



your Lenten devotional

A Journey of Stones

Trinity United
Methodist church
Frederick, Maryland

Written by the
Trinity Church Family
FOR GOD'S GLORY

As the winter continues to howl and swirl about us, there is still that tiny seed of hope in us that knows spring will indeed make itself known again. While the groundhog may have seen the dreaded shadow, we as Christians **needn't dread**. We can carry a knowing that resurrection follows a season that is many times cold, harsh and seemingly endless. The transition from winter to spring, dark to light, dormant to blooming, even death to life emerges during a very important season in the life of the church... **Lent**.

Our lenten journey this year will begin on March 5, Ash Wednesday, and proceed through the budding of spring to Easter Sunday, April 20. Our Lenten theme picks up **where our advent experience took us... on a journey**. This time ours is ***"A Journey of Stones."***

We pray that you will be grown, stretched, and ultimately blessed by this devotional. May God be glorified by the efforts of every contributor and reader.

*Ash Wednesday Service
March 5 at 7pm*

*Palm Sunday - April 13
Maundy Thursday - April 17
Good Friday - April 18
Easter Sunday - April 20*



This week's theme:

WRITTEN IN STONE



The Golden Calf

32 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." 5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." 6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" 9 The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

Moses' Entreaty

11 Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" 14 So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

15 Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. 16 **The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.** 17 Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, **"There is a sound of war in the camp."** 18 But he said,

**"It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,
Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;
But the sound of singing I hear."**

Moses' Anger

19 It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and **the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and** he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. 20 He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it.

21 **Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?"** 22 Aaron said, **"Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil.** 23 **For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'** 24 **I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.'** So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Exodus 32:1-24



Point to Ponder:

What promises are most frequently broken in the world today?

A promise shows hope. A promise encourages trust. A promise brings expectations. But these hopes, trusts, and expectations can be lost in the blink of an eye, in one wrong word, in one action or inaction.

God made a promise to his people, but they turned their backs on Him. Just like the Israelites, we often break our promises to God too. They lacked the patience **to wait on Him, so do we. God's anger made Him want to destroy these people.** Moses, who had previously asked Aaron to come to Egypt and help him speak to the people, had no problem speaking before God. Moses reminded God of the **promise to multiply Moses' descendants as the stars are in heaven. He reminded** God of the promise for these descendants to inherit land.

God did not break His promise, despite His anger at the actions of the people. Through Christ, he has remained faithful even when we are unfaithful.

PRAYER:

Lord, open our eyes and our hearts. Help us to keep our promises, great and small. Let the love in our hearts keep our promises, and not break them, especially out of anger.

Point to Ponder:

*What is it about the things in our lives which
weaken our ability to be closer to God?*

In our daily lives, our thoughts are consumed with so many things which may or may not be of any significance. Unlike the Israelites and the golden calf of Exodus, **we do not worship them, but we don't give our Lord the proper amount of time or attention.**

I was active in the Methodist Church as a youngster, but in my early adult years, I **didn't pay much attention to God. Not sure why.**

Fortunately, we did have our kids baptized and sent them to Sunday School. The **key word is "sent."** I would drop them off and go back home.

In 1973, our daughter was active in the MYF in our church in Rockville. One Sunday, we went to church, mostly to hear her sing in a group who sang contemporary Christian Songs. I was struck by their spirit and particularly by one song, **"Pass It On."** **We got to know the youth leaders. This was the first time in my life that anyone personally shared with me about their love of Christ, not just in words, but by their actions. They knew how to "pass it on."** It was now becoming clear to me. Before I knew it, I was buying contemporary Christian albums and books, including C.S. Lewis's **"Mere Christianity."**

So now, how do we get over the problem posed at the beginning? My main thought is prayer, first for blessings received and then for concerns and things hoped for.

And finally, PASS IT ON!

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for having patience with us as we do the things which disappoint you. We take joy in knowing that there is nothing in all creation which can separate us from Your love, which is ours in Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Point to Ponder:

What do we mean when we refer to "broken people"?

What can Christ do for "the broken"?

Whether it is things or people, everything seems to be broken. We are always fixing something that is broken, a flat tire, a leaking faucet, or a broken phone. At times we too may feel so broken that it seems hopeless or that God could not possibly use us. The Bible is filled with stories of fractured lives and messy situations.

God gave Israel this command: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the **earth beneath or in the waters below**". **Yet; the Israelites broke God's command and built an idol. GOD spoke to Moses, "Go! Get down there! Your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have fallen to pieces.** The scripture says Moses threw down the tablets and smashed them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. The tablets were hand-made by God, pure and sacred, and then we messed up. So is it all over? Is there really no hope now? Are we beyond redemption? Then we see the power of prayer. In answer to the prayers of Moses, God spared the people, as he had before seemed determined on their destruction.

Perhaps the very important lessons we need to draw from this episode are, firstly, that people do sin, human beings do make mistakes. And, secondly, that even afterwards there is still hope, no matter what. We can pick up the pieces. Something broke? No, it's not the end of the world. There are most definitely second chances in life. It is possible to pick up the pieces in life. Whether it's our relationships with God, our marriage partners, our kids or our colleagues, we can make amends and repair the damage. If the Israelites could recover from the Golden Calf, our own challenges are small indeed. An idol is anything you put in front of God. For example, money and status are things we often place ahead of God. We may be broken, but God is stronger!

Thought for today: In what way can you "give God the pieces" of your broken life?

PRAYER:

God we are broken, you know our sins. We pray that you take the broken pieces of our lives and use them to your glory. Amen

This week's theme:... **REJECTED STONES**



Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;
For His loving kindness is everlasting.

² Oh let Israel say,

“His loving kindness is everlasting.”

³ Oh let the house of Aaron say,

“His loving kindness is everlasting.”

⁴ Oh let those who fear the LORD say,

“His loving kindness is everlasting.”

5 From my distress I called upon the Lord;
The Lord answered me and set me in a large place.

6 The Lord is for me; I will not fear;
What can man do to me?

7 The Lord is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.

8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to trust in princes.

10 All nations surrounded me;
In the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

11 They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me;
In the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

12 They surrounded me like bees;
They were extinguished as a fire of thorns;
In the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

13 You pushed me violently so that I was falling,
But the Lord helped me.

14 The Lord is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.

15 The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted;
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

17 I will not die, but live,
And tell of the works of the Lord.

18 The Lord has disciplined me severely,
But He has not given me over to death.

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the Lord.

20 This is the gate of the Lord;
The righteous will enter through it.

21 I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me,
And You have become my salvation.

Parable of the Vine-growers

1 And He began to speak to them in parables: **"A man** planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 2 At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. 3 They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. 6 He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all **to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'** 7 But those vine-growers said to one another, **'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!'** 8 They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not even read this Scripture:

**'The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the chief corner stone;
11 This came about from the Lord,
And it is marvelous in our eyes?'**

12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

Mark 12:1-12



Point to Ponder:

In what ways do people reject God today?

