

# Reflections

Connecting the True Word to Real Life

Lent 1: March 3-9, 2019



## A Word of Introduction

This week is the beginning of Lent. In the Church this time was historically used as a 40 day period of preparation for baptismal candidates before Easter. For others Lent was a time of reflection before God and a season of repentance. It has come to be associated with “giving something up” and is seen as a season of depriving oneself of something in order to gain spiritual benefit. And while Lent certainly contains these elements, it was traditionally a time when persons who had left the community of faith would be reconciled to the congregation. These reflections are based on the Revised Common Lectionary- a collection of scripture readings designed to take churches through the broad sweep of scripture over the course of three years. There is a particularly strong tie between the readings and the theme of this Lenten season. By studying these passages you will be joining a multitude of Christians around the globe who are reading the same parts of the Bible that you are. You can, of course, do these readings on your own and gain great benefit. Greater benefit still can be achieved by joining others to share your thoughts and reflections. Feel free to use these questions as a starting point for your own small group discussion. If there is enough interest, I would be willing to lead or sit in with small groups when my schedule allows. Contact me via e-mail at [dbagley@michiganumc.org](mailto:dbagley@michiganumc.org) to indicate your interest. You can also receive a daily dose of the reflections below along with some additional material by checking our Greater Southwest District Facebook Page each day. This week I’ve added a couple of prayers for morning and evening that you might wish to lift up. I know some of us have difficulty finding the words to pray, so here are some words. Try out these prayers from “Feasting on the Word” and see if they connect with you.

## Passages for the Week

Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16, Romans 10:8b-13, Luke 4:1-13

## Prayers for the Week:

### Morning Prayer

Dear God, you call me to repentance as I begin this new day. If through careless ways I ignore your grace, O Lord, prick my heart, shake me, make me aware of your abiding presence, and lead me in the way of everlasting life. Amen.

### Evening Prayer

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Amen.

## Questions for Reflection

### Day One: Monday, February 11

#### First Fruits - Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

-What do you think the command to offer the "first fruits of the ground" originally meant? Here there is no required amount stated, so how do you think a person knew when they had given enough? Do people still struggle with issues related to how much the Lord requires? How are these resolved?

-In a non-agricultural society what is the equivalent of giving the "first fruits"?

-While the amount to be given is not detailed here the rest of the process for the ritual is spelled out quite clearly. This affirmation is relevant for the people of Israel, but not so much for today's Christian believers. What would be an affirmation that would capture the essence of Christian faith in the same way what's written here expresses the core of Old Testament faith?

### Day Two: Tuesday, February 12

#### In the Shelter of the Most High- Read Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

-When have you most fully felt as if you were dwelling in the shelter of the Most High? Was there a certain event that brought this about or was it just a feeling that you felt? How would you communicate this sense of God's presence to someone else?

-Americans have a love affair with angels that borders on a kind of idolatry. Do you notice the work of God's angels in your life? What form have these angels taken?

-This passage is one that the devil quotes to Jesus as he's seeking to tempt him to do something completely foolish. Do people today still use passages from the Bible to justify their own agendas? What abuses have you noted? How can you recognize when the Bible is being used in this way? Are these selective interpretations made with malicious intent or are they the product of someone trying to communicate God's intent?

### Day Three: Ash Wednesday, February 13

#### Wash Me and I Shall Be Made Clean- Read Psalm 51:1-17

-This is the Psalm that is traditionally read on Ash Wednesday. You probably have heard it or prayed it before. Today, spend some time with it as you try to discern what in your life might need to be cleaned up or set right in order to take the next step in your relationship with God. What would it mean for you to have a "clean heart"? What would it feel like to have a "new and

right Spirit"? How could you reach a point where you would be, not only willing, but eager to offer God the "sacrifice" described in Psalm 51:17?

## **Day Four: Thursday, February 14**

### **Believing and Confessing - Read Romans 10:8b-13**

-What is something that you believe in the depths of your heart? Do you think that your belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is rooted in a place of similar depth?

-Where and how have you noticed God's generosity? Does it seem to you that God treats everyone equally? What distinctions have you noticed- if any?

-Are you better at believing in your heart or confessing with your lips when it comes to matters of faith?

-When have you called on the name of the Lord? Did something move you to do so? What was the result?

## **Day Five: Friday, February 15**

### **In the Wilderness- Read Luke 4:1-13**

-This showdown between Jesus and Satan makes for an interesting dramatic exchange. Is there more that you would make of it? What do you think is going on here? What would have happened had Jesus succumbed to temptation? What happens when we succumb? Are the stakes just as high?

-What is behind the temptations that are offered here? How are they like and not like the temptations we face? If the Tempter were challenging Jesus today, would the temptations be different? If so, what form might they take? How can imagining the way Jesus might face those temptations serve as a model for us?

## **Responding to the Word**

Lent is about giving things up and taking things on in order to draw nearer to God. If Matthew 6 is any indication how we practice a discipline is just as important as the discipline itself. What do you need to give up and take on this Lent? Without becoming unduly judgmental, how might we encourage each other to remain faithful throughout these forty days and beyond?