**Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Gospel of Luke**

**Lent Series 2010**

**First Sunday of Lent, Year C**

## Luke 4:1-13

4Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” 5Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 9Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 12Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Get the passage electronically at Oremus here: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Luke+4:1-13&vnum=yes&version=nrsv>

Connect to Textweek resources for this week: <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/lentc1.htm>

Connect to Textweek resources for Luke’s Gospel this week: <http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/lk4a.htm>

Link here for Chris Haslam’s resources for this week: <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/clnt1l.shtml>

**A Prayer:** through all their desert wanderings, O Lord our God, you led our ancestors from toil and oppression to a land of milk and honey. Through forty days in the wilderness, the Spirit led your Son from the devil’s testing to victory as your servant. Lead us through these forty days of Lent and make that victory of Christ’s our own, till at the font of living water the elect find new birth, the penitent find pardon, and all rejoice to serve you alone. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Savior and deliverer whom you raised from the dead, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

*From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

**A Few Thoughts**

Luke 4:1-3

The parallels for this passage are found in Matthew [4:1-11](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Matthew+4%3A1-11) and Mark [1:12-13](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Mark+1%3A12-13).

On the first Sunday of Lent we return prior to the Epiphany readings, going back in time to just following the Baptism when Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert. This pattern of reading the Gospel works well for our liturgical year, and helps to bring the modern Christian journey through Lent into perspective alongside the journey of Jesus in the desert.

We want to be mindful that it is the Holy Spirit who is the one who is leading Jesus from the moment of baptism throughout his ministry. Jesus is God’s son specifically and this “’sonship’ is mediated by the Holy Spirit.” (LTJ, Luke, 72)

Jesus is led then as God’s son into the desert, full of the Holy Spirit. He is led there specifically to be tested.

Chris Haslam reminds us of these other parallel uses of the words “full of the Holy Spirit:” A Christian phrase: see also Acts [2:4](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Acts+2%3A4) (the Day of Pentecost); [6:3](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Luke+6%3A3), [5](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Luke+6%3A5) (the election of the first deacons); [7:55](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Luke+7%3A55) (Stephen); [11:24](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Luke+11%3A24) (Barnabas). Jesus is the model for Christians under duress.

In the desert we find that it is Job’s tester who comes to Jesus, a little different personality than in the other two Gospels. This devil will offer much in a land without much. The idea is that here the devil is offering a different world to Jesus, a different reign. This reign is one filled with demons and minions. (Haslam tells us that the “wilderness” is the Judean wilderness and it was considered to be the place of demons: see also [8:29](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Luke+8%3A29) and [11:24](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Luke+11%3A24).) This is a reign which is not only contrary to but working against the reign of God. The testing begins long after Jesus becomes hungry. He is dwelling within this counter kingdom where scarcity rules.

He dwells there for forty days which is a holy number. Here are some passages Haslam reminds us about in his exegesis: In Exodus [34:38](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Exodus+34%3A38), Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days; In 1 Kings [19:8](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=1Kings+19%3A8), Elijah spent forty days on the journey to Mount Horeb. According to the northern tradition (in Deuteronomy [9](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Deuteronomy+9)) , Moses received the Law there, rather than on Mount Sinai, the location in the southern tradition. In Deuteronomy [9:9](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Deuteronomy+9%3A9), Moses says “I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water.” “Forty days” appears many times in the Old Testament meaning *a significant period of time*. Recall also that Jonah predicted that Nineveh would be destroyed after “forty days” if the citizens did not repent.

This is an interesting tie-in for the discipleship journey. We, as disciples, live in a world tempted daily by the demons and minions of this counter-kingdom. When we live in the world we are hungry and find little sustenance. When we leave the life lived within the reign of God we will be tempted and it will be like a desert with living water ever more scarce and our own thirst and hunger increasing.

Jesus is first tempted to turn stones to bread. I am reminded first of all of John the Baptist’s words that God can raise up sons and daughters of Abraham from these stones, stones may be living, stones may gush forth with water. But Jesus is tempted here with the opportunity to use his “sonship” powers to try and sustain life in the “counter-kingdom.” (LTJ, Luke, 74)

Jesus responds by reminding the devil and us who are traveling along this desert journey with him that we do not live on bread alone. (Deuteronomy [8:3](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Deuteronomy+8%3A3).) The message Jesus offers in not unique and yet it is always timely. We enter into this time of year to help us intentionally remember that we depend upon the bounty and grace of God for all that we have. This was the lesson taught to Abraham, to Joseph, to Moses, to all the prophets, kings, and holy people of God. As humans it is so very easy to believe that if we just have this or if we simply could have that our lives would be so much better off than they are today. We so easily forget in our hunger brought about in a world of scarcity that God’s love and providence is already there to be consumed.

The devil then shows Jesus all of the kingdoms throughout the empire and says that he can have them if he will but prostrate himself. In Luke’s Gospel this is more than bowing before the devil, acknowledging his power and reign over the counter-kingdom. It is worship he desires.

As I reflect on this passage it reminds me of all the false hopes of prosperity that are offered on late night infomercials. The promise looks good and it is inviting. The promise of the counter-kingdom is subtle and you and I buy into it pretty easily. “If I just had this or that,” we might say to ourselves. Just recently I read an article talking about the unfulfilled hope promised by technology. Jesus’ response is to reorient the conversation towards God. Jesus reminds the devil of the words of the Sh’ma: there is only one God of Israel and him we shall worship.

The first two temptations not having worked, the devil takes Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. The devil offers a few quotes and invites Jesus to test his father. Surely the angels would save Jesus from stubbing his toe. Jesus of course “exhausts” the devil with his focus on the reign of God and his unbending mission to bring it to fruition. At the end of the day it is the tester of Job and Jesus who looses faith and withdraws.