Reject: throw out, discard as worthless, useless or substandard; refuse to accept, use, consider; cast off or out

The above definitions are very harsh. Tuesday, March 12, 2013 I arrived at work and prepared to assist community members who had scheduled car seat checks that afternoon and a FC firefighter who is also a certified child passenger safety technician complete his required car seat checkpoint for re-certifying. My supervisor asked me to come to her office; also there was my director and a HR representative. I was told my position at FMH had been eliminated due to budget shortfalls and restructuring. I was expected to clear out my personal belongings and go home. I explained what I had scheduled that afternoon and stated I would complete that obligation first.

After 23 years of faithful service, I was rejected without any acknowledgment of that service. Behind my back, FMH had hired a contract CPR instructor to teach the classes that were scheduled. There had been no planning for what would happen to Safe Kids Frederick County. I have continued as the coalition coordinator on a volunteer basis working to find a new leadership sponsor. Hopefully this will happen soon.

I continue to work on my negative feelings about the way my position was eliminated. Job loss could be a reason for a person to reject God. The **Wednesday Women's Bible Study and Scriptures have helped me not take that path.**

1 Peter 2:4-5 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and **precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,** to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 28:16 therefore thus says the Lord God, See I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a **tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: "One who trusts will not panic."**

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, help me to continue to trust you, know that you value me and will help me to re-build my life. Please be with others who in these unsure economic times have lost their jobs. Help them to trust you and not panic.

Nancy Boyd

Point to Ponder:

Jesus implied that he was "rejected," a strong word. How does rejection feel and what are ways we can face it with faith?

A mother who doesn't want to keep her newborn child, a group of friends who avoid picking you to be on their sports team, an employer who says "your fired!!!", divorce, and a child who rejects their family after years of nurturing. These are just a few of the countless rejections in our modern day society. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the word rejection was first used in 1415 and its original meaning was "to throw" or "to throw back". It's no wonder that the word holds such deep negative connotations. We know that rejection was occurring well before the word was first used. In fact some may say that it's an inherent part of the human condition meaning it's been in existence since Adam and Eve disobeyed GOD in the Garden of Eden.

Regardless of the when and how, rejection is a difficult act for humans to accept. Rejection can make us feel unloved, worthless, fearful, angry, and sad. Physical ailments of rejection can include headaches, nausea, anxiety, and other health conditions such as depression.

When facing rejection many people turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with their feelings. Others may seek out friends, purchase self-help books, or watch television shows like Dr. Phil. **Regardless of how we deal with rejection it's important to remember that GOD is the great physician and healer.** Reading and studying the bible provides the insight we need to deal with rejection and all of life's issues. **Two bible verses that help me to have faith in myself and trust in the Lord include:** Phillipians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me and Psalm 9:10 And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

PRAYER:

Dear God. Thank you for being my rock and savior. You are the provider of all of my needs and I pray that I may be obedient to your word.

Point to Ponder:

*Jesus asked this question at the end of the parable,
"What will the vineyard owner do when he comes back?"
Assuming that Jesus is the vineyard owner, how would you answer?*

Psalm 118 opens with:

*Give thanks to the LORD, because he is good.
His faithful love continues forever.*

It was that last phrase, repeated throughout that grabbed me:

His faithful love continues forever.

You see I am reading the book of Judges, and that phrase sums it up. Like a broken record the people in the time of Judges reject the Lord, worship other gods, suffer **because of that, and beg the Lord to save them... And each time the Lord sends a new prophet or judge to save the people.**

His faithful love continues forever.

But as Psalm 118 and Mark 12 relate:

***The stone the builders didn't accept
has become the most important stone of all.
The LORD has done it.
It is wonderful in our eyes.***

The teaching of Jesus and his very life were rejected, but the Lord did not abandon us. His disciples carried on his message to this day.

His faithful love continues forever.

We no longer turn to the god of Baul, but we do to the gods of comfort and **wealth and pleasure. We do not always care for what the 'vineyard owner' has lent to us.**

What of this Earth do you put ahead of the Lord? Perhaps a food that does you no good? Well exchange that for:

some of the fruit of the vineyard. (Mark 12:2).

Eat some grapes instead each day during Lent. But as you do remember the vineyard owner, ponder this amazing fruit, that can be a food, a drink, a spread on your toast, or a part of our Holy Communion.

PRAYER:

*Dear Lord, Teach us to take care of what you have lent us.
And to remember that your faithful love continues forever.*

Point to Ponder:

Why is it so easy for us to reject Jesus, "our vineyard owner" still today?

I believe myself to be a Christian, a Disciple of Christ. I don't reject Jesus. Or do I?

I am a part of an accountability group that meets weekly. We start with prayer and then have set of questions that we review with one another. One of the questions asks us **where have you been a "disciple of Christ" this week**, meaning where have we been the hands and feet of Jesus? The next question is where did you **experience "discipleship denied"**, meaning, where did we **NOT act (in deed or thought)** in a Christ like manner.

It was the Discipleship denied that came to mind when I was re-reading the Mark scripture. Rejection is a very strong word. Denied does not seem as strong, but **yet... I would like to think that I do not reject Jesus per se, but I know there have been times that I have denied him.** I am denying him by not doing what I should do... **I should be in prayer daily, I should be actively seeking him daily; I should be studying God's word daily, I should be putting Christ first in everything I do.** My "busy-ness" seems to get in the way... my moods get in the way... my frustrations get in the way... my tendency to procrastinate gets in the way, the list really does go on.

God puts wonderful blessings in our daily lives (through people or circumstances) and if we do not prepare our "eyes to see", our "ears to hear", our "heart to perceive", or if we let our excuses get in the way, we miss out on His gifts to us.

How do you reject Christ? How do you deny him?

PRAYER:

*Lord, please forgive me for not putting you first in everything I think and do. Help me to see how I have rejected you. Where I have denied you, so I can learn, grow and **deepen my relationship with you and others. In Christ's Holy name I pray, AMEN.***

Point to Ponder:

Verse 9 of the Psalm says, "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." Where do we often place our confidences in today's world and how can we better place it in the Lord?

Psalms is my favorite book in the bible. When I was asked to ponder the words of the Psalmist, that was definitely in my comfort zone! I find the words and messages in the book of Psalms comforting, supporting, encouraging and eye-opening. It is the one book in the bible where I feel most connected with God, and best understand His messages to His people.

In the beginning of Psalm 118, we are reminded of God's enduring love, and to always be thankful for it. The Psalm goes on to say that our God will set us free, but will always be with us. There is the constant reminder that mankind will surround us, tempt us, and constantly try to gain our trust over that of our Lord. We are warned and reminded to take refuge in the Lord, and not to put our trust in man and princes. We must place our confidences in the Lord through prayer, worship, reading of the scriptures and fellowship with his people. We must let God be the stone, the foundation, that we build our faith and life on. We must focus on and keep true the final verses of Psalm 118 "You are my God, and I will give you thanks. You are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever."

