said it was for kids grades 4 and up, and then she explained to me why and told me it was a great opportunity to help homeless people and help them get food in there stomachs. My mom thought it was really important so she made me go.

When I got there I was the first one there, and the club organizer, Rita-Claire, signed me in, and explained what to do and she said, "Please go wash your hands and put on some gloves." So I did, and then I asked what I could do she said, "You can unpack carrots" so I went over and unpacked 30 bags of carrots.

Then we all get into groups and make sandwiches for 1 hour, then we pack the sandwiches in lunch

bags with juice, carrots and a dessert. Once we are finished we get a snack then go home. We made 223 lunches the first time I went.

I thought the experience was great and so I went the second time and we made 202 sandwiches. I think its awesome and you should all go and try to reach 300 sandwiches next sandwich club is Saturday March 31. You can ask my mom for the address and time.

After sandwich club is finished, Rita-Claire takes them down to Metro Turning Point, which is an 80-bed shelter in central Halifax. Metro Turning Point is part of a larger organization called Shelter Nova Scotia. Shelter Nova Scotia helps 1200 people per year with things like food, beds for sleeping, and other resources. Sandwich Club sandwiches helps Metro Turning Point be able to make their food budget go even further.

Thanks for listening!



Hudson & Rita-Claire



Hudson's pitch

Mark 4: 1-20

Reflection provided by Peggy Dunbar.

These past few years have been very difficult for me, as I know they may have been for many of you. We all have losses, but hopefully many joys that also bring us peace and comfort. This Lenten period allows us that all important time for heightened reflection.

As I was thinking about what I might share, I kept coming back to how my faith community (our church) has been such a great, often silent, comfort and support. I think a number of us would have these same sentiments. While at times I have questioned my faith, no one can deny what we provide to each other. It doesn't always have to be in words or specific actions, but the silent times we share together—merely a gentle nod, a knowing smile, a little hug or a simple touch...While these can at times bring us to tears, they also provide immeasurable comfort.

I realize that it is not that my pain is different, or any worse; but, how one carries it and copes with it, is different. Within my family, we are all trying to find our way, our new way. I continue to search for peace, to clear my head, and spend my time close to nature—In essence to distract myself and to experience all the beauty that surrounds us. I am nostalgic to a fault, yearn for happier times, and try to occupy my thoughts.

I take great comfort from the Footprints in the Sand poem; the final lines sum it nicely for me: ...The Lord replied, "My Precious, Precious Child, I love you and would never leave you. During your time of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of foot prints, it was then that I carried you."

I also believe some things happen for a reason, by chance really. When I agreed to prepare for this year's Lenten Reader, I had just started a new book. Little did I know how relevant it was to today's reading, and how the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soil would play itself out within its pages. *Five Wives*, by Joan Thomas, is the story of the wives of the missionaries that were killed during the Auca Operation in Ecuador in the mid 1950's. They, as did their husbands, have such faith...more than I could ever imagine. What I have come to appreciate is that faith has a different meaning to each of us, and sometimes manifests in mysterious ways. This book helps you to understand the circumstances that make us who we are, and provides added insights into how even the best soil (the best intentions) can lead to different outcomes.

Mark 4: 21-34

Reflection provided by Ian McKee.

My lesson is Mark 4 verses 21-34. Jesus speaking in parables. I have a story for you. It is not really a lesson similar to those told by Jesus but is in fact it a true story of the Christian Church to make you smile, I hope. There may or may not be a religious lesson but there is a view of the Navy as an organization of which I am extremely proud and the expediencies of that service. I am almost certain you are allowed to smile during lent, not be over exuberant perhaps but a small curve of the lip should be acceptable.

This particular story is about a Royal Navy ship that was on an extended cruise in the 1800s in the remote parts of the Pacific Ocean. Life on board tall ships was hard and particularly so in extreme hot and cold weather. Unfortunately one of the crew died a long way from home. The captain sent for the padre and observing there was no way to take the newly deceased back with them he thus ordered a boat to take him to the nearby beautiful island to conduct an appropriate burial. The chaplain said he was unable to follow that order as there was no consecrated ground on the island and a Christian burial was not possible. The captain ordered the chaplain ashore to consecrate the ground so that a burial could follow forthwith. It cannot be done advised the padre as it requires a bishop to consecrate ground.

Not to be stymied by such a small detail the captain immediately held "Requestmen and Defaulters" and promoted the padre to bishop, sent him ashore and a suitable burial was arranged.

Everyone noticed that the newly created bishop seemed now to be putting on airs and conducting himself in a very superior manner. It was at this point the captain discovered that a bishop outranked a Naval captain in the order of protocol. He forthwith reassembled the Requestmen and Defaulters and demoted the 'bishop' back to chaplain so that the cruise could continue as before.

Christ appears to us many times in connection with the sea. I think he might have approved.

You will have noted that Baptists don't have bishops.

Mark 4: 35-41

Reflection provided by Joanne Stonehouse.

The Calm After the Storm

Upon reading Mark 4:35-41 I was immediately transported back in time to almost fifty years ago to an event which would strengthen my faith and define my relationship with my God. It is 1972 and I find myself in an isolated fishing village on the coast of Labrador fulfilling my responsibilities as a newly appointed teacher. I am boarding with a wonderful multigenerational family whose eldest daughter is about to have her first baby. Her plan was to have the sea plane which delivered the mail take her to the Grenville nursing station just down the coast and the nurses would deliver her baby. She had been in labor for a few hours when a fog bank rolled in totally enveloping the entire village and the harbour which meant that the plane could not land. The decision was made that her father would take her in his open motor boat and that the teacher would go too. The family believed that the teacher, because she had been to university, knew EVERYTHING including how to safely deliver a baby. I desperately tried to explain otherwise but to no avail. The RCMP officer was also coming along as he too had expected to hitch a ride on the mail plane. Like me he had just completed his training and this was his first posting. I assumed that he would know exactly what to do and that, if need be, he would deliver the baby. We are in the open boat and there is "a lop on" which meant that there were substantial waves, wind and white caps. Her contractions are increasing and I motion to the constable that he best get ready to take over. I will never forget the look of sheer terror that came over his face. I soon learned that on the day when this topic was presented he had closed his eyes through most of it. He asked what we should do and I simply said, "We pray". This is exactly what we did. I prayed that we would get there in time and I implored Mr. H to go faster despite the weather conditions. I instructed the constable, who was a devout Roman Catholic, to pray to every applicable saint. Just as in verse 38, the wind was blowing, the waves were breaking and there was water coming into the boat. Then within minutes the curtain of fog lifted, the wind calmed down as did the waves and we were heading straight into the shore guided by the lights of the nursing station. Three nurses greeted us and with the efficient compassion which one associates with all nurses our young mother was whisked away just in time to deliver her baby into safe hands. During our trip back as I gazed into a star filled and perfectly moon lit northern sky I thanked God with all my heart.

