

The
"I Am..."
Sayings
of Jesus

*For Personal or Group Study
For Lent
(or at other times)*

*By the Spiritual Development Team,
Anglican Diocese of Fredericton, 2015*

Pages have been provided for personal notes after each week of devotions.

Sample questions have been provided for your personal or group use.

Groups looking for additional inspiration may want to consider the DVD,

The God We Can Know

with author, the Rev. Rob Fuquay, filmed on locations in the Holy Land associated with each "I Am..." saying of Jesus.

©Upper Room Publications, 2015

www.thegodwecanknow.com

Available from Cokesbury, CBD, and other online Christian suppliers.

The order of these meditations is designed to correspond with the order of Fuquay's videos (each segment about 10 minutes).



*(All contents © 2015 by the Spiritual Development Team,
The Anglican Diocese of Fredericton,
and the various authors.*

Permission is granted to reduplicate, without changes, for non-profit use.

The team would appreciate being notified of all such reduplications!

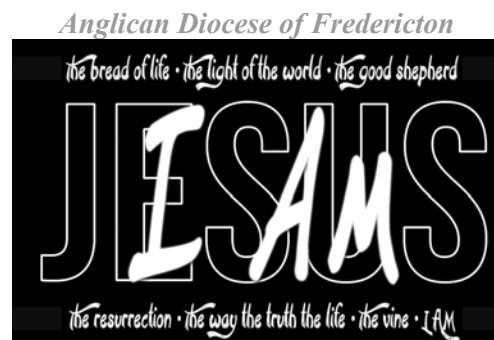
*Individual authors should be contacted, through the diocese,
for any other permissions for use.)*

Diocese of Fredericton website: anglican.nb.ca

**My Notes for Easter Week,
"I Am the Resurrection and the Life"...**

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) How does faith in Jesus the Resurrection and the Life help you to live with confidence and perseverance today?
- (2) In what ways do you practice this resurrection hope in your daily life? How can you do so more?



**"The 'I Am' Sayings of Jesus
Table of Contents:**

Week of Ash Wednesday:	Page 4
<i>Preface (Ash Wednesday)</i>	
"I am the Gate for the Sheep"	
<i>Introduction by the Bishop of Fredericton (Thursday- Friday)</i>	
Week of First Sunday in Lent:	Page 8
"Jesus the Great I Am"	
<i>--the Rev'd Chris McMullen, Rector, Parish of Lancaster</i>	
Week of Second Sunday in Lent:	Page 14
"I Am the Bread of Life"	
<i>--the Rev'd Rob Salloum, Rector, Parish of West Saint John</i>	
Week of Third Sunday in Lent:	Page 20
"I Am the Light of the World"	
<i>--the Rev'd Deacon Debbie Edmondson, Parish of Bright</i>	
Week of Fourth Sunday in Lent:	Page 26
"I Am the Good Shepherd"	
<i>--the Rev'd Ranall Ingalls, Rector, Parish of Sackville and Dorchester</i>	
Week of Fifth Sunday in Lent:	Page 32
"I Am the True Vine"	
<i>--the Rev'd John Paul Westin, Rector, Parish of St. Mark (Stone Church)</i>	
Holy Week (After Palm Sunday):	Page 38
"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life"	
<i>--the Rev'd Chris McMullen, Rector, Parish of Lancaster</i>	
Easter Week:	Page 44
"I Am the Resurrection and the Life"	
<i>--the Rev'd Jonathan Springthorpe, Rector, Parish of Musquash</i>	

Friday in Easter Week: "I Am the Resurrection..."

Please read: Hebrews 12: 1-11

**"...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross,
disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat
at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12: 1-2)**

Halford Luccock tells this story in his *Unfinished Business: Short Diversions On Religious Themes (1956)*: One night at dinner a man, who had spent many summers in Maine, fascinated his companions by telling of his experiences in a little town named Flagstaff. The town was to be flooded, as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled, more gone to seed, more woebegone. Then he added by way of explanation: "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."

The resurrection of Jesus, and his promise that all believers will one day share in his victory over sin and death, gives us faith in the future, and therefore faith in our Lord's presence, mission, and work today. We may live in hope, and "run with perseverance, the race that is set before us."

The resurrection is the triumphant and glorious victory for every believer. Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose the third day according to the Scripture. And, He is coming again! The dead in Christ will be raised up, and those who remain and are alive at His coming will be changed and receive new, glorified bodies (*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*). Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ important to salvation? It demonstrated that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. It proves that God has the power to raise us from the dead. It guarantees that those who believe in Christ will not remain dead, but will be resurrected unto eternal life. That is our blessed hope!

***Prayer:* Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that
like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ
to have ascended into the heavens;
so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend,
and with him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with
Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.**

(Collect for Ascension Day, BCP)

Thursday in Easter Week: "I Am the Resurrection..."

Please read: John 11: 17-27, 38-44

"I am the resurrection and the life..." (*John 11: 25-26*)

Now we come to our text, the fifth of the seven great "I Am" sayings of Jesus. We have been reflecting upon it in this Seventh Week because it is a fitting topic for Easter Week. Jesus not only taught that there was a resurrection. He not only prophesied that he would arise himself. Jesus declared that He is the "Resurrection and the Life". This is similar to His claim to be the "Gate for the Sheep" (*John 10:7*, the theme of Bishop David's Introduction above). His conquest of death makes it possible for us to enter God's "sheepfold" (as Ranall Ingalls explained in his reflections on "I am the Good Shepherd", Week of Fourth Sunday in Lent above.)

The resurrection of Jesus is important for many reasons. Let us thank God for two: First, it attests the immense power of God Himself. To believe in the resurrection is to believe in God. If God exists, and if He created the universe and has power over it, He has power to raise the dead. If He did not, He is not a God worthy of faith and worship. Only He who created life can raise it after death. Only He can reverse the hideousness that is death itself, and only He can remove the sting that is death, and the victory that is the grave's (*1 Corinthians 15:54-55*). In resurrecting Jesus from the grave, God reminds us of His absolute sovereignty over life and death.

Second, the resurrection of Jesus is a testimony to the resurrection of human beings, which is a basic tenet of the Christian faith. Unlike all other religions, Christianity alone possesses a Founder Who transcends death and who promises that His followers will do the same. All other religions were founded by men and prophets whose end was the grave. As Christians, we take comfort in the fact that our God became man, died for our sins, and was resurrected the third day. The grave could not hold Him. He lives, and He sits today at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

***Prayer:* Merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Resurrection and the Life: raise us, we humbly pray, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; that when we depart this life we may rest in him, and at the resurrection receive that blessing which your well-beloved Son shall then pronounce: "Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." Grant this, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.**

(From the Order for the Burial of the Dead, BAS page 601)

Ash Wednesday: Preface

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM..." (*John 8: 28*)

Jesus says: "I am". Through a few phrases starting with these two small words, Jesus lets us know that He is not just sent from God but that He is God. This is what makes the Christian faith unique. Our God hasn't just put things in place and told us how to behave and yet now sits afar off. Rather, God entered into our humanness, made it so that we can be considered right with Him, and continues to slog through life with us. Hallelujah!

This series of meditations on the "I Am" sayings of Jesus has its roots in a talk series offered in the Lancaster Deanery in the Diocese of Fredericton. That content has been restructured into this daily use format by the series speakers and members of the diocesan Spiritual Development Team. On behalf of this team, I wish to thank the authors, and especially the Rev. Chris McMullen for spearheading this effort.

This study is particularly offered as a Lenten devotion but may be used at any time. It may be used for individual daily prayer and study or combined with weekly home group discussions. If you are not yet part of a small Christian study group, why not consider starting one.

Part of the Spiritual Development Team's mandate is to organize and promote special initiatives within the diocese. We also strive to support the commitment to transformation that is a hallmark of the Nicodemus Project, fulfill the second Mark of Mission which calls us to nurture believers, and promote the use of a Rule of Life (*Book of Common Prayer, page 555*).

The Rule of Life guidelines suggest, in part, that we should devote ourselves to the practice of private prayer and Bible-reading, and that we bring the teaching and example of Christ into our everyday life. What better way than to spend time reflecting on the character and purpose of Jesus. As we look into who He is, we learn to recognize Him at work and grow in His likeness.

As you use this study to reflect on these tremendous words of Jesus, we:

"pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power for us who believe."

(Ephesians 1:17-19)

*--Cheryl Jacobs, Chair
Diocese of Fredericton Spiritual Development Team*

Thursday after Ash Wednesday: Bishop's Introduction

Please Read John 10:7-10

"Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep..." (*John 10: 7*)

Gates can signify the beginning or the ending of a journey, but they can also be tantalizing. Imagine a long red brick wall with a gateway in the middle and a locked wrought iron gate, locked and blocking the way forward. You can walk right up to the gate and look through it, straining your neck right and left in order to get a better view, but you cannot see all that there is beyond and you cannot enter through it.

In a sense that is the way it was for the Jews before the coming of Jesus. The writings of the prophets pointed to an Age to Come, where all the troubles and travails of the Present Age would be left behind, but they could not get there until the Messiah came. Some like Simeon had a clearer view than others. When the child Jesus was brought to the Temple he knew that salvation had come to Israel, "...a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel" (*Luke 10: 32*).

Others deliberately ignored the possibilities of the world beyond the gate, because it would disrupt their current situation. Herod the Great is a prime example, when the Magi told him of the birth of a king he was "greatly troubled and all Jerusalem with him" (*Matthew 2:3*).