Luke includes this phrase, “withdrew from him for a time.” The tempter will play an important role towards the end of Jesus’ mission. While the ruler of the counter-kingdom is quiet for most of the Lukan gospel, his minions are not. Luke Timothy Johnson tells us we should not pretend that the clash of the reign of God and the counter-kingdom of the world is over by any stretch of the imagination.

As we come to the end of this passage and I reflect on possible messages for the first Sunday in Lent, there are the obvious themes of desert and testing. There also emerges a theme on the faithfulness of Jesus to bring in the reign of God. Perhaps in our beginning of Lent we might not simply see our journey with Jesus in a desert or wilderness as a time to grow close to God, but rather a time to test our faith in God by stepping boldly forward into ministry and mission. Can we be driven into Lent by the Holy Spirit for the sake of the reign of God and see what it is that we discover along our own journey to Jerusalem? Can we fast, and pray, and be reconciled to the lordship of Christ in our lives?

**The Lambeth Bible Study Method**

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. It is known by both names: "Lambeth" and "African." This method is derived from the practice of Lectio Divina. The entire process should take about 30 minutes.

Question #5: "Briefly identify where this passage touches their life today," can change based upon the lesson. Find lesson oriented questions at this website: <http://www.dcdiocese.org/word-working-second-question>

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads passage. This person then invites a member of the group to begin the process.

2. Each person briefly identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention then invites another person to share.

3. Each shares the word or phrase until all have shared or passed using the same invitation method.

4. The passage is read a second time, preferably from a different translation. The reader then invites a person in the group to begin the process.

5. Each person briefly identifies where this passage touches their life today, and then invites someone who has not shared yet.

6. The passage is read a third time, also from another translation, and the reader invites a person to start the process.

7. Each person responds to the questions, "What does God want me to do, to be or to change?"

8. The group stands up in a circle and holds hands. One person initiates the prayer “I thank God today for …” and “I ask God today for…” The prayer goes around the circle by squeezing the hand to your right.

9. When the circle is fulfilled, the person who initiated the prayer starts the Lord’s Prayer, “Our father…”

Second Sunday in Lent

## Luke 13:31-35

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Oremus online text: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Luke+13:31-35&vnum=yes&version=nrsv>

Textweek general resources for this week: <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/lentc2.htm>

Textweek resources for Luke’s Gospel this week: <http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/lk9a.htm>

Chris Haslam’s commentary: <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/cepfll.shtml>

**A Prayer:**   
O God of salvation, the people in whom you delight hasten with joy to the wedding feast.  Forsaken no more, we bear a new name; desolate no longer, we taste your new wine.  Make us your faithful stewards ready to do whatever Jesus tells us and eager to share with others the wine he provides. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

**A Few Thoughts:**

**Luke 13:31-35**

The passage today contains within unique verses and that are found only here in the Gospel of Luke. The pericope or whole passage begins actually in verse 22 and while I don’t think that one should necessarily elongate the Gospel reading in the service, I do think that for the purposes of bible study and for sermon preparation it is important to read the whole section as one unit.

The passage begins with Jesus traveling. He is making his way to Jerusalem. These passages are wonderful bits of narration by our author and show a skilled writer imparting and telling a story. More than simply literary style the passage reminds us that our great prophet Jesus is making an exodus journey, prophetically teaching along the way, leading God’s people to ultimate deliverance from the bondage of sin. This is part of the mosaic theme I touched on in the pre-reading and background materials.

“How many will be saved?” a companion asks. Interesting is Jesus’ response. He does not give a number but rather turns the question offering discipline instead of answers. Jesus says to them that as followers we are to “act in such a way as to be one who is saved.” (LTJ, Luke, 216)

Notice if you put your finger in your bible and turn to Matthew 7:13, Matthew compares and contrasts a wide and a narrow door. (LTJ, Luke, 216) Luke’s emphasis is on the difficulty of being a disciple; he is focused on the hard work of following Jesus and a life lived in discipleship.

There is no assumption that the door once knocked upon will be opened. Jesus seems to be saying it is going to be difficult for those who do not follow. There will be many who come and follow. Recalling the Holy Spirit’s work in Acts, we see Jesus here offering us a sense that God’s reign is breaking out into the world and people from all over will come to be a part and because of their work within the reign of God they will be granted entrance.

Luke has a strong sense of grace, but it is tempered always with service and discipleship.

It is as if to say that if you are wealthy and health you must believe, but you may not rest upon the grace of the door simply being opened for you. Once you know the truth, you may not live your life as if you did not hoping in the last hour for grace at the doorstep of the master’s house. In fact your entrance into the reign of God will be because you believed and because you worked with Jesus on behalf of the poor and those in need.

As I write this I am wondering, is it possible that once one believes the second step is to serve others; because as Jesus welcomes the poor through the door you may by the grace of those who remember your service walk with them into the reign of God?

Certainly this is present in the thoughts of St. Chrysostom as he writes the following words:

If you ever wish to associate with someone make sure that you do not give your attention to those who enjoy health and wealth and fame as the world sees it, but take care of those in affliction, in critical circumstances, who are utterly deserted and enjoy no consolation. Put a high value on associating with these, for from them you shall receive much profit, and you will do all for the glory of God. God himself has said: I am the father of orphans and the protector of widows.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This short quote does the work of N. T. Wright (a contemporary theologian and Bishop of Durham) some injustice but I think it is important to mention here. For a longer argument on this matter of balancing faith and works I encourage you to read Wright’s book entitled: Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision, 2009. In this text Wright argues that the work of discipleship is essential within the framework of faith. He writes the following as if to echo Jesus’ own essential teaching about the reign of God and the work of discipleship:

The linguistic point about Romans 5-8 (the absence of pistis [faith]) thus points to an underlying theological point of enormous significance for our whole topic. Loose talk about “salvation by faith” (a phrase Paul never uses; the closest he gets, as we have seen is Ephesians 2:8, “by grace you have been saved through faith”) can seriously mislead people into supposing that you can construct an entire Pauline soteriology out of the sole elements of “faith” and “works” of any sort always being ruled out as damaging or compromising the purity of faith. (p. 239)

All that is to say that one must work hard to get into heaven, and that the primary focus is not simply about following Jesus, but that discipleship means acting like Jesus and helping God to restore the world. It is within this context that we come to the passage for today.