PRAYER:

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your enduring love. May we always strive to love you as you love us, turn from sin towards you, and let you be the stone on which we build our faith. Amen.

Point to Ponder:

What are some ways we can turn to the Lord when we are feeling attacked as the Psalmist was? How does the Lord respond when we turn to Him?

As a child, I went to church faithfully every Sunday with my family. I had my first communion, was confirmed, attended CCD weekly, and went to confession **regularly**. **And all that time, I never really picked up a bible. It wasn't until I went to college and started attending a Presbyterian church and taking classes that I really started using a bible.** I bought my first adult bible and adorned it with tabs, but still never really read it regularly. I struggled with it then, and still do to this day. **I don't struggle with the content but rather the delivery of the content. The "flow" of the text, the "big" words, and the parables are just a few of the things that make me scratch my head almost every time I pick it up.** Sometimes I have to read passages over and over and still have no idea what they are talking about. I felt **foolish not understanding the "Word" or being able to quote scripture. I couldn't help to compare myself to my fellow Christians. I felt intimidated and even stupid at times.** Nothing that they had done made me feel that way. As the psalmist was attacked by outsiders, I attacked myself. I was my own worst enemy. Now, there are still times that I have no idea of what a particular passage is about. When I struggle, I have learned to turn to God and my fellow Christians for help. I know **that even though I don't read my bible regularly, that God still loves me. He loves me not for what I know, but because I am his glorious, nutty child. I find peace and comfort in that. I no longer beat myself up when I don't understand what I am reading.** I do my best and rely on God that he will help me understand.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for your comfort and undeserving love. I pray that as I struggle with even the littlest things, I will remember to turn to you first. Amen

This week's theme:

STICKS & STONES



The Adulterous Woman

8 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees *brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, 4 they *said to Him, **“Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.** 5 Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, **“He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”** 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, **“Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”** 11 She said, **“No one, Lord.”** And Jesus said, **“I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”**

Jesus Is the Light of the World

12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, **“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”**

John 8:1-12

Point to Ponder:

"There is more than one way to stone someone." In the places where we spend our time (with family or friends, at school, work, or church) how do people throw stones at one another?

One way we often cast stones is through our words. We've all heard stories of those who are suffering from the bullying of others. In some cases these bullied persons suffer such despair that they chose to end their life. Needless to say, this result is extreme, but words can destroy lives just as surely as a large stone.

How many times have you heard someone spreading rumors or gossip about someone? **As a child I remember playing a game called "Gossip", where someone made up something and whispered it to the person next to them, who in turn passed it on to the next person, and so on around a circle.** We would laugh at what the original statement was versus what the final person who was told the **"gossip" understood it to be.** Oftentimes gossip gets embellished each time someone passes it on, and it can be very hurtful to the person being gossiped about.

Have you ever been blamed for something that you did not do or say? Whether intentional or not, this is a form of casting stones.

Sometimes based on the limited information that we know about someone, we jump to conclusions about that individual. Often we are quick to think the worst of him/her. We should be careful not to draw conclusions without the full story. Even with the full story, we should be slow to judge or criticize others. True, it is part of human nature to be judgmental. Sometimes we feel better about ourselves when we can find flaws in others. But just like the men in the Bible story of the stoning, we have all sinned. There was only one person present that day who was without sin, and that person chose not to cast any stones.

PRAYER:

Loving God, help us to pause and consider the impact of our words and actions on others. May we love one another, just as you have loved us. Amen.

Point to Ponder:

Who do you think was the most surprised at the words that Jesus spoke to the woman... the woman, Pharisees or the disciples and why?

The Pharisees were putting pressure on Jesus to break the law so they could arrest him. Cleverly, rather than responding to their question, Jesus remained silent and just knelt down and wrote in the dirt. When Jesus did finally speak, his words were few and he stated that anyone who is without sin should cast the first stone. Then he stooped down again and again there was silence which must have been deafening to the Pharisees.

Put yourself in the shoes of the Pharisees. They must have been completely **stunned at Jesus' response given that they thought they had a sure way of "trapping" him.** For Jesus to turn the table and have them look at their own sins must have caught them completely off guard for their only response was to quietly leave.

And then think about the adulterous woman. She too must have been completely shocked. She was caught in adultery and in those times the punishment for such a crime was to be stoned. She must have thought her life was over. Miraculously **she's not only granted life, but she's also not condemned and is given a second chance.** Praise God that Jesus shows mercy, gives forgiveness, and restores sinners.

In your walk with Jesus, does He ever surprise you? Do His responses to your prayers ever catch you off guard? Are you ever astonished by His wisdom and love?

PRAYER:

*Lord, thank you for Christ who came to save us sinners rather than to condemn us. **Thank you for the opportunity for second chances in life. Thank you for being "the light of the world."***

Point to Ponder:

Do we need people in the world like the Pharisees, who would make sure that the rest of us live and act properly? Who functions in that capacity for you and how?

As these passages of John 8 unfold, Jesus is in the temple teaching, when the scribes and Pharisees “bring a woman before him who had been caught in adultery”. Then placing her in his midst, they say to Jesus “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her”? **Saying nothing, but rather writing with his finger on the ground, they continued asking him to respond. Then Jesus says “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her”. Reflecting upon this scripture we quickly see that neither a yes (stone her) or no (don't stone her) answer from Jesus would have been an acceptable answer to their question. In fact, wasn't this another attempt of these groups to trap Jesus?**

In preparing this devotion, I learned that the scribes were a literate group that fulfilled a variety of roles in ancient society; so called judges, teachers, or advisors, with loyalty foremost to the Pharisees. The Pharisees* themselves were representatives of political-religious interest groups, who professed religious and political laws which were either one and the same or inextricably intertwined.

Despite the fact that this event took place over 2000 years ago, our world is still filled with scribes and Pharisees, i.e. individuals or groups whose stated goal(s) are to make sure that **each of us “live and act properly” or rather their hidden agenda is to test us to see whether we favor their agenda.** Seeing that they are still with us today, the question remains, do we need people in the world like the Pharisees?

In reflecting upon this question, I recognized the existence of scribes and Pharisees in our modern world. Those individuals in varied walks of life who profess to be all knowledgeable, who question our stance, and solicit our support of their stance on religious, political or societal issues (e.g. pro-life versus abortion). I am sure we might all want these modern day Pharisees to go away, but if one thinks about the merits of the Pharisees, one might consider that this testing, strengthens our faith and convictions, **making us accountable as “disciples” of Christ. Who are the scribes and Pharisees in your life?**

**It is important to note that Pharisees claimed Mosaic authority for their interpretation of Jewish Laws.*

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, keep us strong in our faith and convictions as we face the scribes and Pharisees of the 21st century.