May we all in times of joy, sorrow, fear, triumph, and tragedy remember that we are not alone.



Calm Water

A calm afternoon, at the Miners March, Kentville, Annapolis Valley, NS.

Photo by Warren Hoeg

Mark 5: 1-20

Reflection provided by Julian Summers.

Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man

Fear is a fascinating and complex experience. In effect, it is an emotional response to a perceived threat. This story of Jesus and the demon-possessed man is exemplary of such palpable fear, however, not exclusively so. It can also be read as a message of great hope and the inspiration of great faith. It is interesting to note that the possessed man ran to Jesus, showing that in our fear we have a divine option to turn to. Jesus faces a “legion” without the slightest hint of anxiety or concern, just power and authority. After curing the man of his evil spirits, the people who witnessed also began to fear Jesus. But the resolution of this passage is the people of the Decapolis (the Ten Cities), who heard the stories of Jesus, were ultimately amazed. Be in wonder and know that God is with you always.

A Prayer for the Fearful

We freely give ourselves to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, the source of our strength.
In the presence of fear, have us know that you are among us always.
In the face of many or in the presence of one, shield us from all that strives to separate and isolate us.
There is no longer fear, but stillness in God.

For us, all things become possible through the Lord.

In our trying times remind us of your promises:

“The LORD will fight for you; you need only be still” (Exodus 14:14),
because in the Lord rests our trust. “Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”
(1 Peter 5:7)

Mark 5: 21-43

Sketch provided by Amy Ordoveza.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed



Mark 6: 1-13

Reflection provided by Megan Henderson.

“God does not require that we be successful only that we be faithful.”- Mother Theresa

This passage tells of Jesus's teachings, and of people who were doubtful of him and the things he spoke of. Despite that he was not always accepted by others and his teachings weren't understood by all those that heard him speak, Jesus continued to spread the word of the Lord.

In today's society, many people are doubtful of the Lord's existence and do not understand His word. We, the disciples of Christ, are sent by God to continue to speak of his Word and educate others, despite that the things we believe may not necessarily be in alignment with the beliefs of others and not everyone will agree with us. We are not asked by God to please everyone nor to be successful in convincing people of His existence, but rather simply to stay faithful to Him and to continue to serve Him.

Mark 6: 14-29

Reflection provided by Rita Ugbebor.

GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS REWARD FAITHFUL DISCIPLES WITH EASY LIFE.

The positioning of the narrative of the martyrdom of John the Baptist in the gospel according to Saint Mark was significantly different from those of Mathew and Luke. Mark starts with the successful mission of the twelve disciples which remains the fundamentals of the spread of the Good News of Christ. He sandwiched the story of John's martyrdom (Mark6:14-29) between the mission of the twelve (Mark 6:12&13) and concluded with the successful mission of the twelve in Mark 6:30. This is significant of the way God's work must continue unabated in the midst of persecutions.

As a woman trying to live life each day within the precepts of Christianity and what the world has to offer, I get confused and boxed-in, trying to choose the good or combine both. The results often are a set-back or some sort of challenges that bewilders me. Oftentimes I ran to God explaining how I have tried to keep the faith and live within His precepts. I hoped that doing God's works will result in me living a hitch-free life.

As Christians we try to justify our walk with Christ by expecting all things to work perfectly with us and our loved ones. So, when we confronted with challenges like; sicknesses, delays in our prayers answered, rejection, or even death of a loved one, we get upset, we react negatively in His presence or totally abandon God's ways.

Another lesson we can derive from the positioning of John's martyrdom in Mark's gospel is that God always does not reward faithful disciples with easy life, but His grace is ALWAYS enough for us at each season of our lives. We should not expect applause for preaching prophetically. The way Mark tried to show the church in his time, is also the same way that we as Christians of today need to understand how God want the continuation of His works by us His disciples.



Mark 6: 30-56

Reflection provided by Erick Lee.

The people were hungry. A great crowd had come to listen to Jesus and the day was getting late. Instead of sending the crowd home, Jesus directed the apostles to feed them. But the apostles had only five loaves of bread and two fish. Not nearly enough to feed everyone. Jesus broke the bread and gave it to the apostles to distribute and miraculously there was enough to feed everyone with food left over.

Jesus worked through the apostles to amplify their provisions until there was enough for everyone. When we place our trust in God, our gifts and offerings are also amplified to do his work. Our gifts, money, and talents are never too small to serve God.

This story makes me think about food security in our community. Food security is when all people, at all times can get the food they need to be healthy and active. This includes being able to afford healthy food that is within easy reach.

How can we make a difference in our community to help provide access to healthy food?

How do we address the root causes of food insecurity and not only provide short term relief?

Compassion and generosity can be our response to the people in our community in need.

Mark 7: 1-23

Reflection provided by Bev Smith.

Wherever I lived I have always gone to church but it has only been lately that church has become important to me as I get spiritually revitalized every Sunday. It has helped me to keep a check on my behavior to make sure I am living in a Christian way. Communion has also become more important to me. For many years I went through the motions but now it means much more than that. I also appreciate the fellowship I find at First Baptist and I look forward to seeing everyone each Sunday. I try to be a good Christian and I realize that I do not always achieve that but I also know that the Lord will not abandon me if I stumble and do not always achieve that state. First Baptist has been my church home for 58 years and it will continue to be my place of peace and spiritual rejuvenation. As I age I try to walk in the ways that the Lord would want me to. What is inside is much more important than being clean on the outside and I try to remember that.



