

Lent Take-Homes Week Four

Monday March 7

Readings: Daniel 3:25, 34-43 Matthew 18:21-35

Scripture Verse: Then Peter came up and asked him, "Lord, when my brother wrongs me, how often must I forgive him." Matthew 18:21

Reflection: Chapter 18 in Matthew's gospel emphasizes that generosity in forgiveness is a mark of a Christian life. And in today's passage Jesus underlines the basic reason why our forgiveness is to be without limit. The reason is that we have received limitless forgiveness from God.

The parable of the unforgiving official—the man who had himself experienced generosity from the king—shows how the official did not appreciate what had been done for him and did not see his responsibility to forgive as he had been forgiven.

This was not an isolated theme in Jesus' teaching. He returns to it again and again and includes it when he teaches his followers how to pray. Perhaps Jesus dwelt so frequently on the topic of forgiveness because he knew how hard it would be for his followers.

Perhaps we have not yet accepted God's forgiveness of us and because we haven't accepted God's forgiveness, it is challenging for us to forgive. Sometimes, in our culture, some people seem to feel that forgiveness is a sign of weakness.

Lent is a time for us to be attentive to what is happening at the time of confession and absolution during worship. We can open our hearts to experience the reality of God's forgiveness and simply accept it and allow it to affect our lives and give us the courage and strength to respond by forgiving others. We can ask God to help us forgive as we have been forgiven.

Tuesday March 8

Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19

Scripture Verse: "Take care not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen" Deut 4:9

Reflection: In our first reading, Moses tells the people "not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen but teach them to your children and children's children."

What, we ask, is so important that we need to have it ingrained into our senses for centuries? It is the fact that God loves us, cares for us and protects us. That fact needs to be remembered and passed on.

In today's gospel, when Jesus says that he has come to fulfil the law and the prophets, he is talking about him being the centre of and source of that love and care and protection that God has offered to people since creation began. That love and care and protection surrounded the people of Israel through their centuries of the law and prophets. In Jesus, it is offered to all people as Jesus continues to offer people manna in the desert and a light to guide us in the darkness.

During Lent we are invited to return to the familiarity of our spiritual home, to prayer and worship and listening to God's Word in Scripture and to allow that experience to speak to us of God's ongoing love and care and protection of us.

Wednesday March 9

Readings: Jeremiah 7:23-28 Luke 11:14-23

Scripture Verse: "If it is by the finger of God that [I] drive our demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. Luke 11:20

Reflection: Some time ago there were predictions that in the year 2020 a mile-wide meteorite would pass dangerously close to planet earth. For a few days after this prediction there was no shortage of news reports and "expert" analysis centering on the destruction this meteorite would cause when and if it hit the earth. To add to all this, two Hollywood movies about earth getting hit by a meteorite were released at about the same time as the prediction was made. Further research revealed that the meteorite will actually pass by the earth at a distance of several hundred thousand miles/kilometres.

In our gospel today, Jesus reminds us that there is no guessing, estimating or ambiguity in who he is. Jesus is the human presence of God and of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' voice is the finger of God from which even the demons run. Jeremiah, as well, emphasises God's determination to have people absolutely committed to believing in Him.

In Lent we are invited in the midst of life's confusion to turn to Jesus, to ask for the grace to strengthen our faith and renew our commitment to believe in him fully and completely

Thursday: March 10

Readings: Hosea 14:2-10 Mark 12:28-34

Scripture Verse: You shall love the Lord your God... Mark 12:30

Reflection: It has been written, "Life is change and those who have changed often are perfect." As we know change is often difficult for Anglicans and the older we get the more trapped we can become in our patterns of life. A philosopher wrote about this when he commented on how supple and flexible infants are and how, as we age, we become stiffer and more brittle until at last we die. Life is flexibility. Death is rigidity.

The great commandment to love God above all else is a commandment directed to helping us change. Our love of neighbour cannot be understood or fulfilled without love of God. In our love of God, we begin to look at people the way God looks at them. We learn to treat them the way God treats them. We learn to work with them the way God works with them. We learn to treat them with the respect and dignity they (and we) are due as people created in the image of God.

In Lent we are invited to renew our love of God and to respond to God's love for us through treating others as God treats us. We are invited to become more flexible and to see people as God sees us.

Friday March 11

Readings: Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14

*Scripture Verse: He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth.
Hosea 6:3*

Reflection: Fairy tales often have a wizard or a magician in the story. These "special" people, like Merlin in Camelot, have magical formulae that only they know. Their incantations may bestow a curse or a blessing, or rearrange history or change someone's life. Merlin uses his magic to change the young Arthur into various animals and this, in turn, helps Arthur to see the world with new eyes and new understanding.

Jesus makes it clear in our gospel today that there is no magic formula for prayer that is only possessed by a few. Prayer is a gift that is open to all. Jesus gives us a model for prayer: we are sinners, totally dependant on God for our salvation. We are to lower our heads and ask God to pour mercy on us and rub that mercy, like oil, into our muscles and bones. We are to allow ourselves to be touched by God.

Hosea tells us that this is the love God asks from us. He doesn't want frantic activity. He wants us to allow him to direct our comings and goings.

In Lent we might pray: *Lord I approach you with my head bowed and my hands open. Pour your mercy upon me this day. Let me feel your love. Let me know that you are near me, guiding and leading me. Amen.*