Point to Ponder:

What do you feel is the difference between conviction and condemnation?

How can we feel convicted to search the heart of God when our lives are filled with condemning people and thoughts? Think about those you know who say, **“What did you do that for? Why do you always do that?”** It takes a conscious effort to treat others from a loving place of conviction rather than condemnation, especially when we have been hurt deeply by them.

One of the main principles of condemnation is that it is meant to tear you down. It continually points out what a failure you are and how badly you've messed up. Condemnation shows you the problem, (your sin) but conviction shows you the answer to your problem (the blood of Christ!)

Jesus offers a loving solution in a potentially condemning situation when he says **to the Pharisees and the gathering crowds, “Let he who has done no wrong among you cast the first stone.”** As a result, the accused woman was spared her life, the Pharisees were humbled and received their answer and the people learned about what it truly meant to act with a convicted heart for God and not just a commitment to follow the law.

When you hear condemning voices raging in your life, counter them with the solid **conviction to follow Jesus' example.** You will see that those who condemn you will go away one at a time, until only Jesus is left with you standing there.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Help me to see that when you promised “not to condemn the world, but to save it” that I am a part of that world! Draw a protective line around me to keep me safe from those who condemn me. Let me act from a place of Godly conviction; knowing I am in your care. Amen

Point to Ponder:

What do you think Jesus might have written in the sand?

Folks who were troubled, confused, or agitated by the teachings of Jesus continually looked for ways to trap him. One day, while Jesus was teaching in the temple, some scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman caught in adultery. "Moses said to stone such; what do you say?" was their challenge. To them, it was a clear cut decision: stones were needed and the stones were ready. What do you say, Jesus?

But Jesus ignored them, instead writing in the sand. Writing what? Thief? **Embezzler? Adulterer? We don't know. But I like to think that, because Jesus** could read their innermost secrets, he characterized them individually and accurately. The stones were ready, but then forgotten, unused. Jesus redirected the attention of the troublemakers from "others" to "themselves". Focus on yourself, not the stones, Jesus said.

Thought: Do we carry around stones, ready just in case we 'need' them?

PRAYER:

*Pray with me: Lord Jesus, help us to recognize the stones we carry around.
Encourage us to throw away those stones. Forgive us when we do
throw stones. Amen*

Point to Ponder:

How has God extended mercy to you at a time when you became aware of sin in your life?

The first time I was aware of God's Great Mercy is when I answered an altar call on my life in my early 30's.

EPH 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.

Although God had been preparing my heart up to that point - it was in the actual stepping forth that I knew I was giving my heart to an all trustworthy, loving, forgiving, righteous, merciful God. I had complete confidence at that point in time that the sinful life I had led due to my selfish and short sightedness was forgiven and I was welcomed into the arms of my loving Father.

Many, many mercies have followed in the 35 years since that decision and I still hold fast to the heart and head knowledge that as I genuinely ask for forgiveness... His mercy will always be upon me.

1 John 9- If we confess our sin he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

PRAYER:

Dear Father, my creator, my redeemer, my provider should the occasion arise please give me the grace to forgive others this day as you have so unconditionally forgiven me.

This week's theme:

HEARTS OF STONE



Woes upon the Pharisees

37 Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee *asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. 38 When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. 39 But the **Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. 40 You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.**

42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. 44 Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

45 One of the lawyers *said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." 46 But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. 48 So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you **build their tombs. 49 For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, 50 so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' 52 **Woe to you lawyers!** For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."**

Point to Ponder:

*What "religious rules" in our society today are rather foolish or useless?
If you were "in charge" would you suspend these rules?*

To put it bluntly, this scripture speaks against our inclination to look clown on the outside to the world while being dirty on the inside - having a heart of stone towards God.

We in the church do this by making sure we get to church each week, going to Sunday School, and focusing on our self-development & faith journey. All of these actions are good and to be commended, but we can do these things because they are visible and we can get credit from people for doing them.

The world does this by focusing on education, sports activities, and outside physical appearance. Again, all of these actions are good, but we are motivated by looking good (clean) in front of others and trying to get ahead of someone else.

We need to go deeper - get into the inside to clean our hearts. We need to focus on the way God wants us to live. He wants us to do these good things mentioned above, but to please him not ourselves. He also wants us to go deeper and make sure we are helping others as the first priority - like getting outside of our tight social groups, inviting those that are different and strangers into our lives. He wants us to help others develop their faith journey (even our enemies) instead of focusing on our own only. We need to help the destitute and poor even when it is uncomfortable. Ironically, in doing these actions we may become dirty on the **outside (being God's hands & feet to the world), but clean on the inside.**

Lastly, He wants us to pray and communicate in private with Him. This way we can listen and better understand how and what we can do to go deeper.

This all sounds very daunting. However, with God by our side and with the power of the Holy Spirit working through us this can be done and we can strive to go deeper with Christ.

PRAYER:

Lord, help me to be motivated by pleasing and being obedient to You instead of doing things that get me noticed and make me feel good. In doing this, the light will shine on You instead of me. Let me also be motivated by knowing You loved me first and sacrificed Yourself on the cross even when I was your enemy.

Point to Ponder:

How do you think Jesus truly felt about the Pharisees... love, anger, frustration?

In Luke 11:37–52, Jesus is about to eat dinner with a Pharisee when the Pharisee expresses surprise that Jesus has not washed first. Jesus reacts by chastising the Pharisee and his friends for, among other things, their love of prestige, their lack of generosity for the poor, their laws that burden people, and for being a hindrance to others who try to learn.

Is Jesus reacting defensively—feeling uncouth or like a country bumpkin for not washing—when he accuses the Pharisee of not being clean on the inside, of being **“greedy and wicked”** in his soul? Or is Jesus simply using this situation as an opportunity to teach that all too often, we get caught up in rituals without incorporating our actual faith and spiritual practice in and outside of those rituals?

We practice a variety of rituals that are supposed to demonstrate that we are Christians, such as tithing, attending church on Sunday, saying grace before meals, donating to our favorite charity. But do we truly make our faith a part of our hearts, our consciences? Do we practice our Christian faith beyond Sunday, in our **compassion, our daily treatment of others, whether it's the driver in front of us who's too slow to suit us, the co-worker or spouse who irritates us, or the child who defies us?** Do we keep our minds and hearts open to practicing loving kindness and patience, helpfulness, and charity, whether with our co-workers, our spouses, our children, or strangers?

PRAYER:

*Lord, help me to look beyond following the letter of the law in practicing my faith;
help me to keep my heart open to others' needs and to Your will for me.*

Point to Ponder:

Jesus proved that people are more important than programs and that love is more important than rules. If this is true, what changes would need to be made in our families, churches, or world?

