

Reflections for the
Fourth Week of Lent



March 18, 2007

To

March 24, 2007

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Jesus concludes his discourse in Chapter 6 and the crowds begin to thin out. They say, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Jesus, though, won't let the matter simply end without a further teaching on God's calling and enabling power. The disciples have been chosen and they have been called and God will equip them to follow. This was more than many could stomach and they began to leave in great numbers.

With the sound of the crowd beginning to fade into the distance, Jesus now turns to the Twelve and asks, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Speaking for the group, Simon Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

While it might not be politically correct, I like to Marine Corps motto "A Few Good Men". The Corps prides itself on making men and women into an elite fighting force. Jesus it seems has taken all the recruits, put them through basic training and now is ready to graduate those that have made it through. Those unable to make the grade have left and gone back to their spiritual darkness. Those that remain learn that one of them will be a betrayer, but their course is now set and their marching orders have been given. They have chosen the life that God gives through Jesus Christ.

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Prayer: Lord, let us never have to hear the question you asked the twelve. But if we must hear it, then let us answer as Peter did.

Saturday March 24, 2007

Are You One of the Twelve?

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 102

Jeremiah 23:9-15

Romans 9:1-18

John 6:60-71

John 6:60-71

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Many Disciples Desert Jesus

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? 62What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! 63The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit^{al} and they are life. 64Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

70 Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" 71(He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

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Welcome to Daily Lenten Scripture Reflections. This is the print version of my online blog. I am making this copy available for those that do not have internet access. The Reflections will be created in six weekly booklets. Please be sure that you get a new booklet each week. Better yet, visit my blog:

<http://revtdg.wordpress.com>

On the blog you can read these same reflections and offer your comments upon them.

I also appreciate you comments in other forms. Give me a call or drop me a note and let me know if these reflections have helped focus your thoughts during this season of Lent.

Sunday March 18

Living the Wild Life

Daily Lectionary Readings

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

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The Parable of the Lost Sheep

1Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3Then Jesus told them this parable:

The Parable of the Lost Son

"There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' 20So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed

I have tried to convey the sense of holiness associated with Communion. I have tried to show the importance of regularly receiving "The Body and Blood of Christ." I sometimes wonder, though, if my words ever get past the physical sensibilities of the congregation and strike a chord with their spirits.

For me, there is nothing that equates with the taking of the communion elements and the grace that they impart to my life.

What about you? What does Holy Communion mean to you? What is it's role in your spiritual journey?

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Prayer: Lord, help us to be nurtured through communion as we receive your grace into our lives.



HOLY COMMUNION

Friday March 23, 2007

Feeding on the Body of Christ

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 107:1-32

Jeremiah 23:1-8

Romans 8:28-39

John 6:52-59

John 6:52-59

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52Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

53Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." 59He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

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Once again, they are thinking physically. He wants us to become cannibals! How can he let us eat his flesh!

Jesus is thinking spiritually. His body and blood are symbols of something greater that God is doing. God is offering his children a food to satisfy their spiritual hunger and desire.

As a pastor, I am keenly aware of the Communion wars that can sometimes arise within a church. Some folks wonder why we have it so often. Some folks wonders why we don't have it more often. Some folks simply don't attend on the Sundays that it is offered. Most folks don't understand the sacramental nature of the meal.

him.

21"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.[a]'

22"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

25"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

28"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

31" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

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I suppose that this story is one of the more famous from the Bible and would most likely be recognized by many persons that are not Christian. Just mention the words Prodigal Son and most everyone instantly knows what you are talking about . It is such universal familiarity that sometimes breeds a lack of understanding on the part of those that really think that they know the story. It has three main characters: The younger son, known as the Prodigal, the father, and the older brother.

At face value, it is the story of rebellion and its consequences. The younger son goes to his father one day and basically says, "Dad. I want to act as if you are dead. Give me my inheritance today." A lot of folks think that the father must truly have favored the younger son. Personally, I would not be giving any of my children their share of the "estate" as long as I am living. Yet, the father in this story does. And the younger son is off to see the world and all its pleasures and excitement. It appears, though, that the younger son was not so

good at money management. It wasn't long before he had spent his inheritance on "wild living". HE found himself feed slop to the pigs on a farm and suddenly came to his senses and decided to go back home and see if he could work for his dad.

Meantime, back at the home place, dad has been spending his time looking out at the horizon hoping to catch a glimpse of the younger son coming back home. One day, his prayers are answered and, as the speck on the horizon grows clearer, he knows that it is his son. The Father runs to greet him. Embraces him and orders a ring and new clothes to be given to him. The son, the Prodigal has returned, and there is going to be celebration and partying tonight at the home place.