Some Pharisees come up to Jesus. They are consistently throughout Luke recognized and described as opponents of the prophets. So, here they come, and one must wonder if they have Jesus’ best interest at heart. One might even go so far as to think that perhaps what they are saying is to stop this preaching, stop this teaching, get out of here and there won’t be trouble. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem and I do not have the sense they want him to continue on his journey. This is certainly the way most scholars read this warning, not as a warning at all but rather a threat veiled in kindness.

They tell Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. This is very different than the message being told to the reader by the narrator in 9.9 and 23.8. Herod simply wants to see him and it isn’t even Herod in the end that puts him to death. Herod sends him back to Pilate. Again, this seems to amplify the Pharisees desire to have Jesus stop teaching about discipleship and the reign of God.

Jesus says to the messengers go back and tell that crafty person, that sly king, that fox that I continue on to my goal which is resurrection (the image here of the third day). Chris Haslam points out that we may not wish to take this literally. He writes, “Jesus did not mean “third” literally; rather, he means a short and limited time. The NRSV translates the Greek literally, but [BlkLk](javascript:reference('BlkLk')) translates it as day by day, and one day soon. He says that there is an Aramaic idiom behind the Greek which does not refer to two actual days but to an indefinite short period followed by a still indefinite, but certain, event. This idiom is also at work in Hosea [6:2](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Hosea+6%3A2): “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him”.

Sometimes we can miss the point if we get stuck here. I believe the subject of Jesus’ words is the determination to go on to Jerusalem and that there he intends to die. So it is that Jesus continues on to Jerusalem and the pharisees depart.

It is then that Jesus teaches about the prophets and how they have suffered under the stoning nature of God’s rulers and people. Jesus’ message is clear; God wants to gather his person like a hen gathers her brood. God wishes to offer care and protection.

Jesus says your “house” is not being left. Some scholars believe this has to do with the sacking and destruction of the Temple. It is more likely that Jesus is referring to God’s people being left, as it were, like sheep without a shepherd, chicks without a mother hen. (LTJ, Luke, 219) Haslam also points out the following, “Verse 35: “your house”: The Old Testament background seems to be Jeremiah [22:1-9](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Jeremiah+22%3A1-9) where house means the king’s household of leaders. [[NJBC](javascript:reference('NJBC'))] I like both ideas very much. And we might be wise to remember Jesus in his own family’s synagogue and how he was received.

There are in these thoughts the continuing theme of each Gospel proclamation that Jesus and God are calling people out of their comfortable religion into a discipleship of faith along the way and always proclaiming the reign of God and its bounty.

We conclude this passage with “Blessed is the one who is coming in the name of the Lord.” This looks forward to Jesus’ own triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It also is a prophecy regarding Jesus’ return. The parallels are found in Matthew 21:9, Psalm 117:26. It is important I think to note that the psalm is referring to “the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Christians have always understood this to mean Jesus.

So we end with the understanding, I think, that one of the chief reasons that Jesus is crucified is because of his teachings about the reign of God and discipleship. Jesus also understands clearly that his death in Jerusalem is only part of reaching the third day and resurrection which is a primary goal of his ministry. I believe truly that Jesus understood his death as essential to the working out of salvation history and that he was following a long line of prophetic witnesses. He could not be stopped in his work and his drive to enter Jerusalem, which meant for him certain death on the one hand, but also the salvific event needed to gather God’s people under his wing. Indeed, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

**The Lambeth Bible Study Method**

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. It is known by both names: "Lambeth" and "African." This method is derived from the practice of Lectio Divina. The entire process should take about 30 minutes.

Question #5: "Briefly identify where this passage touches their life today," can change based upon the lesson. Find lesson oriented questions at this website: <http://www.dcdiocese.org/word-working-second-question>

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads passage. This person then invites a member of the group to begin the process.

2. Each person briefly identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention then invites another person to share.

3. Each shares the word or phrase until all have shared or passed using the same invitation method.

4. The passage is read a second time, preferably from a different translation. The reader then invites a person in the group to begin the process.

5. Each person briefly identifies where this passage touches their life today, and then invites someone who has not shared yet.

6. The passage is read a third time, also from another translation, and the reader invites a person to start the process.

7. Each person responds to the questions, "What does God want me to do, to be or to change?"

8. The group stands up in a circle and holds hands. One person initiates the prayer “I thank God today for …” and “I ask God today for…” The prayer goes around the circle by squeezing the hand to your right.

9. When the circle is fulfilled, the person who initiated the prayer starts the Lord’s Prayer, “Our father…”

Third Sunday in Lent

## Luke 13:1-9

13At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

6Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ 8He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Oremus text online: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Luke+13:1-9&vnum=yes&version=nrsv>

Textweek general resources: <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/lentc3.htm>

Textweek resources for the Luke’s Gospel this week: <http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/lk13a.htm>

Chris Haslam’s online commentary: <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/clnt3l.shtml>

**A Prayer:**  
God of Abraham, god of Isaac, god of Jacob, you revealed your name to Moses in the burning bush and your mercy to every generation in the teaching of Jesus. Tend us patiently as the tree you have planted, and do not let us perish. Cultivate us with compassion, and nurture us with forbearance, until, by your grace, we bear at last the abundant fruit of conversion. We ask this through the One into whom we have been baptized, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

*From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

A Few Thoughts

**Luke 13:1-9**

This passage comes to us after a series of natural disasters and in the midst of war. Death is a perennial companion with life but in recent months we discover the pain of death that comes at the hands of natural disasters and we wonder as did the ancients do these deaths mean anything about the faithfulness of those who lost their lives. This often comes after considering the feeling of being blessed by being granted life in the midst of such tragedy. Chris Haslam reminds us in his commentary for this reading that both Jews and the Hellenists of Jesus time believe that pain and premature death were signs of God’s “adverse judgment.” We see this not only in Luke’s Gospel but Jesus addresses this idea in John’s Gospel [9:2-3](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=John+9%3A2-3), Jesus rejects the idea that a man was born blind because of his or his parents’ sinful ways.

