



The Fifth Sunday in Lent

ANNOUNCEMENT

Since the doors to our church will be opened for worship services next Sunday, Palm Sunday, this will be the last devotional service of this type to be sent by email to parishioners. We will be following CDC Covid guidelines; wearing mask throughout the service and maintaining social distancing. A full explanation of our Covid protocols can be found in the church's newsletter. Those who are able and feel safe to return to church are encouraged to do so. We are also encouraging all who can to get vaccinated.

I will continue to offer a much reduced devotion called "Reflections" consisting of my reflections on a portion of the lectionary (scripture) readings appointed for a given Sunday via Facebook: Christ Episcopal Church Yankton, SD and the church's Website: www.chrstepiscopalchurchyankton.com.

Who could have imagined a year ago that I would be writing devotions for over a year. That said, it has been an honor and a privilege for me to have been able to prepare and share these devotions with all of you. I look forward to continue offering Reflections in the weeks ahead.

Blessings,

Norm

* * * * *

Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbors:

Most merciful God,

we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

May Almighty God have mercy on us forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.



Lord, open our lips. And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy: Come let us adore him.

A Song of Penitence *Kyrie Pantokrator*

Prayer of Manasseh, 1-2, 4, 6-7, 11-15

O Lord and Ruler of the hosts of heaven, *
God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
and of all their righteous offspring:
You made the heavens and the earth, *
with all their vast array.
All things quake with fear at your presence; *
they tremble because of your power.
But your merciful promise is beyond all measure; *
it surpasses all that our minds can fathom.
O Lord, you are full of compassion, *
long-suffering, and abounding in mercy.
You hold back your hand; *
you do not punish as we deserve.
In your great goodness, Lord,
you have promised forgiveness to sinners, *
that they may repent of their sin and be saved.
And now, O Lord, I bend the knee of my heart, *
and make my appeal, sure of your gracious goodness.
I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, *
and I know my wickedness only too well.
Therefore I make this prayer to you: *
Forgive me, Lord, forgive me.
Do not let me perish in my sin, *
nor condemn me to the depths of the earth.
For you, O Lord, are the God of those who repent, *
and in me you will show forth your goodness.
Unworthy as I am, you will save me,
in accordance with your great mercy, *
and I will praise you without ceasing all the days of my life.
For all the powers of heaven sing your praises, *
and yours is the glory to ages of ages. Amen.

Psalm 51:1-13

Miserere mei, Deus

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; *
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

2 Wash me through and through from my wickedness *
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, *
and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you only have I sinned *
and done what is evil in your sight.

5 And so you are justified when you speak *
and upright in your judgment.

6 Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, *
a sinner from my mother's womb.

7 For behold, you look for truth deep within me, *
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

8 Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; *
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.

9 Make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the body you have broken may rejoice.

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

11 Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.

12 Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.

13 Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

THE FIRST LESSON

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more

THE CANTICLE

*Lord Jesus, think on me, and purge away my sin;
from harmful passions set me free, and make me pure within.*

*Lord Jesus, think on me, with care and wore oppressed;
let me thy loving servant be, and taste thy promised rest.*

*Lord Jesus, think on me, nor let me go astray;
through darkness and perplexity point thou the heavenly way.*

*Lord Jesus, think on me, that, when the flood is passed.
I may the eternal brightness see, and share thy joy at last.*

*(Synesius of Cyrene 375-414)
(TH 1982 # 641)*

THE SECOND LESSON

John 15: 1-12 [Alternate lesson]

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

REFLECTION

by
Norm Wright



Lord of love, give us the joy of your salvation and sustain us with your bountiful Spirit. Amen.

I selected an alternate lesson for this Sunday to get us on a fast track to communion, which in the Gospel of John crosses the divide of being in the world but not of the world. This lesson comes from Jesus' supper discourse with his disciples; John's version of the Last Supper. In this reading we find Jesus, who earlier described himself as the Bread of Life in John 6, describing himself as the True Vine, thus rounding out the implied bread and wine of Holy Communion, but instead of speaking of wine directly, he speaks of its source, the vine and the fruit it produces. The vine uniquely defines what Holy Communion is about.