Meanwhile, out in the fields working, as any dutiful son would do, was the older brother. Perhaps he was doing not only what was expected of him, but also picking up the slack left by his departed brother. Each day, I'll be he was stewing under the collar to be left behind and was jealous and angry. He hears a party going on back at the house and asks a servant what was happening. The news must have come as a shock to him. He storms to the house and asks dad to come out and talk with him. He refuses to go in and celebrate what he considers to be an abomination. The son that rejected the dad, becomes the one that gets all the attention. Yet, ultimately, his father explains, " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

I have never been the prodigal. I have always tried to be the son that stayed at home and did what was expected of him. I have, though, encountered some Prodigals along the way. I know the stress that such Prodigals can produce within the family. They live their lives doing what they want and they still get all the attention. Somehow, it just doesn't seem fair. Yet in God's scheme of things, fairness often takes an unexpected turn. The Apostle Paul says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us..." He didn't wait for me to turn around and get my life in gear and do the right thing and then die for me. Instead, he died for me while I was still "living the wild life." He knew that one day I would come home to him. Are you still living the wild life? Are you ready to come home to Him?

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Prayer: Lord, let me stop living the wild life and come home to your loving arms.

true meaning of God's plan for their lives. Believe in Jesus—whom I have sent—and you will be saved. He has said this time and time again in the Gospel, but they do not believe. Their spiritual eyes are sealed shut and they cannot grasp the eternal import of his message for them.

As a pastor, this passage from John's Gospel is as close as the writer gets to a communion scene as is found in the other Gospels on Jesus' last night with the disciples. John does not have Jesus talk about the bread and the cup and doing these things in memory of him. Instead, he equates Jesus flesh with the Bread of Heaven and talks about those that eat this bread and the significance that such eating has for their lives.

For John, there is great symbolism in the I am statements: I am the Light of the World, I am the Bread of Life, etc. John appears to be giving us pegs onto which we can hang our faith. In this part of the Gospel, the peg is the Bread of Life comparison. We all know about bread and how we need it physically. John says, Jesus is spiritual bread that we also need and that we must not ignore.

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Prayer: Lord, let me taste, feel and eat the Bread of Life which you offer freely to me.



Thursday March 22, 2007

Do We Really Know Jesus?

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 69

Jeremiah 22:13-23

Romans 8:12-27

John 6:41-51

John 6:41-51

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41At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

43"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. 44"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'^[a] Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48I am the bread of life. 49Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

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They began to grumble again because what Jesus was trying to teach them was outside of the box thinking. When he equates himself with Moses and the manna, they remind him that he is simply the son of Mary and Joseph. We know them and there is nothing special about you. How can you claim that you have come down from heaven?

Jesus must again assert his heavenly connection and try to get them to look not at the physical side of things, but to open their spiritual eyes and find the

Monday March 19, 2007

Leftovers for Dinner

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 89:1-18

Jeremiah 16:10-21

Romans 7:1-12

John 6:1-15

John 6:1-15

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Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

1Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. 3Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

5When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages^[a] would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

10Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. 11Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

12When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13So they gathered them and

filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

14After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

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Pastor's Note: This week, we digress in the Gospel to a previous chapter. If you noticed as we progressed our way through John's Gospel, the daily lectionary skipped over chapter 6. Well, the lectionary now goes back and treats the chapter in its entirety for this whole week.

We begin chapter 6 of John's gospel with yet another of Jesus' public miracles—The Feeding of the Five Thousand. This story is one that seems to indicate that Jesus was testing his Disciples to see how much they were learning. I think from the results, we can see that they still were a long way from earning their graduate degree. As the crowd, perhaps with 5,000 we could really say multitude, approached, Jesus suggested to Phillip that the crowd be fed. Phillip, being a pragmatist says "Even with eight months wages we couldn't feed this crowd." The semi-optimistic Andrew then jumps into the conversation, "Here is a boy with five loaves and two small fish." His optimism then turns to pessimism, "But I don't know how far that will go with so many people to feed."

Now that Jesus has set the scenario, it's time to get to work and show everyone what God is really capable of doing. Everyone sat down. Jesus blessed the bread and fish and the disciples began handing out free food to the crowd. When they were done, they collected twelve baskets with uneaten barley loaves that remained!

At this point the crowd loved him! He had fed their physical hunger and they were beginning to say "This is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing their thoughts knew that they even intended on making him their King. Yet he also knew that his time had not yet come and withdrew by himself away from the multitude.

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Whenever I read this account, I am reminded of a recent Vacation Bible School in which the children sang, "Five small loaves, and two small fish. Jesus fed the

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A familiar theme appears again. The crowd is seeing and understanding the situation through their physical senses. They are not grasping the spiritual importance of what is transpiring before their very eyes. They start with a good probing spiritual question: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" They quickly turn it around though and begin questioning about physical things. They fall back to the party line — "Moses did this for us, can you not do the same."—mentality.