The coming of Jesus opened the gate to the Age to Come, in fact he is the way into that new reality. In one sense we do not have full access to the pasture which lies beyond, that will come when Jesus comes again, but we are able to step in. We cannot see all that there is to see, but we are able to know enough to point the way forward to others who are fully in the Present Age. In fact we are like travellers who can move backwards and forwards through the gate bringing insights from what is to come to help people to understand what lies beyond.

What lies beyond is a Kingdom of a very different type. A society where the least is the most and the most the least. Where the King is the servant. A place where the blind see, the captive is free, the lame walk and God's favour is spread abroad for all to experience.

***Prayer:* "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."**

(The "Nunc Dimittis", Luke 2:29-32)

Wednesday in Easter Week: "I Am the Resurrection..."

Please read: John 2: 13-22

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (*John 2: 19*)

In his debates against his opponents in the Temple during his last fateful days, Jesus defended among many other things his teaching about the Resurrection of the Dead: "He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong." (*Mark 12: 26-27*) Earlier in his ministry he had spoken allusively of the "sign of Jonah": "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (*Matthew 12:39-40*) Jesus prophesied that God would vindicate his ministry and his person, with a "sign" that would leave no doubt about his messiahship and work.

At his mock-up of a trial, his accusers reported: "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise'" (*Matthew 27:63*). Following his Transfiguration, Jesus was more direct with his disciples: "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." (*Mark 8:31*) According to all four gospels, he clearly taught this on three occasions (as Chris McMullen mentioned in his meditations on "I am the Way", see also *Mark 9:30-32* and *10:32-34*), but "They understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what He said was hidden from them..." (*Luke 18: 34*)

This was partly because even though most of Jesus' contemporaries (other than the Sadducean party) believed in a general resurrection of the dead at the end of human history, no one expected any individual to experience that until the final "Day of the Lord" (miraculous healings not included, of course, as those blessed souls, like Lazarus, would of course die again in good time). The mix-up about raising the temple, as well as the singularity of Jesus' claim, provide strong historical evidence that something unprecedented happened on that first Easter, that give Jesus' followers, now as then, a reason to "encourage one another with these words" (the conclusion of *I Thessalonians 4: 13-18*). Jesus, literally, lives!

***Prayer:* Thanks be to you, victorious Christ,
Breaking the bars to heaven's room;
defeating evil, death and gloom:
For ever in Your empty tomb
Lock them, O Conqueror of doom!
Ignite, O Rising Sun, hope's blaze,
Ending earth's nights in glorious days.**

(Joyce Denham, Circle of Prayer, Lion Publishing 2003, page 53)

Tuesday in Easter Week: "I Am the Resurrection..."

Please read: Job 19: 20-27

**"For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God..."** (*Job 19: 25-26*)

Even though in Jesus' day not all Israelites believed in a resurrection from the dead, this mystical hope was part of Jewish faith, and is rooted in the story of salvation in the Old Testament. Some examples: In Genesis 22 Abraham hoped against hope that he would receive his sacrificed son Isaac back from the grave (*Hebrews 11:17-19*). In the books of Kings, Elijah resurrected the son of Zarephath's widow (*I Kings 17:17-24*); Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman (*II Kings 4: 32-26*); and a dead man comes back to life when he touched Elisha's bones (*II Kings 13:21*). Ezekiel has a vision of a valley of dry bones coming to life (*Ezekiel 37*). Isaiah sings God's promise that God will swallow up death forever (*Isaiah 25: 6-9*). The Psalmist rejoices in the hope that he will not be abandoned to the grave forever (*Psalms 16: 9-11*, quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, *Acts 2: 24-32*). And Daniel received the promise that "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (*Daniel 12: 1-3*)

All of these texts are expressing the Hebrew hope that in spite of all the death and tragedy that God's people have experienced, God will vindicate His own. By Jesus' day, this hope had developed into the concrete doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. How could God not fulfill His many promises to His own? Therefore, Jewish believers concluded, God's own will be made alive again, to finally enjoy the veracity of God's word. (See Jesus' similar argument to the doubting Sadducees, "He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong." *Mark 12: 26-27*)

In spite of all that Job experienced, he still had hope. As he himself concludes, that hope could only be vindicated on the far side of his grave.

***Prayer:* Into our place of darkness,
Into our place of strife,
Into our fears and worries,
Come, with Your risen life.

Into those who are dying,
Into those weary of life,
Into those tired from exertions,
Come, with Your risen life.**

(Ray Simpson, *A Holy Island Prayer Book*, Morehouse 2002; page 20)

Friday after Ash Wednesday: Bishop's Introduction

Please read: John 10:7- 10

**"All who have come before me are thieves... I am the gate;
whoever enters through me will be saved."** (*John 10: 8-9*)

Robin Williams starred in a very strange movie called *What Dreams May Come*. It cannot be celebrated as a theologically sound classic, but it did have one beautiful feature. Chris Nielsen (Williams) is killed in a road accident and goes to "Heaven". The point about this is that he goes to a place which is far more vivid than anything he has ever experienced before. In a sense that is what Jesus is pointing us towards in *John 10:10*. He has come so that his sheep "may have life and have it to the full".

This is the essence of our message. Scripture is pretty clear that as a result of humanity turning our back on God and wanting our own way, everything is less than it was intended to be. Romans 8 reminds us that the whole creation has been restricted because of our actions. It literally groans in pain (*Romans 8:22*). There are also several places where Paul says that before Jesus acted in our lives we were dead; but now we are alive.

So often as the Church we point to the things of death and we condemn rather than lift up. I fully appreciate that we are in Lent and it is the season for sober reflection upon our individual and corporate condition before God. But as Advent prepares us for the coming of Jesus and the Second Coming, Lent prepares us for Easter.

Easter is the time where all bets are off. The curse of death, which has held all creation, has been broken and we are free to live fully. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis uses the image of the end of a perpetual winter to show that the bondage of death is broken.

As we enter this time of reflection let's consider where we're heading. We are moving towards a celebration of death defying life giving resurrection. It is the gift that God gives in Jesus and we need to try to grasp it more fully. What does life to the full look like for us, our communities, those we serve? How do we demonstrate the difference of the new life which Jesus offers? In essence how do we show more of the fullness of life in Christ?

***Prayer:* Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors of our hearts,
that we may seek the good of others
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,
to the praise of God the Father.**

Collect for The Second Sunday of Easter (Common Worship)

**My Notes for the Week after Ash Wednesday,
"I Am the Gate"...**

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) *Are you satisfied with the Present Age or do you long for the Age to Come beyond the Gate?*
- (2) *In what ways do you currently pass through the Gate and glimpse life to the full? How can you do so more?*

Monday in Easter Week: "I Am the Resurrection..."

Please read: I Corinthians 15: 1-8, 12-23

"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." (I Corinthians 15: 19-20)

From *Parade* magazine comes the story of self-made millionaire Eugene Land, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Lang had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains in detail the importance of the resurrection of Christ. Some in Corinth did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. In this chapter Paul gives six disastrous consequences if there were no resurrection: 1) preaching Christ would be senseless (*v. 14*); 2) faith in Christ would be useless (*v. 14*); 3) all the witnesses and preachers of the resurrection would be liars (*v. 15*); 4) no one would be redeemed from sin (*v. 17*); 5) all former believers would have perished (*v. 18*); and 6) Christians would be the most pitiable people on the earth (*v. 19*).

But our Christian faith, like the Gospel itself, stands upon the historical events of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we affirm them in the Apostle's Creed, the cross, empty tomb and the risen presence and reign of Jesus are central to our faith in God.

***Prayer:* Christ great High Priest, risen on high,
Christ offering life, never to die:**

**Christ great High Priest, ascended above,
Come down O Lord, cover with love.**

**Christ great High Priest, back from the dead,
Show us Your presence, in the bread.**

**Christ great High Priest, Saviour divine,
Give us Yourself, in the red wine.**

(David Adam, Tides and Seasons, SPCK 1989, page 58)

**My Notes for Holy Week,
"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life"...**

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) *Do you see the three parts of this claim (Way, Truth, Life) as interrelated?*
- (2) *In what ways have you walked the Way of Jesus? How can you do so more?*

Monday after the First Sunday in Lent; "I Am"

Please read: Exodus 3: 1-15

"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3: 14)

We begin our Lenten journey of reflections upon the "I Am" sayings of Jesus with the Holy Name of God. Moses wanted to tell the Israelites the name of this God who would deliver them from oppression and lead them into freedom. He needed an answer to this natural question: who are you talking about? At that time, there were many "gods". Their names helped people to figure out what their powers were and how they fit into the wider cosmic pantheon of powers and principalities (including Pharaoh and other ancient kings) in which they understood themselves to live.

Different English translations render God's answer differently, but most will use capital letters to honour the name that God gives for himself. The original Hebrew, "*Eyeh, Eyeh*", (Greek, "*égo eimi*") rendered as "*Yahweh*" by modern scholars, was in older English rendered "Jehovah". When Jews come upon this Name in their Bible, they reverently replace it by saying "*adonai*", "the Lord" (to avoid inadvertently breaking the Third Commandment, *Exodus 20:7*). That is why in most translations the Holy Name is given as "the LORD". At this critical moment in the Biblical story, we are told that the holy name of God simply means "I am Who I am." God is the ultimate "I AM" who does not derive his identity or character from anything else. In fact, everything else derives its reality from him. As Paul Tillich taught, God is not just some super "being". God is "Being Itself"!

