

Order of Service for Sunday, March 7, 2021, 3rd Sunday of Lent



St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Lebanon, OR 97355
Bishop +John S. Thornton, Presiding

A Greeting

You have to see it in every light,
that one lily among all the others;
see it in the morning,
the low, long rays lifting it skyward;
see it at mid-day,
the sun setting it, petal by petal, aflame;
see it in the evening,
as shadows, slowly, quietly darken its day;
only then,
from its bloom to its withering,
do you see its singularity,
only then,
all that's rare about it
and beautiful.

You have to see it from every angle,
that one lily among all the others;
see it from the front porch,
as if upon a fallen star;
see it alongside,
together in a moment transmuted;
see it from below,
weeding it lithe and free;
only then,
from its bloom to its withering,
so you see its singularity,
only then,
and that is rare about it
and beautiful.

With all of us,
with each,
it must be the same.

+John S. Thornton

Collect for The Third Sunday in Lent: Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and

inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

First Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

- **Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s People**
- **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, *
and the firmament shows his handiwork.

2 One day tells its tale to another, *
and one night imparts knowledge to another.

3 Although they have no words or language, *
and their voices are not heard,

4 Their sound has gone out into all lands, *
and their message to the ends of the world.

5 In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; *
it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

6 It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens
and runs about to the end of it again; *
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul; *
the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

8 The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart; *
the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever; *
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold, *
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

11 By them also is your servant enlightened, *
and in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can tell how often he offends? *
cleanse me from my secret faults.

Second Lesson: A Reading from the Gospel of John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

- **Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's People**
- **Thanks be to God**

Sermon: "They Know Not What They Do"

Bishop + John S. Thornton

"But we proclaim Christ crucified," the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth.

(The New English Bible puts it a little more bluntly: "But we proclaim Christ – yes, Christ nailed to a cross.")

For Jews and Greeks, Paul said, that didn't make any sense. For Jews, it was foolishness. For Greeks, it was weakness. But for Paul, it was THE REVELATION OF HUMANKIND'S UNKNOWING, about something we just don't know about ourselves, about something

we don't want to know about ourselves, about something we just have to know about ourselves. In a word, we're "unconscious" – and, while it makes our lives easier, it makes the world worse, not knowing what we do and not wanting to know.

Luke, the Gospel-writer, like the other Gospel-writers, Mark, Matthew and John, has a crucifixion story. (Remember, The Gospel According to Luke is a "Gospel," not journalism. not biography. It's one man's understanding of the meaning of another man's life, of the meaning of our own humanity seen in him, of the meaning of the One whose immortality can be seen in us.) Like the other Gospel-writers', Luke's crucifixion story has many of the same details.. But, unlike all of the others, Luke puts these words into the mouth of Jesus: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I repeat: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Only Luke does that.

Luke has Jesus saying that while hanging on a cross, wrists and ankles tied, hands and feet nailed, side slit open, blood gushing, minutes from a death that didn't in any way look redeeming. But who was there to hear it? Paul wasn't. He was a second-generation Gentile Christian. (Some scholars find evidence to prove that he was a second-generation Jewish Christian.) The women who followed Jesus from Galilee, particularly Mary Magdalene, always Mary Magdalene, never forsaking Jesus Mary Magdalene, were too far away to hear anything but the screaming and the moaning and, maybe, the final guttural howl. And the centurion who was in charge of executions that day had little interest in the suffering of criminals. His job was to kill them. But Luke put those words into the mouth of Jesus because that's what came out of the mouth of Jesus maybe a hundred times while he was teaching and healing over the three years of his ministry. The disciples heard him say it. The women heard him say it. Those he taught and healed heard him say it. And nobody would ever forget. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Luke knew that there would be no Gospel, no Good News, without those words, word for word.

That utterance – I mean that revelation – is, in my opinion, the most generous thing ever said about the human race. Sure, Jesus could see what's beautiful about us; but he could see what's ugly too. "They know not what they do." It's true, truer than true, that we don't know what we're doing half the time, two-thirds of the time, nine-tenths of the time. We're hardly conscious of what's deep, deep within us, motivating us or failing to do so. So we just go along with systems of injustice and suffering, with what Gandhi would call the "systems of evil," to which we consent by our silence or, often, by our active participation – and by which, of course, we benefit one way or another.

