

Morning Prayer

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 21, 2021

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85887946777?pwd=ei94MEdsMUh6clV6b2dUblFOQ3I2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

As a Lenten practice for us as a congregation, we would like to keep a period of five minutes silence before the Prelude begins. Zoom participants mute at 9:55 a.m. We are taking on this practice as an opportunity for all worshippers to gather their thoughts, spend a brief time in prayer, and prepare their hearts for worship.

Prelude

Announcements

The Penitential Order

Opening Hymn

Hymnal 495

Hail, thou once despiséd Jesus



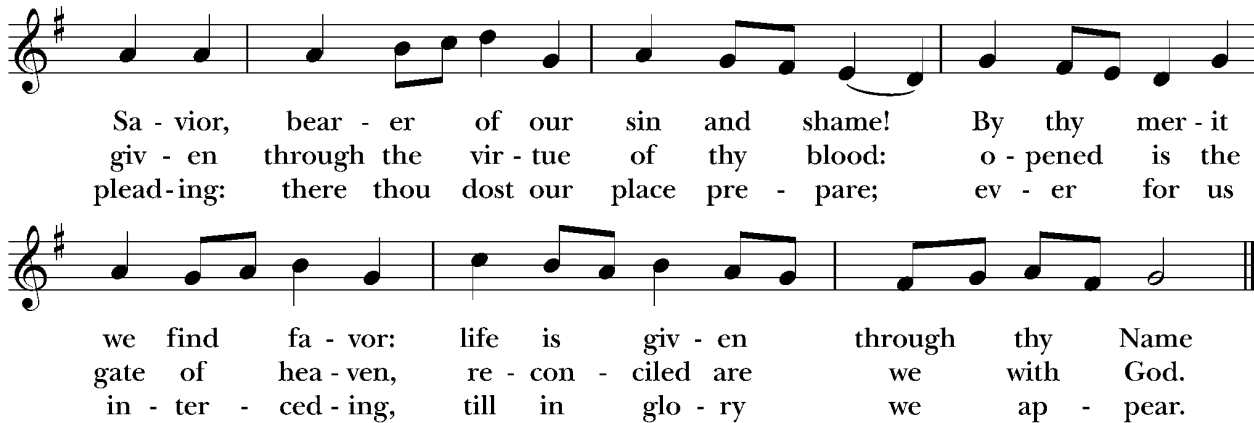
1 Hail, thou once de - spis - ed Je - sus! Hail, thou Gal - i -
2 Pas - chal Lamb, by God ap - point - ed, all our sins on
3 Je - sus, hail! en - throned in glo - ry, there for ev - er



le - an King! Thou didst suf - fer to re - lease us;
thee were laid: by al - might - y love a - noint - ed,
to a - bid; all the heaven - ly hosts a - dore thee,



thou didst free sal - va - tion bring. Hail, thou u - ni - ver - sal
thou hast full a - tone - ment made. All thy peo - ple are for -
seat - ed at thy Fa - ther's side. There for sin - ners thou art



Sa - vior, bear - er of our sin and shame! By thy mer - it
 giv - en through the vir - tue of thy blood: o - pened is the
 plead - ing: there thou dost our place pre - pare; ev - er for us
 we find fa - vor: life is giv - en through thy Name
 gate of hea - ven, re - con - ciled are we with God.
 in - ter - ced - ing, till in glo - ry we ap - pear.

Presider Blessed be the God of our salvation:
People **Who bears our burdens and forgives our sins.**

The Decalogue

Hear the commandments of God to God's people:
 I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.
 You shall have no other gods but me.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Honor your father and your mother.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit murder.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit adultery.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not steal.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not be a false witness.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

The Presider then says

Hear these words of scripture:

If we claim to be sinless, we are self-deceived and strangers to the truth. If we confess our sins, God is just, and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong.

Spirit of God, search our hearts.

Confession of Sin

The Presider then says

Gentle Father, show us our sins as they really are, so that we may truly renounce them and know the depth and richness of your mercy.

Silence is kept for a time.

The Presider begins

Most merciful God,
**we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

A Priest then says

Almighty God, who pardons all who truly repent, forgive + your sins, strengthen you by the Holy Spirit, and keep you in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. **Amen.**

Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One.
Have mercy upon us.

The Invitatory and Psalter

Presider Lord, open our lips.

People **And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.

Invitatory

BCP p. 80

O God, be merciful to us and bless us, *
show us the light of your countenance and come to us.

Let your ways be known upon earth, *
your saving health among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, *
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide all the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.