We often speak of the Lord too flippantly. What an awesome thing it is, to invoke the Creator of the universe with mere human speech! Let us never take this privilege for granted, but always pray: "Hallowed be Thy Name!"

God was telling Moses that he and his people weren't being summoned to liberty and righteousness by the usual run-of-the-mill mythological deity. The God of Abraham and his family is none other than the great "I Am," the Creator of all things! As Christians, we need to recognize the incredible claim we make by saying Jesus is LORD. May that title alone transform us!

***Prayer:* Lord of the elements, All praises due.**

Lord of the oceans, Glory to You.

You give the morning, And the fresh dew.

You give Your presence, Loyal and true.

You give me life: My being renew.

Lord of the elements, Glory to You!

(David Adam, Tides and Seasons: Modern Prayers in the Celtic Tradition © SPCK 1989)

Tuesday after the First Sunday in Lent: "I Am"

Please read: Isaiah 48: 9-17

"Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called:

I AM HE; I am the first and the last...

I am the LORD your God,

Who teaches you what is best for you,

Who directs you in the way you should go." (*Isaiah 48: 12,17b*)

Allusions to God's Holy Name are frequent throughout the Old Testament. The Hebrew "*Eyeh, Eyeh*" was translated as "*égo eimi*" in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible common in Jesus' day and most familiar to the writers of the New Testament. The Jews were most peculiar people in their rejection of the universal polytheism of the ancient world, and their exclusive allegiance to one God: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." (*Exodus 20: 2-3*) Because this was so counter to the "common sense" of the time, the prophets needed again and again to remind the people of this truth. Isaiah pounded home the message that the God who called the Jews is the great "I Am". All their sufferings and hardships were not a contradiction to this truth. They were in fact part of God's plan. Israel's defeats by other nations were not indications that their "gods" were greater than the LORD. They were signs of the LORD's long-term purpose to use Israel as a "light to the nations", by first refining them, through disappointment and discipline, into the holy nation they were called to be. God continues that policy today! (*Hebrews 12: 7-11*)

Once asked if there was any real proof for the existence of God, the great theologian Karl Barth replied "the survival of the Jewish people." That was a telling answer, in the face of the genocidal Nazi policies that Barth so vigorously opposed. The great "I Am" is testifying in the human story to the reality of his eternal greatness through... the people who believe in Him. That is a tough vocation for believers! Tough, but not ineffectual.

The phrase "I am He" in *Isaiah 48: 9* translates the literal "*Eyeh, Eyeh*" or (in Greek) "*égo eimi*" –or we could even say the name "Jehovah"– into English. We have come to the root of the "I Am" sayings in John's Gospel.

**Prayer: O Heavenly Father, in whom we live and move
and have our being: We humbly pray thee
so to guide and govern us by thy Holy Spirit,
that in all the cares and occupations of our daily life
we may never forget thee, but remember that we are ever walking
in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(*BCP pages 731-732*)

Good Friday: "I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life"

Please read: Philippians 3: 10 – 4: 1

"...this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (*Philippians 3: 13b-14*)

This is the most solemn day in the Christian calendar. Yet, along with Easter (and, John might say, Ascension Day, in 2015 on May 14th), our Saviour was "lifted up" for our salvation: to become *the Way* to know the *Truth* about God and ourselves as His children, and to receive eternal *Life*.

"Eternal Life" means more than a two-dimensional notion of life after death. It is much richer than the wider world's usual notions of ghostly spirits "crossing over" to some nebulous spooky existence "in a better place". The Bible speaks of this by promising no less than "Resurrection from the Dead" and "New Heaven and Earth"! The life and destiny in glory that God gives to us in Christ is a reality (*'truth'*) and a living experience (*'life'*) so awesome that death itself cannot contradict it. Indeed, through Jesus' being "*lifted up*" (on the cross, from the grave, and ultimately to God's right hand in glory) on our behalf and as our "Captain" or "Pioneer" (*Hebrews 12:2*), this "eternal life" is a reality (*'Truth'* again) and vital existence (*'Life'* again) that starts for us even now; day by day. People who have not grown up in the household of faith are often perplexed at how indifferent life-long Christians can appear to be about what Christ has done and is doing every day for us. He is *the Way* and we should say "No way!" to every other notion and way!

That is St. Paul's point in today's scripture reading. Paul is reflecting on the privilege of following Jesus, even from a prison cell! A cell that for him might even turn out to be "death row" (*Philippians 1:21-24*). From this prison he does not occupy his lonely hours with thoughts about "what if" or "if only". "...this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (*Philippians 3: 13b-14*) May we seek ever new ways to appropriate, in our lives, the death and resurrection of our Lord!

**Prayer: Almighty and ever-living God,
increase in us your gift of faith,
that forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to what is before,
we may run the way of Your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. Amen.**

(*Collect for Proper 29, BAS page 387*)

Maudy Thursday: "I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life"

Please read: John 3: 1-16

**"...just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that
whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3: 14-15)**

In this the first of Jesus' three prophecies of his "being lifted up" in death, resurrection (*cf. Luke 9:21-22; 9:43-45 and 18:31-33* and their parallels in Mark and Matthew) and ascension, he speaks of those who believe in Him receiving "eternal life". This is the third of the trinity of "Way, Truth and Life" that we are exploring this week. (We have read them in reverse order.)

John the Evangelist wants us to see Nicodemus in a good light. In *John 7:50-52* he tries to defend Jesus' right to a fair hearing from his opponents; then in *John 19: 39* he is found bravely assisting Joseph of Arimathea with giving Jesus' body a proper burial. He was clearly attracted to Jesus, but at the same time confused by our Lord's unconventional message and ministry.

In today's reading Nicodemus comes to tell Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God..." (*John 3:2*). Jesus in response hardly gives him a break! He cuts right to the heart of the matter, perhaps confident that Nicodemus can take it! "No one has seen the Kingdom of God without being born from above ...of water and the Spirit." (*John 3: 3,5*) The "Way" to God's Kingdom is not a progress of human effort. It is a rebirth in the power of God's own Spirit (as John the Baptist signalled with his ministry of water baptism). We have as much "control" over this salvation as we can control the wind (*John 3:8*). It is a gift of new "life" from the loving energy of God's own person. Jesus is amazed that Nicodemus cannot understand, even though a scholar like him should know the frequent prophecies of this new spirit-empowered life in the Hebrew Bible (*Isaiah 44:3-5; Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-28* to name but three).

Jesus is *the Way* because he not only shows us *the Truth* about ourselves and our God; he also, through his death, resurrection, and ascension to God on high, as *the Son of Man*, brings the very 'life' of God Himself into *our* life.

***Prayer:* Almighty God,
Whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
was lifted high upon the cross
that He might draw the whole world to himself,
may we who rejoice in the mystery of our redemption,
have grace to take up our cross and follow Him,
Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. Amen.**

(Collect for Holy Cross Day, BAS page 422)

Wednesday after the First Sunday in Lent: "I Am"

Please read: Mark 14: 53-64

**"Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ,
the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus.
'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of
the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Mark 14: 61b-62)**

Up until this point in the unfolding narrative of Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been very coy about being identified as "Christ" or "Son of God" (*Mark 1: 24-25; 8: 29-31; 9: 9, etc.*). He wanted to define these titles with his own witness and character, so that his contemporaries' political and mythological misapprehensions would not handicap their understanding of his true identity. Now that he is at the beginning of the climax of his ministry (his death and resurrection, *Mark 8:31, 9: 9-10*), the time is right: "I am!" In Mark's original Greek this is "*égo eimi*", which in turn translates Jesus' original words in Hebrew or Aramaic: "*eyeh, eyeh*". "I Am Who I Am!"

In First-century *Koiné* Greek "*égo eimi*" could simply mean "That's me!" or "Here I am." But the Sanhedrin's reaction shows us that they regarded our Lord's answer as a blasphemous misuse of God's holy Name itself, worthy of capital punishment (*Leviticus 24: 16; John 19: 7*).

What an incredible irony, that at the very moment he is being questioned by those who want to and can have him killed, Jesus identifies himself with the Life-Giving Creator of all! That healing paradox is one of the key messages of Mark's Gospel. If we, like the first disciples, find this hard to understand (*Mark 9: 30-32; John 12: 16, 20: 9*), then we may thank God for the "I Am" sayings in John's Gospel. They will help us to appreciate the full promise and meaning of the seemingly odd way that our God in Christ has worked our salvation for us.

In today's text, Jesus is standing up for his Father ...and for us, too!

***Prayer:* Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility,
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge both the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.**

(Collect for Advent, BCP; this version, BAS, Advent 1)

Thursday after the First Sunday in Lent; "I Am"

Please read: John 8: 51-59

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered.
"Before Abraham was, I am!" (John 8: 58)

Now we are ready to look at the "I Am" sayings in John's Gospel.

In John's account Jesus uses the expression "*égo eimi*" in the absolute sense several times, in addition to his famous seven "I am..." sayings followed by a comforting predicate (Bread of Life; Light of the World; the Sheep-gate and Good Shepherd; Way, Truth and Life; the Resurrection and the Life; and the true Vine). This can be confusing in English because we also use the verb "to be" to conjugate the present tense (like "...I am working," *John 5:17*) while this is not the case in New Testament Greek. In today's text, however, Jesus' startling use of this phrase is obvious. We must remember that stoning is the appropriate penalty for breaking the Third Commandment (*Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 24:16*). Jesus' opponents aren't just upset that he's claiming to be older than Abraham (*John 8: 59*)!

