



The Journey to Jerusalem

**Church of the Servant
Lent, 2006**

MaraJoy Cooper Norden, Editor

Introduction

Dear Friends at Church of the Servant:

The season of Lent (and this book of meditations) offers us the opportunity to go on a journey. Jesus will be our guide, should we decide to take the journey. We shall have companions along the way: the children who worship in Children and Worship (who inspired the theme for these meditations), the writers of these meditations, all who read these meditations and Christians around the globe. Other companions will seem more distant, but are with us none the less: Jesus' disciples, blind Bartimaeus (who sees now), Mary, and Peter, just to name a few. We will journey with them, following Jesus, toward Jerusalem.

Going on a journey means that at the end you are in a different place than when you started. We all know by now what awaits Jesus at the end of the Lenten journey: betrayal, a trial, crucifixion (and resurrection). I wonder what awaits *us* in Jerusalem. I wonder what trials might befall us over the next 47 days. I wonder what baggage we might let go of with the help of Jesus. I wonder how we might be transformed when Easter Sunday comes. Who knows? But one thing is for sure: Jesus will not abandon us along the way. He is both our guide and our destination. So we can go forward with courage.

A few practical matters: as I mentioned earlier, this book is organized around the Children and Worship stories for Lent, called "Journey to Jerusalem." The children follow the stories of Jesus as he travels toward Jerusalem for Passover, for crucifixion. So, in this book of meditations, each week of meditations revolves loosely (in some cases extremely loosely) around the story the children will experience on Sunday. A whole week on one story means there may be some repetition of themes throughout the week. This is intentional. We are invited during Lent to live deeply into the journey of Jesus, to slow down, to take the time to explore the stories from different angles. There is much to be gleaned. Also, each Friday (and Wednesday during Holy Week), Greg Scheer gives us a song for meditation. That song will be used in worship the following Sunday (or Maundy Thursday). Lastly, I included a mini-liturgy to use as a companion to these meditations if you wish.

I would like to thank the many people who contributed to this project. Everyone who wrote, listened, advised. I would especially like to thank my dad, Rev. James Cooper, for his wise reading, and Mary Loeks for her good ideas. Putting together this book was one of those "I can't believe they're paying me to do this" experiences. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

MaraJoy C. Norden

The meditations written by the late Lionel Basney were originally printed by *The Banner* in 1999. They are reprinted with the permission of *The Banner* and Ruth Basney, who is a member of Church of the Servant.

The cover art is by Angela Taylor Perry.

All of the quotes from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless noted otherwise.

All the songs are used with permission from OneLicense.net, and CCLI #292288.

Week One: Ashes

Jesus' Face

“He set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

The look on the face of a friend is worth noticing. It can be a look into her soul – worry maybe, or sadness, or disapproval. And, if we care, we'll ask about that look.

In our text Luke lets us look into the face of Jesus. He *wants* us to look. Jesus' face is expressing something important and Luke wants us to notice. New Testament translations describe it in different ways: for example, “Jesus steadfastly set his face . . .”, or “Jesus resolutely took the road . . .”, or “he gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey to Jerusalem.” What does this steely look of determination mean?

Jesus had just told his disciples to listen carefully to him. “The Son of Man,” he said, “is going to be delivered over to human hands.” He wanted them to know about the suffering that awaited him; suffering he had endure for their sake and for ours. Jesus steadfast face was set toward the cross.

In this Lenten season we are urged to join with Jesus on this journey to Jerusalem. Why? Because we need to remember Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. We need to remember that it was for us he suffered and died. We need to stand beneath the cross of Jesus and penitently sing: “Amazing love, how can it be that Christ my Lord should die for me?”

This journey with Jesus demands that we “take it slow.” Like the coming of spring, we cannot rush it. All the important things in life, the things that renew us and enrich us, demand that we slow ourselves down. Enjoying our children, deepening our relationships, feeding our souls, maintaining good health, none of these can be hurried. Nor can worship or prayer or faithful discipleship or the journey to Jerusalem with Jesus. Lent calls us again to what John Ortberg calls “the unhurried life,” so that we can remember, reflect and be renewed.