For a long time now I have purposed to put people over "programs." But I know that I have to *mean to*; **life doesn't innately lead you to this.** In the midst of competing priorities, deadlines, expectations, unspoken expectations, and the myriad demands we try to manage, it is very easy for actual people to get lost in our mix.

For instance: Checking things off one's list can seem much more appealing than making a phone call that you know could be too long for your time, too irritating for your emotions, too demanding for your energy, or too _____ (you fill in the blank). Checking in on so-and-so can really put a crimp in your schedule (you know how they can go on and on) and I might not get to _____. Writing that note of appreciation seems so silly when I can just shoot over an email or text (if I remember).

In this scripture, Jesus seems to be just about as frustrated, dare I say angry, as we see him in the Word. He is admonishing the Pharisees and lawyers for filth on the inside that is hidden to the outside. He offers piercing analysis of how they treat **others versus how what they expect of themselves...** **"You weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers."** Does this vaguely echo of all the programs **"the church"** should be providing, but kindly do not ask me to help. Or, more personally, do I hear him say here, **"Heather, put down your list and hold a hand, dry an eye, hug someone lonely, or all the programs you coordinate in the world mean nothing?"** BAM. If you were drawing from this passage for you, what might he be suggesting you do to line up the cleanliness of your inside and out?

PRAYER:

Gracious Lord, thank you for the candor of your Word. Thank you that is both loving and yet direct enough to move us toward your image. Please help me seek your Spirit in figuring out what to do for you next.

Point to Ponder:

In what area of life or in what situation, do you have to work very hard not to have a hard heart? How can we fight hardening hearts?

I like the scripture in "the Message" for Luke 11:37-52

Wow! Those were strong accusations that Jesus gave to the Pharisees in today's scripture. I am sure we all would have been offended and insulted if Jesus said **that we too were "hopeless and frauds."** I always wonder how people look at me and think of me. Am I alike on the inside as well as the outside? Do I act as I believe in my everyday life? Even further, I wonder what and how will people remember me when I die? Does my talk match my walk? And even deeper, does my heart match my walk and talk. What kind of legacy do I leave behind and what have I taught my sons?

Justice is like that as well. What actions do we show and do to promote justice? It is one thing to say what we should do and believe, but then another thing to truly put those words and thoughts into action. This is what Jesus was trying to tell the Pharisees. We have heard the saying - **"put up or shut up," but I believe we are not to shut up.** Many times it is difficult to stay in the same mind, body & spirit walk in my life. I want to keep everything steady, but a wall builds up around my heart and I have to **"cry out to God" to chip it away so I can keep my life giving blood pumping throughout my whole body.** If I continue to ask God to keep my heart **"soft" and caring, then the rest of my body will follow.** It just makes sense to feel good physically in order for you to promote and thus **"do" good.**

Thought to Ponder: Are you the same inside and out? Is your heart walled off from the rest of your body?

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, thank you for "calling me out" and reminding me to soften my heart. That is difficult to do, but as long as I ask you to help and chip away at the walls, I know that you will keep my heart, body and mind on the same path. I pray too that the path you have me walk will always be pleasing to you. Let my words match my actions. Amen

Point to Ponder:

*How might we be hindering others who are walking toward faith
as the lawyers hindered others?*

In this reading, Jesus admonishes the experts in the law -- "the lawyers" -- for burdening the people with issues and situations that they can not be expected to deal with, and for doing nothing to help them overcome their problems. This seems familiar to me in many ways. One example might be having to deal with a supervisor at a place of business, when the supervisor may not be overly skilled at assigning tasks and delegating responsibilities.

We can't always be fortunate enough to choose who we work for. Sometimes, our bosses are very good at leading a group of workers in a true team environment soliciting ideas on the best way to get a particular task accomplished, sharing information, etc. But others may be very autocratic, and just assign work without taking into consideration all of the factors that might have an effect on the outcome of the work and the morale of the workers.

Just because "a boss" may have an impressive title and may have learned a lot of things over the course of his or her career, doesn't make him or her an effective leader. A supervisor can't just issue orders and expect them to be carried out without providing some degree of nurture and support to those over whom he or she is responsible.

I think Jesus is an example of how to be a good "leader." He wouldn't simply tell his disciples that they were to just "go do something," but rather he would take the time to explain why something should be done in a certain way, and would find a way to illustrate its purpose and what the expected outcomes might be.

If you ever find yourself in a situation where you might be feeling overwhelmed at work, and you don't understand why you're being instructed to do a particular thing, there isn't any reason to have to bear these burdens. Perhaps your supervisor just doesn't realize that you're uncomfortable with what you've been told to do. I suggest you ask yourself, "If Jesus were my boss, how would I have expected Him to have given me this particular assignment?"

Then, talk to your supervisor openly, in a non-hostile way, and ask for additional guidance and direction, and maybe for examples of what steps he or she might take to get the particular job done.

PRAYER:

Lord, help me to be more like Jesus. Help me to always remember that my actions can be seen by others. And help me remember that I need not feel hindered by others who may not themselves yet know the true path to eternal life. These things I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Matt Stegle

Point to Ponder:

Hard hearts are so detrimental, even fatal to faith. Why should we soften our hardness of heart in this world that is so hard, and how can we begin to soften?

My faith has always been very internal. I do share my faith with others, but it is always a little difficult unless I know the person, or at least know a little about **where they are coming from in their faith. I've always felt that I am the least** qualified to share God, or at least my version of what God is to me. In this passage in Luke, Jesus is telling the Pharisees that while they were essentially correct in what they were doing and teaching, they were not trying to do it with an inward purity God wanted. They were focused on how things looked and even what other people thought. Instead of leading in the way of God, and recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, they were the first to reject him. They were book smart, but had hearts of stone.

I think it is very easy to lose track of what God wants of us. That he loves us even as we sin, and is there waiting for us to ask for forgiveness. He never gives up on us even if he should. Even if we are doing what God wants us to do, but we are not doing it from a place of love and purity of heart, we might as well be doing nothing. As we go through the motions and worry about what others think or how we look doing it, our hearts can become hardened. We start to think less about what God wants, and start worrying about what other people do and think, instead of what we are doing. There is nothing more detrimental or even fatal to faith as a hardened heart.

God does not expect us to be perfect, because no human is. There was only been one perfect human, and he was the Son of God. We are all children of God and we can all try to live the way God wants us to. But in the process we need to strive to be more like God, and not try to be God. We do not know everything; we can teach and tell our fellow Christians what we believe Christ would want us to **do, but we must always remember that like the Pharisees we don't know** everything. And like the Pharisees if we ever think we do know it all, we need to step back, and ask God for guidance. Only God can make your heart whole and soften it with his love and grace.