This then is the context in which we pick up our first verse of today’s passage where in a few who had gathered around Jesus talk about how Pilate mingled the blood of Galileans with the blood of the sacrifices they were making in the Temple. While we do not have a historical account of such events, the story does match in theme and tone other accounts of Pilate’s cruelty to the Jews.

Jesus understanding perhaps their question responds by asking, “Do you think that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? This response is what I like to think of as the *Jesus twist*. Here we have a group who thinks that there is a hierarchy of sin and punishment dealt out accordingly, Jesus points out to them that they think this in all likelihood because they are safe and therefore more holy. He knows they are arguing that the violence of one’s death relates to the darkness of one’s sins – an idea that is misused and popular throughout the Christendom of the middle ages and continues even today in some circles of believers. Jesus goes right to the point and is unwilling for his listeners to believe they are greater than or that they sin less or that their sins are lesser so he says: “Everyone must repent. Everyone is called to repent, repent early, repent often, repent now, and repent.” He tells them they are going to die too and suddenly and unprepared.

Jesus tells us of the story of the tower in Siloam, a city tower connected with the wall. Perhaps Jesus is speaking about one of the towers near the pool mentioned in John 9:7. Josephus mentions such a wall near the pool (LTJ, Luke, 211). And, Jesus drives his point home asking, were these people more indebt to God than others?

Next, Jesus moves into teaching mode and offers a parable about the fig tree planted in a vineyard. Notice that while Mark in 11:12ff and Matthew in 21:18ff both offer a story about Jesus and a fig tree, here we are told about how Jesus uses the fig tree image as part of a parable for the explanation of his words regarding the Galileans and those washing in the pool of Siloam. (LTJ, Luke, 211)

Jesus is drawing on very powerful images from Micah 4:4 and Joel 2:22 where it is used as a sign of God’s blessing.

So we have a man who is coming regularly to his fig tree. He was a blessed man, but he comes out one day to find that there was no fruit on it. So, he says “cut it down now.” The vinedresser, the garden helper, says “please don’t. Let’s see if it will bear next year. It needs for the soil to be aerated and it needs fertilizer. Then we can see, then we can cut it down.”

So, we see hear that Jesus is teaching those who will listen that they must repent. They must repent because they do not know what may happen and death may come at any moment. They must all repent. No one has more or less sin than someone else. Repentance is the daily work of the follower of Jesus. It is important and key as a daily exercise not because it prepares you for death but because it aerates the soil and provides fertilizer like the fig tree. A daily diet of repentance provides room in one’s life for the following of Jesus and eventually bears fruit in the work with Jesus bringing forth the reign of God.

How is repentance something that bears fruit? Repentance is the act of bring the ego into alignment with the soul and the Holy Spirit of God. Repentance is the taking of a fearless inventory that helps one to understand what the individual’s role is in brokenness and dysfunction. Repentance helps us understand the individual acts we take or do not take that have affects on the wider community. How do my habits of consumption affect others? How do my wants and desires get bruised when I don’t get my way? How do I lash out and blame others when I am at fault? How do I seek to have others give me esteem so I feel good about myself instead of understanding that God esteems me and loves me?

When we as Christians seek to get things in a healthy frame of living we discover that we are bringing in the reign of God. When we change our habits we change the world in which we live.

Luke Timothy Johnson’s words resonate with me as I read and ponder the meaning of this passage. He writes in his commentary on this passage, “…Jesus respond[s] to these reports of death in the city in classic prophetic style: they are turned to warning examples for his listeners. The people who died were not more deserving of death than others. One cannot argue from sudden and violent death to the enormity of sin. Indeed, Jesus himself will suffer a death that appears to be as much a punishment for sin. But the prophet’s point is that death itself, with the judgment of God, are always so close. It can happen when engaged in ritual. It can happen standing under a wall. And when it happens so suddenly, there is no time to repent…The repentance called for by the prophet Jesus, of course, is not simply a turning from sin but an acceptance of the visitation of God in the proclamation of God’s kingdom.”

Luke Timothy Johnson continues regarding the fig tree parable: “…it is a parable that clearly has the function of interpreting this section of his narrative. The fig tree is not summarily cut down. It is allowed to have time; indeed, it has already had time to bear fruit. The comfort to Jesus’ listeners is that the Prophet is still on his way to the city; there is still time to respond.”

This is an important week to be preaching. This is an opportunity to tell about Jesus’ teaching on tragedy and death brought on by disaster. It is an opportunity to speak about the importance and ritual of repentance which is an ancient and essential practice of Christianity. And, it is also an opportunity to speak about how repentance bears fruit.

**The Lambeth Bible Study Method**

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. It is known by both names: "Lambeth" and "African." This method is derived from the practice of Lectio Divina. The entire process should take about 30 minutes.

Question #5: "Briefly identify where this passage touches their life today," can change based upon the lesson. Find lesson oriented questions at this website: <http://www.dcdiocese.org/word-working-second-question>

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads passage. This person then invites a member of the group to begin the process.

2. Each person briefly identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention then invites another person to share.

3. Each shares the word or phrase until all have shared or passed using the same invitation method.

4. The passage is read a second time, preferably from a different translation. The reader then invites a person in the group to begin the process.

5. Each person briefly identifies where this passage touches their life today, and then invites someone who has not shared yet.

6. The passage is read a third time, also from another translation, and the reader invites a person to start the process.

7. Each person responds to the questions, "What does God want me to do, to be or to change?"

8. The group stands up in a circle and holds hands. One person initiates the prayer “I thank God today for …” and “I ask God today for…” The prayer goes around the circle by squeezing the hand to your right.