The journey begins right here, right now. Jesus beckons us with two simple, compelling words: “Follow me.”

Ron Peterson

Mercy Over Justice

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:1-2).

King David was broken. He had just received notice from the prophet Nathan that God had pronounced him guilty of arranging the murder of Uriah and committing adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. Imagine going before a judge and being declared guilty of your most recent sin. The judge stands and tells you that the consequence of your sin is the death of another: David's newborn son would die because of David's sin (2 Samuel 12:7-19). David learned how costly sin can be. As Paul said in Romans, "The wages of sin is death."

Psalm 51 records David's penitence. In response to God's judgment, he immediately offers a full confession. Instead of blaming Bathsheba for his sin or questioning the legalities of God's verdict, he acknowledges his own guilt and asks God for help. I know many prisoners who exhaust themselves trying to finagle their way through legal loopholes. But David has shown us how to approach God when we have done wrong: he cried out to heaven in repentance. "Have mercy on me!" "Cleanse me!" "I have sinned!" These are the words of a man who knows that the Truth is the only way out of trouble.

As Christians, we've all had a courtroom experience of our own. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God has stood declared us all guilty of sin. And, as it was with David, the consequence of our sin is the death of another: God's son Jesus Christ.

The season of lent is our call to stop explaining our sins away and trying to finagle our way out of judgment, and to cry out to God in repentance: "Have mercy on me!" "Cleanse me!" "I have sinned!"

As a prisoner who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, I know the depth of David's remorse. I also know the height of David's exuberance in response to his forgiveness, for he had been spared from the judgment he deserved. Repentance gives way to thanksgiving to Jesus Christ, our benefactor, who died to erase our guilt and to give us the great benefits of forgiveness, mercy, and eternal life.

Lent is the time for all of us to measure our gratefulness to Jesus Christ for his sacrifice and his love, for it's true what David said: "If you, O Lord, kept a record of our sins, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3).

Troy Rienstra

Throughout These Lenten Days and

1. Through-out these Lent - en days and nights, we turn to
 2. The pil - grim Christ, the Lamb of God, who found in
 3. We bear the si - lence, cross and pain of hu - man
 4. And though the road is hard and steep, the Spir - it
 5. So let us choose the path of one who wore for -
 6. Re - joice, O sons and daugh - ters! Sing and shout ho -

walk the in - ward way, where, meet - ing Christ, our guide and
 weak-ness great - er power, em - brac - es us, though lost and
 bur - dens, hu - man strife, while sis - ters, bro - thers help sus -
 ev - er calls us on through Cal - vary's dy - ing, dark and
 us the crown of thorn, and slept in death that we might
 san - nas! Raise the strain! For Christ, whose death Good Fri - day

light, we live in hope till Eas - ter day. Where,
 flawed, and leads us to his ris - ing hour. Em -
 tain our cou - rage till the feast of life. While
 deep, un - til we see the com - ing dawn. Through
 wake to life on Res - ur - rec - tion Morn! Who
 brings, on Eas - ter day will live a - gain! For

meet - ing Christ, our guide and light, we
 brac - es us, though lost and flawed, and
 sis - ters, bro - thers help sus - tain our
 Cal - vary's dy - ing, dark and deep, un -
 slept in death that we might wake to
 Christ, whose death Good Fri - day brings, on

Text: James Gertmenian @ 1993 Hope Publishing Co.

Music: Greg Scheer © 2005

(continued on the next page)

Friday, March 3 (continued)

Throughout These Lenten Days and Nights

live in hope till Easter day.
leads us to his rising hour.
courage till the feast of life.
til we see the coming dawn.
life on Resurrection Morn!
Easter day will live again!