Psalms 51:1-13

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; *
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

²**Wash me through and through from my wickedness, ***
and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, *
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴**Against you only have I sinned ***
and done what is evil in your sight.

⁵And so you are justified when you speak *
and upright in your judgment.

⁶**Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, ***
a sinner from my mother's womb.

⁷For behold, you look for truth deep within me, *
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

**⁸Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; *
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.**

⁹Make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the body you have broken may rejoice.

**¹⁰Hide your face from my sins, *
and blot out all my iniquities.**

¹¹Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.

**¹²Cast me not away from your presence, *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.**

¹³Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.**

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.

The Lessons

First Reading

Jeremiah 31:31-34

A Reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah.

³¹“The days are surely coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though we were married,” says the LORD. ³³“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the LORD: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” says the LORD; “for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”

Reader The Word of the Lord.
People **Thanks be to God.**

Canticle 14: A Song of Penitence

Kyrie Pantokrator

O Lord and Ruler of the hosts of heaven, *

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

and of all their righteous offspring:

You made the heavens and the earth, *
with all their vast array.

All things quake with fear at your presence; *

they tremble because of your power.

But your merciful promise is beyond all measure; *
it surpasses all that our minds can fathom.

O Lord, you are full of compassion, *

long-suffering, and abounding in mercy.

You hold back your hand; *
you do not punish as we deserve.

In your great goodness, Lord,

you have promised forgiveness to sinners, *

that they may repent of their sin and be saved.

And now, O Lord, I bend the knee of my heart, *
and make my appeal, sure of your gracious goodness.

I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, *

and I know my wickedness only too well.

Therefore I make this prayer to you: *
Forgive me, Lord, forgive me.

Do not let me perish in my sin, *

nor condemn me to the depths of the earth.

For you, O Lord, are the God of those who repent, *
and in me you will show forth your goodness.

Unworthy as I am, you will save me,

in accordance with your great mercy, *

and I will praise you without ceasing all the days of my life.

For all the powers of heaven sing your praises, *
and yours is the glory, to ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Second Reading

Hebrews 5:5-10

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Hebrews.

⁵Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

⁶as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Hymn


Hymnal 439

What wondrous love is this?

Unison



1 What won - drous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What
2 To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing, to
3 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on, and



won - drous love is this, O my soul! What won - drous love is this that
God and to the Lamb, I will sing. To God and to the Lamb who
when from death I'm free, I'll sing on. And when from death I'm free I'll



caused the Lord of bliss to lay a - side his crown for my
is the great I AM, while mil - lions join the theme, I will
sing and joy - ful be, and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing



soul, for my soul, to lay a - side his crown for my soul.
sing, I will sing, while mil - lions join the theme I will sing.
on, I'll sing on, and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing on.

Third Reading

John 12:20-33

A Reading from John.

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.



²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

The Apostles' Creed

The Presider begins

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth;
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Prayers

Presider Hear our cry, O God.

People **And listen to our prayer.**

Presider Let us pray.

The People's Respondent, the Presider, and the People

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven;
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;
The way of your justice be followed by the people of the world;
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
Sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test; strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.

**From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.**

V. Make your ways known upon earth, O God,
R. Your saving power among all peoples.
V. Renew your Church in holiness,
R. And help us to serve you with joy.
V. Guide the leaders of this and every nation,
R. That justice may prevail throughout the world
V. Let your way be known upon earth;
R. Your saving health among all nations.
V. Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten,
R. Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.
V. Make us instruments of your peace,
R. And let your glory be over all the earth.

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Most merciful God, by the passion of your Son Jesus Christ, you delivered us from the power of darkness; grant that, through faith in him who suffered on the cross, we may be found acceptable in your sight. Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Jesus, they hung you on a cross because you love sinners. Save us from our self-righteousness and from our contempt for those who differ from us. In your strong name; **Amen.**

Jesus, crucified, despised and suffering, you made yourself one with us. Help us to follow you and bear the shame. In your holy name; **Amen.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. **Amen.**

Intercessions and thanksgivings

Presider Eternal and loving God, through the glorification of your Son Jesus you have taught us to follow him through death into eternal life: Glorify your name in us, as we bring before you the concerns of the world, saying: Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.

Intercessor Blessed Father, your Son Jesus has taught your Church that when a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it bears much fruit: Empower us in our journey of sacrifice and compassion to follow Christ in such faithfulness that we may be glorified with him. Empower our Bishops Bonnie, Michael, Justin, Moises, Elizabeth, Donald and Craig. Empower all ministers, priests, deacons, ministry teams, those in formation; and our brothers and sisters worshipping at Trinity Church, Monroe; and Ascension, El Siebo, and St Anthony of Padua, Carreton, in the Dominican Republic. **Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Silence is kept.

