



2008 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

WEEK FIVE

Learning How to Be Human: 40 days of Intentions

MONDAY – MARCH 3RD

PSALM 89 AND MARK 7:24-27

God's Covenant with David and Israel's Afflictions

The 89th Psalm begins with David singing praises of God's love and God's faithfulness to all generations to come. He praises God for choosing him to be his servant and establishing this throne for all generations to come. David was to become the King of Israel. David talks at length of God's faithfulness and might, his glory and his strength. In a vision, God promised David that His love would be with his people always, and that they would have protection, strength and endurance forever.

Nevertheless, David's descendents could not buy into this covenant. In their eyes, there was no throne to be occupied by David or his descendents. They were not yet ready to follow this "spiritual guidance". Instead, they continued to rely on old preconceived notions and out-of-sync instincts. God punished them for this, and David took this punishment to heart. He asked for renewal of this covenant, and in desperation, his descendents followed his example to follow this God and walk according to his truth and the covenant was renewed.

David had the ability to live as God's servant. How was he able to make this covenant and not look back? I have often decided that I would "give to God" a person, a situation, a problem, a heartache, and listen for spiritual guidance on how to make my next move only to be defeated by some old preconceived notion that I have the answer and know what is best, so I take it back! I refuse to let God give me the direction that could give me peace of mind.

In Mark 7, there is mother who came to Jesus asking him to take the demon from her daughter. This woman was not even Jewish and she had the ability to trust in Jesus' ability to heal. She was obviously desperate enough to trust in anything to save her child. And her child's demon was lifted.

Then Jesus is taken to a man who is deaf and mute and is asked to heal him. Why did this man decide to trust Jesus enough to let him place his fingers in his ears, spit and touch his tongue? This man had never heard a word of Jesus' teachings, yet let Jesus do these things to him. Where did his trust come from?

But the pattern that I see here is that there was a covenant with David and his people, they broke the covenant, they were made desperate, then they trusted and the covenant was renewed. Sometimes I remember the lesson before I take things into my own hands, and sometimes I remember only afterward, but the more I practice the concept to trust the "spiritual guidance" that is God, the easier it becomes.

*During Lent, help us to recommit our trust in God's guidance
and strive to walk according to truth and love in His word.*

Help us to remember that God is faithful and forgiving, even when we fall short of this goal. Amen.

Cathy Dohanyos

TUESDAY – MARCH 4TH

MARK 8:1-10

A huge crowd of hungry folks and not a MacDonald's in sight! "What to do? What to do?" the disciples ask as they wring their hands. Luke, telling the same story, reports that the disciples told Jesus, "Send them away" – hungry, tired, far from home. And Luke has Jesus reply, "You feed them."

We claim to be "Disciples", so Jesus must be talking to us – not about the 4000 – but about 37 million hungry Americans living below the poverty line, and another 57 million barely hanging on by their fingernails whom we told in our 1996 "Welfare Reform" that, if they wanted to eat, they had to work at hourly jobs that enabled them to just scrape by.

"How ya gonna do it?" the disciples asked. "How we gonna do it?" we ask. Jesus' answer comes right at the beginning of the story: "He had compassion on them." And then Jesus inquired, "How much food do you have?" Our answer is, "We have more than enough." It's time for us who have too much to share with those who have too little so that they, too, may have enough.

We have "Bread For the World" which keeps the pressure on Congress to be more compassionate toward those who have little. We have "Week of Compassion" which enables us to feed the hungry at home and abroad. We have the Cleveland Food Bank that attends to the hungry at our doorstep.

The famous French mime, Marcel Marceau, says, "Give more than your receive."

"Send them away" – or – "Have compassion." It's our choice.

We dare to call you "Our Father." Father, open our eyes that we may see those who need our help, near at hand and far away. Open our hearts with compassion in their behalf in the name of Christ. Amen.

Rev. Albert O. Kean

WEDNESDAY – MARCH 5TH

GENESIS 50:15-26 AND MARK 8:11-26

A couple of years ago I attended a staff development day for Board of Education employees where I heard an intriguing motivational speaker. I don't recall his name; I do remember that in an animated speech he emphasized the fact that, as educators and people who work around youth, we ought to remember that the students are merely children, sometimes a little rough around the edges, and certainly not perfect. He encouraged us to be forgiving and patient toward them. He said we should see the kids as "M&M's", which stands for "mistake making." His analogy has stayed with me.

Having chosen to participate in the Lenten study on forgiveness ("mistake making"), the subject of forgiveness has been on my mind lately, and, consequently, I saw a common theme between the Bible verses I was given to reflect on before writing this devotional. One focuses on Joseph forgiving his brothers, much to their surprise, for selling him into slavery, (Genesis 50:15-26). Joseph's brothers worried that he would hate them and requite them for the evil they did unto him. However, Joseph merely wept when they asked forgiveness, and told them that they had been fulfilling God's plan all along. Then Joseph comforted them and fed them and their children.