"Before Abraham was, I am." God's plan to come in person and redeem his creation, as a creature himself, was in place even before God called Abram to begin the Biblical story of blessing all people (*Genesis 12: 1-3*). God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world..." (*Ephesians 1: 4*). We need to consider this truth deeply. Jesus "is the same yesterday, today and forever." (*Hebrews 13: 8*) The Bible is making the claim that God is not limited by the linear succession of time in the way that his four-dimensional creatures are. "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day." (*II Peter 3: 8; Psalm 90: 4*) God's plan for all of creation transcends the time-lines of that creation itself. For us as for Abraham this means that everything we experience, including our failures, can and have become part of God's plan. Before we were and are, the great "I Am" is already redeeming our times, as all of our lives!

Prayer: O God of our ancestors, God of our people,
Before Whose face the human generations pass away;
We thank You that in You we are kept safe forever,
And that the broken fragments of our history
Are gathered up in the redeeming act of Your dear Son...
Help us to walk daily in the Communion of Saints,
declaring our faith in the forgiveness of sins
And the resurrection of the body.
Now send us out on the power of Your Holy Spirit,
To live and work for Your praise and glory. Amen.
(Anglican Church of Kenya, Our Modern Services, 2002.)

Wednesday in Holy Week; "I Am the Way..."

Please read: John 8: 21-32

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize
that I Am... and that I do nothing on my own,
but I speak these things as the Father instructed me." (*John 8:28*)

All four Gospels attest the fact that on three occasions at least, Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. "He said all this quite openly." (*Mark 8: 31-32*; see also *Mark 9:30-32* and *Mark 10: 32-34* –all three are also recorded in *Matthew* and *Luke*). In John's Gospel Jesus' three prophesies of his final great work take an intriguingly different form. In *John 3:14, 8:28* and *12:32* Jesus says that "the Son of Man will be *lifted up*." (We are looking at them in reverse order this week.) Jesus was alluding to Isaiah's prophesy that the "Suffering Servant" of the Lord "*shall be exalted and lifted up*" through the Lord's paradoxical "way" of suffering, death and exaltation (*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*; the phrase introduces this song at *52:13*).

Just as the other evangelists state that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about, so John records the people's confusion. No one before Jesus taught that the Messiah (Christ) of Israel would rescue his people by becoming himself the victim of the very violence and sin they hoped to be delivered from! Though it is clearly there in the Hebrew Bible (in addition to Isaiah we have *Psalms 22* and *Zechariah 9: 9-12, 12:10-13:9*), Jesus' contemporaries were expecting a war-hero, not a Saviour of Love. That is a very natural way for sinners to think (*Matthew 16:23*)! But God has a different "way" to save and deliver us. In today's reading, Jesus promises us that his being "lifted up" on the cross, (and his subsequent being "lifted up" from death, and ultimately being "lifted up" to glory at the right hand of God), will reveal, to the eyes of obedient faith, the truth of Jesus' claim to be *I AM* ("*égo eimi*," *John 8:28*) visiting us in person, to heal and to save.

Yesterday we considered God's *Way* to rescue his fallen human creatures: through Jesus. Today's text assures us of the *Truth* of this *Way*. "If you continue in my Word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (*John 8: 31-32*) Let us not be deceived by false notions of salvation!

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, Who in thy Son Jesus Christ
hast given us a true faith and a sure hope:
Help us, we pray Thee, to live as those who believe
in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
and the resurrection to life everlasting;
and strengthen this faith and hope in us all the days of our life;
through the love of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.
(Occasional Prayer # 43a The Communion of Saints, BCP page 56)

Tuesday in Holy Week; "I Am the Way..."

Please read: John 12: 20-36

"When I am lifted up from the earth,
I will draw all people to myself." (John 12:32)

John records Jesus speaking about "the Way" and Thomas asking how we can "know the way". Jesus replies "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" so "Truth" and "Life" are expansions on the claim that Jesus is "the Way".

Many find this claim offensive. So it is important to recognize that Jesus is not claiming that a particular religion or church is "the Way". Presumably religions and spiritual institutions can do a better or lesser job of opening people to the grace and healing that God has given to us in Jesus. But it is Jesus who is the Way to the Father, and not those institutions or religions themselves. Perhaps some people may even enjoy the Way of Jesus, without knowing Him by name or identifying with explicit Christians.

It was the interest of Greek "outsiders" that shows Jesus that his time "to be lifted up" has come. He is the answer to all true and life-giving hopes.

C.S. Lewis explains it this way in his final *Narnia Chronicles* book, *The Last Battle*, Emeth, a soldier of the evil empire that worships the devil-god Tash, has died. Much to his shock it is Aslan, the "Lion of Judah" hero of the good Narnians, and not Tash, whom he meets in the afterlife:

"But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, 'Son, thou art welcome.' But I said, 'Alas, Lord I am no son of thine but a servant of Tash.' He answered, 'Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me.' ... 'Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one?' The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, 'It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites -- I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him.'"

Prayer: O God, the protector of all that trust in Thee,
without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy; that,
Thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through
things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.
Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord.
Amen.

(Collect for Trinity IV, *BCP*)

Friday after the First Sunday in Lent; "I Am"

Please read: John 6: 16-21

"...they saw Jesus approaching the boat,
walking on the water; and they were terrified.
But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.'" (John 6: 19-20)

Travellers to the Holy Land often attest to the powerful squalls that can suddenly arise on the Sea of Tiberias, intimidating even experienced fisher folk. Behind this story, however, is a whole Eastern tradition of associating the powers of the sea with the dark forces of chaos that threaten our fragile human existence. Part of the beauty of Genesis 1, for instance, is the way its Jewish story-tellers took the violent mythologies of ancient cultures, with their gods fighting it out against being drowned by watery monsters, and virtually "demythologized" them: the Sovereign Creator but commands the waters into boundaries, and they obey Him. (Compare the chaos-beast "Leviathon" becoming but God's playful pet in *Psalms 104:26*.)

Even today with all of our technology, humans cannot (as least in the short-term) change the weather. (In spite of how much we complain about it!) The people who gave us the Bible know that only God can do that. So then, who is this, that even the winds and the waves obey him (*Mark 4: 41*)? That is from Mark's Gospel. John's however has a different emphasis (he doesn't even mention that Jesus calmed the storm, *Mark 4: 39*). For John, the amazing fact was that Jesus walked on the stormy waters.

"It is I; don't be afraid." (*John 6:20*) You may have guessed it: in the original Aramaic that Jesus would have spoken, as in John's Greek, the phrase is literally "I Am" (*égo eimi*). While this can simply mean "It's me!" in Koiné Greek, it is likely here that John is communicating a deeper truth.

When we are overwhelmed with the storms of life, we need not be afraid. We can, as Gene MacLellan taught us to sing: "Put your hand in the hand of the Man who stilled the waters." In Jesus, the great "I Am" has come to us, calm and in command over the waves that so frighten us. We need not be afraid. They, too, have become part of God's plan for us!

Prayer: O God our defender,
storms rage about us and cause us to be afraid.
Rescue your people from despair,
deliver your sons and daughters from fear,
and preserve us all from unbelief;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and ever.

(Collect for Proper 12 [Sunday between June 19-25], *BAS*)

**My Notes for the First Week in Lent,
"I AM"...**

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) *How can Christians approach Jesus as Saviour and friend while also exalting Him as LORD?*
- (2) *In what ways have you trusted in the unchanging I Am through the storms of life? How can you do so more?*

Monday in Holy Week; "I Am the Way..."

Please read: John 14: 1-7

**"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
no one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)**

Today's reading comes from the opening dialogue of Jesus' final "pep-talk" with his disciples, just before he is betrayed, arrested, and led to his final confrontation with evil and death. Like a coach before the ultimate, final game, Jesus prepares his disciples for what lies ahead. In Chapters 14-16 He will speak of his death; the courage his followers can have in the face of suffering; the need to "abide" in the love of God that He has brought to them; the command to love one-another; the privilege of prayer; and His saving gift of the "Comforter" or "Advocate", the Holy Spirit. He ends with a rallying call to courage (in the stirring translation of the *King James Bible*): "In the world you will face tribulation. But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world!" (*John 16:33*) Jesus' being "lifted up" (*John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32*) –a phrase we will explore this week– is to "prepare a place" for his own. By now, his disciples should understand the way to that destiny.

But they don't! Thomas surely speaks for all of them –and to be honest, for us most of the time as well. "How can we know the way?" (*John 14:5*)

That's why Jesus' answer to Thomas is so comforting. When hearing the phrase "the way" a first-century Jew would think of God's Law, the *Torah*. The commandments and legislation of the first five books of the Bible shows the way to a life of integrity with God. On the other hand, a non-Jewish reader of John's Gospel might have been led to think about the many philosophical lifestyles, mystery rites or esoteric religious teachings that the pagan schools and religions of the day offered to seekers.