Text: James Gertmenian @1993 Hope Publishing Co.

Music: Greg Scheer © 2005

Crucifixion, penance, self-denial and ashes. Lent is certainly a journey into the valley of the shadow of death. But it is never without hope. We journey with Christ to the cross, but we also know what lies on the other side: resurrection, forgiveness, feasting and new life. James Gertmenian's text powerfully captures both the shadows of the Lenten journey and the dazzling light of our Easter hope. Let's use the hymn to mark time during this Lenten season, as we follow Jesus to the wilderness, cross, grave and resurrection.

Greg Scheer

Saturday, March 4

The Season

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place . . .
(The Pilgrim's Progress)

Every January 1 we hang a large calendar on the kitchen wall and begin to write reminders in the daily squares – birthdays, vacations, committee meetings, coffee duty. Slowly – actually, not all *that* slowly – the squares fill with a thicket of notes. Appointments come and go; the year turns. Then it is Dec. 31. We take the calendar down, heavy with memories, and lay it aside until tax time.

The new calendar comes with some appointments printed – the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Yom Kippur. Easter is there, in the spring, which means that Lent comes now, in late winter. And when you look out the window, there is Lent's image, its feel: you see the unbroken gray, the trees, still gaunt, and you feel your need of Easter.

Of course, for our sisters and brothers in Santiago and Johannesburg, Lent comes in late summer and Easter on the porch of fall. But the season's turn is important however it comes, for it reminds us that our lives proceed in circles. Lunch won't last long; you'll be hungry again (thank goodness) in a few hours. The encouragement you give a friend today will need to be renewed tomorrow. The same holds true for our spiritual lives. We don't move toward heaven in gigantic, decisive step after another. We move in small, repetitive, cumulative patterns – learn to make a habit of what we do well, repenting, again and again, what we do badly.

Lent is for repentance. Repentance is a hard idea and a hard job. Yet the calendars of our lives fill with the gray scribbling of our mistakes and bad habits. We have been selfish when we should have been generous, impatient when we should have been patient, cold when we should have been warm.

Of course a believer's life has many moments of repentance. We may say a general confession on Sunday, and this is important. But our sins get so mixed up with the dailyness of our lives that they disappear from view. It is good, healthy, to have a time when our job is to bring them to mind.

I have been a gardener all my adult life, in a small way (seasons again.) I spade, plant, mulch, weed, pick, peel, slice, and can the results – and then I get tired of the whole business. I go out sometime in October, pull up the gray, dilapidated plants, the ones with no life left in them, and stand for a moment in the garden's emptiness and quiet. Lent is the time to clean the garden – to pull up the old habits, the ones with no life in them. We look forward to Easter, to new seed, the fresh flower. But first, the cleaning up.

Lionel Basney

Week Two: Hiding the Alleluia

Hiding the Alleluia

Jana Brassler* introduced the idea of “hiding the Alleluia” to some of our children. A card with the word, ALLELUIA, on it was wrapped up and hidden away during the season of Lent. The word itself was not to be spoken or sung until Easter Sunday. The hymn, “Man of Sorrows,” was a regular part of our Lenten liturgy at that time. The children would look around for each other and their leaders, as, tight-lipped, they mouthed “Mm-mm-mmm-mmmm, what a Savior!”

During the Lenten season, our children’s worshipers follow the journey of Jesus as he made his way up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples one last time. Each week’s story is laid out on a long purple felt underlay, shaped like a cross. On the first Sunday of Lent, we take our “Alleluia” card, and hide it away in a pocket at the top of the cross. We neither see nor say nor sing “Alleluia” during Lent. It is a way to remember, and reflect on, the price Jesus paid to make our “Alleluia” on Easter morning possible.