9. When the circle is fulfilled, the person who initiated the prayer starts the Lord’s Prayer, “Our father…”

Fourth Sunday in Lent

## Luke 15:1-32

15Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” 3So he told them this parable: 4“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 7Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ 10Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

11Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. 13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ 20So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. 25“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Oremus text online: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Luke+15:1-32&vnum=yes&version=nrsv>

Textweek general resources: <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/lentc4.htm>

Textweek resources for the Luke’s Gospel this week: <http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/lk15.htm>

Chris Haslam’s commentary for this week: <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/clnt4l.shtml>

**A Prayer:**  
Forsaking your embrace, O good and gracious God, we have wandered far from you and squandered the inheritance of our baptism… Restore us now with the embrace of your compassion, and grant that we who have been found by your grace may gladly welcome to the table of your family all who long to find their way home. We ask this through Christ, our peace and reconciliation, the Lord who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, god for ever and ever.

*From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

A Few Thoughts

**Luke 15:1-3,11b-32**

We begin with the idea that the tax collectors and sinners are coming to listen, to hear, Jesus. If we look at the previous chapter we see this is in direct response to the words “let the one with ears to hear listen.” What follows is a complaint from those having a difficult time hearing, the Pharisees. They are complaining that Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners.

It is to these accusations that Jesus offers us a parable. I have a friend who believes that it is their charge that he ate with sinners which ultimately brought about Jesus’ death. There are many factors which contributed to Jesus’ death; Raymond Brown’s treatment of the texts in his book *The Death of the Messiah* seems an important resource on this topic. Nevertheless, I believe most will say that this action of hospitality was one of the most serious and perhaps inflammatory actions undertaken by the Son of God; made all the more scurrilous by the growing popularity of the his prophetic teaching and works of miraculous grace.

In this season of Lent one may very well be led by meditations to ask, “Who is this Messiah who stoops to choose me?” The answer is that it is exactly this Lord that we proclaim. And so we turn to the parable to better understand the meaning of this profound gesture.

I would note first that this is the first of three parables on the topic of those who cannot hear what God is doing in the reign of God. The next one is the parable of the shepherd with the one lost sheep and the third is the parable of the woman with the lost coin.

So we have the wayward sheep. The shepherd leaves all his sheep to find the one. He puts the lamb on his shoulders thereby insuring work for Tiffany stained glass manufactures for decades. Actually, most people may remember that first year bible class or the History Channel’s explanation of this very ancient connection to the shepherd Hermes. Regardless of the historical birth of the image it is a powerful one of our theology of redemption and works deep on our mind and hearts as we think of our own lost selves and the good shepherd seeking after us. What is miraculous is that any good shepherd would actually, pragmatically, leave the rest for the one. I think this taps deeply into the real time imagery Jesus is offering his listeners. Were the Pharisees and scribes, the people of Israel themselves, not of enough value to the shepherd? Why wouldn’t the shepherd be satisfied with the sacrifices and faithful people so very focused on the Temple worship of Jesus’ day? The parable though puts an explanation point on the words of Jesus, “I have come to gather up the lost sheep of Israel.” Jesus is in fact illustrating his mission and our own. We are to be like Jesus more concerned with those outside of our safe pasture. Who are those in need?

We can easily echo Jesus’ mission to the poor, the oppressed, and the captives. Here is an example of how God is concerned and we are to be concerned, so concerned that we reach out and find the lost sheep. How often do we come to worship to receive? What would it be like to turn our gaze outward and seek the lost? How might this change our ministry concerns?

Before Jesus moves to the next parable he teaches those who are listening, “In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven at one sinner’s repentance that at ninety-nine righteous people who do not need repentance.”

The structure of the second parable of the woman and the lost coin is the same as the first parable. The invitation to rejoice accentuates the celebration of the work of our woman and her found drachma. It isn’t really very much, but read what she had to do to find it: she had to light a lamp, and sweep the house. That is a lot of work for a coin that might have been sowed to your wedding garment!

Then we arrive at the story of the man who had two sons. We commonly call this the story of the prodigal son, but this means we are too easily focused on one and not the other. I have often wondered if the more interesting story isn’t the part hardly ever spoken about: what the faithful son does and says. After all, as a full member of the body of Christ, a faithful servant, I am much more like the insider in this story than the outsider. What would it be like to engage in preaching and teaching that focused the church’s attention on the “good son?” Most everyone likes to be the good guy, the one with the white hat in the old westerns, the savior, and the best man. When it comes to bible stories we like to be the bad guy, the outlaw, the outcast, the last man. When we, the corporate we, do this as the church I think we may miss the better half of Jesus’ point.

So, let’s lean into this parable. So we have two sons, one of them asks for a share of the property. He is of course asking for an early share in the inheritance. If interested you may wish to look at Leviticus 27:8-11. He receives it and goes off to a foreign land. He certainly squanders his share, living without control. However, there is no suggestion of sexual excess. He literally scattered his wealth.

Then there is a famine. Our bad son ends up tending the pigs. This is really bad. Luke Timothy Johnson writes:

“Not eating pork becomes a test of fidelity to Torah in the time of the Maccabees. To tend the pigs of a Gentile is about as alienated as a Jew could imagine being. In the Mishnah, raising pigs is forbidden to Jews. The attitude toward Samaritans and pigs alike is captured by the saying of Eliezar, ‘He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one that eats the flesh of swine.’ One rabbi, at least, considered the craft of shepherding to be equivalent to the ‘craft of robbers.’” (LTJ, *Luke*, 237)

Well, after being filled with enough corn husks, he comes to his senses and decides to return to his father and tell him how wrong he was. He has sinned against God and he will only ask for work, like one of the fieldworkers. Interesting though that even though he requests menial work he addresses the head of the house as father. All he wants is his daily bread. All he wants from the father who is connected to heaven is a small apportionment of bread.

