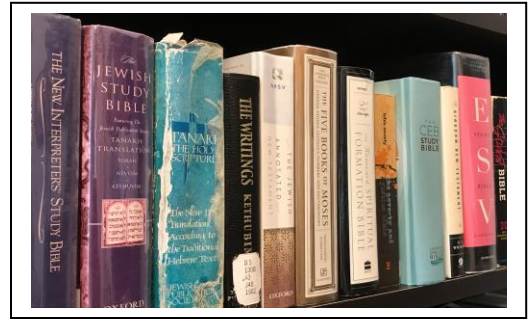


# Reflections

Connecting the True Word to Real Life

Lent 4: March 24-30, 2019



## A Word of Introduction

It's week four of Lent. The reading from the Gospel of Luke takes us to a parable that has been described as one of the most perfect short stories. Though you have heard it and read it many times before, it's always worth another look. In I Corinthians Paul talks about how he sees his ministerial work. And, in the book of Joshua we have a Hebrew language lesson. The reflections that follow are based on this week's passages from 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. 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. The prayers for morning and evening remain. Even if you have no trouble finding the words you need to pray, lifting up those of others might help your focus and expand your spirit. The morning prayer this week comes from the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle of the World Council of Churches.

## Passages for the Week

Joshua 5:9-12, Psalm 72, I Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

## Prayers for the Week:

### Morning Prayer

You, my Lord and my God,  
Give me all that leads to you.  
You, my Lord and my God,  
Take away from me all that separates me from you.  
You, my Lord and my God,  
Take me away from myself and offer me entirely to you.

### Evening Prayer

God of my life, as I lie down this night in the shadow of your wings,  
I know that you will be with me even as you have helped me through this day.  
Whether I am weary from the day, or whether the day has been a rich feat of blessings,  
I give thanks for you power and glory, which are present in every circumstance.  
As I give myself over to rest and sleep, I remember that your steadfast love is better than life.  
So, I pray, surround me with your love tonight and always.  
In the peace of Christ I pray. Amen.

## Questions for Reflection

### Day One: Monday, March 25

#### Mana No More - Read Joshua 5:9-12.

-This reading follows the moment when Joshua and the Israelites crossed the river Jordan into the Promised Land. Those making the crossing would have been reminded of their ancestors miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians as the crossing of the Red Sea a generation before. It is only fitting that they are celebrating this day with the feast of Passover (a holy day that commemorates Israel's deliverance from Egypt). It was a reminder that God, who had done great things for them, was continuing to be at work for their good. What symbols do we use in church to remind us of God's presence and activity in our lives? How do we use these to communicate the essentials of our faith?

-The Passover Feast provided the Israelites with a ritual to mark their passage into a new way of life. What rituals mark life changes in our culture and faith? How do these practices help us recognize God's faithful care and guidance?

### Day Two: Tuesday, March 26

#### You are my Hiding Place - Read Psalm 72

-In the early days of Christianity this Psalm was one of seven penitential Psalms. Those who prayed it offered it up to restore their relationship with God and one another through the power of forgiveness. The Apostle Paul quotes verse 1 and 2 of it in Romans 4 to help make his argument about justification by faith. In clear terms Psalm 32 describes what a forgiven person is empowered to do: 1) offer faithful prayer, 2) receive God's protection, 3) offer instruction to others and 4) rejoice in God's love. It is also clear in describing the consequences for failing to seek peace and reconciliation with God- "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." When have you kept silence before God when there was something you should have confessed? How does your relationship with God feel today, right now? If you have need, pray this Psalm as part of making peace with God.

-Does your soul, "cling to God"? What would have to happen to make you comfortable with the notion of clinging to God if you're not already?

### Day Three: Wednesday, March 27

#### A New Creation- Read I Corinthians 5:16-21

-In this part of Paul's second letter to the Church at Corinth he describes the dramatic change made possible by Christ's death on the cross. For him the Crucifixion is the central event of

human history. It makes possible a great transformation or those who believe. They become nothing less than a “new creation”. How “new” do you feel? What needs to be renewed or restored in you?

-Paul has a high view of the role that those who believe play in God’s plan. He says that we are to become “ambassadors for Christ”. What does this mean for you? What are some practical ways you might live it out?

-If what Paul says in verse 20 of II Corinthians 5 is true, what are people seeing as God makes his appeal through you?

## **Day Four: Thursday, March 28**

### **The Greatest Story Ever Told - Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

-This is probably the best-known parable in the Bible. It was carefully designed to touch the imaginations of people who had grown up with stories of brothers like: Cain and Able, Jacob and Essau, and Joseph and his male siblings. It still speaks today. Some have christened it the perfect short story. It has inspired artists and script writers. The message you receive depends upon where you place yourself in the story. That is- which character you identify with most. Which one is it for you? What message do you hear? Has this message been different at different places in your life?

## **Day Five: Friday, March 29**

### **The Rest of the Story- Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

-Read the Parable of the Prodigal again. Imagine what comes next. Write your own ending for one of the characters in the story. How do you think they were challenged or changed by the events related in the story? Where are they five years from where the story ends? Try to imagine the best case scenario- one filled with God’s possibilities.

## **Responding to the Word**

Is there a prodigal in your life that you need to welcome home? What steps might you take with God’s help to bring about that homecoming?