For the children who enter into the stories of Jesus’ last days before his death, “alleluia” is tucked away out of sight, but it is always there, within reach. Most of us have moments that drop dark hints of what life devoid of Yahweh would be. Even during our dark seasons, those times when we cannot bring ourselves to sing or say, “Alleluia,” those times when alleluia is hidden from our sight, it is never far from us. The pain of losing a grandchild, the pain of a kidney stone, the pain of betrayal by someone who had been trusted—these may mute our praises for a time. But they are only dark hints, for “Yah” is always there with us, even if out of sight.

For one horrific moment, the tri-unity of God was ripped apart. The midday sky darkened. The air rumbled and cracked with thunder. For one horrific moment, there could be no allelu-yah. That one, horrific moment so that the rest of us need never know such a moment. It is what the journey to Jerusalem is about.

*Man of Sorrows what a name for the Son of God who came.
Ruined sinners to reclaim – Alleluia, what a Savior!
(Philip P. Bliss, 1875)*

Mary Foxwell Loeks

*Jana Brassler, former children’s worship leader and trainer at Church of the Servant, is now a missionary in China supported by this congregation.

Monday, March 6

The Burden

Behold I saw a man clothed with rags . . . a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. (The Pilgrim's Progress)

Lent is the time for repentance.

It's a hard idea and not a popular one. A theologian tells me repentance is not a popular topic even among theologians. perhaps that is why we sometimes hear preaching meant to make us feel sorry for our sins but not for ourselves.

We live in a therapeutic culture. Among us sin is something to be cured, like a headache. The goal is not to draw closer to God but to feel free to enjoy ourselves. We may even see repentance as morbid, as pointlessly depressing.

But to believe that anything wrong with us can be fixed with an aspirin is to think too little of ourselves. For it would mean we had no really good possibilities to begin with – that the most anyone could expect of us was to do a little business, have a little fun.

But love always has thought better of us than this. Our parents dreamed we would become exemplary people, brave, distinguished. And God expects even more – that we will become friends, charged with the energy and freedom of his love. Lent is the time when we renew our hope of glory.

When we do, however, we see, too, that we aren't what God hoped we would become. Something is in the way; something is deeply, not superficially, wrong.

John Bunyan opens *The Pilgrim's Progress* with a picture of it: Christian stands at the start of his journey "with a great burden upon his back." In Barry Moser's wonderful recent watercolor, the burden is bigger than Christians, a heap of bags and bundles. It bends Christian in half.

Christian cannot wish it away or shrug it off. It falls off when he stands at the cross, the sign that only Christ's dying and rising can make repentance work at all.

Yet we need another picture, not for the fact of sin but for all the daily examples of it and how we cope with them. Maybe that picture is the canvas bag I carry my books and papers in. Shapeless, endlessly stretchable, it is always in my hand, heavier as the week goes on.

Eventually I sit down and unpack it. There is the letter I didn't answer, the favor I didn't do, the injustice I didn't repair. There are the opportunities for charity I put off.

Sometimes I find I have done well: there is a note of thanks from a student. But I had to pull out all the trash to find it.

Lionel Basney

Tuesday, March 7

The Turn

For it is an hard matter to go down into the Valley of Humiliation.
(The Pilgrim's Progress)

The Bible speaks of repentance often. The two common biblical words for it, one Hebrew, one Greek, have similar meanings. Both mean turning – turning around, turning away from our sins and back to God. It's a decisive image: you change direction; you face the other way.

What do we repent of? In the Bible it is often idolatry – putting the wrong thing at the center of our lives. Or it is an outright wrong, done on impulse or by design. It is the favorite anger, the nurtured grudge, the stab of envy, the pet dream of greed or lust or power. It is our preoccupation with ourselves.

We recut the world as we want it to be. And because we are only small parts of the world, the recutting is always a lessening. We make other people less, in our minds, so that we can dream of using them; we make the world less, in our minds, so that we can waste it freely. If we could, we would junk the world and start over.

This is why repentance can be hard: it hurts to let go of the dream of having the world all our way. Jesus is (as always) honest about the cost: it can feel, he said, like cutting off your hand.

