



JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

WEEK 6 • April 5 - 11, 2009

Today, Lent is marked by a time of prayer and preparation to celebrate Easter. Since Sundays celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the six Sundays that occur during Lent are not counted as part of the 40 days of Lent, and are referred to as the Sundays in Lent. Christians today use this period of time for introspection, self examination, and repentance. This season of the year is equal only to the Season of Advent in importance in the Christian year, and is part of the second major grouping of Christian festivals and sacred time that includes Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost.

Lent is a time of reflection and it involves a variety of spiritual practices. While traditionally it involves giving up something, it can also mean taking up something new. That can be joining us for the Journey to Jerusalem by writing a reflection or joining us for the Lenten Study Class. If you want more information please feel free to call Rev LaDue at 619-2207-2571, ext 132.

April 5, 2009

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

Join us in worship

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP

Below are the worship services offered at First Church.

Palm Sunday, April 5

Dr. Jim Standiford
8:00, 9:30 & 11:00

Rev. Molly Vetter
9:30

Water's Edge Contemporary Service
The Cove

Maundy Thursday, April 9

Rev. Mary Allman-Boyle
7:30 p.m.

Good Friday, April 10

Rev. Elbert Kim
12:10 p.m.

Easter Vigil, April 11

Rev. Molly Vetter
7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday, April 12

Dr. Jim Standiford
8:00, 9:30 & 11:00

Rev. Molly Vetter
9:30

Water's Edge Contemporary Service
The Cove

April 6, 2009

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Scripture Lesson:
Mark 14: 1-15

Our passage today begins the passion section of Mark's gospel, which continues to the end of chapter 15. It is an appropriate passage to read on Monday of Holy Week in that it recounts Jesus' anointing, Judas' agreement to betray Jesus, and the preparation for the Passover meal.

her gift of expensive ointment, and Judas' easy betrayal for an unspecified sum makes clear who the real disciple is. With these two figures as backdrop, we see Jesus and his other disciples faithfully preparing to celebrate God's freedom-giving love and care.

Anointing for burial with costly oil was only done for very important people. Thus, this unknown woman's act is prophetic. No one yet knew Jesus' true identity, but she is remembered most kindly because of her generous act and gracious ways. The mystery of faith is evidenced in the contrast between her recognition of the truth about Jesus and the bickering around the table and the money-grubbing ways of Judas. The contrast between

As we approach Easter, the new Passover, the new gift of life-giving love; let us not begrudge generosity, and let us not bicker about little things. Rather, let us seek ways to reflect God's extravagant love for humankind. May your week be filled to overflowing with many moments when grace is generously poured over you.

Jim Standiford is the senior pastor at First Church. He is a rabid basketball fan, loves the spring time of year, has mowed lawns since he was 9, and seeks to follow Jesus every day.



April 7, 2009

DAY THIRTY-SIX

Scripture Lesson:
Mark 14: 32-51

Wake Up and Rejoice!

Jesus knew he was going to be betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane by Judas, and soon thereafter he would face death. Instead of trying to flee and save himself, Jesus wanted to pray with his disciples. The disciples were so tired that they could not stay awake, leaving Jesus to pray alone. Rather than watching and praying, Jesus found his disciples sleeping. Jesus said to his disciples, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The Message paraphrase of this passage from Mark interprets Jesus' words as, "Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire." The disciples were asked to do such a simple task for Jesus; pray with him, yet as they were too tired, they ended up sleeping. This passage hit me pretty hard.

ing," when instead we could be out in the world serving God?

Until a few years ago, I found that my actions during Lent were much like those of the disciples. I knew that Lent was important, but I never gave the Lenten season my full attention. While I knew that there was more that I could be doing to help my fellow man and serve God, temptations (such as MySpace) got in the way of doing these things; I, too, ended up being "as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire." I had a hundred different definitions of what Lent meant to other people, but I realized I had never sat down and really thought about what Lent meant to me.