The other selection focuses on Jesus chastising his disciples for not understanding his primary purpose while on earth – to reconcile people to God. The disciples thought that surely Jesus was upset about their not remembering to bring along enough food (Mark 8:11-26). However, Jesus said no, that was not why he gave them a stern finger. He accused them of not understanding, of "having eyes but not seeing, of having ears but not hearing," of not remembering how he fed five thousand people with only five loaves. Food was not the issue at all. It was the disciples' lack of trust and belief in him, like the Pharisees who were always asking for a sign. If they had eyes and ears, they would have truly seen the signs. Then Jesus proceeded to heal a blind man, further demonstrating God's forgiveness and healing power.

In each case, we get a snapshot of how “M&M’s” (mistake making) people view themselves and how they tend to focus on their own failures instead of on God’s great love. We, too, often have a limited view of spiritual things, convinced that our sins are too grave and unforgivable. We forget that *nothing* can separate us from God’s love and forgiveness, that He is always patient with us, his dear children, whom he will never forsake.

*Dear Forgiving Father,
Give us ears that can hear and eyes that can see your love and forgiveness made possible
through Jesus Christ your Son. In His Name we Pray, Amen.*

Kim Ehrlich

THURSDAY – MARCH 6TH
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26

I am struck by how as I age, my body changes. There are things that I sorely miss about that youthful body I once had. Some of those physical abilities were a big part of who I have always been. Now that they are gone I have mourned them, feeling that I am diminishing in substance and purpose. Yet my body and self are constantly changing and reforming. There are new abilities forming and it is a painful but hopeful process.

I have felt the same losses as our church has aged and is changing. Some of those old traditions I miss greatly. I wonder how this body of Christ will survive as the old traditions fall away. Yet then, I hear children laughing. I see God’s work being done in our community. I see new friendships forging. It is a sometimes painful, but always hopeful process.

There appears to be a correlation between my own personal changing and our church’s reshaping and changing. It occurs to me that my personal mission is to determine how my changing old abilities and fledgling new abilities can be used for God’s purpose in this growing body of Christ. We can’t think ourselves too insignificant to make a difference. God has need of us all.

*The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet,
“I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker
are indispensable.*

Oh Lord, allow me to open myself to your plan for me. Show me the way to use my personal abilities to support the ever-changing body of Christians here at Disciples Christian Church. Amen.

Marsha Werman

FRIDAY – MARCH 7TH
EXODUS 2:1-22

“And it came to pass in those days when Moses was grown that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers. And he looked this way and that, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Exodus 2:11-12

Moses grew up as a pampered prince in the Pharaoh’s household. Somehow, he has discovered that he is, in fact, an Israelite. Moses murders an Egyptian and now he is a wanted man. He flees to the land of Midian to escape a death sentence. He takes shelter in Jethro’s household, marries his daughter, Zipporah, fathers a son and settles down for 40 years.

God found him among his Arab neighbors and his sheep and demanded his services as a leader to free his people.

Moses has lots of excuses. He tells God that people will not listen to him. He has a bad voice and no talent for persuasion and speech making.

God said, “Now go and I will teach you what you shall speak.”

This reluctant fugitive stood up to the power of Pharaoh and led the children of Israel through terrible times and years of wandering. He became the supreme lawgiver for God’s people, always with God’s help.

God can transform and use the most unlikely and resistant persons to do great things.

Maybe he can use us.

*Dear God, We know all too well the reason why we “cannot”.
Give us a glimpse of what can happen if we respond to your voice that says, “Go”. Amen.*

Carol Edwards

SATURDAY – MARCH 8TH
EXODUS 2:23 - 3:15

“Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

People from different cultures learn to show respect in different ways. In some cultures we are expected to cover our heads when we enter a house of worship or holy place, and in other cultures we are expected to remove our hats or scarves as a sign of respect. In many houses of worship we are expected to leave our shoes at the door, and some families train their children to take off their shoes immediately upon entering the house. When Moses sees the burning bush that is not consumed by the fire and turns aside to investigate, God tells him to keep a respectful distance and to remove his sandals in the presence of the Holy. When Moses realizes that he is in the presence of the God of his ancestors, he hides his face out of fear of God. Then God tells Moses that the misery of his people in slavery has been taken to heart, and sends Moses to lead his people to freedom.

Two things come out of this story for me. One, is that when an experience of the holy breaks through into our ordinary lives, it is a good idea to show respect and to listen for some message from God. Two, is that if we have truly been in the presence of the Holy One, the message will be a commission to service of others.

*Holy God, open our eyes to see your leading in our lives,
and open our hearts and hands to serve your children here and now.*

Rev. Dr. Howard Ratcliff

SUNDAY - MARCH 9th
ROMANS 12:1-12

How many of us have experienced discontentment with our earthly bodies, either their appearance or their lack of abilities? How many of us, bombarded by the media with images of the “perfect” man or woman, have given in to envy? The passage for today reminds us that God did not give us our bodies with the intention that they be socially acceptable in comparison to the bodies of others; we are advised to use them as living sacrifices, to love, hate and honor with them. In serving the Lord through the actions of our physical selves, we stand as a model to those around us. We must use our unique gifts (as I have seen many of our church family do) to serve our families, communities and the Lord. The worth of our bodies should be measured not by how they appear, but by how they are used to radiate love and compassion.

*Dear Lord, please help us to be grateful for our bodies and to use them as you have intended –
to perform your work and share your love. Amen.*

Hilary Ehrlich