Yet there is danger here: seeing how serious *repentance* is, we may overdramatize *repenting* and discourage ourselves before we start.

No doubt some of us – the ones who run concentration camps or who gut pension funds and ruin whole communities – do need to make public, dramatic repentances. For many of our faults, though, turning around can begin with a small step. It may be like acknowledging the wrong we have done a friend: it's hard to do, but we have the friendship to rely on. It is the friendship God has shown us that encourages us to try.

Repenting is like turning around. C.S. Lewis once recalled his first arrival, as a student, at Oxford train station. He set off for town, unfortunately in the wrong direction. It was not until minutes later, when he stopped and turned around, that he saw “far away, never more beautiful since . . . the fabled cluster of spires and towers.”

There it is – the world as God meant it to be. The sight, all by itself, will change something in us. But we will still need to walk back to the crossroads and set off in the right direction.

Lionel Basney

The Task

This Vanity Fair is no new erected business, but a thing of ancient standing.
(The Pilgrim's Progress)

It's an odd thing, but in our feel-good society we're having a feel-bad moment.

You catch it on the talk shows. "Feel any remorse over that?" Geraldo asks, after his guest has described some bizarre bit of behavior. Talk shows have a gloss of moral earnestness. Of course, the guests are being paid to confess. And they often come from an economic class that makes it easy for Geraldo to condescend to them without offending his viewers.

There are more serious examples. What should we do about grave historical wrongs? Jewish groups have been demanding for decades that the Vatican apologize for its conduct during the Holocaust. African Americans are asking the United States government to apologize for slavery.

These wrongs cannot be doubted: the Holocaust and slavery were the Vanity Fair at its most lethal. Yet we may wonder if an apology is the right response. Governments, after all, are more temporary than nations. If the U.S. Congress apologizes, does that mean the United States has apologized? And what will this mean the next time you meet something of another skin tone in the grocery store or are asked to make right an injustice at work?

We are caught up, all of us, in sins larger than ourselves. And we often wonder whether we are responsible and how we should respond.

For example, like it or not we are all involved in the excesses and dangers that we call the environmental crisis. For the most part, the scientific community agrees, now, that the global economy is overstressing the creation. We are using more and wasting more than the earth can afford.

Here is a large, systemic wrong we must face. I often talk with people about it, and they always ask, "What can any of us do?" It's a natural, sensible Lenten question, and it has a direct answer: Do the nearest good thing you can. Put yourself to the nuisance of recycling; turn the thermostat down; shorten your shower. Sell your fourth car and then your third and drive your children to their appointments yourself. Or let them drive you.

This is the work we call restitution – making right what we have done wrong. Small, specific, practical turnings.

No matter how large the wrong, there is comfort in a small turning. Fairly soon, in a day, a week, you see that something is better.

Lionel Basney

Thursday, March 9

The Freedom

These Mountains are Immanuel's Land, and they are within sight of the City.
(The Pilgrim's Progress)

So we set about repentance, restitution: we make time, name our faults, turn to God in faith and expectation. What then?

The answer, I think, is that we feel right at home again. Perhaps it is like waking up. We get back the world we know and love, but freed now from the cramp and fog of our preoccupation with ourselves. And we feel again that we have a true, absorbing place in God's world as well as work to do.

Maybe that doesn't seem enough: "I repent, and then I get a work assignment?" Sometimes we do feel other things – the warmth, the exhilaration, of God's love. Sometimes we feel like Ebenezer Scrooge on the Christmas morning of his redemption – "light as a feather, happy as an angel."

But Scrooge took his rediscovered joy straight to his counting house and raised his clerk's salary. If we don't put our joy to work, if we don't reinsert it into our daily responsibilities, we can make it into an idol. We can make it into a yardstick. We come to think that if we aren't feeling exhilarated, then there is something wrong with our faith experience.