Almighty One, you have driven out the ruler of this world through the glorification of Jesus: Put your law of love within the hearts of all who hold authority among the nations, that they may hear of joy and gladness, so that the broken body of the world may rejoice. **Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Silence is kept.

Bring the joy of your saving help to all who suffer throughout the world [especially _____], that they may hear of joy and gladness and be healed. **Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Silence is kept.

Gracious God, you have promised that all who serve your beloved will be honored in your sight: Have mercy upon this community, that all may know you, from the least to the greatest, and follow in the way that Christ has shown us. **Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Silence is kept.

Let our prayers ascend to Jesus, our eternal high priest, as we offer up our intercessions and supplications [especially for _____]. We thank you for the incarnation of your Son Jesus, who shares our sorrows and our joys. Hear our praise and thankfulness for all the blessings we enjoy [especially for _____].

We entrust into your life all of those who have surrendered their lives into your eternal keeping [especially _____]. May they rest in your peace. **Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.**

Silence is kept.

Presider Holy One, your Son Jesus has taught your Church that when a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it bears much fruit: Give us the joy of your saving help again, and sustain us with your bountiful Spirit, o God, as we follow Jesus in service to your world, that the salvation and glorification you have accomplished through his cross and resurrection may extend your eternal life throughout creation. Create in us clean hearts, O God. **Amen**

In union, O Lord, with your faithful people at every altar of your Church where the Holy Eucharist is now being celebrated, we desire to offer you praise and thanksgiving. We remember your death, Lord Christ; we proclaim your resurrection; we await your coming in glory. And since we cannot receive you today in the Sacrament of your Body and Blood, we beseech you to come spiritually into our hearts. **Cleanse and strengthen us with your grace, Lord Jesus, and let us never be separated from you. May we live in you, and you in us, in this life and in the life to come. Amen.**

The Presider then says

My brothers and sisters, I invite you- wherever you are- to take into your hands the gifts you offer today. Gifts of food, gifts of money, gifts of whatever form, and join me as we offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and make good our vows to the Most High.

Let us pray.

Loving God and merciful Creator, whose hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: we come to you with thanksgiving and praise. We offer to you this day our gifts of time, talent, and possessions, knowing that all we are, and all we have, is a gift from you. **Please accept these gifts, and help us to reach out to others as you, our God, have reached out to us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom

The People's Respondent, the Presider, and the People

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: **Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting**

us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

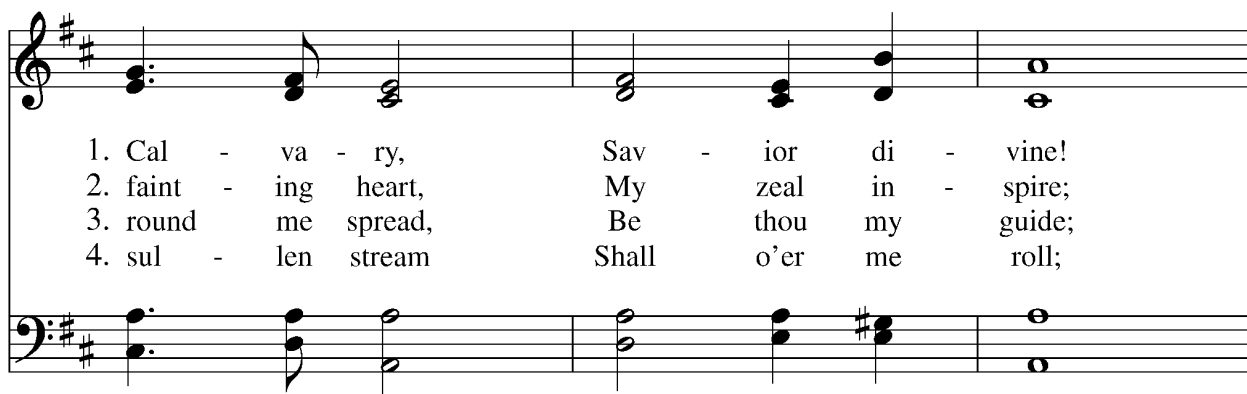
Closing Hymn

LEVAS 88

My faith looks up to thee



1. My faith looks up to thee, Thou lamb of
2. May thy rich grace im - part Strength to my
3. While life's dark maze I tread, And griefs a -
4. When ends life's tran - sient dream, When death's cold,



1. Cal - va - ry, Sav - ior di - vine!
2. faint - ing heart, My zeal in - spire;
3. round me spread, Be thou my guide;
4. sul - len stream Shall o'er me roll;



1. Now hear me while I pray, Take all my guilt a - way;
2. As thou hast died for me, O may my love to thee
3. Bid dark - ness turn to - day, Wipe sor - row's tears a - way;
4. Blest Sav - ior, then in love, Fear and dis - trust re - move,

1. O let me from this day Be whol - ly thine.
 2. Pure, warm, and change - less be, A liv - ing fire.
 3. Not let me ev - er stray From thee a - side.
 4. O bear me safe a - bove, A ran - somed soul.

