

**Luther Place Memorial Church
Lenten Devotionals**

Week One -- Amanda Weber

Thursday, February 18, 2010

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 - Exodus 5:10-23 - Acts 7:30-34

Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?' - Exodus 5:22

Ah, the start of Lent. It's another year, and another 40-day journey as we await the death and resurrection of Jesus. I've often wondered what the significance is of the number 40 in the bible. Like the number 7, 40 is one that recurs often: Jesus fasts for 40 days in the wilderness, the rain falls on Noah's ark for 40 days and 40 nights, Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the 10 commandments for 40 days. Today's reading from Exodus comes from a book of the bible that knows "40" quite well. Exodus tells the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt, only to wander around the desert for 40 years. We enter the Exodus story today before the 40-year journey has even begun. Pharaoh, in his hard-heartedness, takes away the Israelites resources and commands that they build bricks just the same. I love Moses' reaction to this – he gets angry with God and asks the age-old question, "Why me?"

The journey for Moses – and for us – has only just begun. I often feel that I, too, am asked to make something out of nothing, and like Moses and the Israelites, it is easy to get angry with God for the impossibilities which are presented to us. The joy of Lent, however, is the opportunity to realize that God will and does make a way...even if it's not *our* way. As we embark on this 40-day spiritual journey, I invite you to reflect on the following questions: Where are you coming from? Where are you now? Where are you going? And remember...the best news is this: you are not journeying alone! In addition to being surrounded by the Luther Place community, Psalm 91 reminds us that God has commanded angels to protect and guard us. Let the journey begin!

Prayer: O God, as we begin another Lenten spiritual journey, we are reminded of Moses leading your people through the desert for 40 years. We ask "why us?" and we listen for your answer. Build up in us the strength to lead and the faith to trust the ways you are working in our lives.

Help me, help me, help me, help me, help me.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!

Friday, February 19, 2010

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 - Exodus 6:1-13 - Acts 7:35-42

...but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.
- Exodus 6:9b

One of my favorite songs from camp is called "Holiness."

Holiness, holiness is what I long for

Holiness is what I need

Holiness, holiness is what you want from me...

As we sing this song, we repeat the verse with different words; holiness can be replaced with righteousness, faithfulness, loveliness, and... brokenness. I recently taught this song to a group of worship leaders from New Jerusalem Lutheran Church in Lovettsville, VA. One of the adult men interrupted the song and said, "Brokenness? Why would we ask for that??"

In some ways, it's a lot like my cleaning my room. It usually looks much worse before it starts to look better. Continuing the Exodus story in today's reading, I couldn't help but think of reasons we actually *long* to be broken. It seems as though, time and again, God reminds us of our need to be healed. When we let ourselves break, we create the possibility to be put back together anew. One of the challenging things about the process of healing is that it takes time. For the Israelites, it took 40 years of wandering. During Lent, it's a day-by-day process of admitting our brokenness and seeking renewal. A journey from darkness to light. Even the word "Lent" comes from the lengthening of daylight hours as we approach the joy of spring and new life. In what ways do you feel broken? In what ways do you perhaps *need* to be broken? And where is the light seeping in?

Prayer: Merciful God, we pray to be broken. Enter into our lives and mend us and reshape us to better serve you and those around us. We pray that we might create the time and space during this Lenten season for self-reflection. Help us to help one another, and remind us that even as we are broken, we are not alone.

Help me, help me, help me, help me, help me.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!

Saturday, February 20, 2010

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - John 12:27-36

'Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.' - John 12:35b

While today's passage from Ecclesiastes is perhaps one of the most beautiful and poetic in the entirety of the bible, I also find it to be one of the most frustrating. It essentially justifies the existence of everything, stressing more importantly the goal of finding balance between extremes. I mean, sure, there is a time for war, and a time for peace, but *when* is it time for war? And *when* is it time for peace?

This balance is one that I contemplated quite frequently about a year and a half ago, when I participated in Ramadan, fasting from sun up to sun down for the entire month of September. I had never fasted more than a day at a time, and was interested in exploring this tradition. While there were many aspects of Ramadan that I admired, I really struggled with the lack of energy I felt after long days with no food or water. A Muslim friend of mine shared with me that while she no longer fasts from food and water, she considers herself to be fasting all the time. She fasts from evil and darkness and hurt. This approach to fasting changed the way I look at Lent. Many people give something up or take something on as a spiritual practice for 40 days. I remember 8th grade when I gave up caffeine, quickly realizing I could consume caffeine-free sodas without breaking any rules! Or in 10th grade when I gave up AOL Instant Messenger, only to become much more addicted once Easter arrived. Participating in Ramadan helped me realize that fasting was not about punishing myself for a brief period of time, but rather a redistribution of energy. In what ways can our Lenten spiritual practices create balance in our lives? How can the journey of Lent be one that continues beyond Easter?

Prayer: Compassionate God, you know all, and we struggle to know you. Give us the mindfulness to find balance in our busy lives, and use this wilderness journey to challenge us in new ways. We pray for focus, understanding, and inspiration as we seek to learn more about ourselves, reflected in you.

Help me, help me, help me, help me, help me.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!