But the "Way" is not a set of instructions, but a Person. The "Way" is not a guide-book, but a Relationship with the Guide. Commandments, liturgies and insightful teachings all have their place; but only as compliments to the help and presence of the Saviour, who pioneers "the Way" for us through living, serving, suffering, and even dying ...and rising again as Victor and Lord. However "how" we draw near to God's eternity, it will be with His help and in His good company. He is the Way.

Prayer: Almighty God,
**Your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.
Give us grace to love one another
and walk in the way of his commandments,
Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever.**

(Collect for Fifth Sunday in Easter, BAS page 340)

**My Notes for the Fifth Week in Lent,
"I Am the Vine"...**

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) *How have you experienced God's pruning (discipline) in your life?*
- (2) *In what ways do you intentionally remain in Jesus the Vine? How can you do so more?*

Monday after the Second Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Bread of Life"

Please read: John 6:35-40

"I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall never hunger"
(John 6:35)

During this season of Lent, we are reflecting on Jesus powerful "I am" statements expressed in John's Gospel. For this week, we are contemplating the deep meaning of Jesus proclamation: **"I am the Bread of Life."**

Years ago, I lived close to a bakery. I looked forward to the East wind as it delivered the aroma of the baking bread straight from the bakery into our house. There really is no better smell than that of freshly baking bread. Bread is very important to our lives and our diet: (1) It is a Nourishing Staple; (2) It is Unique among food; (3) It is Personal for each of us.

1) **It is a Nourishing Staple:** A staple is food that is central to our diet. In western society, bread is often part of, or a side dish at a large meal. In Europe, on other hand, bread is an essential part of the main course. In a typical household, families would bake their own bread and serve it as part of the main meal. So, when Jesus refers to himself as the **Bread of life**, He is asserting that His prominence in our lives is essential to our complete nourishment. He was effectively saying "No bread no life...no Jesus...no life!"

2) **It is Unique among food:** Bread is unique. It has a special quality and taste that sets it apart from the normal every-day stuff. It is enjoyed as book ends in a sandwich. It takes on the flavour of soup when dipped. Bread can be made into a pocket for hot and cold food. In the same way, unique to everything and everyone, is Jesus. He is and continues to be the single most prominent Person in all of History. He has been and continues to be the centre of discussion, and attention. His existence and presence makes Him unique and special as compared to all other religious figures.

3) **It is Personal for each of us:** I am sure you've all heard the phrase "breaking bread together," to describe having a meal together. Meals together were meant to be and are intimate times. All the parishes in our diocese have special community dinners from time to time. At meals barriers come down and friendships are developed and strengthened.

Bread is for everyone. Anyone can get bread and everyone needs bread. In the same way, Jesus is accessible to everyone. Like our experience of bread, Jesus meets us personally and nourishes us by his life.

Prayer: **Jesus, You are the bread of Life for me.
Help me to remember to allow you
to establish your rightful place of prominence in my life.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

Tuesday after the Second Sunday in Lent: "I Am the Bread of Life"

Please read: Psalm 139

**"Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:2)**

The central place of bread and the prominent place of Jesus as the Bread "sets the table" for us to consider the context of this priceless metaphor.

The Scriptures powerfully apply to the time in which they were delivered, to us today, and for the future. During His earthly ministry, Jesus preached, taught, and met people one-to-one and en masse. His miracles and teachings served to reveal Him as God and unveil God's Kingdom. Hence, Jesus proclamation 'I am the bread of life' follows soon after the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus blesses a modest lunch into a miraculous feast which overflows into twelve more baskets. I can imagine how everyone must have been thrilled. The crowd I am sure were then urging Jesus to do even more wonders.

But later in the Synagogue, as highlighted in John Ch. 6, Jesus proclaims: "I am the bread of life!" And through Him, there is communion again with God. Jesus is emphatic as he repeats and expands upon it FOUR TIMES! The repetition of the claim adds emphasis and draws attention to its importance.

Jesus repeats to emphasise and connects the Old Covenant to Himself (the Embodiment of the New Covenant). Jesus says *"I am the bread of life"*.

1. *John 6:35 "I am the bread of life"* – I am unlike any earthly bread. If you partake of my body you will live forever;

2. *John 6:41 "I am the bread that comes down from heaven."* "Though you grumble about me being the son of Joseph, 'I Am' the One!"

3. *John 6:48 "I am the bread of life"* You had Manna in the desert provided by my Father. It was good for one day. "I Am" will sustain you forever;

4. *John 6:58 "I am the true bread that comes down from heaven"* Manna in the desert was enough keep you alive, but I will satisfy you like no other.

Though Jesus gave these examples and repeated His words, many found it difficult to understand and accept Him. "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (*John 6:60*) They couldn't see that He is the Christ! They focused on the miracle and missed the Host!

How many times in our lives have we been blind to the work of God in our lives? How many times have we missed hearing the voice of God speaking to us directly or through others? In Psalm 139, we are encouraged to invite the Lord into every area of our life. Let's take time to open the door for Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for your patience and understanding.

I invite you into the area of my life that I have kept from you.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent: "I Am the Vine..."

Please Read: John 15: 10-17

**"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.
I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete." (John 15: 10,11)**

v. 10 What are Jesus' commandments? To remain in relation to the Father through Him, and through all those who are in Him. Loving God and neighbour is remaining in Jesus' love. We can remain in everlasting love even if we have to go through suffering and death (the "second death" (*Revelation 20: 6,14*) won't touch us, as it could not touch Jesus).

v. 11 Jesus has a purpose in telling us these things about who He is; the Father's will, which He and the Holy Spirit share, is that our joy shall be made complete, as their joy in one another is complete. The Holy Trinity wants to share His life forever. That's why God made us in His own image, to be "chips off the Old Block", children of our heavenly Father! God loves us so much He wants to share us with all creation. That is divine generosity!

The old BCP offertory sentence is not only about our financial offerings it is about the offering of ourselves, like the Thanksgiving after Communion, after we have received the sap of God in Jesus, the True Vine, under the forms of His Body and Blood, we can then begin to bear fruit through Jesus: *"And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee"* (*BCP p. 85*). With Jesus in us we can now reflect Jesus (and the love of the Father in Him) to the world. *"Blessed be Thou, LORD God of Israel, for ever and ever. All that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine. All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given thee."* (*Communion Offertory Prayer, BCP p. 74*)—namely, ourselves.

**Prayer: We give ourselves back to You Lord our God,
restored in Jesus, to be able to be stewards
of the life You gave Adam and Eve,
to bless and enhance all of creation
as You do Yourself, O God. Amen.**

Thursday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Vine..."

Please Read: John 15: 7-11

**"If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love." (John 15 :7-9).**

v. 7 How will our desires be done if Christ's words remain in us? Because if we remain living in faith with Jesus, then Jesus will be able to communicate His will for us, to and through us, so that we can ask for what the Father wants to give us...whatever that is! Our desire as followers of Jesus, is to desire what Jesus desires for our lives, and Jesus always desires what the Father desires. He came solely to do the Father's will.

v. 8 We are the Father's glory when we reflect the glory of His Son, who reflects the fullness of His (the Father's) glory. St. Irenaeus wrote, "The glory of God is man fully alive." Jesus is the Light of the world but He says we also are the light of the world. He is the Christ but we are the *Christ-ians* (little Christs). When we shine and live fully then God is glorified.

v. 9 How has the Father loved the Son? With an everlasting love. It is a love that will raise Jesus from the dead. Jesus loves us with the same, raising-to-life, everlasting love. We must remain in Him so that His everlasting love does not become "time-limited". God's offer is not a time limited offer- it is eternal! God does not have one life for Himself and then a second-class one for us. God shares His life fully with us in Jesus Christ.

So what, in particular does this passage tell us about our relationship to God in Jesus? God has a purpose for us in Christ and He has a purpose for us with our lives. We are people with a purpose, made to bear fruit and glorify God. Notice Jesus doesn't say anything about what kind of fruit it is. That is God's secret; only when we see the fruit will we start to understand what kind of branches we are. We are all "grafted on" to the vine.

***Prayer:* Father, teach us what we should
ask for when we pray
so that we receive it and glorify You.
Keep us in the same love You had for Jesus
and which he has for us.
Make us one with You, now and always.
Amen.**

Wednesday after Second Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Bread of Life"

Please read: Matthew 26:26-30.

**"He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it.
Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying,
"This is my body, which is given for you" (Luke 22:19)**

Now that we have seen the context of Jesus' teaching, for Wednesday and Thursday, we will take a closer look at the Bread of life in the Eucharist.

In our calendar, there is one day in October designated to celebrate thanksgiving together. As we gather we *thank God* for all that He is and for all the marvellous things that He has done. While our culture offers a thanksgiving feast once a year, when we come together as the body of Christ, we may wonderfully celebrate a thanksgiving feast every week.

Have you ever thought about the significance of this meal? In different traditions, the feast is given different titles: *Breaking Bread; the Lord's Table; Holy Communion; Holy Eucharist*. These titles are all very helpful.

Breaking Bread: Breaking Bread is a deeply meaningful way to describe the term. Jesus broke His Body for us. We as broken people in a paradoxical turn are healed and made whole by the breaking of Christ's body for us.

Lord's Table: Table fellowship was very important in Jesus' day. Folks went to great length to prepare to host guests. When Jesus saw Zaccheus in a tree he said he would go to his house, to no doubt have a meal (*Luke 19:5!*)

Holy Communion: Communion is a very intimate way to describe the feast. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" and when you partake of my body, we commune together. It is a Physical and Spiritual Communion. We take the bread and eat in, and we feed on, Jesus' body in our hearts.