Dismissal and Blessing

A Priest says

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy, for the love of him who laid down his life for us. **Amen.**

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all + evermore. **Amen.** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

Postlude

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HOLY WEEK SERVICES SCHEDULE

Palm/Passion Eve March 27, 2021	4:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist in church
Palm/Passion Sunday March 28, 2021	10:00 a.m. Morning Prayer on Zoom
Maundy Thursday April 1, 2021	7:00 p.m. Zoom Sunday services link
Good Friday April 2, 2021	12:00 p.m. Zoom Sunday services link
	2:30 p.m. Stations of the Cross
	- Via Video --Text for Stations devotional text here.
Holy Saturday April 3, 2021	5:00 p.m. Zoom Sunday services link
Easter Day April 4, 2021	10:00 a.m. Morning Prayer on Zoom
	12:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist in church

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REGARDING OFFERINGS TO ST. BARNABAS CHURCH

To make an offering to St Barnabas, please mail your check to the church: 20500 W Old US-12, Chelsea MI 48118-1309. Mail is being collected daily.

**CONTINUING OUR DONATIONS OF FOOD AND FUNDS
TO FAITH IN ACTION**

Faith in Action is continuing to provide leadership in collecting donations to support households in need in the Chelsea and Dexter areas. They will be in need of our continuing help in the weeks of winter still to come.

Needed right now: *boxed/shelf-stable milk, cooking oil, salt/pepper, spices, coffee, tea bags, sugar, flour, canned tuna, crackers, cake mix, canned frosting, dish soap, women’s hygiene products.* You may bring your donations to FIA, or to Nancy who will see that they get there. **If you bring food directly to FIA**, please let Nancy know, so she can continue to keep our records of donation. If you write a check, please make it to *Faith In Action*. The **next Food Drive at the church** will be **TODAY**. The building will be open for you to leave your donations.

Financial donations to help us combat the continuing effects of the pandemic can be made by PayPal at www.faithinaction1.org, by [Facebook](#), or by mailing a check to *Faith in Action, 603 S. Main Street, Chelsea MI 48118*. **If you need help, please call FIA at (734) 475-3305**

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Why do we include congregations in the Dominican Republic in our prayers each week?

The Diocese of Michigan and the Diocese of the Dominican Republic are bound together in what is called a “Companion Diocese” relationship. Here is some information on that topic, from <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/companion-diocese/> “Companion diocese relationships are formally recognized by the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church at the request of the dioceses involved, on the basis of a resolution by both partners proposing the companion relationship. The companion dioceses usually commit to the relationship for a fixed period of years, but this commitment is renewable. A companion relationship may be shared as long as the dioceses wish to continue the relationship.

A diocese of the Episcopal Church may enter into a companion relationship with an overseas diocese of the Anglican Communion. The mission of the dioceses in the companion

relationship includes mutual encouragement and prayer, intensified understanding and concern, and the exchange of both spiritual and material resources. Companion relationships are to strengthen the Anglican Communion through the direct experience of interdependence across cultural and geographical boundaries. Each partner in the companion relationship is to be both a giver and a receiver.”

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Upcoming Commemorations

- March 21 Thomas Cranmer: Archbishop of Canterbury, Editor of the First Book of Common Prayer, 1549, and Martyr, 1556; and, Thomas Ken, Bishop, 1711
- 22 James De Koven, Priest, 1879
- 23 Gregory the Illuminator, Bishop and Missionary, c.332
- 24 Oscar Romero, Archbishop and Martyr, 1980 and the Martyrs of El Salvador
- 25 The Annunciation of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 26 Richard Allen: First Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1831
- 27 Charles Henry Brent, Bishop, 1929

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March 21, 2021 – Lent 5B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

This powerful passage speaks of God’s promise of reconciliation and hope to the people of Israel. The Babylonian army had conquered Jerusalem, razed the Temple, and sent Jeremiah and many others into exile in Babylon. Many exiles believed that this traumatic defeat was God’s punishment for their idolatry and their injustice towards one another. They knew they had turned away from God, and they believed God responded in kind, by turning away from them.