This is like thinking that if we aren't feeling crazy in love, there is something wrong with our marriages. But that excitement is a sometimes thing. It isn't the heart of the matter: the marriage is, that patient melding of lives and selves. That is where we are at home.

That is where we have work to do, the best kind of work – work that frees us, that lets us forget ourselves.

Let me give you a picture. Many years ago I watched a child take a stack of scrap paper and a pencil and begin to tell a story. It started with a little girl, but in a minute it reached toward talking trees and airplanes, battles and magic lakes. All the time the child was speaking the story, her hand floated across the paper, drawing picture after picture. The sheets spread at her feet like a river delta.

She drew in the perfect freedom of the story. It was as if the drawing flowed out of her imagination, down her arm, through her pencil, out onto the paper.

When the story ended, she dropped the pencil and left. There would be more stories when she wanted them. They were where she was at home, where she did her work, the kind God did when the world was made.

Lionel Basney

Restore My Soul.

1. Re-store my soul, re - fresh my heart, re - new my
 2. Re-light the fire that burned so strong, re - minding

life in ev - ry part, re - veal to me what sin re -
 me what You have done. My one re - quest is to be

mains and lead me to the cross a - gain. At the
 changed, so lead me to the cross a - gain.

cross I'll find a way to live the life Your hand has
 made, so find me there, Lord, and help me stay in true sur -

ren - der with You, my Sav - ior.

Andi Rozier ©2002 Harvest Songs

David doesn't mince words in Psalm 51. Unlike many of our (my) confessions, there are no excuses, no fancy words and no qualifiers. It is an honest and humble "I'm sorry." Andi Rozier follows the simplicity and honesty of Psalm 51 in his song, "Restore My Soul." The beautiful English folk tune "O Waly, Waly" sets the tone for the verse of this prayer song. It is answered by a newly composed refrain that reminds us that a renewed soul can only come through the cross. As we continue our journey to the cross, let's be honest to ourselves and to God. We have been sinful from birth. We are transgressors without excuse. But we are also redeemed at great cost and forgiven with great love.

Greg Scheer

Saturday, March 11

The Promise

*And the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.
(The Pilgrim's Progress)*

All the time, while waiting, praying through Lent, we are expecting Easter.

Standing in the empty garden, we wait for the first green shoots. Unpacking the bag, we imagine a time when there will be nothing in it but good things. Plodding down the road, we look for the city's spires.

For 30 years, give or take a month, I lived in a small, rural town. It stands scattered in a river valley and up the valley's steep west wall, which is itself part of the mountains behind it.

In my boyhood, in the early 1950s, trains still ran on the straight track in the flat of the valley. I grew up within hearing of the train whistle, that powerful wail of longing and comfort.

I live even more deeply in the country now, and one of my pleasures is to waken in the morning, before light, hearing the deep throb of the locomotive not many hundreds of yards away and its air hard trumpeting.

The whistle blows because the tracks cross a main road, the one that reaches from town to out to the Interstate highway. A century ago, the crossing was its own little town. The town has vanished now, though the foursquare, substantial brick house where the stationmaster lived still stands.

When I hear the morning train I imagine that it is calling for the town that used to be there. So we live as believers, thinking of the place we started from, Eden, the home we can't go back to.

I also imagine the little crossing town restored – a family living again in the stationmaster's house, the master coming out with his pocket watch to meet the evening train. So we dream of the place we are traveling toward, Bunyan's Celestial City, the new Jerusalem.

Lent is the time when we renew our hope of glory. The hard job of repenting prepares us. There will be a day when the train will call, and it will be answered with a shout of welcome from the community of God's love, whole again, restored.

Lionel Basney

Week Three: Jesus Cleanses the Temple

House Cleaning

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple . . . But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? (Malachi 3:1-2).