Holy Eucharist is another deeply meaningful way to describe the feast. I want to teach you a word today. When you hear it, it will sound like: 'a fiery stove! It is a Greek word: 'efhawdysto'. It means, "thank you!"

"efhawdysto:" comes from another word "hariso" which is: a gift that need not be reciprocated. The word "Ευχαριστώ" (transliterated phonetically- "efhawdysto") is the word from which we get the word "Eucharist."

The Eucharist is a gift of God in Jesus Christ to each one of us. It is a gift that requires *no gift* in return -merely our sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks for the many things that God has done for us, and is doing in our lives day to day.

***Prayer:* Heavenly Father, thank you so much,
for the most wonderful gift that Jesus is to us. Help me to honour
you with who I am and what I do for you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.**

Thursday after Second Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Bread of Life"

Please read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-36

"Do this in memory of me." (Luke 22:19)

Last day, we focused on the important response of Gratitude for the gift of the bread of life in the Eucharist. Today, we are looking at another important response to the Gift of God in the bread of life: "remembering."

Our remembering what God has done is very important to God and for us. It is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. God remembers his Covenant with His people. God chooses and wills not to remember our sins. On the other hand, God's people were constantly forgetting. In Psalm 78, we see a vivid picture of the cycle of forgetfulness and trouble.

In order to help them remember, rituals were established. The Passover was an important one. All the ingredients in the meal help them *remember* their deliverance from Egypt, and the Goodness and presence of God with them.

In the life of our church, our liturgy serves to remind us of the goodness of God and our need for Him. On Maundy Thursday, we celebrate the "Institution of the Lord's Supper." It was at this meal that Jesus said the blessing, and most importantly for us, he said: " This is my Body which was given for you, DO THIS to remember me." (1 Cor. 11:24 *NLT*) So, we are called to REMEMBER His death (broken body); His presence with us (eating the bread); fellowship (sharing it with others); His life (nourished by His life symbolism of taking him into our bodies).

Have you ever really thought about the deep meaning of the feast? Jesus gave His body for each of us. The most awesome thing is that God became a human being like each one of us, and he experienced all of the emotions, joys, sorrows, temptations, rejection and pain that you and I do. His broken body is symbolic of a broken world and also is the means by which the broken world is healed. His body was broken for you and for me. Jesus, the bread of life did all of this for us. He requires from us, a commitment to him.

How often we forget God in our daily lives! We get distracted by the difficulties of life, or past events are too painful for us, and we have trouble believing that things will change and God wills his best for us. Sometimes we forget God because we have become comfortable doing things our own way. Perhaps we do not believe that God will come through for us like he came through for the Israelites. God is consistent. God has shown us his faithfulness in the past, and He will be faithful in the future.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Thank You for all that you do for me.
Forgive me for forgetting you. As I think about you each day,
help me to be faithful in relationship with you. Amen.

Wednesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Vine..."

Please Read: John 15: 1-9

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

(John 15:4-6)

v. 4 "Remaining" (in some translations, "abiding") is our great struggle. Adam and Eve were told to remain in trust- they couldn't bear it. They tried to find out what their lives would bear without remaining in God's word. Their lives bore death without God. So do ours when we try to exclude God from our plans and actions- our lives become barren and without purpose. Jesus said we are made to bear life, so we must remain in the One who is the Life of the world. Only God knows the kind of fruit He has made us to bear- if we don't remain in Him then we will not be able to bear that fruit.

v. 5 We need to get the order straight. What happens if the branches try to be the vine? They aren't connected to the other branches, only the vine. We cannot bypass Jesus. "Remaining" is an active response to Jesus' word. Remaining in Jesus shows Him we trust Him with our lives and believe what He has said to us.

v. 6 When we do not remain then we also choose an active response, that is, to not trust Jesus. Branches that don't bear fruit are not only fruitless but sap the energy of the whole plant. That is why we prune withered branches and dead leaves from plants at home. They are cleared away so that the gardener can get at the other fruit-bearing branches more easily; this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Holy Spirit,
we give You permission to prune from our lives
what does not seek to glorify Jesus.
Give us the strength to allow You
to do this work in us,
and show us the fruit
that comes from remaining in Jesus.
Amen.

Tuesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Vine..."

Friday after Second Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Bread of Life"

Please Read: John 15: 1-5

Please read: Luke 24:13-35

**"I am the true vine,
and my Father is the gardener.
He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes
so that it will be even more fruitful.**

**You are already clean
because of the word I have spoken to you." (John 15:1-3)**

**"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks,
broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened
and they recognized him." (Luke 24:30,31)**

Throughout Scripture, lessons were learned and God's people developed character "on the road." In both the Old and New Testaments, there are a multitude of examples of "on the road" learning.

v. 1 The vine provides life for the branches. The gardener does not prune the vine, he prunes the branches. The gardener nourishes, waters and supplies the vine with what it needs (as the Father does through the Holy Spirit). The words 'disciple' and 'discipline' come from the same Latin root word which has to do with choosing to follow training which is expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behaviour. Disciples of Jesus should expect God to discipline us so that our behaviour can bear more fruit for His kingdom purposes. God's pruning is always for our advantage and others'.

In Exodus, the people of God were led out of Egypt on a journey and the destination was home. God's people learned to trust Him on the road. God led them through the Red Sea on dry land. In the New Testament Gospels, we witness that much of Jesus' ministry occurred on the road. On the road, he met people and their lives were changed forever. As He walked the road, he came alongside people, listening to them and turning their hearts.

v. 2 Branches that don't bear fruit actually hinder the work of the vine- they take sap and resources that could be directed into fruit-bearing branches. We are branches- branches are made to bear fruit, not to be vines or leaves or fruit but to bear fruit.

This is how it was on the road to Emmaus. As depicted in the Gospel of Luke, after the Resurrection, Jesus appears to two disciples on the road leading to Emmaus. Walking along, these two disciples did not immediately recognize Jesus suddenly appearing and walking along. But Jesus did walk with them! And as the three walked together, he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and all that was said about Him (Luke 24:27).

v. 3 "You are already clean:" you are already pruned by Jesus' words. Jesus' word does not come back empty. It will accomplish its purpose in the disciples. If we ask, then we will also receive the instruction (discipline) we need to be more fruitful. The word Jesus has planted in us, and which we believe, makes us clean and able to accomplish His will.

The two disciples seemed to be "waking up" as they walked because they invited Jesus to accompany them to their destination. Little did they know that He was the Host of the party! For later, at the Table, these disciples come to the realization that Jesus had been with them! With joy they exclaimed: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

Prayer: Dear Jesus,
**speak to us clearly so that we hear,
remove from us the things
we allow into our lives
which block our ability to hear Your voice,
and make us more fruitful in our lives
as Your disciples.
Amen.**

Jesus wanted the people in His day and in our time and for all time to search HIM out as an end. To be the Centre. He gave us his ALL -not part or half-heartedly. He asks us, to give ourselves fully to him. By "feeding" on the "Bread of Life," our eyes are opened and we have life.

As we take the bread, we are encouraged to take to heart the words that are said to us: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you – and feed on him in your heart by faith and with thanksgiving!" (BCP p. 84)

God is addressing us today, in the 21st Century! Jesus says "I am the Bread of life." "I AM about life... Whosoever feeds on this bread will live forever!"

Prayer: Dear Lord, open my eyes that I might see you. Help me to grow in my faith, knowledge and understanding. Help me to recognize your movement in my life, In Jesus name, Amen.

**My Notes for the Second Week in Lent,
"I Am the Bread of Life"...**

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) *How have you found that Jesus satisfies you like no other (person, thing or idea)?*
- (2) *In what ways do you feed on the Bread of Life? How can you do so more?*

Monday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Vine..."

Please Read: John 3: 14-21

**"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.**

**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to
save the world through him." (John 3:16,17)**

The seven I AM's of John's gospel illustrate the practical reason for which Christ came into the world. As He said above, Jesus came "to save" as His name signifies ("Yahweh Shua," literally, "I AM Saves", Matthew 1: 21). The Second Person of the Trinity does not exist in order to save. He exists as the full expression of the Father's glory, in relation to the Spirit of God. But when He becomes incarnate of the Virgin Mary, He best expresses the Father's glory by saving, restoring the Father's creation, through the power of the Holy Spirit... "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

The I AM statements all connect the Son of God's eternal nature with the Son of Man's work on earth- to save and restore. Therefore Jesus does certain things because the Son has a certain kind of nature, He reflects the Father's glory by being and doing the following (He did it in His work once and for all in His life, death, resurrection and ascension, and He does it still in us His body on earth):

"I am the bread of life" because Jesus came to feed us. "I am the light of the world" because Jesus came to help us to see. "I am the door [gate] of the sheep" because Jesus came to provide an entrance to God. "I am the good shepherd" because Jesus came to watch over and protect us. "I am the resurrection, and the life" because Jesus came to lead us through death. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" because Jesus came to be our way back to God. And "I am the true vine" because Jesus came to enable our lives to bear fruit.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, You didn't have to save us
but You did, because You are love,
and the only way to show us Your love
was to save us through Jesus Christ.**

**Help us to believe what Jesus said He is, so that
we may become all that You want us to be today.**

Amen.