Awe

An Autumn view from the Canning Lookoff, Annapolis Valley, NS.

Photo by Warren Hoeg

Mark 7: 24-37

Reflection provided by Andrew Bethune.

Barney strode down the avenue. He had a spring in his step. He had brand new shoes on. Canary yellow sneakers with bright white laces. As he stepped around the fallen leaves on the sidewalk, the corners of his mouth curled into a satisfied smile.

Barney had his eye on these shoes for weeks. He had to save money from four paychecks to afford them. It was a long wait, but today he finally walked into the store and bought them. It was the first new piece of clothing he had bought in two years.

The sun peeked through the billowing grey clouds in the sky. A fragrant breeze came up, lifting a few crisp leaves to float beside Barney as he walked down the avenue in his new yellow shoes.

Barney saw the figure a block away. A head cast down, a rain jacket draped over the form like an impotent tarp. The person underneath didn't move, only sat and held a coffee cup in one hand and in the other a cardboard sign that said, "ANYTHING HELPS".

As he approached the downcast person, Barney fished in his pocket. He still had some change left. His heart quickened: he was about to make this person's day. Grabbing all the coins he could feel, he tossed the money into the cup.

Barney was surprised when a splash of hot coffee leapt from the cup and into the lap of the person he was trying to help. "God damn you!" spat the person, splashing the rest of the cup back over Barney's legs. Barney ran away, shocked.

A figure lays on a park bench, covered by a rain jacket. With his head hidden, he doesn't see the man approaching. "Hey, get up!" snaps the man. The figure sits up, bleary-eyed. "Move it!" snaps the man again, jostling the homeless man down to one end of the bench. He puts a foot up to tie his shoe. The homeless man notices they are canary yellow shoes, stained with sloppy black silt. The laces are an ugly brown colour, and dripping.

"My feet are burning," says the man in the yellow shoes. He looks at the homeless man with a searching gaze. "Not like you care," he sniffs. He kicks rocks up at the homeless man and stomps away. A dry leaf skips across the path.

No matter what kind of person you run into, or what kind of day you're having, it's up to you to treat everyone with dignity. If you fail to do that, you forfeit your own dignity.

Mark 8: 1-21

Reflection provided by Kim Harper-Givens.

After reading two different commentaries on the biblical meaning of Mark 8:1-21, I chose to quote Rev. Dr. Ray Fowler, Senior Pastor of Plantation Community Church in Plantation, Florida. Reverend Fowler's thoughts resonated with me; and so I would like to share them with all of you.

"Have you been worrying over God's provision lately? I know I have been struggling with this. These are difficult economic times, and some of us are feeling financial pressures like never before. We need to take this second feeding of the multitude to heart. Remember! Remember who Jesus is and what he has done. Don't just look at the feeding of the four thousand and say, "What a neat miracle!" Don't be like the Pharisees looking for a sign when Christ has already come. Don't be like the disciples wondering if Jesus can do it again and just focusing on the physical bread. Dig deeper, and see the deeper meaning behind the miracle. Jesus is God. He has not changed. What he has done before, he can do again. He has promised to meet your every need, and he will continue to do so."

May this Lenten season be a time of reflection on our trust and faith in Jesus; and may we ask of Jesus that we will be an answer to someone's prayer and a "miracle" to others.

Mark 8: 22 - Mark 9:1

Reflection provided by Paula Z. Antunes.

Jesus worked miracles and people were so amazed with His power over the greatest enemies, that they had a hard time believing in those miracles. This Lent, I will make sure my heart is open to believe. Because I can see, today, Jesus working miracles in our lives through other people. And whatever the struggle, Jesus will calm it down.



Mark 9: 2-29

Reflection provided by John Dalton.

Here we have another wonderful story about a miracle that Jesus performed. But it is the very last line in particular that I wish to comment on. “This kind can come out only by prayer.” The Gospels tell us Jesus prayed often... in the morning, at night, before eating, after healing people, while hanging on the cross. He even taught us how to pray. Jesus certainly believed in the power of prayer.

My own father was fond of quoting Lord Tennyson “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of”. My father believed in the power of prayer. And so do I. But what is prayer? Prayer is when we talk to God. It’s as plain and simple as that. We talk to God in formal prayers at church, and we talk to God in intimate prayers at home or alone. When I pray each morning at home, it’s an opportunity to tell God how grateful I am for all the blessings I enjoy every day, and to ask God to protect and bless my children and all those I love. I call those my everyday prayers. But there have also been hard times, sad times, when I had a particular request to ask of God, a problem that I knew could only be solved through the power of prayer. And every time, every time, God answered that request. Not immediately, and most times not in the way I had imagined, but the request was never denied. “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of”.

Jesus certainly believed in the power of prayer. Do you?

Mark 9: 30-50

Reflection provided by Christine Fall Moore.

As I read Mark 9:30-50 I reflected on what it is to be human while following the teachings of Jesus. What mattered in the past? What matters in this moment? What matters in the future? What will matter when I die?

These are the words I meditate on daily. We are all seasoned through the pain, the suffering, the laughter, and joy, but what will remain? When I look back on the story of Jesus and Mark 9:30-50 what matters is compassion, love and kindness. What matters is presence. What matters in the future is not the tangible as we cannot take things to the grave, but what matters is faith. I will return to the place where I came from, just as we all do, and there we will be one with God, differences will fade, and our true essence will remain. When I am stripped of my body, titles, and all materials what will be left?

These teachings tell me to remember the goal, that we will be fully integrated again to share our experiences, to increase our frequency.

