

## Lent Week Four

### **Monday March 16**

Scripture Reading: Luke 4: 16-30

*Scripture Verse: And Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town." Luke 4:24*

In today's gospel, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth where he worshipped as a young boy. They invited him to do one of the readings. The congregation was made up of neighbours, relatives and friends. Jesus did the reading and then tried to teach them but their minds were closed.

They would not allow him to be their teacher. They focused on who he was and were incapable of seeing who he had become.

We have probably all heard the definition of an expert as "someone who lives at least 50 kilometres away". It seems like our minds are always more open to strangers than to people we have known for a long time. The phenomenon of "consultants" proved this point. Their biggest asset is that they are strangers. We invite them in, they study our procedures, they make their recommendations and they leave. In almost every case there is someone within the organization who has been saying the things said by the consultant and recommending that which the consultant recommends. But we tend to not listen to them.

Perhaps we need to be more open to the gifts and talents of the people with whom we worship and work. What talents and gifts do we miss because they are so close to home?

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, you fill the earth with endless blessings. Help us to recognize your gifts both great and small and share them more generously.*

### **Tuesday March 17**

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

*Scripture Verse: Jesus said, "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother and sister from your heart." Matthew 21:35*

There are unfortunately, people who believe that God is out to get us. God, they think, watches our every move and keeps a log of our misdeeds so that, when we die, God will judge us harshly. They approach the day of judgement with more fear than hope.

The God whom we are to fear when we die is not the God revealed to us in Jesus. The God revealed to us in Jesus is a loving and forgiving God who is present with us throughout our lives to support and guide us towards living responsible, accountable lives as followers of Jesus. God affirms our good deeds and offers forgiveness when we botch things up.

Our response to God's forgiveness is to allow it to shape the way we live so that we live responsible lives trying to be faithful followers of Jesus. When we experience the reality of God's healing, forgiving love in our lives we become more able to share that experience with others. The difficulties we often have with forgiving others can disappear (or at least be greatly diminished) once we experience the power of God's forgiveness in our lives.

Being forgiven by God is perhaps the most precious gift we can receive from God. In Lent we focus on trying to share this gift with others in our lives.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, your arms are always open to welcome us home. May we learn to forgive as you forgive us.*

### **Wednesday March 18**

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

Scripture Verse: *“However take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live.”*

*Deuteronomy 4:9*

The Jewish faith has a tradition of remembering. The Israelites were exhorted to not forget that God had brought them out of Egypt and had given them a unique set of statutes and decrees that would be the envy of the surrounding nations. This kind of remembering was far more than just recalling facts. In the Hebrew Scriptures “remembering” meant entering afresh into something from the past so that it was brought to life again in the present experience. At each celebration of the Passover, the events of the Exodus are recalled and revisited, passed on to children and children's children in a living tradition.

Jesus himself developed this rich concept of community remembering and took it to a new level at the Last Supper when he instructed us to take bread and wine “in remembrance” of him (1 Corinthians 11:24; Luke 22:19)

Remembering can also mean re-remembering...putting together that which is broken or divided. When we remember what God has done for us, we, in our fragmented state, are healed and re-membered, put together in some way.

This creative remembering can happen in a variety of ways. For example recalling and re-engaging in moments of prayer that were meaningful can be a resource for us if we are going through a tough time. The purpose is not to re-create a past experience for its own sake. The purpose is to open up our hearts again so that God can work in us even more deeply now.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember the moments and insights that you want me to cherish and keep alive in my heart.*

### **Thursday March 19**

Scripture Reading: Luke 11: 14-23

*Scripture Verse: Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. Luke 11:17*

Jesus makes a sharp response to those who suggest that he can cast out demons because he is in league with Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. He points out that he would be divided against himself if that were the case.

This reminds us of how easily we can be divided against ourselves. Most of us experience times when our surface desires are in conflict with our better selves. Perhaps the temptation to gossip or be selfish might try to get the better of us. Many such things can fragment us so that we need

Jesus to “re-member” us and to unify us with the centre of ourselves. The alternative is despair, as the demon of discouragement tempts us to give up trying to live by the best and highest that we know.

It is true that we often cannot “pull ourselves together” by our own efforts alone. But the gift of God's loving guidance is there, whenever we turn to God and pray about our need and confusion. Then we discover that what holds us together is not our achievements or position or possessions but the simple act of acknowledging our need of God, as God's beloved children, cherished, forgiven, refashioned by God into becoming more the persons we were created to be. In Lent we are invited to examine our lives to see what, if anything, divides us against ourselves.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am before you with all the contradictions of my heart and mind. Help me to be present to you with my whole self. Unify me and help me, by your grace and mercy to connect with my true self.*

### **Friday March 20**

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2: 4-10

*Scripture Verse: For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared. Ephesians 2:10*

In verse 10 of today's Scripture reading, Paul tells us that we are God's handiwork (or as the New Jerusalem Bible translates it, “God's work of art”)

We are often reminded of our sinfulness and unworthiness. It is good to hear that God takes as much delight in fashioning us as a master artisan would take over a cherished piece of work. We were created in God's image with divine love and skill. We are constantly mended and remade (re-membered) by God's Holy Spirit since God desires to do good things through us. We are created “for the good works that God has prepared”.

Everything is gift, from the intricacies of the human body to the complexities of our minds and yearnings of our spirit.

Salvation is also a gift and not of our own doing. Sometimes Christians mistakenly assume that our own actions can earn us salvation. Paul reminds us that it is “by grace we have been saved through faith” not the other way around. God continues to love us and reach out to us even when we least deserve it.

At times we lack confidence. The pressure to “succeed” can cause stress and feelings of inadequacy. But God values us for who we are—as a wise and loving parent perceives each of her or his children. To celebrate the fact that we are precious in God's eyes, God's beloved, God's handiwork, is not pride—it is true faith.

In Lent we are invited to reflect on the gifts God has given us and ask ourselves how we use those gifts to do good works and help others.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, I place myself in your hands and trust in your unfailing gift of love.*