

Saturday, March 22

John 7:1-13 *Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.* (v.13)

Fear is a powerful force in our lives. We no longer have to fear being arrested for believing in Christ—at least in the U.S.—but our fears still stop us from “speaking openly of him.” What is it we fear? We don’t want to be too out of step with the secular world. “They” might label us religious fanatics if we witness in the workplace or country club. Perhaps we feel with so many other Christians today that evangelism is embarrassing, and our belief is too personal to talk about. Maybe we fear that our faith is too small, our words weak, and our witness lacks power.

These fears all have one thing in common—me, me, me. It is Jesus who has the right words and power to reach the people we meet every day. We need to let him do the work through us. How? Be willing. Pray for the words and courage! Start small—one on one. Jesus can do it.

Dear Lord Jesus, let me be bold. Use me and speak through me so that you will be glorified.

Jeremiah 5:20-31; Psalms 75, 76; Romans 3:19-31

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Sunday, March 16

Mark 3:31—4:9 *“And others are the ones sown among thorns; they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”* (vv.18-19 RSV)

The Christian walk is not easy. The things and problems of the world seem to pop up and distract us time and time again. Even our churches are vulnerable. Paul tells the Corinthians in today’s reading that factions in the church itself are destructive and dangerous to the body. Jesus addresses the problem in the Parable of the Sower when he speaks of these thorns that grow up and choke us. A thorn for me is the power politics in my church. I have trouble not getting caught up in “sides!” Another thorn is settling for the world’s low standards, being satisfied with mediocre instead of becoming what God wants for me. I think, as a follower of Christ, I need to keep my little garden free of rocks and thorns. I need to be ready for God’s touch (Jeremiah 1:9). The only way I know to do that is by keeping my attention—through prayer, study and being in Christian community—on Jesus and not the world. It takes work to be a fit field for God.

Prepare me, Lord, to receive your Word so that I may nourish it and help it grow.

Jeremiah 1:1-10; Psalms 24, 29; 1 Corinthians 3:11-23

Monday, March 17

John 4:27-42 *“One sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”* (vv.37b-38)

The lesson today is a great comfort to me. I’m glad to know that I am just a laborer in God’s field and not the foreman. My job might just be the watering or gathering perhaps. That means I must be ready to work (like Jeremiah) and trust God to lead me and protect me. But my job might be just a small part in someone’s conversion. It could be an act of kindness or an invitation to pray. I need to be willing to do my part whatever the task and then believe that God will take it from there.

My experience has been that when I have felt a nudge from the Lord to speak with someone about Him and I followed through, good things happened. A small step forward was taken or maybe a giant leap. The great part of the process for me is that when I respond to the nudge, the Lord nudges me more often! This is faith building for me and gives me more to share next time.

Dear Father in Heaven, help me to be a willing worker in Your field.
Jeremiah 1:11-19; Psalms 56, 57, 58; Romans 1:1-15

Tuesday, March 18

Jeremiah 2:1-13 *“Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.”* (v.11)

Our country was started by people whose religion was a major priority in their life. They were willing to leave things known and move so they would not have to change their religious beliefs.

Today we seem to have little to believe in. We have lowered our standards of morality and raised our tolerance of all behaviors, beliefs, and lifestyles. In short, we have changed our ideas of God to fit our world today. We rationalize items like dishonesty in the workplace and infidelity in marriage as we explain away guilt and sin.

In today’s readings we get God’s view of this. Even Jesus, in John 4:48, says, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” He was openly disgusted. Can you imagine God’s feelings when we continually look for answers elsewhere and ignore what has been clearly shown to us through Jesus?

Dear Lord, help me keep my eyes on Jesus and my life choices in harmony with Your will. This is hard in our world today. I will need Your help.

Psalms 61, 62; Romans 1:16-25; John 4:43-54

Wednesday, March 19

Psalms 72 *For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.* (vv.12-13)

Psalms 72 is a detailed description of the perfect king or future Messiah. He sounds wonderful! Then if you read the Jeremiah and Romans texts you begin to understand why this Messiah is our only hope for eternal life—life with God.

Enter Jesus. In the Gospel reading for today Jesus heals the man by the pool of healing water. The man did not ask to be healed. I don’t think he even knew who Jesus was. He only complained that he had no one to help get to the water when it moved (that is when it healed people). Here is where Jesus sounds like that Messiah described in the psalm. He helped him and healed him because he was in need. Not because of the man’s great faith, or his nice way of asking for help, or even his charming personality; he didn’t have those qualities. This man shows there is hope for us all. The wonderful Messiah will help us too! He will save our lives and deliver us.

O Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to save needy creatures like me and the man by the pool.

Jeremiah 3:6-18; Romans 1:28—2:11; John 5:1-18

Thursday, March 20

John 5:19-29 *“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.”* (vv.22-23a)

When I was a child, my mother always reminded me that it was not our place to judge others. She was correct, of course; she got that from the Bible. But at the same time my ability to make “value judgments” or to use “good judgment” was considered a positive trait in her eyes. This was confusing to me and, by the emphasis Jesus puts on it, I assume it is confusing for other people too! After all, if we did not “evaluate” other people we meet as to motives, honesty, and intentions, our life could be in danger or at least our pocketbook! A misjudgment could be serious.

I don’t think this is the type of judging Jesus (or my mother) was talking about. He means judging someone’s soul—their fitness for eternal life. Judgment with a capital J. We are told in today’s reading that it will be Jesus doing that job for the Father. That is good news to me! Jesus has been here; he knows how hard it is to be a mortal. He has “walked in my moccasins.” I trust him; he is my redeemer.

Lord Jesus, help me be more like the person you were.

Jeremiah 4:9-10,19-28; Psalms 70, 71; Romans 2:12-24

Friday, March 21

John 5:30-47 *“I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.”* (v.43)

During Lent, we frequently are asked to put ourselves in Jesus’ place. What was he feeling in the events that led up to his arrest and crucifixion? I think this reading points to his feeling of loneliness. He has healed a man but because it was on the Sabbath he is criticized by the Jewish leaders. How sad it must make him to be so misunderstood. The miracles he does, the Scriptures and even John the Baptist all point to him as the Son of God. But some are blind to this reality. They see a dangerous lawbreaker who will upset their status quo.

The other readings for today show an equally bleak aspect of the human condition. The hope is in this unique man who is also God. He alone can show us how to be one with the Father. He has made the atonement possible. It is important to me that Jesus was human and had feelings like mine. I have felt misunderstood and alone because of critical remarks. Jesus helps me keep my priorities straight.

Dear Jesus, I want to receive you and be your disciple.

Jeremiah 5:1-9; Psalm 69; Romans 2:25—3:18