When the father sees him, he runs, hugs, and kisses his son. Now we have extravagant gestures being offered. He doesn’t even have the opportunity to pray and ask to be treated as a daily worker. Let’s have the fatted calf and a robe for this celebratory return.

The son was lost but now found, dead but now alive. Here the son reflects the story of Jesus as a child found in the temple, he reflects Jesus after his resurrection. Today, like the past, those who have been lost resonate with this moment.

But while you and I may have indeed had moments of being lost, and will surely have plenty more moments of being lost in our future…we must recognize today we are listening as one who is found. So, it is our story which comes next. Some days we are like the tax collector and the sinner in the beginning of the story, most days we are like the Pharisees and the good son.

It is this good son who is so angry he cannot even go into the feast he is so angry. Notice here the similarity to the other son. He does not come in, but is out on the roadside. The father runs out to meet him as well. He comes out and he comforts him. He feels compassion and pleads with him to enter, this is the meaning of the Greek in this instance (LTJ, Luke, 238).

Here comes the comparison. The good son wastes not a minute in telling father of how he has been mistreated. He feels a sense of injustice and resents being treated like a slave. He has been bound to his father with no freedom. He has played by the rules. And, they never even killed a goat for him. Then he does something interesting, the good son says that the bad son has been about sexual immorality. It seems important that the son supplies something of his brother’s story not supplied by the narrator Jesus. The good son is quick to show how the bad son is completely unlike him and should not be here at all. Here is the parabolic twist for the Pharisee who is complaining that Jesus is eating with sinners.

Here again are the words of compassion equally given to both sons. The elder son is friend and companion who have shared everything in a community of possessions. Not unlike Luke’s Acts where the community of faithful followers of Jesus share everything in common with one another.

So we hear the final teaching of Jesus in the mouth of the father: we must celebrate the lost who are found and the dead who are alive.

I quote from Luke Timothy Johnson’s conclusion here:

“If the first part of the story is pure gospel – the lost are being found, the dead rising, and sinners are repenting because of the call of the prophet – then the last part of the story is a sad commentary on the Pharissaic refusal out of envy and resentment to accept this good news extended to the outcast. The allegorical level of meaning is irresistible: they, like the elder son, had stayed within covenant and had not wandered off; they had never broken any of the commandments. But (the story suggests) they regarded themselves not as sons so much as slaves. And they resented others being allowed into the people without cost. The son refusing to come into the house of singing and rejoicing is exactly like those who stand outside the heavenly banquet while many others enter in (13:28-30). And if this all were not obvious from the wording of the final scene, then Luke’s compositional frame makes it unmistakable: he told these stories to righteous ones who complained about the prophet accepting sinners. (15:1-2)” (LTJ, Luke, 242)

Are we ready for the banquet? Are we ready to rejoice with those who are found today? Are we facing inward looking at the party or outward like Jesus and the Father and welcoming people in? Are we more ready to make up stories about how others can’t possibly be part of us? Or, are we more ready to greet them, clothe them, and feed them?

This is a powerful message for the institutional church considering mission and ministry outside of its walls. This is a powerful message for the institutional church seeking to understand its work of welcoming the stranger.

**The Lambeth Bible Study Method**

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. It is known by both names: "Lambeth" and "African." This method is derived from the practice of Lectio Divina. The entire process should take about 30 minutes.

Question #5: "Briefly identify where this passage touches their life today," can change based upon the lesson. Find lesson oriented questions at this website: <http://www.dcdiocese.org/word-working-second-question>

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads passage. This person then invites a member of the group to begin the process.

2. Each person briefly identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention then invites another person to share.

3. Each shares the word or phrase until all have shared or passed using the same invitation method.

4. The passage is read a second time, preferably from a different translation. The reader then invites a person in the group to begin the process.

5. Each person briefly identifies where this passage touches their life today, and then invites someone who has not shared yet.

6. The passage is read a third time, also from another translation, and the reader invites a person to start the process.

7. Each person responds to the questions, "What does God want me to do, to be or to change?"

8. The group stands up in a circle and holds hands. One person initiates the prayer “I thank God today for …” and “I ask God today for…” The prayer goes around the circle by squeezing the hand to your right.

9. When the circle is fulfilled, the person who initiated the prayer starts the Lord’s Prayer, “Our father…”

Fifth Sunday in Lent

## John 12:1-11

12Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” 9When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Oremus online text: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=John+12:1-11&vnum=yes&version=nrsv>

Textweek general resources for this Sunday: <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/lentc5.htm>

Textweek resources for John’s Gospel this week: <http://www.textweek.com/mkjnacts/jn12a.htm>

Chris Haslam’s commentary: <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/clnt5l.shtml>

**A Prayer:**  
Infinite is your compassion, O God, and gracious the pardon that Jesus, the Teacher, offers to every sinner who stands before him. Gladden our hearts at the word that sends us on our way in peace; and grant that we, who have been forgiven so much, may embrace as brothers and sisters every sinner who joins us at this feast of forgiveness. We ask this through Christ, our peace and our reconciliation the Lord who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

*From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

A Few Thoughts

**John 12:1-8**

*Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.*

We are taking a break from the Lukan journey to the cross this week in Lent as we pause for special material out of the Johannine chronicle of Jesus’ last days. Here we have a meal; probably Saturday evening after the Sabbath has ended (as in John’s Gospel that is from Friday to Saturday). It could in fact be the traditional meal to end Sabbath – the *Habdalah*. Furthermore, we are told the meal is taking place in the town of Bethany identified with the raising of Lazarus.

*3Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

The perfume used for the anointment is *myron* which is a generic form made from nard rather than from myrrh. Nard is mixed with oil from the storax shrub to create an ointment. All this is to say in the accounts by both Mark and John we should be careful of going too far with the idea of the gifts of the magi being gifts of this type of oil.

