

Reflections

Connecting the True Word to Real Life

Lent 5: April 1-7, 2019



A Word of Introduction

By next Sunday we'll find ourselves just two weeks from the celebration of Easter. If you're like me the lateness of Easter may have you feeling a bit out of synch. But, the good news about the late arrival of the Paschal season means there's no good excuse not to have sunrise service outside. I recommend your local cemetery as a venue. At the Bagley house this year spring break, a college and a high school graduation are competing for our attention as Lent continues to unfold. Probably all the more reason for some intentional focus on the things of God and the way of the Cross. This week's readings and reflections will help you do that. It is my hope that you'll find something here to take to heart each day. 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 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 and evening prayer this week comes from the Prayer of St. Patrick's breastplate. I missed including it earlier this month, but if you've ever read St. Patrick's *Confession* or his *Letter to Coroticus* you know that he is a saint for all seasons and probably would have nothing to do with green beer.

Passages for the Week

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalm 126, Philippians 3:4-14, John 12:1-8

Prayers for the Week:

This week's prayers are taken from an adaptation of the traditional *Prayer of St. Patrick's Breastplate*. Through the centuries it has found its way into hymns and poetry. You can find these words set to music in our hymnal supplement, *The Faith We Sing*.

Morning Prayer

*Christ be beside me, Christ before me.
Christ be behind me, King of my heart.
Christ be within me, Christ be below me.
Christ be above me, never to part.*

Evening Prayer

Christ be in all hearts, Christ be in all tongues.
Christ all around me, shield in my strife.
Christ in my sitting, Christ in my sleeping,
Christ in my rising, light of my life.

Questions for Reflection

Day One: Monday, April 1

A Way in the Wilderness - Read Isaiah 43:11-21.

-In Israel's history, God uses agents outside the faith community to accomplish the divine purpose in history. God will, for instance, use Cyrus the Persian monarch to "break down the bars of Babylon and turn the shouting of the Chaldeans into lamentation". Why does God make use of such agents, even without their knowledge or assent? Other than Cyrus, what other instances of this can you identify?

-The prophet invited the people to find hope for the future by contemplating God's acts in the past. Why would Isaiah have done this? What would such focus accomplish? When has a reference to the past helped you find hope for the future? What "new thing" do you expect from God in your life?

Day Two: Tuesday April 2

Exiles and Exodus - Read Isaiah 43:11-21.

-In this passage, Isaiah uses imagery from Exodus to connect the people with God's promised deliverance from Exile in Babylon. What parallels do you see?

-In the New Testament Christians are sometimes described as "aliens and exiles" in the world (see Hebrews 11 and I Peter 2:11-12 for examples). What is an "exile". How real is this identity to you? What are the risks of identifying too closely with the world? Are there also risks to be found in separating ourselves from the world? How do you feel like an "exile"? To the extent that you identify with this, how do these words from Isaiah speak to you? What might change in your life if you took seriously this "exile" identity?

Day Three: Wednesday, April 3

Like Those Who Dream- Read Psalm 126

-This Psalm uses the imagery of the cycle of planting and harvest to remind people of the hope that joy follows sadness and life comes from death. The writer uses this specific image as a

means of reinforcing the specific hope that God would hear their prayers and bring laughter out of sorrow and hope from despair. What situations in your life might this Psalm speak to? What are some modern day equivalents to the images of sowing and reaping? What past movements of God's grace give you hope for God's provision in your present situation? How do you visualize God's response taking shape?

Day Four: Thursday, April 4

Pressing On - Read Philippians 3:4b-14

-What is so valuable about knowing Christ and the reality of his sufferings? Why did Paul set aside his worldly credentials and seek a deeper relationship with Christ? Are we still called to make such sacrifices today? What is the appropriate role of status, hierarchy and recognition of achievement in the church? How do you appraise the worth of persons?

-What does it mean to "press on toward the goal" as Paul lifts it up here? What does a person need to do to become fit for this sort of rigorous spiritual activity?

Day Five: Friday, April 5

Extravagance- Read John 12:1-8

-Mary's extravagant gesture comes from her appreciation of Jesus' favor and kindness toward her. When have you been filled with a similar feeling of gratitude? What was your response? When have you tried, like Judas, to restrain another's generosity, possibly from selfish motives? What is the appropriate balance between maintaining what seems necessary, and meeting human need?

Responding to the Word

How can we best show gratitude for what Jesus has done for us? Find some time to do that this week.