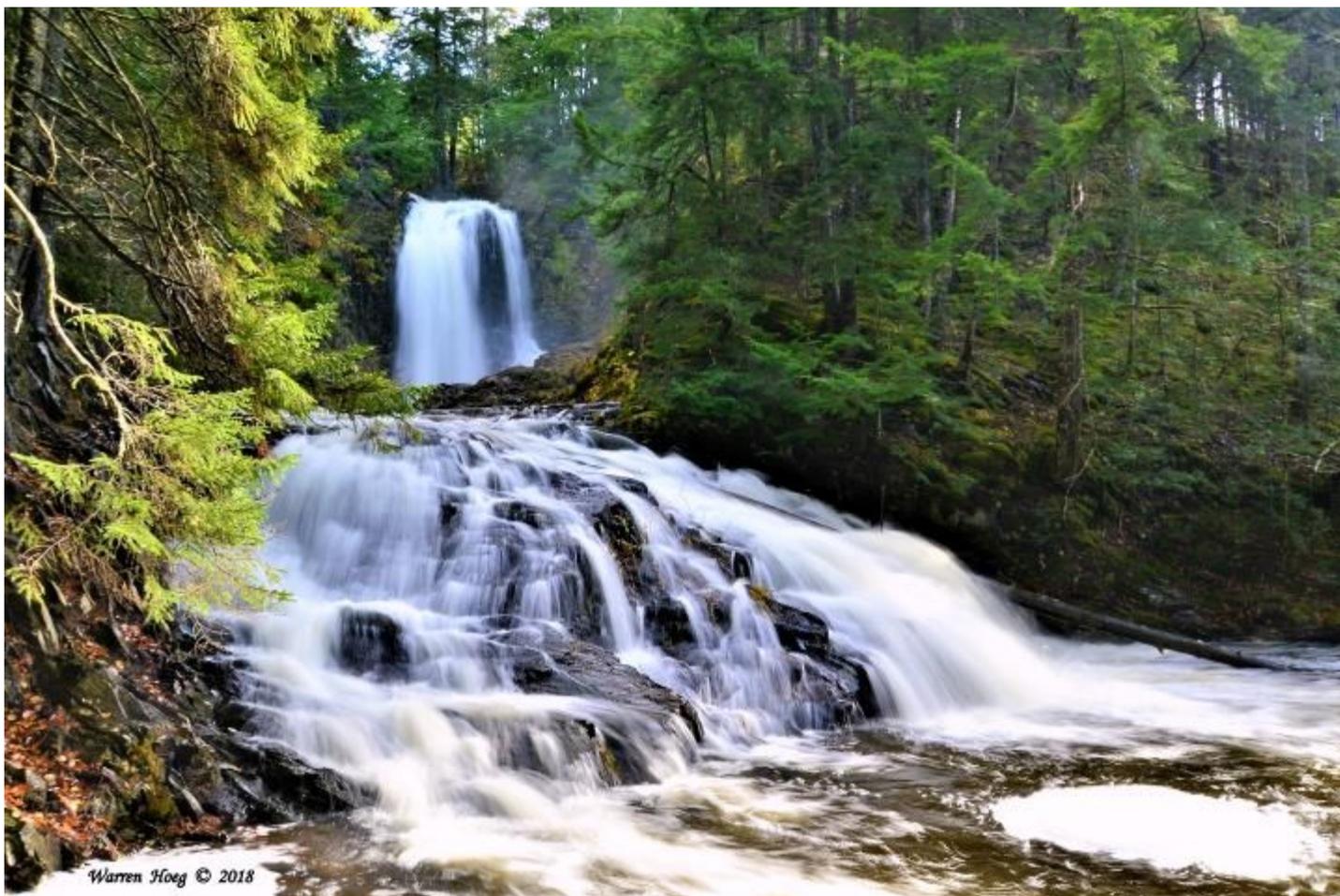
Mark 10: 1-16

Reflection provided by Janet Margeson.

These passages have given me a lot to contemplate over and I am constantly reminded that context for today's world should be used in the interpretation of Mark's "getting down to business" writings. He writes of divorce and perhaps his meaning was to secure the union so that a woman would not be cast into society as a beggar and therefore carry this stigma to her end with no hope for reunification into a loving relationship. I would like to believe that this is no longer the case in today's societies but know this is not true as I read of many cultures where escape from non-loving relationships ends in terror. I am reminded of Rumana Monzur (https://www.cbc.ca/documentarychannel/m_features/survivor-rumana-monzur-talks-about-why-she-stayed-in-an-abusive-marriage) who credits love for her daughter as the motivator to move forward for justice to fight for women who need to "untie the knot" that binds them in abusive relationships.

Mark teaches his disciples that children are at the very center of life in the kingdom, gathering them up in his arms and laid his hands of blessing on them. This metaphor teaches us that we must all be watchful for those that push children away and not welcome them into safety. I look around our church family and know of many situations where the security of children became life changing moments for these people. Deacon Emerita Dr. Pauline Allsop was in Sierra Leone at the time of the Liberian Civil War where she was involved in distributing food to families that were impacted by this war spilling over the borders. Her mission continues to teach us much as we cannot give up on God's love for the most vulnerable. As a teacher, I remember the first time that I had to make a call to Social Services as I was very worried about a young girl. I was in my early 20's and looking back now, was not that much removed from being a child myself yet knew at the time, the safety of a child was the most important thing to ensure. Throughout my career, the call was made several more times, each time knowing that my faith was guiding me to make the right decision and not second guess myself. In one case, I was able to witness many years later the outcome of my decision, where the young girl child became a happy, confident individual. Jesus continues to teach us to be vigilant and aware of the needs of the child. Seek to listen with open hearts to others around us and know that God's love will assist in the route to feed the hungry and provide safety for those in need as the need is real. As Ishmael Beah recently said at an open dialogue series at Dalhousie University "continue to tell the story", so that we become educated on the plight of those around us and the conditions that affect humanity.

As Jesus has taught us: accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child.....



Mountain

A double waterfall, "Butcher Hill Falls", in the mountains of Colchester Co.,
NS.

Photo by Warren Hoeg

Mark 10: 17-34

Reflection provided by Sandy Yip

In today's passage, a wealthy man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' initial reply is to list the Ten Commandments with which we are all familiar, upholding the importance of the Old Testament Law. When the man replies that he has followed these laws all his life, Jesus has no doubt of his sincerity. He then instructs the man to go above and beyond, to sell all his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor -- underlining the importance of caring for others -- and to follow Jesus. In Jesus' time, wealth was a sign of blessing, so it was radical for His disciples to be told to divest themselves of their possessions. Does Jesus really call us to give up all our worldly possessions in order to gain eternal life?

What does the wealthy person lack -- perhaps a sense of dependency and vulnerability? Wealth is often accompanied by power and prestige. These may become barriers to generosity, humility, and gratitude. Jesus reminds us to be attuned to the needs of others in our community, and to seek righteousness. He also tells us that all things are possible through God, even those that might be impossible on our own.