To me, Lent is letting go of all the selfish things that block us from a communion with God, and then asking God to use us in the way He sees fit. We remember how Jesus survived in the desert for forty days

while he was tempted and put through numerous tests by Satan. We must let go of the things that Satan tempts us with on a daily basis throughout the year, and not just limiting ourselves to acting differently during the forty days of Lent. There is so much in the world today that needs our help. While Lent is a perfect opportunity to give up those temptations that make us "lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire," is it enough? Is giving up something for only 40 days a year the best way we can serve God?

As we move closer to Easter, let us remember what Jesus gave up for us. Rather than giving up a temptation for only 40 days, let us continue that practice throughout the year; let us continue our prayers and serving God throughout the year. Rather than being too tired to serve God, we need to make time to joyfully serve Him and glorify His name.

How often do we find ourselves "sleep-

Evan Neel is a life-long Methodist. He is involved in several committees at First Church, is a preschool-age Sunday School teacher, drummer for the Water's Edge Music Team, sound technician for weddings, and dishwasher for events here at the church. Evan is a full-time college student, majoring in Religious Studies, with plans to attend seminary after graduation.



April 8, 2009

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Scripture Lesson:
Mark 14: 66-72

I have shared with some of you that a rogue urban rooster has been crowing very early in the morning (and at dusk, too), in my neighborhood in the city of San Diego. No one seems to own the rooster, but a few neighbors do seem to be scattering feed.

While that rooster is a literal wake-up call for me each morning, I have always seen the rooster in the story of Peter's denial as a figurative wake-up call.

Peter was a close follower of Jesus, so close that our tradition tells us Peter went on to found the church. Jesus called Peter his rock. Yet on this early morning, Peter crumbled. Peter denied that he knew anything about Jesus even under

the questioning of people who had seen them together. Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed twice.

Recently, I have come to an awareness that Peter was not only denying Jesus, Peter was denying himself. Peter was denying his values, his beliefs, his faith. Peter was denying his core identity.

And when he heard the cock crow, it was a wake-up call. He realized what he had done, and he wept.

Often I have read this story and asked myself: How I am I denying Jesus in my life? Now I also ask: How am I denying my true self and in so doing denying the grace and love I know through Jesus?

In Holy Week, as we enter into the holy days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, may we know and honor our true selves, created and loved by God, as we prepare, as Peter did, to embrace anew the faith and hope and grace we know as followers of Jesus.

Rev. Karen Clark Ristine is a fifth-generation Texan and fourth-generation journalist, who left the newsroom after more than 20 years to enter seminary and become a United Methodist minister. She graduated in May 2008 from Claremont School of Theology with a Master's of Divinity degree and works as an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church of San Diego. And she's gotten really good of late at imitating a crowing rooster..



April 9, 2009

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Scripture Lesson:
Mark 14: 12-26 or 26-31

I have been blessed this Lenten Season to be in an attitude of prayer and preparation. My reflection has been primarily centered on the events and happenings of Maundy Thursday. Reflecting on the three synoptic gospel accounts as well as the gospel of John, has broadened my devotion time. While prayerfully reflecting on the direction of my homily for the Maundy Thursday service, I found myself being drawn into the events and emotions; taking on the role of a first century disciple who participated in the Upper Room. Soon the emotions welled up as I lived in that moment, that time. I found myself writing the story of the foot washing and the betrayal. It was more than writing, however, it was an encounter with Jesus and the twelve. To better

understand the significance I had to journey backward in time to other events leading up to Jerusalem. I needed to re-experience the predictions of betrayal and suffering; re-experience the disciples' misunderstandings; re-experience the desires to be first as opposed to last and servant of all. I needed to re-experience the Passover festival. What was its significance? When did I as a participant at the Last Supper and the new covenant understand the correlation to Passover? I broke into tears as I cried out to Jesus, not to go. I cried out in angst over my inadequacies. I cried out for my betrayal and desertion.

I invite you to come to the table tonight with penitent hearts crying out to Jesus who knows our vulnerabilities and our pain. Cry out to Jesus.