***My Notes for the Fourth Week in Lent,
"I Am the Good Shepherd"...***

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) Who/what are the various hirelings that you stray from the Good Shepherd to follow?*
- (2) In what ways (at what times) have you let yourself be found and brought back to Jesus' fold? How can you do so more?*

***Monday after the Third Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Light of the World"***

Please read: John 8:12-30

"I am the Light of the World" (John 8: 12)

Jesus is the light from God that lights the way for life. Jesus' followers reflect the light that comes from him, and will never walk in darkness.

Robert Fulghum, in his book *It was on Fire when I Lay Down on It*, tells the following story. He was on the island of Crete, attending a conference at an Institute that had been built in dedication to human understanding and peace. It overlooks a small airstrip where Nazi paratroopers invaded Crete and were attacked by peasants armed with only kitchen knives and hay scythes. The institute was built in the atmosphere of memory and hatred, dedicated to healing the wounds of war. Dr. Alexander Papaderos, the founder of the institute was teaching the class Mr. Fulghum was in. At the end of the class, Papaderos asked "Are there any questions?", and up to this day, Robert Fulghum, had made it a point to always ask "What is the Meaning of Life" at this juncture, in case someone had the answer.

Determining that the question was asked in earnestness, Dr. Papaderos answered by taking a small round mirror from his wallet, and telling the story from when he was a young boy during the war. He came upon a site where a German motorcycle had crashed. He tried to find all of the pieces to the mirror to reconstruct it, but that was impossible. So he settled on one piece that was manageable, and scratching it on a stone, he made it round. He played with that mirror and was fascinated on how it reflected light into dark places where the sun could not reach. He made a game of it. As he grew up, he kept the mirror and would still idly play with it, reflecting the light. He came to think of it, not as a game, but as a metaphor for what he might do with his own life. He understood he was not the light, or the source of the light, but light - truth, understanding, knowledge - is there and will only shine in many dark places when reflected. He came to realize that if he could reflect light into dark places of the world - "into the black places in the hearts of men" - some things could change, and perhaps, others would see and do likewise. This was the meaning of his life.

***Prayer:* Gracious God, we are grateful that you are the Light, and that we can only be light by being close enough to you to reflect your radiance. Help us to stay in your presence, so that we can share your light. If there is any sense of self-importance, please take it away, so that we can tell others of your love. Make us lovers of you and others. We rejoice in your light, and need not wallow in darkness anymore, but bring light to the whole world.**

**Tuesday after the Third Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Light of the World"**

Please read: Matthew 5:13-16 Salt and Light

**"Let your light so shine before people, that they will see your good works,
and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5: 16)**

Do you remember that Camp song *"This Little Light of Mine"*? "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine..." then continues on with repetitive verses, "All around the neighbourhood, I'm going to let it shine... Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm going to let it shine... Don't let Satan [blow] it out! I'm going to let it shine. Let it shine, all the time, let it shine!"

With hand gestures and body language, this little ditty inspired many young people to let their light shine, no matter what!

Another version of the song fills out the verses: "Every day, every day, every day, every way, Gonna let my little light shine!"

"Light that shines is the light of love,
Hides the darkness from above,
Shines on me and it shines on you,
Shows you what the power of love can do.
Shine my light both bright and clear,
Shine my light both far and near,
In every dark corner that I find,
Gonna let my little light shine!"

"Monday gave me the gift of love,
Tuesday peace came from above,
Wednesday told me to have more faith,
Thursday gave me a little more grace,
Friday told me to watch and pray,
Saturday told me just what to say,
Sunday gave me the power divine
To let my little light shine!"

***Prayer:* Faithful God, you have called us
to be a light shining in the world.
Make us reflect the light of Christ,
so that people see your love and goodness
in our words and actions. Amen.**

**Friday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Good Shepherd"**

Please read: Exodus 40:17-end

**"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the
Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter: 2:25)**

Israel followed God present to them in a Pillar of Cloud by Day and a Pillar of fire by night. At his command, they built a Tent or Tabernacle – a moveable Temple – that they might be gathered together to the God who had drawn near to them. So the ragged band of Hebrew slaves became a flock, and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob their Shepherd. Why did they follow? Because they saw in God three things we need in a shepherd.

First, a shepherd must know sheep. Secondly, a shepherd must care for them. Thirdly, a shepherd must actually be able to protect and care for them. In a word, a shepherd needs Knowledge, Love, and Power.

KNOWLEDGE. Christ our Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He made us. He has lived our life and died our death.

LOVE. Christ loves His sheep. He has thrown in his lot with us, 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health'. For this He has paid a terrible price, bearing the weight of our spiritual diseases – callous indifference, lust for vengeance, blind pursuit of pleasure or fortune or excitement, bitter hatred, self-satisfaction and self-righteousness.

POWER. Christ has the power to keep His sheep, even beyond death. He has shown this power by his holy and life-giving resurrection. Christians can sing even at the grave 'Alléluia, Alléluia, Alléluia' as in the Russian *Kontakion of the Dead*. Sometimes by God's grace they can pray with St Thomas à Becket in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, 'I am not in danger, only near to death.'

Christ the Good Shepherd is the image of God's good Providence – the order imparted to all things by His Wisdom, Power, and Love. So early Christians sometimes portrayed Jesus as Orpheus, the shepherd of the stars. Centuries later American slaves expressed the same truth when out of terrible darkness they sang, 'He's got the whole world in His hands.'

***Prayer:* Almighty God, Who hast given Thine only Son to be
unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life:
Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive
that His inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves
to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.**

(Collect for 'Good Shepherd Sunday', Easter 2, BCP)

**Thursday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Good Shepherd"**

Please read: St John 8:31-end

"Before Abraham was, I AM." (St John 8:58)

At last Jesus answers the essential question, 'Who art thou?' (St John 8:25). It is not an answer the religious leaders are prepared to hear. They seek to kill him. The stage is set for the final confrontation between Jesus and the hostile powers that rule the human heart. It is no accident that the ancient Gospel for Passion Sunday, preserved in our Church until the last revision of the Prayer Book, was St John 8, beginning at verse 46.

Like the people of Jesus' day, we must ask Christ, 'Who are you?' And we must be prepared for an answer that draws us into a fight to the death against the powers that rule our hearts. All the sins that bring death to human will and understanding must themselves die: pride, anger, lust, envy, gluttony, avarice or covetousness, sloth or accidie. We will allow ourselves to be patients in the hand of the Good Physician, or the diseases of our souls will finally kill faith, hope and charity. We will be sheep prepared to follow our Good Shepherd and to be found by Him when we are lost, or we will hate Him as a threat to things we hold dear: security; popularity; position; wealth; pleasure; our own good opinion of ourselves.

Christ will show Himself to be *the* Good Shepherd during Holy Week.

To many ancient peoples, including the Hebrews, Greeks and Romans, shepherding was an image of kingship. So, for example, in Plato's *Republic* Socrates argues with Thrasymachus that it belongs to the shepherd's art to care for the welfare of the sheep, and not to fleece them, and to the art of kingship to care for the people, and not to make them serve his selfish desires. When Jesus claims to be 'the Good Shepherd', he is claiming kingship. 'I AM' was the name God gave to Himself when He appeared to Moses in the burning bush (*Exodus 3:14*). When Jesus says, 'I AM the Good Shepherd', He is claiming to be God: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

This is what is at stake in the conflict between Jesus, the Romans, and the religious authorities in Passion Week and Holy Week. Everything hinges on an answer to the question: Who is Jesus? He gives his answer by his loud and eloquent silence before Pilate and Herod. Their courts have no jurisdiction over Him. He cannot be compelled to answer the charges made. It is they who are on trial. It is we who are on trial. It is the whole broken, fallen human race that is on trial. "All we like sheep have gone astray..."

***Prayer:* Help us, save us, have mercy upon us, O God, by thy grace.**

**Wednesday after the Third Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Light of the World"**

Please read: 1 John 1: 5-10 Walking in the Light

**"...if we walk in the light, as He is in the light,
we have fellowship with one-another, and
the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)**

When we are in the light, we see things for what they are and we learn to love others for who they are. Walking in the light is a transformative experience that fills our life with love and compassion and grace. For ourselves, for others and for this community, we want to walk in the light, live in the light and have the light as the permanent way of being where there is no darkness, no confusion or chaos or cause for stumbling.

First, "we have fellowship with one another". We have thought many times about hospitality as the key to Christian living and the need for us to show hospitality towards one another because God has shown hospitality towards us. When we live in fellowship with one another, we love one another and are prepared to live with each other's failings; we constantly practice forgiveness; we encourage one another in life and in the faith; and we share our lives with one another. Hospitality is paramount to making the Christian community grow ever stronger.

Second, "the blood of Jesus... cleanses us from all sin." The greatest act of hospitality was the death of Jesus on the cross, his resurrection, and his ascension, through which we have been invited into the very heart of God. The greatest act of hospitality is the invitation to become Children of God. God is the light, and we are called to walk in his light. When we do so, darkness is dispelled and we experience hope and joy, our fellowship life increases as our hospitality increases, our experience of living as children of God increases as we grow deeper into the hospitality of God.

***Prayer:* Gracious God,
Your light has splintered the darkness
and hope is ours once more.
The light calls us forward;
we remember the past
and walk confidently into the future.
Amen.**

**Thursday after the Third Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Light of the World"**

Please read: John 9:1-12 Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

**"Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"
...He kept saying, 'I am the man.'" (John 9: 8-9)**

This story is not just about a blind man being healed. This story challenges us to recognize the ways in which we are blind and cannot recognize our blindness — and the ways in which we are wrong about the blindness of others. The joy of this text is that there is hope.