PRAYER:

Father God, we ask you to keep our hearts softened and full of your love and grace, and help us to remember that only through you can we truly be whole. Amen

This week's theme:

UPON THIS ROCK



Peter's Confession of Christ

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, **“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”** 14 And they said, **“Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”** 15 He ***said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”** 16 Simon Peter answered, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** 17 And Jesus said to him, **“Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.** 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth **shall have been loosed in heaven.”** 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

Matthew 16:13-20

Point to Ponder:

If Jesus were to give you a "nickname" to describe your faith, as he did Peter, what would it be and why? (i.e. The Blaze, The Core, Marshmallow Man, etc.)

In today's scripture we are asked who is the Son of Man? And we, of course, would say Jesus Christ. We have been brought up saying that Jesus is the true Messiah, but what is really behind that statement? When we were told that Jesus is the true Son of Man, we just accepted that answer, we truly base it on what someone else says. We should do more than just accept the answer, we should also acknowledge that God will SHOW us that Jesus is the Son of Man.

When Jesus ask Simon Peter who the Messiah is, Jesus replies that Simon Peter shouldn't have to know who he is based upon flesh and blood but through God. We should follow in the footsteps of Simon Peter and through God we will know who the true Son of Man is. When Simon became very faithful to Jesus, Jesus gave **him the nickname of "The Rock."** **In the same way, maybe God has given** nicknames for us individually. In this world there are many careers that make us all different from each other. You may be viewed as a teacher, a doctor, or a carpenter, whereas people may view me as an artist. **But in God's eyes, he will call me "my child" as he calls everyone. Although he give us these talents, God, like any parent, doesn't distinguish us by our talents or gifts but simply recognizes all of as his children. We may all have different talents, but we each can use them all to praise God.**

PRAYER:

*Prayer: Lord, please help me use my gifts, and talents to praise you. Help me become **more like Simon Peter, "The Rock," by becoming more faithful in you. Amen.***

Point to Ponder:

Has there ever been a time in your life when the "curtains were opened up" and you had a clear view of Jesus, as Peter did?

It has always been fascinating to me to hear the different ways God speaks to people. I have not met anyone who has heard a booming voice like that of James Earl Jones or Charlton Heston, but always something much more subtle than that. We often hear that still small voice when witnessing a beautiful sunset, or watching the thundering magnificence of the vast ocean. Sometimes He speaks through others voices or something we read. But frequently when I hear (or feel) **these silent urgings, it is urging me to do something that I really don't want to do.** In today's Bible reading it is made clear that Peter has heard God's voice. It doesn't mention how he heard it only that he was told that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Currently the subject of the ladies Bible Study here at Trinity is "Discerning the Voice of God." We have learned some of the best ways to hear God's voice is through prayer, meditation, scripture and worship. Furthermore, we should **anticipate and expect God's answer and his guidance.** Maybe I knew all this before but it has heightened my awareness and openness to His guidance in my life. I need to make myself more open to discerning His voice. As we read in Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God".

PRAYER:

Our dear heavenly Father, help us to be receptive to hearing God's voice.

May we be accepting and respond in obedience, just as Peter accepted that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Amen

Point to Ponder:
Peter - Flawed but Indomitable

One of the most inspirational persons in the Bible, Simon Peter has much to teach us. He provides a larger-than-life example for all of us—that is, humanity. Although his opportunities were unique—a chance to accompany Christ and the other disciples was a special one—like all of us, he has his strengths and his weaknesses. A faithful disciple, actually a leader among the disciples, he is earthy, sincere, loyal and willing. Like all of us, he has his flaws. When Christ walked on the water, Peter wanted to try it. He was succeeding until he suddenly doubted himself and then fell in.

Christ knew of this incident and knew of the failures to come—denying Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and then again later. However, probably because **Christ recognized Peter's faith, strength, and leadership skills, he still chose Peter** to be the founder of his church. He gave Peter enormous power and he proved to be a loyal, stalwart, even indomitable leader. He, helped by many others, was eminently successful in establishing the Christian Church we know today.

While none of us can imagine ourselves in Peter's shoes, in many ways, Peter exemplifies us all: our potential, our strengths and our weaknesses. Peter shows us what a humble man can do in the right circumstances. Therefore, if we can maintain the requisite faith, obedience and strength, we also could be amazing Christians. Only doubt and sin can defeat us.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we thank you so much for all the many ways you provide for us and the love you lavish on us. Your sending Christ to be our Savior gave believers the chance to live a secure life safe in your loving arms. We pray for those who are not believe

Point to Ponder:

Why do you think Jesus instructed the disciples to keep quiet about him being The Messiah?

In the verses previous to this one Jesus had asked the disciples who people were saying that he was and who they said he was. Simon Peter, God bless his heart, jumped right in there and said that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. **Peter didn't have a clue as to exactly what impact that comment was going to make on Christians in the future.** Jesus knew that Peter had been given some insight from God because he had made this statement.

Although Peter had received this message he was still somewhat in the dark. **Jesus' reason for not wanting the disciples to share this information wasn't because he was trying to hide. Jesus didn't want Peter's revelation repeated because he knew that the disciples did not fully understand the kind of Messiah he had come to be. He wasn't the warrior or military commander for which most were looking. Instead he was a suffering servant.** Jesus knew that the disciples needed to come to a full understanding of Jesus and their mission as disciples before they could proclaim it to others in a way that would not cause a rebellion. **There wasn't any real way that they could understand what Jesus' earthly mission was until it was complete.**

You have heard me say before that we have such an advantage over the early followers because we know the end of the story. We have the opportunity to read theological points of view drawn from history and context. In our walks today, unlike the disciples, we are totally free to share who Jesus was then and who he is now. Actually we are encouraged in the Word to witness and share our testimonies. We have permission to shout out the good news so that others may come into relationship and get to know Jesus the way we know Jesus.

PRAYER:

Lord God, please give my spirit insight as to the height and breadth and depth of who you are. Please give me the wisdom to know how to best share your Good News within my little piece of the world. Amen

Point to Ponder:

Jesus spoke of the future of the church in this passage. How does the church help and hinder your belief in Christ?

Jesus said to Peter: “you are a rock and on this rock foundation I will build my church.” The Christian church is built on the firm foundation of an understanding of Jesus as God’s own son and our faith and understanding of God’s everlasting love of his creation. With that firm foundation, I trust in God and Jesus to help me in times of doubt when faced with life challenges like employment issues and medical concerns. Sometimes our faith foundation can be weakened by life challenges and as Christians we forget where our strength comes... it comes from God.

In late August 2011, the mid-Atlantic region was hit midday by a moderate earthquake. I was at my school preparing for the new school season when the earthquake hit. I remember wondering out into the hallway and asking if the air conditioner had malfunctioned as the whole school seemed to shake and then move sideways for a time. Eventually staff was sent home to work for the day as cracks were found in the floor tiles on the 2nd floor. Once home, I walked around our house and found two minor cracks in the overlay of our foundation. Yes, our foundation was cracked.