*4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him)*

Judas is identified in scripture as the son of Simon. A little family tree from the New Testament scholar J. N. Sanders places Jesus in the house of Simon the leper. Simon the leper is father to his eldest son Judas Iscarot, Lazarus whom Jesus raised, and then Mary and Martha. Sanders describes Judas as a “masculine Martha gone wrong!” (As quoted in Raymond Browne, Anchor Bible, v 29, p 448)

*4But Judas said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)*

If we remember that one denarri was a day’s wage. We then can do a little biblical math to understand that 300 silver pieces or denarri is indeed a great sum. This means that we have a lot of money being spent on the anointing. As Browne puts it, “this was a pound of expensive perfume indeed.” (448) It is fascinating to think about the amount of bread this could really have purchased. Interesting comparisons on the amount can be found here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denarius>. Today in U. S. Dollars a worker earning minimum wage would earn about $58 and when we multiply that as equal to 1 Denarri we have: $17,400.

*7Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.*

There is some debate about this piece of scripture as Mary has no role in the embalming of Jesus.

*8You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” 9When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.*

This is of course a quote from scripture, a paraphrase of Deuteronomy [15:11](http://bible.crosswalk.com/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?version=nrs&word=Deuteronomy+15%3A11): “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land”

So what do we make of the passage? Certainly John is leaning on a synoptic tradition that many scholars believe he had some access to, specifically Mark’s Gospel. While there is much debate about whether John and the synoptics are describing the same scene, this seems somewhat to miss John’s unique message in the scene along the way to Jerusalem with Jesus’ face set as a flint towards his prophetic death and resurrection.

Furthermore we can get caught up in the issues that arise from overly criticizing the texts and trying to figure out why Mary isn’t at the burial of Jesus for the anointing, and if she was to save some, why doesn’t she? These questions lead us in a different direction.

It is my belief that we have here THE anointing for his burial. That the tender moment described, and completely missed by Judas and so many of us on our first reading, is that this is in fact Jesus’ anointing and preparation for death. This is happening at this moment at Simon’s house where his children, raised from the dead, the doers, the prayers, and the rebels all gather together for a meal. All nature of follower of Jesus is here and they are all witnessing a most powerful and incredibly intimate moment. This is as Raymond Browne writes, “the culminating expression of loving faith.”

I am always moved by this story when we reach this moment in our Lenten journey. In part because I find my senses have been tuned to a great devotion of our Lord, and so I am truly touched and begin to prepare myself for Holy Week and the veneration of the glorious cross; not out of a sense of rehearsing the past but out of a truly contrite heart’s desire to give thanks for the grace and love Jesus expresses for us.

The moment of anointing stands in stark contrast to the backdrop of a Gospel very rarely focused on Jesus. In John’s Gospel we are constantly being reminded that all of this is for us and for the Glory of God. His goal is the restoration of creation. His work is to reorient our eyes upon God and to direct our prayers to his father who is in heaven. So here in this moment is John and the synoptics give us a glimpse into what our glorious and venerable worship of Jesus might indeed be like were we to observe it with the faith of Mary.

Let us not forget Judas though; it is as he points out an extravagant moment when tremendous amounts of wealth are being literally poured upon a man’s feet. But let us take a few steps back theologically and look at the whole testimony of scripture. We must remember Jesus’ connection of himself with the poor from the Gospel of Matthew, 25.31ff:

34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

We are then tempted to mix the two passages and be reminded that Jesus is with us always in the poor. And that we have an opportunity to anoint the poor with service in such an extravagant manner, not unlike Mary in the anointing of Jesus. How would our towns and cities be changed if we through our great devotion to Jesus Christ, anointed the poor with fine oil?

**The Lambeth Bible Study Method**

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. It is known by both names: "Lambeth" and "African." This method is derived from the practice of Lectio Divina. The entire process should take about 30 minutes.

Question #5: "Briefly identify where this passage touches their life today," can change based upon the lesson. Find lesson oriented questions at this website: <http://www.dcdiocese.org/word-working-second-question>

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads passage. This person then invites a member of the group to begin the process.

2. Each person briefly identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention then invites another person to share.

3. Each shares the word or phrase until all have shared or passed using the same invitation method.

4. The passage is read a second time, preferably from a different translation. The reader then invites a person in the group to begin the process.

5. Each person briefly identifies where this passage touches their life today, and then invites someone who has not shared yet.

6. The passage is read a third time, also from another translation, and the reader invites a person to start the process.

7. Each person responds to the questions, "What does God want me to do, to be or to change?"

8. The group stands up in a circle and holds hands. One person initiates the prayer “I thank God today for …” and “I ask God today for…” The prayer goes around the circle by squeezing the hand to your right.

9. When the circle is fulfilled, the person who initiated the prayer starts the Lord’s Prayer, “Our father…”

Palm Sunday

## Luke 19:28-40

28After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” 39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Oremus online text: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Luke+19:28-40&vnum=yes&version=nrsv>

Textweek general resources: <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/palmsc.htm>

Textweek resources for Luke’s Gospel: <http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/lk19b.htm>

**A Prayer:**  
You Servant, Lord our God, speak the word that all the weary long to hear. Your Son humbles himself to carry the cross that your people long to embrace. As we enter this holy week, let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus. Empty us of ourselves, and draw us close to his cross, that, comforted by his word of forgiveness and gladdened by his promise of Paradise, into your hands we may commend our spirits. We ask this through your Son, the Christ, our Passover and Peace, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

*From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

**A Few Thoughts**

**This Sunday is Palm Sunday. We are tempted to preach on the passion reading. I have always struggled with this ancient tradition as in our culture I often find that it excuses people from coming to the services on Good Friday. Moreover, it clouds and complicates the wonderful readings we have in our Gospel for the day.**

**We are given for our lesson in *year C* the passage from Luke 19, beginning at the 28th verse. This passage is reaching towards the culmination of Jesus’ ministry and is often referred to as the prophet’s entry into Jerusalem. Here in this moment we see all of Jesus’ followers hoping for something new, more than likely a return to Davidic rule…meanwhile the prophetic mission of Jesus is unraveling before them and revealing quite a different mystery to behold.**