This passage reminds me of other similar teachings of Jesus:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." - Matthew 6:25-33

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." - Matthew 25:35-36

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" -Mark 8:34-37

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." -Luke 12:48

Prayer: Gracious and all-knowing God, in our daily efforts to secure material comfort for ourselves and our families, may we remember that all we have is gained through your grace and bounty. Let us be ready to follow you, to share both our material and spiritual gifts with those in need, and by so doing help build your Kingdom here on earth. Amen.

Mark 10: 35-52

Reflection provided by FBCH Youth Group

The Request of James and John and Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

James and John: "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory"

Bartimaeus: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." ... (Jesus) What do you want me to do for you? "Rabbi, I want to see". Go, your faith has healed you.

In reviewing these two stories with the youth they had many great questions and insightful reflections.

What is the difference between the disciples' ask and Bartimaeus's?

Why did Jesus grant one ask and not the other?

The disciples were thinking "I'm all that and a bag of chips" said the youth. The disciples thought they were special and they wanted to be recognized and put in a place of honour for everyone to see."

The disciples asked for what they WANTED, the blind man was asking for what he NEEDED, what we all need - God's mercy.

The disciples were wanting recognition and power. The blind man called out for "mercy" and asked for his sight. The blind man was given his sight literally, the disciples needed sight spiritually.

Let us be humble and ask God's Mercy, ask for spiritual sight to see God's life for us.

Mark 11: 1-11

Reflection provided by Lois MacGibbon and Isabella Kirkegaard.

Jesus the King chose to ride on a donkey

Recently my work took me to the Halifax Provincial Court. I had left Isabella at the Halifax Regional Library as she had a day off school. We had had breakfast at Pavia's as it was early and the library was not yet open. To enter Pavia's, we needed to walk through the locked outer library foyer where four homeless people were tucked into the corners, faces covered, perhaps trying to be unobtrusive. Upon my return from court, Izzy had a story for me.

"After you left, I witnessed a fight between a homeless man and woman. They were both very loud and the woman kept cursing at the man. A security guard and a librarian had to get involved. The homeless woman was forced to leave the building. She sat on a bench and cried. Then another homeless man went to her. He laid his belongings on the concrete and sat next to her. He rubbed her back while she cried. From his bag he pulled out a pink blanket and placed it over her. They sat and kept each other company."

"How did the security guard and other person in authority treat the woman?" I asked.

"They were very strict and sounded angry." she replied. "How was your morning?" Isabella asked.

"It was long and the case I was called to was delayed by two hours so the lawyer suggested I sit and watch the other cases. I was thankful that the Judge presiding today was kind and treated the defendants with respect. She seemed to recognize that their lives were important, despite the troubled lives they lived." I replied.

Later that night Olivia, Izzy and Hugh were enjoying take-out for supper while I was resting in the family room. During their conversation I heard Olivia ask, "So, which countries would be considered the superpowers of today?" A most interesting dialogue ensued.

The day had given our family many opportunities to reflect on power and humility.

Jesus the King chose to ride on a donkey.

Mark 11: 12-33

Reflection provided by Sandra Murphy.

At the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia there is a painting of the Purification of the Temple accredited to the 16th century Italian artist Jacopo Bassano and most certainly from his workshop. The scene is chaotic. An angry Christ raises his arm while tables fall around him and dogs, cattle and sheep try frantically to get out of the way. The setting is a magnificent building much like the Renaissance churches we would see in Italy today with pillar decorated with scarlet bunting. The stall keepers and money lender who are trying hopelessly to keep their stalls and tables upright are richly or poorly dressed in 16th century costume. Jesus himself is richly dressed in red and blue.

Bassano is known primarily for his religious painting and for transposing the Biblical stories to his own era. Making the Biblical stories conform to a particular time in history has been the role of artist through the ages. The very early church did not focus on the crucifixion in its religious representation but on the Good Shepherd image. Depictions of the crucifixion dominated medieval church art and Renaissance artists, including Bossano, loved to paint the Nativity. The Purification of the Temple does not figure large in any era and one wonders what, or who, prompted Bassano to paint this story.

I think we struggle with the image of the angry Christ. The withering of the fig tree; the anger at the commercialization of the temple; and the contempt for the questions posed Him by the chief priest and scribes makes Mark 11:12-33 an uncomfortable read for many of us. Add to this the verses that state that if we believe enough our prayer can move mountains, inclines us to turn away to more comfortable images of “gentle Jesus meek and mild” and from our doubts about the efficacy of our own prayer.

In reflecting on the passage and on the Bossano painting I am reminded of context. Mark was writing this gospel at a devastating time in Jewish history. Not only were the Jewish people rising up against their Roman rulers but they were often engaged in violent political and internal disputes which would lead soon to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. If we think of Bossano’s time we know that Christendom was being rent by religious and political disputes. The image of an angry Christ, robed as a 16th century Venetian, makes sense and His humanity all the more real as this part of the gospel of Mark moves us further and further along the road to Calvary.

If I were an artist, how would I portray the Purification of the Temple scene for a 21st century audience? I can think of many institutional settings where the dictates and demands of ambition, self-interest and greed are undermining societal good and turning those institutions into “dens of thieves”. I would love to see the 21st century artistic interpretation of the Purification of the Temple.

So in this Lenten season, as Jesus moves inexorably once again towards the cross, perhaps we should allow Him and us some anger at what is happening to Him and to our world.

Mark 12: 1-17

Reflection provided by David Dexter.

Focus. I often find it difficult to stay focussed on the task at hand. Distractions. So many. New ways to do things. New relationships to learn. Constantly shifting landscapes of work processes. New dynamics in growing and evolving families. And in all of it, a demand for quick results, fast responses, and a ubiquitous need for communication. Lent? Who's got time for Lent!

Set amidst the hustle and bustle of life in Halifax is our community of faith at First Baptist Church. Without my relationships at First Baptist, I likely wouldn't do anything or contemplate anything in particular during the Lenten period. Like most people, I would be 'too busy', or otherwise too distracted by life to bother with Lent. Well, Jenny slowed me down with her request to offer a reflection for the Lenten Reader.