But Jeremiah here tells them that this is not the end of the story: even now, God is making the first move to restore their relationship. God promises to make a new and even better covenant with them—to forge an even more honest, open, and intimate connection with God’s people. The people have sinned, yes; but God’s forgiveness flows from an even deeper generosity, from the depth of God’s longing to know and be known by God’s people. “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” God does not want outward signs of obedience or fear, but the love of hearts that are both just and genuine.

- All of us have turned away from God in one way or another. Be honest: when you think about repentance, do you imagine yourself having to earn back God’s love? Or do you imagine God as eager to make the first move, to forgive?
- Have there been moments when you did right by someone, not out of duty or guilt, but out of authentic desire? What made that possible? How might you bring that possibility into other spheres of your life?

Psalm 51:1-13

This beautiful psalm contains some of the Bible's profound words of humility and penitence. Holding nothing back, the psalmist confesses to being "a sinner from my mother's womb," yet also confesses faith that "you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly." God will speak to the part of our souls that thrills to the truth—that pulses deep beneath our pride, our wild will to go it alone.

The psalm is a plea for God to help us "want what we want to want." That phrase from the philosopher Harry Frankfurt captures the reality that our desires often conflict or crowd each other out. The whole psalm is a cry to be brought again into the embrace of the parent who can calm and reorient us, upon whose presence we depend for nourishment, instruction, and care. "Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit."

- Can you name an impulse or desire that conflicts with "what you want to want?" What would it cost you to let go of that desire today?
- When do you find yourself trying to "go it alone"—to go without the help God is always offering? Where do you want to loosen your grip and let God shoulder some of the burden?

Hebrews 5:5-10

Melchizedek has the whiff of mystery about him. He appears for only a fleeting moment in Genesis 14; he blesses Abram and gives him bread and wine when Abram passes through his city on a mission to rescue his brother Lot. This was before Abram was Abraham – before God had called him and blessed him, promising to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. And it was before Melchizedek's city, Salem, got a new name, too: Jerusalem.

In this complicated passage, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes Jesus as the heir to this tradition of blessing and sharing bread and wine more ancient even than Abraham. It is a way of naming Jesus as one who brings us back to the deepest roots of the Israelite tradition in acts of sacred hospitality, and in solidarity with the most vulnerable. By describing Jesus as similar to this mysterious priest-king, the author of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus used his power as God's Son not to dominate or exclude, but to welcome, nourish, and bless.

- Can you think of someone who you met only in passing who nonetheless made an impact on you, who blessed you? Have you met a Melchizedek?
- Is there a small way you can channel your gratitude to them by being a blessing to someone passing through your life right now? What are some of the gifts you have to offer others?

John 12:20-33

This passage comes just after Jesus' triumphal procession into Jerusalem, which we remember each year on Palm Sunday. In other words, we are beginning the most tragic chapter of Jesus' life and ministry: his journey to the Cross. When Jesus speaks about a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies to bear much fruit, he is obviously speaking about his own impending death; that death will bring forth an explosion of life-giving grace, a life beyond death. But Jesus is also announcing that this paradoxical connection between death and life is at the heart of discipleship. He tells the Greek-speaking Jews who have come to see him—and he tells us today—that if we insist on holding tight to our lives as they are, everything we want to control and contain will eventually be taken away from us. But if we're willing to let our lives crack open like

a seed planted in the earth, we will witness an abundant outpouring of life: *in us and given through us.*

It is part of the mystery of life that we only enjoy that abundance by continually giving it away. Like Melchizedek, like Abraham and Sarah, we are blessed to be a blessing: to plant our lives like seeds in the earth and to share the fruits.

- Is there a part of your life, or a relationship, where you're holding on tight to "the way things have always been" amid change? What if that change isn't so much a loss as a breaking open so that God might grow something new—in you, and in the world?
- As we move into the season of spring, there are seeds stirring in the earth. Is there a part of your heart that has been lying still this winter, waiting for this moment to break open into shoots and blossoms? Is there a ministry in your community that could help that part of you grow, where you could share the beauty of God's work in you with others?

This study written by Carl Adair.

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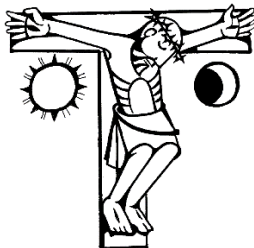
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Our Mission:

We seek to grow as diverse disciples of Jesus Christ, and to serve Jesus by serving others in the world, guided by the values of Ancient Rites, Open Minds, and Affirming Hearts.



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