Rev. Mary Allman-Boyle is Minister of Faith-Sharing and Spiritual Formation. It is her passion to walk with people in their Christian Spiritual Journey. She does this through the Alpha Course, ChristCare Small Groups, the Women's Retreat and one-on-one discipleship. She is actively involved in Cultivating Fruitfulness and is excited about the fruitful possibilities empowered through the Holy Spirit.



April 10, 2009

DAY THIRTY-NINE

Scripture Lesson:
Mark 15: 1-39

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”

We come near to the end of our Lenten journey as we observe the darkest day in our faith tradition. Good Friday is the day when we remember the ultimate sacrifice that our Lord Jesus Christ paid for our redemption. Since childhood my family observed this day with somberness fasting from three o'clock in the afternoon, the time of Jesus' death, until sunrise Easter morning, celebrating Christ's resurrection. During these faint hours, my parents instructed me to ponder the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross as a way of focusing on him and not my starvation. Easily I would resonate with Jesus' words, "I thirst." Of course, I would twist those words to "I hunger." But of all the sayings, the one

that troubled me most was "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why would Jesus say this? If anyone on earth was close to God as close can be, it would have been Jesus. And yet, Jesus cries out these words as if God had abandoned him. Was the physical pain of crucifixion too much? Or perhaps it was more psychological or emotional, being rejected by the very people whom he healed and cared for. Or maybe it was the spiritual gravity of taken on all our sins. I wonder whether there is validity to what some have called the "Divine Child-Abuse," in which God the Father actually did forsake his own Son. Yet our theological teachings tell us that Jesus is God himself, that God gave his own life

for us. So why would Jesus cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

A friend shared an insight with me some years ago, when he said, "You know, Elbert, these words are taken from Psalm 22, which was written long before Jesus' crucifixion and one that many would have known." In saying these words, Jesus began reciting a psalm that would have led those grieving at the foot of the cross to join in. The psalm speaks of the suffering and sacrifice, but then it transitions to words of hope that God is always near and delivers his people. Even while dying, Jesus takes care of us, providing hope and strength in the midst of grief and sorrow.

Thanks be to God!

Rev. Elbert Kim is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and serves as the Minister of Education overseeing the educational ministries of children, youth, and adults at First Church. .



April 11, 2009

DAY FORTY

Scripture Lesson:
Isaiah 53: 1-9

Holy Saturday can be a tough day for me; I'm not particularly good at just sitting and waiting. But this day – the day between the suffering of Christ's crucifixion and the hopeful joy of resurrection – all we can do is sit and wait. (Well, and get things ready for Easter; perhaps this is another reason I enjoy church work. It's a holy excuse for doing something today.)

I also have trouble waiting for bulbs to grow and seeds to sprout. I love planning what I will plant, scheming about how it will fit into the garden, and sticking the seeds into the ground. I struggle through those days (sometimes drawn out to weeks!) when there's nothing to do but wait for the growth to emerge from the ground.

And, yet, those days of waiting help me remember something so critical: this growth is God's work, not mine.

Resurrection is God's work, too. It doesn't require our preparation, our decoration or our anticipation. It comes whether we're ready or not, insisting on a new view of reality.

In the scripture passage for today, the prophet Isaiah speaks with sorrow of the suffering God endures. As Christians, we read this ancient prophecy in connection with Jesus Christ's own life. His suffering gives us pause to consider the ways we have contributed to the oppression and affliction of others. "All we, like sheep, have gone astray," he writes, calling us

to awareness of our own need of God's grace and redirection.

Today, we sit in silence, unable to solve the brokenness of our world. We share sorrow: for children who go to bed hungry in San Diego. For mothers who spend their long days walking to find safe drinking water. For families trying to live in the midst of violence in Afghanistan. For so many others.

We wait today, remembering that resurrection comes through God, and holding on to hope. We pray that resurrection will find us again, and that God might open up a way for us to get food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and to share in shalom – a peace beyond our understanding.

Molly Vetter gets to spend her days in ministry through First Church, and is especially enthusiastic about ways we can be in service to others, together. She is also grateful that the potatoes she planted in her front yard in City Heights finally sprouted.