Many times divisive actions within the Christian church such as congregational infighting, staff concerns, and lack of program finances can crack the foundation of **our commitment to God and Jesus. With prayer and devotion to God’s love and plan for us, our foundation can be made strong again.**

PRAYER:

*Our loving God, please continue to strengthen us in our commitment to you so our **Christian foundation remains strong. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Point to Ponder:

How has Jesus been your Rock?

This passage starts about Jesus asking his disciples who people think he is and who the disciples say he is. They are entering the district of Caesarea Philippi when this happens. The disciples respond that people think Jesus is John the Baptist, while others say Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Simon Peter responds to Jesus' question about who do they say he is. Peter answers "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Then Jesus says to him "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Jesus then says to Peter "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

He then warned the disciples that they should tell no one that he was the Christ.

This passage is about us Christians being the rock that Jesus and the Lord will build his church on. Jesus is our Rock and Savior and we in turn are Christ's rock which forms the foundation of the Christian faith (Church) on this earth. Christ gives us the strength to be this Rock and the power so that evil cannot overtake us. Peter was the beginning of the Christian Rock that the Christian faith is built upon.

As Christ's rock he is giving us the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Christ is the key and he has given himself to us so that we can open the gates to the kingdom and we have been given the power to bind others to this kingdom here on earth through Christ so that others are also bound in heaven. Christ also says that what we loose here will stay here and not be in heaven.

Without Christ we cannot be the bedrocks that form the foundation of the Christian Church. Christ is the cornerstone of this bedrock foundation that ultimately holds us all together.

In my own experience in life I have found that a life without the rock foundation of Christ puts me in sinking sand. However, every time I call on Christ for strength, wisdom and guidance, he puts me on firm footing and confidence in what I am doing and my sinking immediately stops. In fact I begin to rise out of the pit I was in and am standing on the solid rock of Christ that never sinks.

PRAYER:

Lord Christ, guide us and keep us from stepping off from you. We thank you that you are our Rock allowing us in turn to be the Rock for others to come to you.

In Christ's name we pray, AMEN .

Bill Ryan

This week's theme:

Crying Stones



29 When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say, 'The Lord has need of it.'" 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They said, "The Lord has need of it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. 37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, 38 shouting:

**"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord;
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"**

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

Luke 19:29-40

Point to Ponder:

If Jesus rode in to the parking lot of your work, or school, or even church, what kind of reception would he receive?

Verse 31 – “The Lord has need of it”

What would you do if someone approached you in a parking lot and wanted to take your car, saying “The Lord needs it”? I would probably say, “Are you crazy? Who are you to make such a demand? How do I know it’s for the Lord? Go away!” What if it was someone proclaiming to be Jesus?

How often do we hesitate when the Lord calls us, saying he needs us to do something? At the time Jesus asked for the colt, he was well known, so the owner would not have hesitated to give him the colt. When was the last time that we gladly turned something of value to us over to God? When was the last time we turned anything over to God? Not necessarily an item or a belonging, but something that was troubling us. The owners of the colt gave their possession to God for his use. We should be willing to give ourselves or our possessions over to God to be used for his glory. My hope is that when the time comes, when God calls me, I will step up, step out to be used by God for his glory.

Verse 39 – “The stones along the road would burst into cheers”

The people following Jesus were celebrating his arrival even though they were celebrating for the wrong reason. They thought he was going to lead them in restoring their nation to its former glory. They ignored the prophets and didn’t understand Jesus’ real mission. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to keep them quiet because they didn’t want anyone challenging their power and authority. Jesus was establishing God’s eternal kingdom, a reason for the greatest celebration of all. If the people kept quiet, the rocks and trees would be compelled to take up the cheer for the coming Kingdom.

How often have I kept quiet; don’t sing it too loud; don’t shout it too loud; don’t make a fuss. My hope is that I will be able to be the cheering stones and proclaim Jesus as our savior whenever the time comes.

Isaiah 55:12 – The mountains and hills will burst into song and the trees of the field will clap their hands!

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we present ourselves to you as living sacrifices. Put a new song in our hearts today we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Point to Ponder:

Knowing what you do about Jesus, what differences are there between him and any earthly king? If you had been one of the Pharisees, do you think you would have recognized him as "King"?

Jesus is riding into the holy city of Jerusalem on a donkey. The people were spreading their cloaks on the road. As Jesus rode, the crowd began praising him and celebrating his arrival. The disciples were praising God joyfully with loud voices. The Pharisees wanted to quiet the crowd, but Jesus knew the emotion and excitement was so powerful that even the stones on the street would cry out. The Pharisees wanted the disciples of Jesus to be quiet and not show their passion for Jesus. **The Pharisees were looking for a way to stop Jesus' growing popularity.**

Any earthly king of today would ride into a city with much security. It would be a **planned and coordinated appearance**. **In today's time, the cheering and celebrating** would be welcomed and encouraged. The celebration would make the news and spread on the internet for all to see. The people would be encouraged to show their support of their king. There would be no one trying to **silence the crowd**. **It would be a celebration showing the people's support of the monarchy.**

Many of the Pharisees did not see Jesus as "King". They saw His miracles, they heard His words, but instead of receiving Him with joy as He entered Jerusalem, they did all that they could to stop Him. The Pharisees were rule followers and many did not listen to Jesus. In Matthew 23 Jesus condemns the Pharisees for saying one thing and doing something else. Jesus said to obey their teaching, but **don't do as they do**. **The Pharisees thought they kept all of God's rules and were always right.**

PRAYER:

*Lord, help us to obey your instructions, even when we don't understand all of the details or your plans. Help us rejoice and cry out with loud praises to You. Let our witness not be silenced, but our faith be contagious. In your holy name we pray.
Amen*

Point to Ponder:

In our world today, who is telling the followers of Jesus to shut up?

“Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”
(Luke 19:39-40).

(Go deeper, read: Luke 19:1-48)

Amazing, some people may think, that people were asking Jesus to tame his followers for crying out that he was the King of the Jews, the one blessed by God to come into Jerusalem. Now we think of these unbelieving Pharisees as people who lacked faith (and maybe they **did lack faith**) but I think they were afraid of how Jesus' entrance into the city would be received.

Sometimes we are like these Pharisees, maybe well intended in our counsel to our friends because we do not want them to experience negative things but not realizing that God might have a bigger plan for us even if it is dangerous. Sometimes we need to think of the bigger picture, sometimes we have to believe that God is the one in control.