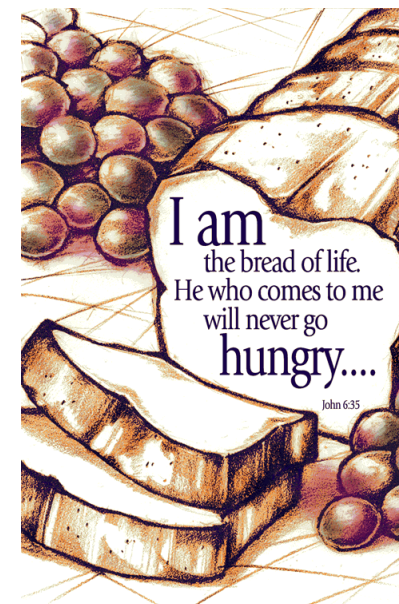
Jesus assures them that he can but first they must understand that all the things that he does and that Moses did, originate from God. He then tells them that he is the Bread of Life come down from heaven and that it is the Father's will that anyone that believes in him will have eternal life.

One of the best wedding presents that Debbie and I received was a bread maker. There is something magic about mixing the ingredients together and then four hours and ten minutes later taking out fresh hot bread. I suppose that bread would be the one item that I hope I never have to give up eating. I could do without steak, but a good piece of fresh bread is hard to do without.

Jesus is sort of the same way. He is hard to do without. As I have traveled with him on my spiritual journey I have come to realize the importance of the Bread that he offers to me. I have come to know that there is a hunger in my Spirit that can only be satisfied by the bread that he provides. I have also come to understand that he has offered himself as part of God's plan for me so that I may not hunger or thirst spiritually again. Furthermore, once I have claimed him, he doesn't let go of his claim upon me. I have believed in him and he does not abandon me.

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Prayer: Lord, may that hunger within me continue to grow and grow and let me always turn back to the Bread of Life to satisfy it.



Wednesday March 21, 2007

The Bread of Life

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 101

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Romans 8:1-11

John 6:27-40

John 6:27-40

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27Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

28Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

29Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

30So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'^[a]"

32Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

35Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. 36But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

crowd, with just such a dish." I am also reminded of the crowd around me that needs food. In our communities it would be nice if we could take five loaves and two fish—multiply them and feed the community. We, though, just can't do that. We don't have the power to multiply and give out like Jesus did. I sometimes wonder, however, if Jesus is not testing us in other ways. We can't do the miracle of multiplication, but we can do the action of helping, and loving, and feeding, and housing and caring for those that might be less fortunate. I suppose, we could be pessimistic like Phillip and wonder how to accomplish this, or we could be more like Andrew and begin to see the resources that exist around us that we could use to alleviate the problems that face our community.

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Prayer: Lord, let us see the resources at our disposal and put them to work for your Kingdom as we seek to make a difference in our community.

Tuesday March 20, 2007

Continental Breakfast for the Crowd

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 97

Jeremiah 17:13-25

Romans 7:13-25

John 6:16-27

John 6:16-27

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Jesus Walks on the Water

16When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, 17where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. 18A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. 19When they had rowed three or three and a half miles,^[a] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified.

20But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." 21Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

22The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. 23Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. 24Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Jesus the Bread of Life

25When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

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This is not the more famous Jesus walking on water story where Peter steps out of the boat to join him. Rather, this account has Jesus appearing to his disciples that have gone on without him to the other shore. In the middle of the night—in the middle of a storm—to a group of tired, and upon seeing him—Frightened followers—Jesus appears and they immediately make it safely to the shore.

The next day, the multitude, fresh from a nights sleep and a good meal, begin looking for their complimentary continental breakfast buffet. Jesus though was nowhere to be found. They realized that the disciples left without him. When some boats landed and they still hadn't found Jesus, they set out searching for him. They might have missed breakfast, but they sure weren't going to miss lunch!

When they caught up with Jesus, he quickly lets them know that they only reason that they are seeking him is to have their physical hunger satisfied. Jesus points out that it is not their physical hunger that is driving them but really the hunger of their spirits that needs to be quenched.

I don't think there is anything much better than a well grilled steak, a baked potato and a salad. As far as I am concerned its natures perfect meal. However, even after such a perfect meal for dinner. The next morning I wake up wanting something more to eat. The physical hunger that was satisfied by the steak and potatoes is once again coursing through my body and I have to eat to make the hunger go away.

I also realize that there is within me a spiritual hunger that needs to be satisfied. At times the hunger pangs are stronger than at others, yet I ignore these pangs at my own peril. I've learned that just like physical hunger, you can put off your spiritual hunger. You can train your body to exist on less physical food and you can train your spirit to get by on less spiritual food than it really needs. Starving your spirit, however, will lead to burnout and a sense of separation from God.

Thus, I suggest that instead of starving your spirit, you should seek to satiate your spirit with God's word and with prayer.

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Prayer: Lord, as I feel those spiritual hunger pangs, let me satisfy them with a fresh helping of your Word.