It's a scene. Jolting. Noisy. Unmistakably conspicuous. In a moment of unrehearsed drama Jesus, *the Nazarene*, improvises a scourge of thick cords and makes his way to the Court of the Gentiles. Forgoing dialogue, he blisters through a buzzing hive of temple-based entrepreneurs and turns it inside out. Sounds of shattering pottery and metal-on-marble alarm and energize the crowd. *All this must go!* Loose coins mix and scatter and dove cages flutter as all eyes fix upon the quiet Galilean teacher who is suddenly, kinetically, brazenly creating a scene. What is he up to? Is the Prince of Peace now an agent of divine wrath?

No. This would come in less than 40 years at the hands of Roman armies when Jerusalem, the holy city of divine peace, would fall. This visit reveals a less familiar, starker face of grace. C.S. Lewis might call it a "severe mercy" – something shocking enough to get our attention. Here, it's a final invitation to get things right.

As Jesus prepares for the "temple" of his own body to undergo the ultimate sacrifice, he first cleanses Herod's 26-acre temple of its hidden leaven: Compromise, hypocrisy, blinding pride. The deepest sin rests comfortably inside. The same priests who forbid Roman coinage to mingle with Jewish half-shekels in the temple treasury have no qualms about allowing moneychangers access to the Court of the Gentiles, on holy grounds, to take advantage of a situation. Profits, kickbacks, conveniences. Shades of gray that gently blacken the hearts of even the holy.

Jesus arrives, days before Passover, to set things right. He does not act out of simple rage or jealousy or with the misdirected zeal of a suicide bomber. He does not "react" to anything he sees. He acts – consumed only by his Father's will. Nothing else moves or motivates him. Nothing personal, nothing political. His Father's house is now a haunt for thieves and he must clear the air for real praying to happen once more.

Malachi's long foretold "*messenger of the covenant*" arrives unannounced. The Lord has "*suddenly come to his temple!*" But he's knocking things down and making quite a scene. "*Who can abide the day of his coming?*" The priests and Sanhedrin cannot. They mistake God's severe mercy for insult and retaliate by helping silence the messenger. I wonder if I sometimes do the same.

Tom VanderMolen

Demanding a Miracle

*The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"
Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"
(John 2:18-19).*

The temple Jews were very angry that Jesus disrupted the temple, which was their livelihood. They asked him "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" The Jews ask for a miracle because they could not accept Jesus' scandalous action unless they have proof that he's someone sent by God (they're convinced that he's not).

We should note that Jesus *could have* done a miracle right then and there. But he offers them something else. It's a miracle, but not the kind they wanted: "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days." It's not immediate, and it's a miracle that they cannot understand and do not accept. Jesus is offering something greater and more powerful than a construction miracle. He's promising a resurrection from the dead, a radically new relationship with God. That will be their sign that he's of God.

Why is Jesus so cryptic with them? Why doesn't he give the Jews the instant proof of a miracle that they asked for? We learn more in verses 23-25. Many people put faith in Jesus because they saw him do miracles, but John says that Jesus "would not entrust himself to them." He didn't invest in these people. He left them to their own devices. This is hard to accept.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that "Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." I wonder if Jesus did not entrust himself to them because he knew that faith based on miracles, things that are seen, is weak. I wonder if this is why he refused to give the Jews in the temple instant proof that he was the Son of God. Faith is the "assurance of things *hoped for*, the assurance of things *unseen*." I wonder if Jesus didn't entrust himself to them because he knew that belief based on miracles that are seen is not faith at all, but rather, shallow excitement.

In this story, Jesus is not in the business of doing miracles to prove that he's worthy of faith. Jesus works more quietly, in ways that can only be recognized in retrospect. But these quiet ways of Jesus are much more powerful and fruitful than the instant miracles we demand. We just have to wait and believe, because we might not see until later. Who knows, Jesus just might rebuild that temple in 3 days.

MaraJoy C. Norden

Tuesday, March 14

Preparation

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully (Psalm 24:3-4).