In Mark 12: 13-17 we hear in a parable the famous words of Jesus when asked by the Pharisees whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Rome: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Jesus dodges a trap the Pharisees had laid for him with this unexpected answer. At the same time, he challenges us to think about what we should be giving to God. It's a big question. What does he mean?

Our daily tasks are often described as earning our living, paying our way, paying our taxes, looking after those we love, and staying out of trouble. For lots of us, this is exhausting. Jesus wants us to do more? Yup. Extra, and extraordinary work. We are asked to also risk our time, talent, and treasure in the quest to demonstrate love for all we encounter in our community. Many of us do this personally in untold quiet ways. As a faith community, we strive to do good works together, and to figure out how to sustain our voice for hope, love and justice into the future. In our work together we all have something to offer. We all have something to render unto others. This is Jesus' message. There is good work to do. We all know it. We are all called to step forward with our talents for God's work.

Prayer: Lord, bring our focus anew to helping those close, caring for those we encounter, and preparing our community for your work and mission into the future.

Mark 12: 18-37

Reflection provided by Amelia Crowell.

In this passage, Jesus speaks to the learned Saducees who are trying to enter into a debate with him and test him as a teacher. They begin by trying to trick him with a detailed tale of a man with a series of wives in his earthly life and asking who he will be married to in heaven? Jesus explains that we will not be as we are now in heaven. These type of questions will not even be applicable. We cannot in our earthly world even conceive of what heaven will be like.

They begin with the trivial, but then they want to reach the heart of the law so they ask a more meaningful question? “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment”. The answer: “To love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. All of the law is to be found in this commandment.”

In our day to day lives, it is so easy to get caught up in the little superficial details- am I doing enough, am I working out enough, am I working hard enough, showing up in the ways I want to. We go around in circles taunting ourselves with these questions leading ourselves to question our authenticity and leaving us feeling ‘less than’.

Jesus confronts this in his listeners by simplifying our quest and sums it up in one word “love”. Love for God and for neighbor.

How we live and commit to this love is of course unique for every person, but to have this rule of love in the centre of our lives gives a different perspective.

I lead with love throughout my nursing career when I am caring for families who are under some of the most stressful times of their lives. Leading with love in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit looks like giving extra time to teach families how to be a parent even though your baby shower hasn’t even happened yet, it is celebrating all successful moments regardless of how small, and reassuring parents that in a time where they feel powerless, scared, and stressed.

I lead with love in my day to day live by showing up not only physically, but mentally as well. We live in such a fast paced world these days with many distractions. Leading with love day to day, to me, means giving your undivided attention to moments with those you love. It means giving a little extra time to the people around you on your busiest days. It means sending small reminders of your love to your friends and family, and finally, it means showing love to yourself. Leading with love towards yourself could look like showing yourself forgiveness when you make mistakes and or giving yourself the same care as you would to your family, friend, or partner.

Twenty-Eight Day of Lent
continued...

Saturday, March 28th

Lastly, leading with love day to day to me most importantly means demonstrating these examples to my daughter so that she can learn to lead with the same love as she grows.

The simplicity and beauty of this commandment to place love at the centre will always guide us throughout our lives even when the world around us is changing.



Struggle

Bald Eagles, in a heated struggle over food, at Sheffield Mills, Annapolis Valley, NS.

Photo by Warren Hoeg

Mark 12: 38-44

Reflection provided by Rev. Jenny Drewitz.

As I began sitting with this text thoughts of the beautiful handmade church offering that sits atop the focal shelf in the Godly Play room came to my mind. This church has been around for many, many years. How many? I'm not quite sure, but some of the older church members told me they remembered using it when they were in Sunday school as children. The crafter of this project knew the joy adding a bell on the inside that would ring when hit with the coin would bring to children. This is motivation to bring loose change to drop in the slot and be warmed by the joyful chime inside. There are times when the same coin will be entered multiple times just to hear the sound (coins can exit by the secret stairs that slide out to hold the donations). And although this does emulate the text, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7), it's quite the opposite of the woman from the passage here. This woman gave all that she had quietly. I have also seen some of our kids reflect this sort of giving, secretly walking up to the church during reflection time and sliding open the stairs to add their offering there so no one would hear the chime. I have watched others offer their coins to a friend that didn't have one and wanted to ring the bell.

But I think this text is not just about money. This woman gave all she could, out of the generosity and kindness of her own heart. I have had the privilege of witnessing this in our own congregation many times over the years, not just in the Godly Play space with the children, but in our whole church. I've seen volunteers come to change lightbulbs in the sanctuary ceiling, test fire alarms, water the plants at the front of the church, empty the dishwasher from the last round of Sunday coffee mugs. There have been silent workers putting together annual reports, sewing felt backgrounds for the Godly Play room, restocking the pews with pencils and envelopes. I've witnessed the book room suddenly becoming straightened, offering plates and chancel railings being polished and communion linens and table clothes getting ironed. There are so many small tasks in our church that have relied on volunteers that go unseen. These silent workers have helped to keep our building a hospitable environment to welcome our wider community and extend a welcoming hand. As I think about the kindness and generosity of this woman, I also see that in so many of you. Thank you for offering your "2 cents" and being cheerful givers.

Mark 13: 1-23

Reflection provided by Lara Hazelton.

Back in the 1980's, when I was a teenager growing up in Dartmouth, my favorite thing to do with my friends on Saturday mornings was to go to the mall. The number 59 bus went directly to Penhorn Mall, and if we transferred at the terminal there, it was not far to Mic Mac Mall. Going to the mall was a social activity, a way to connect with my friends in the days before texting and group chats. Sometimes a new section of the mall would open, with more stores, more cool items, more people. The mall was an exciting place to be, always growing, expanding and improving.

Shopping malls were an important part of my adolescence, but I realized a few weeks ago that my teenage memories of malls had blinded me to what has been happening to them in recent years. My husband Bob and I watched a short documentary about shopping malls on YouTube that described the rise and fall of malls in North America. According to Wikipedia, there have only been 3 new indoor shopping malls built in Canada since 1992. Not only are they not being built, vacancy rates are rising, and there are increasing numbers of 'dead malls', empty and even abandoned. Now that I have heard about it, I can see the trend occurring here, too. While Mic Mac Mall survives, Penhorn Mall no longer exists in its previous form, and many of the local malls have empty storefronts, something that would not have been the case just 10 years ago.