**We begin in the first verse with the narrator telling us that Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem. This very first verse is intimately connected with the parable that directly precedes our text today. Neither Luke 19:11-27 or our passage for this Sunday, Luke 19:28-40, can be read alone. Here is the parable Jesus tells before his entry:**

12So [Jesus] said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. 13He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, ‘Do business with these until I come back.’ 14But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to rule over us.’ 15When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading. 16The first came forward and said, ‘Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds.’ 17He said to him, ‘Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.’ 18Then the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your pound has made five pounds.’ 19He said to him, ‘And you, rule over five cities.’ 20Then the other came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, 21for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ 22He said to him, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? 23Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest.’ 24He said to the bystanders, ‘Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’ 25(And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten pounds!’) 26‘I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 27But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.’”

**As we read this passage we see that Jesus is teaching that indeed he is the one who has the authority, he will exercise it, and he will give it away. As we project this forward we can easily recognize that the great prophet’s entry into Jerusalem will be messianic and kingly. We can imagine that he will soon and very soon give authority to his followers. He will even grant entrance into the kingdom to a thief. This exercise of authority and power will continue to be handed down through the apostles. So we look and see as he enters Jerusalem he is himself entering the distant country, where he will receive from God and claim as his own the rightful place as ruler in the reign of God. He is prepared for his death and to give away the authority to heal and reconcile the world to his followers. As we gather with Jesus on the hilltop, on the Mount of Olives, are we ready to receive the authority given to us? Are we ready to follow Jesus into Jerusalem? Are we ready to faithfully walk with him all the way to his cross and then to Easter morning?**

**The ancient pilgrim tales from Egeria recalls centuries of Christian practice on this palm day of rehearsing, re-imagining, and re-enacting Jesus’ entry. You can read more about this here:** <http://www.ccel.org/m/mcclure/etheria/etheria.htm>**.**

**We are reminded of Zechariah 9.9 with the colt which is sent for by Jesus and retrieved by his disciples. Again, a simple prophecy but one characteristic of Luke’s writings, reminding us of the power this particular king lords over all.**

**Jesus then begins to make his way into the city riding the colt, as people throw their garments down before him. Each of us may remember any number of movie portrayals of this image or re-enactments at church or summer camp, in these reenactments and films we are touched in our heart with the true sense of wonderment at participation with Christ in this moment of triumphal entry. “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven! Glory in highest heaven!.” We are here connected to the kingship parable. The crowd is rejoicing in the presence of the visitation of God in Jesus.**

**As we reenact this event Sunday I will be thinking not of doing something that was done long ago but rather my own celebration of Christ’s eternal presence with us. Christ is with us this week. Christ has been with us through Lent. Christ is present in the life of the church. Christ is known to us and before us. Our Lenten journey is almost fulfilled and thanks to the presence of the risen Christ we may walk with Jesus into the last days of his life, his trial, and his crucifixion.**

**The Pharisees call out and rebuke the crowd. They even tell Jesus that he is to silence the people. They are objecting to the cry that Jesus is king. As Luke Timothy Johnson points out, that this shows us clearly that they are the ones from the parable “who would not have him rule over them.”**

**Jesus retorts that even if they were silenced the stones would cry out. He is the king and nothing and no silence will make it different. We may remember God’s promise on the plain to Abraham that the children of God will be raised up from these stones. For more on this please refer to the following passages in Luke’s Gospel: 19.44; 20.17,18; 21:5-6; 24:2 and Acts 4:11. Furthermore, Luke Timothy Johnson continues the exegesis of this passage bring to life more fully the kingdom parable on pages 298 and following in his text *Luke*.**

**From this triumphal entry Jesus is making his way to the Temple where he will claim in, cleaning it out, and make it the seat of his prophetic Word. The prophet king has come to claim his people and to offer to them a place in the reign of God.**

**The Lambeth Bible Study Method**

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. It is known by both names: "Lambeth" and "African." This method is derived from the practice of Lectio Divina. The entire process should take about 30 minutes.

Question #5: "Briefly identify where this passage touches their life today," can change based upon the lesson. Find lesson oriented questions at this website: <http://www.dcdiocese.org/word-working-second-question>

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads passage. This person then invites a member of the group to begin the process.

2. Each person briefly identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention then invites another person to share.

3. Each shares the word or phrase until all have shared or passed using the same invitation method.

4. The passage is read a second time, preferably from a different translation. The reader then invites a person in the group to begin the process.

5. Each person briefly identifies where this passage touches their life today, and then invites someone who has not shared yet.

6. The passage is read a third time, also from another translation, and the reader invites a person to start the process.

7. Each person responds to the questions, "What does God want me to do, to be or to change?"

8. The group stands up in a circle and holds hands. One person initiates the prayer “I thank God today for …” and “I ask God today for…” The prayer goes around the circle by squeezing the hand to your right.

9. When the circle is fulfilled, the person who initiated the prayer starts the Lord’s Prayer, “Our father…”

1. Psalm 67:6, John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions, 6.12 (Paulist Press, 1963) I chose this quote after hearing Diana Butler Bass giver her plenary as I thought it was a nice tie-in. I did have the following quote from Giovanni Battista Franzoni the former abbot of San Paolo Fuori le Mura, “In the sixth century, Saint Benedict abandoned the worldly city and took refuge in the mountains so as to be able to find a favorable environment in which to seek God and live the Gospel. This led him to create a community of men who lived the same life as the “poor of the earth.” Today, perhaps, St. Benedict would abandon the countryside and the mountains, now covered with gracious and comfortable villas. Perhaps he would abandon all those places where the rich and powerful have chosen to live and would go live among the dependent and exploited masses of the city in search of the “right place” to reread the Gospel. From *The Earth is Gods*, 1978, Italian News Agency. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)