In the sanctuary of my soul
I come before your Holy presence
I bow down before you
and wait...
I worship you
I confess the evil of my flesh and its will to take over my mind
I am yours Lord, I will glorify you
You are my redeemer, my wisdom
You are my peace, my joy
I love you, I love me
You have saved me from myself
You have not given me a spirit of fear
a spirit of doubt or procrastination
You have given me redemption and power
Thank you Jesus
You are my hope and I praise you
Here I am lord
I present my body as a living sacrifice
In my mind
In my heart
In my soul
with my eyes
with my feet
with my hands
with my ears
Guide my prayers O God
Guide me to the inner sanctuary of my soul
I offer all my desires, my passions, my pleasures
I will not pollute my body with the sins of this world.
I stand firm in spirit against fulfilling my flesh and its appetites
what I look at
what I listen to
what I say
what I touch
where I go
I submit my flesh to you and offer it as a living sacrifice

Angela Taylor Perry

Wednesday, March 15
Matthew 21:12-13

Bankrupt!

*He said to them, "It is written,
'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'
but you are making it a den of robbers"*
(Matthew 21:13).

Jesus confronted the bankruptcy of his people when he cleansed the temple. Jesus calls the people robbers. They should be worshippers, but they are robbers. The temple should be a house of worship, but they have turned it into a house of trade (John 2:16). With their bankrupt hearts they have stolen the richness of temple worship.

How dare we bankrupt the temple! How dare we turn our Father's House into a market! Instead of a desire for communion with God, there is bellowing and bleating from animals. Instead of soft hearts and adoration, there is disrespect and shady business. Instead of a desire for forgiveness and direction, there is trading and bustle. Instead of people being treated as God's possession to be developed for God's enjoyment, people were exploited. The trading cheated Jesus's Father. Bankruptcy!

Jesus is double-ly motivated: for his Father's glory and for the renewal of his people and their worship. His zeal motivates him to restore God's honor in the temple. He honors God by making way for richness again in the temple. He honors God by offering abundance again to the bankrupt hearts of the people. He drove out those who used the temple and the worshippers as their possessions rather than God's. He shows us that God is glorified when people are treasured rather than exploited.

During this season of Lent, let's examine our motivation:

I wonder what motivates us. It is zeal for the Father's glory? I wonder if we care about our Father's glory.

I wonder if we treat God's people as His treasure and possession. I wonder if we give God glory by honoring each other. I wonder if we take care of one another, so that no one is bankrupt, spiritually or otherwise.

Janice McWhertor

Again!

Oh Jesus
Enter
 the temple
 of our hearts.
Drive out
 self-seeking ambition.
Overturn
 the tables of misused power.
Clear out
 all that is not holy.

Then watch.
See.
See in a clean place how we creep forward for your healing.
 For we are the lame,
 stagnant in deed and thought.
 And we are the blind,
 longing to live in the light.
Carry us away with your teaching.
Heal us.

Listen!
 Your works are wonderful.
 Do you hear the “Hosannas” bouncing off the walls?
 In your temple there is praise again.

Lorilyn Wiering

What Wondrous Love is This?

WONDROUS LOVE. P. M. Alto by Mrs. R. D. B. 159

1. What wondrous love is this? O my soul! O my soul! What wondrous love is this? O my soul! What wondrous love is this

2. When I was sinking down, Sinking down, sinking down; When I was sinking down, Sinking down; When I was sinking down,

3. Ye friends of Zion's King, Join the praise, join the praise; Ye friends of Zi-on's King, Join the praise; Ye friends of Zi-on's King,

That caused the Lord of bliss To send this precious peace To my soul, to my soul? To send this precious peace To my soul!

Beneath God's righteous crown, Christ laid a-side his crown For my soul, Christ laid a - side his crown For my soul.

With heart and voices sing, And strike each tuneful string In his praise, in his praise, And strike each tuneful string In his praise.