In Mark 13:1-23, the disciples marvel at the huge stones of the temple. What impressive buildings! But Jesus tells them, "Not one stone here will be left on another; all will be thrown down." The disciples might have been tempted to say, not a chance. But instead, they asked, what can we expect, then?

What follows are some very unsettling words from Jesus that predict a dark future for the disciples and their community. Prophecy is not easy to interpret, but clearly Jesus was telling His listeners that the great temple, like the malls of my youth, was not what it appeared to be. It wasn't going to last forever, and bigger was not better.

There is an obvious parallel between what is happening to shopping malls and the closures or repurposing of church buildings. It is tempting to worry about what it means when a church is turned into condos, for example. But just because malls are closing doesn't mean no one is shopping. Malls are not all there is of retail, and churches are not all there is of faith.

Times change, and the temple was not going to survive in its previous form. Like the disciples, I ask what we can expect to happen next.

Mark 13: 24-37

Reflection provided by Quintina Rolle.

A Litany for Lent



We fast from judging others,
but feast on patience.

We fast from apparent differences,
but feast on unity of all life.

We fast from words that pollute,
but feast on words that affirm.

We fast from complaining,
but feast on appreciation.

We fast from bitterness and anger,
but feast on forgiveness and mercy.

We fast from discouragement,
but feast on hope.

We fast from suspicion,
but feast on trust.

We fast from idle gossip,
but feast on purposeful silence.

We fast from problems that overwhelm,
but feast on prayer that strengthens.

Mark 14: 1-11

Reflection and photos provided by Erin Appelbe .

Winter, frozen and still.

Dormant till weather warms.

The sun's rays shall breathe new life into frozen limbs,

In the coming of days.

Jesus too must be covered,

to rest as dormant winter does

Yet, he too shall rise as the flowers do through spring soil.

Mark 14:6 - "She poured perfume on my body beforehand
to prepare for my burial"



Mark 14: 12-31

Reflection provided by Bud and Judy Whalen.

THE LAST SUPPER - IT'S INCREDIBLE IMPACT

This passage is familiar to most of us as it narrates the Last Supper. We learn how the Passover meal was prepared and celebrated, then how communion was first initiated. We see Christ preparing the disciples for his death, and it describes the shattering announcement that one of the disciples would betray Him.

Why did Jesus pick the Passover feast as a time to impart this information?

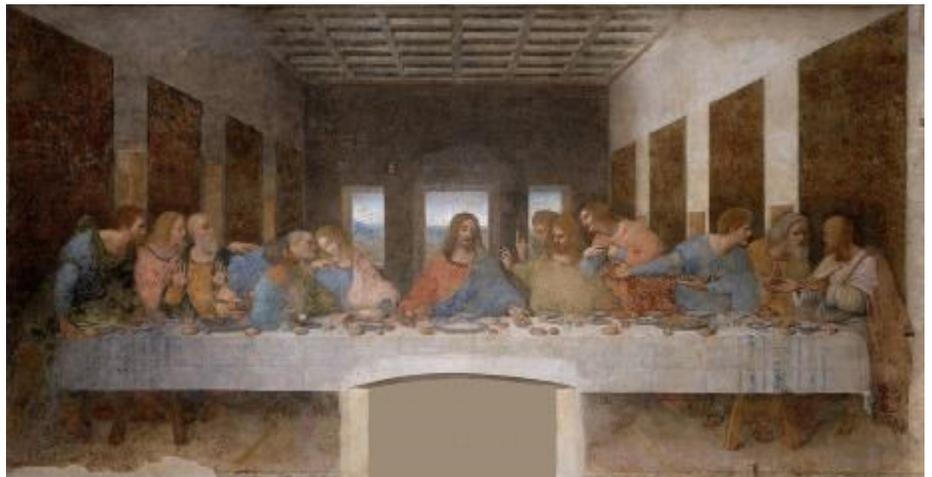
Eating together is universally common to us all. It is one of the surest ways to build relationships. Think wedding feasts, birthday celebrations, holiday and family Sunday dinners. And we remember these events. Food has a huge significance in cultures around the world. It isn't surprising that he chose to spend his last hours over a meal with his disciples with whom he had spent so much time during the previous three years.

As the meal progressed, Jesus showed he was aware of the fate which was to befall him. It must have been agonizing to eat with Judas, the man who would soon betray him!

Jesus orchestrated a meal by which to remember him and his teaching. A meal to celebrate him. A meal to bring us together as a family of believers. He gave us something more. He gave us his body and blood so we could be forgiven when we transgress. He took part in his own deliverance for the whole of humanity.

In referring to Peter's triple denial, Christ teaches us that although we may deny him, abandon him and question him, we can return to him because of his abiding love for us.

This extraordinary meal is remembered at communion services worldwide. As we journey toward Maundy Thursday we pause to remember the great lessons he taught during the Last Supper.



Mark 14: 32-52

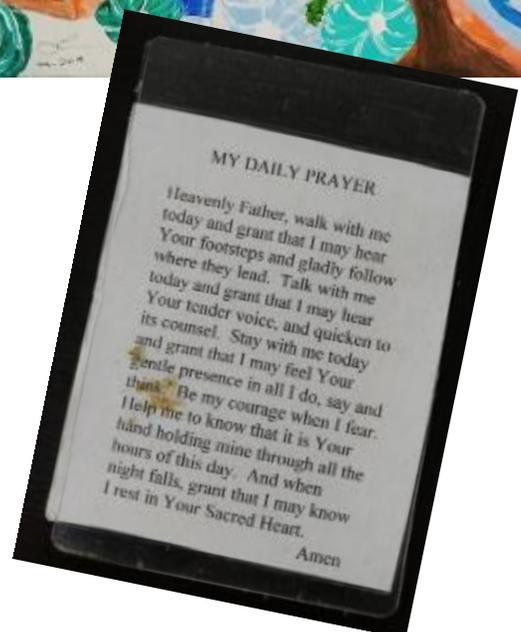
Reflection provided by Leander Mendoza.