Entertainer, Ray Charles, although not blind from birth, went blind at an early age. He was being escorted to a concert hall in Augusta, Georgia, where he was scheduled to perform, but the building was being picketed by a group protesting that the concert was going to be segregated with only whites allowed on the main dance floor and blacks restricted to the balcony. A young black man managed to get Charles' attention through the noise of the crowd chanting "NO MORE SEGREGATION!" but Charles' response was "That's how it is. This is Georgia" and "Look man, there ain't nothing I can do about that. I'm an entertainer. And we all gotta play Jim Crow down here." But there was a moment when the white organizer of the concert interrupted their conversation to put-down the protester — and, suddenly, Charles began to see. He confessed to his manager, "He's right" and ordered the band back on the tour bus. When the white organizer of the concert threatened to sue him, Charles reversed his former strategy, and now said to the white man, "I can't do nothing about it. Ain't nothing I can do, man."

He remained physically blind, but saw for the first time what he could do to help in the struggle against racism and for Civil Rights.

Our challenge continues to be in this season of Lent to make space in our lives to listen for God's call — the places in our living where God is calling us to confess with our mouth: I do not have all the answers, but "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." (John 9: 25)

Prayer:

**Lord God almighty,
come and dispel the darkness from our hearts,
that in the radiance of your brightness
we may know You, the only unfading light,
glorious in all eternity. Amen.**

Wednesday after the Fourth in Lent; "I Am the Good Shepherd"

Please read: St John 8:1-9

"For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. ... I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgement." (Ezekiel 34:11 & 16)

Today's readings for Morning Prayer in the *BCP* build directly on yesterday's thoughts. In Exodus 32 we read how the people of Israel quickly tired of waiting on the living God and demanded that their priests give them idols. We will have God on our own terms to serve our own purposes. This is so much more attractive than waiting on God in emptiness and longing. We demand shepherds who will give us what we want, without waiting, preparation, or reflection. With tears, God gives us such shepherds, that we may learn to desire better. We hear from these kinds of shepherds in the second lesson, including the story of the woman taken in adultery.

Why do the people bring this woman to Jesus? To see her condemned. To see her wrong to her husband avenged. To prop up their self-righteous indignation. "Everyone loves to see justice done / on somebody else." (Bruce Cockburn, *Justice*) Everyone, that is, except the Good Shepherd.

What is the difference between a good shepherd and a hireling? Jesus tells us. The hireling runs away when danger comes. The good shepherd stays with his sheep. Why? Because they are His. They do not belong to the hireling. He cares only for his wages. The shepherd loves His sheep because He knows them and they are His (*St John 10:12-14*).

From Jesus' point of view, this woman is a wounded sheep, in terrible danger. His part is not to abandon her to the evil she is doing and the evil she has suffered, but to stand with her and fight with and for her. First, he deals with the immediate threat to her physical life. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Then he deals with the enemy into whose power she has surrendered herself. "Does any condemn you? Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Only the love of the Good Shepherd allows us to see our sins as He does, and to hate them perfectly, as He does. Angry self-righteous condemnation only increases the fear and defensiveness that cut us off from God and from one another. Unless we weep for the sinner, we have nothing worthwhile to say about the sin.

Prayer: **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed.**

**Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Good Shepherd"**

Please read: St John 7:25-end

"The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want." (*Psalms 23:1*)

In Lent, the Good Shepherd leads us into the desert, where we can no longer pretend that we can care for ourselves, or that we have within ourselves what we need to make fruitful the barren wastes we have made of our souls and our communities. If we follow where He leads in Lent, we can only turn away from the empty illusions we have loved and wait on God in grief. For that reason, the traditional Lenten spiritual disciplines mimic grief: loss of appetite (fasting), sleeplessness (vigils), withdrawal (silence, solitude), loss of libido (chastity), preoccupation with memories (meditation on holy Scripture), tears (self-examination and repentance). A season of grief is a season of intense longing. To the extent this is true, it is a season of love. Lent calls us to a holy and life-giving grief, feeding and fed by a growing desire for God. The word 'Lent' means 'spring'. It is the season of new life not in spite of the fact that it is the season of grief and repentance, but because of it.

Yet we draw back from this. It appears horrible. We refuse to believe God could ask us to follow in this way.

But our Good Shepherd knows better. In this case what we need is not what we want. As Ezekiel is commanded to eat the scroll that is bitter to his taste but sweeter than honey to his stomach, our Master calls us to taste of a holy and life-giving grief. Our taste and our vision is not the final measure, for everything we see is not the way it seems, 'tears can sing, and joy shed tears' (Bruce Cockburn, *Hills of Morning*)

We hate this. Like the religious leaders today's reading from St John, we would rather see Him dead than follow Him in this way. We prefer our illusions of self-sufficiency. We prefer to believe that we are well and need no physician (*St Luke 5:31*). We anxiously protect our good opinion of ourselves. We justify ourselves at any cost. We hate what calls our self-righteousness into question. We refuse the way of life that would open to us true knowledge of ourselves – our brokenness, our crying need.

Jesus says, 'If any thirst, let him come unto me and drink.' He Himself is the Fountain of living water. Our Good Shepherd not only knows the way to green pasture, He makes our empty deserts to abound with good fruit.

***Prayer:* Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.**

(The Jesus Prayer)

**Friday after the Third Sunday in Lent;
"I Am the Light of the World"**

Please read: John 1:1-12 The Word Became Flesh

**"The Light shines in the darkness, and
the darkness did not overcome it."** (*John 1:5*)

For John, LIGHT is divine energy manifested as truth, virtue and holiness, and communion with God in the Church. The strongest of all weapons against DARKNESS is our love for God, a strong, vibrant, intimate relationship with Him.

As we grow in spiritual maturity, we hunger for that relationship with Jesus. At the same time, there can often be confusion and fear. Fear can keep us from recognizing the Light. Our own insecurities and doubts of our worth feed our fear. We can make peace with those parts of ourselves that we find despicable, unworthy and embarrassing -- anger, jealousy, pride, selfishness, and other evil thoughts and deeds.

Author Sue Monk Kid writes: "Too many of us panic in the dark. We don't understand that it's a holy dark and that the idea is to surrender to it and journey through to the real light." The journey through to the real light is the building of relationship with Jesus. He already knows everything about us. Surrender and trust that Jesus will never turn away, and will give us every help to build that intense, intimate relationship with him.

***Prayer:* Lord, You have always given
bread for the coming day,
And though I am poor,
today I believe.**

**Lord, You have always given
strength for the coming day,
And though I am weak,
today I believe.**

**Lord, You have always given
peace for the coming day;
And though of anxious heart,
today I believe...**

**Lord, You have always lightened
this darkness of mine,
And though the night is here,
today, I believe.**

*(From the Northumbria Community,
Celtic Daily Prayer, Marshall Pickering, 1994)*

***My Notes for the Third Week in Lent,
"I Am the Light of the World"...***

Questions you may wish to consider:

- (1) When have you been aware of being in God's light?*
- (2) In what ways have you been the mirror reflecting the Light of Jesus?
How can you do so more?*

Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent; "I Am the Good Shepherd"

Please read: Galatians 4:26-5:1

**"I AM the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd
gives His life for the Sheep." (St John 10:11)**

Yesterday was 'Mothering Sunday'. It gets its name from St Paul's words at the beginning of the ancient Epistle for the day, 'Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.' It is often called 'Refreshment Sunday', too, from the ancient Gospel, which recounts the feeding of the Five Thousand in the desert (*St John 6:5-14*). It would be difficult to find a more appropriate introduction to this week's reflections on Jesus the Good Shepherd, for this 'mother' -the heavenly or spiritual Jerusalem- is the fold to which God's rational sheep belong and this 'refreshment' is the Body and Blood of the Shepherd who freely lays down His life for the sheep.

Shepherding is mothering. It is the care of wards who are not ready or able to care for themselves, who do not always know what is good for them. Even when they do, they do not always pursue it!

Lent recalls us to this understanding of ourselves. We are sheep in exile from the true home of our humanity. And this exile is a matter of our will – of what we ourselves love and desire. In the *BCP* daily lectionary, beginning at Septuagesima, we read Genesis. There we find ourselves in Adam and Eve, exiled from the true home of human understanding and desire. For us as for them there is no way home, no way to a fruitful and truly human life, but through suffering and by a long and difficult road. We find ourselves in Abraham, called out of the comfortable and the familiar to be a pilgrim. We find ourselves especially in the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt. Divided, angry, filled with fear and mistrust, determined to save our own skins and look out for number one, we're not a promising project. Forty years in the desert won't be enough to make us free and responsible citizens of His Kingdom.

In Lent, we draw close to Jesus in the full recognition of the desert we have made of our souls and our communities –that is, in repentance. In the midst of Lent, on Mothering Sunday, we are refreshed by a vision of God's shepherding. We have a home, a fold: the City of God. We have a Good Shepherd, for He has laid down His life for us. Though we bring death upon ourselves, and make of ourselves and our world a desert, He leads us through the valley of the shadow of this death to green pastures.

***Prayer:* Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we,
who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished,
by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved:
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

(Collect for Lent IV, BCP page 147)