We frequently treat the sacraments like vaccines. Baptism becomes the one and done initial dose and Holy Communion becomes a weekly or periodic booster shot to keep us immune from the effects of the sins we keep spinning in, but this is an erroneous understanding of these signs and symbols of God's grace. The sacraments do not actuate God's grace, they symbolize it to make it recognizable. One might say they dramatize God's grace through the blessing of water and the consecrating of bread and wine to remind us whose we are and the role we are to play in living out the grace of God in this world as the mystical (not of this world) Body of Christ.

God's grace has been present since the first day of creation. God's eternal assessment of creation as good has never changed, but in the drama that has become this life, we have. In the story of Adam and Eve is revealed the onset of the continuing drama about how we humans have created a world of our own making, a differentiated world dominated by polar opposites brought about by our ability to discriminate and identify what **we determine** as good and evil. This is why God the Son entered into our drama in the person of Jesus to save us from ourselves; to stop us playing from the same old script of selfishness and deceitfulness in order to provide us with a new script by which to change the setting in which our lives are played out.

This new script has been threaded through the entirety of scripture. It is hinted at in our first lesson where Jeremiah writes, *"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant (a new script) with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them... I will write it on their hearts... I will be their God... they shall be my people... for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."*

Rooted in the metaphorical Tree of Life, the original script, which God guarded after Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, emerges as the True Vine, as a new script played out in the life and ministry of Jesus who, in John 14: 6 declared he is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus' way of life is the way to being truly alive.

Using the imagery of the vine, Jesus describes a mystical, holy communion as a living organism in which those who are baptized into the Body of Christ take on the role of bearing its fruit, of becoming the Body of Christ in this world; being rooted in God's original script, spoken through the language of love. As we read last Sunday, "*For God so loved the world.*"

This new script provides a new stage on which to live out our lives. It calls for a new direction in which to play the roles that have been given to us from the beginning. The new setting is a backdrop of contrasts that sheds light on what this world is and what it could be. The one stage direction we are to follow in this new script is to love one another as Christ has loved us; to give ourselves to one another, to be there for the other as Christ was and is for us.

While the Ten commandments provides a list of things we should and shouldn't do, and can be understood as rooted in the idea of loving God and one's neighbor, they are not explicit in telling us to do so from the perspective of love, but rather from the perspective of being obedient. In this new script, Jesus transfigures them into one "new" commandment; one thing to invest our our faith in, and this one thing is all that God ever wanted from us from day one; to love God as God loves us and to love one another. The pathway to exhibiting one's faith and one's love for God is to love that which God loves as Jesus did, and in that love we find ourselves in communion one another and with God in Christ.

Amen



Chorale

*Create in us a new heart, O God, and fill it with a new song;
fill it with music inspired by past blessings, your grace ever-present,
to sing of a new start in faith, hope, and love.*

*Create in us a new heart, O God, and fill it with a new song;
fill it with music, and grant us new visions that bind us as one.
Grant us the courage to serve everyone.*

*Grant us your presence in all that we do. Entwine us, envine us with
Christ, one with you.*

*Create in us a new heart, O God, and fill it with a new song;
fill it with music inspired by past blessings, your grace ever present,
to sing of a new start in hope, faith, and love.*

(Norm Wright 2011)

(From choral music written for Christ Episcopal Church's 150 Anniversary on June 26, 2011)



THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of Love, we pray for the whole Church and our parish family. Guide your Church and this parish in the way of truth and love.

God of Healing, we pray for Bernard, Sue, Bev Ann, Pat Michels, Jolene, Darold, Jim Black, and for those we hold in our hearts. On this Sunday we pray for Carolyn Gilster. Grant unto Carolyn and all in need of comfort your healing presence.

God our Protector, we pray for those affected by Covid-19; for healthcare workers around the world; for those who provide essential services, first responders, fire fighters, police. We pray for the leaders of all nations, for all government officials every where, and for all those making decisions in times of crisis. Grant them protection and guide those in authority to make wise decisions.

God our Defender, we pray for the homeless and the jobless in our nation, and for those who have lost their homeland, their sense of security, and who find themselves dependent on the good will of others in strange lands; that their needs are met and grant them the comfort of your Holy Spirit.

God of Life, we pray for those who have died. On this Sunday we pray for Willard Lynch. May he and all the departed find life in you.

God of Mission, we pray for all bishops, priests, deacons, and all who serve your Church. Grant them guidance in their various ministries and guide us in our mission to enlarge the Family of Faith in our midst.

THE PRAYER FOR MISSION

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent you blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near; Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into you fold; pour out you Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of you kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

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The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.