I felt I have to share one of my husband Lorne's paintings. The painting that I would like to share is that of his faith journey. The butterfly represents him and the images around him represent his family, his heartaches, his loves and his unflinching faith in God.

I found this prayer in his wallet just shortly after he passed. It was laminated and obviously well used:

My Daily Prayer

Heavenly Father walk with me today and grant that I may hear Your footsteps and gladly follow where they lead. Talk with me today and grant that I may hear Your tender voice and quicken to its counsel. Stay with me today and grant that I may feel your gentle presence in all I do, say and think. Be my courage when I fear. Help me to know that it is hand holding mine through all the hours of this day. And when night falls, grant that I may know I rest in Your Sacred Heart. Amen.





Isolation

A grounded, and abandoned, British ship, at Felson South, near Lunenburg,
NS.

Photo by Warren Hoeg

Mark 14: 53-72

Reflection provided by Emma Hazelton.

This passage is about Jesus being “tried” by the religious leaders, and about Peter watching from afar and later denying having known Jesus. Several aspects of this trial were not conducted appropriately, including the testimonies of the witnesses, who were unable to agree on what had happened to make Jesus guilty of the charges against him. Through all of this, Jesus is silent. He does not testify, he only responds when he is asked “are you the Messiah?” at which point he says that he is. The court uses this against him and finds him guilty of blasphemy.

Jesus knew that the court was going to find him guilty no matter what he said, and decided to say nothing instead. On the other hand, Peter decides to deny knowing Jesus, not speaking up when he could in order to save himself. At the end of the passage he realizes what he has done, and feels guilty for denying following Jesus. I think often in our lives, when we see injustices, we remain silent because we believe that we are “just one person” and our actions can’t change the outcome. But we need to remember that staying silent on these issues can speak volumes about which side we support, whether intended or not. We as Christians have been given the responsibility of showing the world what Jesus would do if he were here. Part of this responsibility is addressing injustices when we see them, and not staying silent for self-preservation.

Mark 15: 1-20

Photo provided by Ben Lemphers.

This photo taken at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem during a trip in the Spring of 2019. This is the site where Jesus is thought to have been crucified and buried. Pilgrims pray at the Stone of Anointing, where its believed Jesus' body was prepared for burial.



Mark 15: 21-39

Reflection and art provided by Matheus Antunes .

This image is a virtual art made by me last year. Observing it made me think about our faith as this beautiful flame. We must take care of it and put attention not only every day, but every time in our lives, to help us keeping in the path of god and never let your faith fade away. We are faced with many problems constantly and sometimes we become so obsessed to fix them that we forget that these problems are solved even faster when our flames are vibrating inside of us, becoming another distraction to separate us from our constantly care of our faith. After our sacred flame goes out and our darkness prevail, we fall in a deep loop. To relight it again we must face against our own darkness and only with the orientation of God we are able to make a beautiful flame again, not only restoring it but spreading the heat with the people that we love and care.



Candle (2019)

Mark 15: 40-47

Reflection provided by Scott and Margaret Sterns.

By Mary Elizabeth Frye 1932

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

Mark 16: 1-8a

Reflection provided by Dianne Kokesh.

Early risers....that is what my Mom and I were. As a young girl, my brother and Dad were not up at the crack of dawn- like Mom and me. There was so much fun to be had in the morning, I couldn't imagine how one could waste time sleeping-in. Early in the morning you could make plans for the day, play games, and if you were at the cottage you could go outside in your pajamas. That was a special time – Mom and I outside at the cottage in the early morning exploring the beach and the garden in our pajamas. In later years, Mom and I remained morning people and planners for trying to get the most out of every day.

After Mom passed in 2009, I was going through her bedside table and found a small clipping from a FBCH bulletin (March 1994). I couldn't believe how the words "spoke" to me and how it reflected what I knew to be my Mother's beliefs. I find the words inspirational and calming; clearly my Mom did as well.

I met God in the morning, when my day was at its best.
And His presence came like sunshine,
Like a glory in my breast.
All day long the presence lingered,
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness,
O'er a very troubled sea.
So, I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way –
You must seek God in the morning,
If you want Him through the day.

Mark 16: 8b-20

Reflection provided by Rev. Rusty Edwards.

Handling snakes and drinking poison... If you find yourself perplexed by the ending to Mark, I have good news for you. The oldest and best manuscripts of Mark do not include 16:8b-20. These verses were added on later. For that reason, I do not include them in my own understanding of what constitutes Mark's Gospel.

Why would someone add a new ending to an already complete Gospel?

Scholars believe one of the main reasons is that people felt uncomfortable with how Mark actually ends. Mark ends with a report that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome arrived at Jesus' tomb only to find the stone rolled away and a young man dressed in a white robe. The robed man told them Jesus was alive and that they were to go and tell his followers.

But then the text comes to its grand conclusion with these words: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Notice what the ending does not give us. The ending does not report any actual appearance of Jesus. The ending does not tell us about Jesus meeting the eleven male disciples. We are not even sure the women told anyone—except the very fact we are reading a Gospel tells us they did. Is this any way to end a Gospel? Some people thought it was not. The Gospel needed a story of Jesus actually appearing in his resurrection body. The story needed the witness of trusted men.

The truth is, we often want to add more to the story of Easter. We walk into the amazing good news that even our world's death-dealing cannot defeat the God we know in Jesus. We celebrate resurrection and all that means for creation. But, we want to add to this a few more proofs, the assurances of trusted religious leaders, and maybe even throw-in scriptural substantiation of our religious practices (thank goodness we do not handle snakes). But that is not what Mark offers us at Easter.

Instead, Mark leaves us holding the good news of resurrection with minimal substantiation. The evidence is within us—like the three women we have to decide without much proof whether we believe or not. The story ends by passing on to us... and it only continues when we decide we too will follow in the Way of Jesus.

This Easter, are we looking for a nice ending to the Lenten-Easter story? Or, are we willing to accept that Mark invites us to become part of the ending, extending the story of resurrection into our own time as we follow in the Way of Jesus?

He is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed!
Alleluia!



Light

Sunrise over the Cole Harbour Salt Marsh, Dartmouth, NS.

Photo by Warren Hoeg