There's one thing I need to caution myself and you about. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" does not mean that we're all excused, that it's all okay, so let's forget it, let's move on – "Let's move on!" is our solution to the violation of persons and the Law – God just loves us no matter what. And the wreckage of lives and societies remains. Jesus' words from the cross really mean that, since we don't know what we're doing, we had better learn what it is we're doing. The results of our not knowing are killing us. And saying that "everybody does it" is the cheapest of all absolutions.

It was H. Richard Niebuhr, the ethics professor at Yale Divinity School when I was there in the 1950s, who warned us that “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.”

Let's get real.

During Black History Month (February), I read Sherrilynn Ifill's book titled *On the Courthouse Lawn*. That's where lynchings occurred, on the courthouse lawn in Easton, Maryland. Between 1890 and 1960, there were five thousand lynchings in the U.S. Each one drew a crowd of white spectators, sometimes by the hundreds, sometimes on Sunday, the Lord's Day. They made no connection. No one was ever prosecuted. If there was an investigation, no one could remember who the lynchers were, even if they lived next door. There was a covenant of silence. Everyone was guilty. But Jim Crow was their idea of “peace.”

Now there's a surge of anti-Asian hate crimes in America, because, evidently, some people believe that all Asians are Chinese and that all of the Chinese people in the U.S. are the transmitters of the “China virus,” that incendiary designation.

Oh, God help us. Just as St. Seraphim of Sarov said, “All condemnation is of the devil.”

What we don't know about ourselves is that we're always looking for a scapegoat to bear our sins. It's always someone else who's causing our troubles. It will be someone who looks other than we, someone who is powerless, someone who has no advocate or defender, someone whose life means nothing to us and whose death we wouldn't mourn. We won't know what we're doing – but we're not excused. We have to learn that the “other” also bears the image of God – and that God's image is in us precisely in the moment when we see God's image in another.

My loves, getting to know ourselves is hard work. Getting to know what can be done on impulse and what has to be carefully constrained is hard work. We have to know what's what about us. We can let love rip; but unlove has to be sat on.

Back in the mid-1970s, while I was the Rector of St. Stephen's Church in Belvedere, California, I decided it would be useful to become a Jungian analyst. (Parenthetically, my parishioners put up with a lot from me. They used to say, jokingly, “This too will pass.”) But, honestly, I thought I should know who I am and what I could do that wouldn't require so much forgiveness.

To become an Jungian analyst one has to be analyzed first. It takes six years of “training analysis.” Six years. What's six years? So I made an appointment with a Jungian analyst in Berkeley. He was considered one of the best. I went twice a month. We talked about my dreams and my reactions to persons and events. After a few months, I quit. There were three reasons: first, it was costing too much money; second, I found myself uninteresting and boring; and third, as we went deeper and deeper – and sweatier – I realized that there was a lot I didn't want to know about myself. It scared the hell out of

me. My whole self-concept was based on a fiction. If you call me a coward for quitting, I'll agree with you.

There's only one thing that made the adventure into the recesses of myself worth the time and money. The analyst told me that I have an "aerial personality." In my dreams, I was frequently flying. I guess that means that I don't have my feet on the ground and/or my head is in the clouds.

Obviously, I'm still not fully aware of myself. However, I am aware enough to know that the words in Exodus 23:2 are dogma for me: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." In old age, I'm still learning not to follow the multitude, but follow my own mind and my own heart.

The best advice I have for all of us is to follow the Christ, so that the following can become not only our deep satisfaction, but our salvation. We can ease up on the emphasis on right thinking and put the emphasis on right acting. What needs to flow in us is the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the Beatitudes. What needs to flow in us is Matthew 25 ("I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat...") What needs to flow in us is Romans 12 ("Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good...") and all the things in Scripture that make us aware, deep down, of who we really are and who we can be. However, because all of our truth-seeking and our mercy-doing will be imperfect, we'll still need to hear those words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

+John S. Thornton

The Creed: "Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God"

Prayers

A Collect for Lent : Almighty God, may we, by the prayer and discipline of Lent, enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings; that by following in the Way, we may come to share in the glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For the Poor and the Neglected

(BCP p. 824)

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For the Oppressed

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer for St. Martin's

God of Love,
open our eyes and ears to perceive you at work
in creation, the church, and our parish.
Fill our hearts with your love
that we may reach out in love to others.
Stir up our imagination with your Holy Spirit
that we may find new ways to live into life with you.
Give us a vision of your mission
that we may share your love and your spirit
in all the places where we work and play and worship you.
In Jesus' holy name, **Amen.**

Blessings

The Peace

The Dismissal