I remember one time I was going to witness to this man who had a bad reputation in our community, people saw him as a part of a drug gang in the neighborhood, and my friends did not want me to approach him because they were fearing I might be hurt by him or his friends. I felt that I had something important to share with him, a message that could **change his life, so I went and talked to him about Jesus' love for him. I guess God had been working in this man's life because he listen, was moved by the Holy Spirit. Although, he did not make a commitment to follow Christ at that time; by going beyond the warnings of my friends it allowed me to continue talking with him at other times and to talk to some of his friends; who later on did surrendered their lives to Jesus.**

Like Jesus sometimes we have to look at the bigger picture of what God wants even if it looks dangerous, or unsavory. Let me be employed by you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you. I freely and heartily yield all things to you pleasure and disposal. (Paraphrased from John Wesley's Covenant Service , 1780).

PRAYER:

Jesus, lead me to do what you want me to do for your glory. I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Point to Ponder:

How can we creatively proclaim, announce, herald the name of Jesus in our circles of influence?

For as long as I can remember, I thought I was born into the wrong generation. It has taken me many years to realize that the gifts the Lord gave me can only be used right now, in this time. Those gifts, a combination of the creative and technical, allow me to express and share scripture digitally, announcing the name and word of our Lord and Savior through beautiful images.

For some, the power of social media and the internet is lost. For others, the use of these tools in everyday life is natural. I fall into the latter. I see an incredible way to use the digital world to praise the Lord and announce his name to people I **wouldn't normally be able to sit and have a conversation with, but with whom I** can openly share everyday victories in His name.

Last year I was going through a very difficult time. I spent a lot of time praying. One particular day, I was sitting reading my email when I noticed a message from my cousin. The message only contained one thing, a scripture quote. It was **Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."** I had a great moment of peace but as usual moved on pretty quickly to the next thing on my list. That next thing was Facebook. The first thing I saw when I opened Facebook was one simple scripture, Jeremiah 29:11. Of course, the second time the Lord put that in front of me in less than 5 minutes, I had to stop and give thanks. I gave thanks because I knew that no matter what I was experiencing in that moment or that month or that year, He was always watching and guiding me, as long as I chose to hear. And even He knows that a digital message or two can definitely get through.

So, I choose to share with friends near and far the word, with the hope that it may be just what they need to hear in that very moment.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank for you giving me what I need when I need it. Just as the disciples declared your name on the road, I am honored to use the gifts and tools I have at my disposal to declare your name to people all over the world.

Point to Ponder:

How can we best persevere when we fail to give voice to our faith, to proclaim who Christ is to us, when we should have?

In this scripture, Jesus is riding a colt as he descends from the Mount of Olives approaching Jerusalem. His disciples began to praise Jesus there. They shout, **"Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."** Some of the Pharisees say to Jesus, **"Master, rebuke thy disciples."** Jesus answered, **"If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."**

We should often likewise proclaim the greatness of Christ. When we are close to God, he opens our eyes wide so that we can better witness the great feats he accomplishes in our lives. A description of these feats, then provide a natural way for us to proclaim the greatness of Christ.

Although the disciples acclaim Jesus in loud voices, I feel we do not need to always shout our praise. God recognizes our earnest expressions of faith in our prayers as well as in the songs we sing. PSALMS 100: 1-3 says: **"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God..."** Songs such as, **"All Hail the Power of Jesus Name,"** make it unnecessary for the surrounding stones to cry out.

Perhaps you can list other songs you sing which profess the greatness of Jesus.

PRAYER:

Lord, help us to not hesitate when opportunities arise to voice our love and faith in Christ. Amen

Point to Ponder:

*If Christ's followers do not cry out, scripture says the stones would.
What might the stones say?*

Hummmm... maybe something like, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord! Lord, God Almighty, you are creator of heaven and earth. We praise you who formed us and cry out to you who fulfills the Word today!"

What I love about idea of the stones crying out, is that we have never seen a stone **cry out as people do. We regularly witness joyful "crying out" in all sorts of situations, parades, theatrical productions, concerts, and sporting events. As humans, our excitement or elation can just bubble out into praise. But stones, now that is something else entirely.**

All through scripture, Jesus seems to specialize in the "something else entirely." He knew the colt would be waiting. Later in the week, he would tell his disciples that he must leave them. He foretold that one would betray him. Throughout his ministry he knew things, healed things, spoke things that were completely **unfamiliar to his skeptics and followers alike. Why shouldn't another piece of creation respond to his greatness if we are too self-righteous, prideful, or full of unbelief to cheer his arrival as our savior?**

PRAYER:

Lord, please help my spirit to receive you with praise... to welcome you in such a way the stones have no need to cry out. And if I grow silent if lauding you, may I hear your creation sing of your praises. Amen.

The Temptation of Jesus

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And **the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."** 4 But He answered and said, **"It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"**

5 Then the devil *took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 **and *said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,**

'He will command His angels concerning You';

and

'On their hands they will bear You up,

So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'"

7 Jesus said to him, **"On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"**

8 Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 **and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."** 10 Then Jesus *said to him, **"Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"** 11 Then the devil *left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Point to Ponder:

If Jesus already knows our sins, why is it so important to confess them to God?

There are times when a Trinity Preschool student has disobeyed a teacher or been very unkind to a classmate or broken a school rule. The student may spend time in a “thinking chair” to reflect on this mistake. After a few minutes a teacher will ask this child, “Why did you need to sit in a thinking chair?” and “What should you do the next time?” before allowing the child to rejoin the group. It is important for the child to understand and acknowledge what they have done wrong before he/she can learn to make better choices.

As Christians we must confess our sins to God even though He knows them. By confessing to God we show Him that we are aware of our shortcomings and we know that we are in need of forgiveness. This helps us understand what behaviors we need to change in our lives to live the way He expects us to live.

Jesus taught His disciples to include the words “and forgive us our debts” (which is the version I learned as a child) in the prayer He taught them. This tells us beyond any doubt that confessing our sins to God is a necessary and expected part of our relationship with God.

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive me for the poor choices I have made today, especially those that have hurt others, and guide me to make better choices that will please you tomorrow. Amen.

Point to Ponder:

In what ways do "disciples" today compete with one another as to which is the greatest? How do you think God feels about this?

While reading this passage a few times, another verse came to mind.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Matthew 18:1

At one time or another, I'm sure we have all competed in some way; sports, grades, work, or many others. There is nothing wrong with a good, healthy competition as long as we keep in mind that we would have nothing if not for God's grace.

Who hasn't thought about beating someone else to the finish? I like a little healthy competition as much as anyone else, but sometimes we may get carried away and forget about what God has given to us.

When we think about what Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 18, verses 2-5, that **"whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** I think that God would want us to remember to be humble and not have big heads over talents or gifts that have been given to us to use by God.

My mom quilted. She loved to quilt and even taught others how to quilt. She was not perfect and never boasted herself to be (although her homemade bread came pretty close)! Sometimes her quilt would have a square that wasn't quite straight. Mom said that was her "humility square." This was to remind herself that she didn't need to be perfect; she was a child of God.

What is your "humility square"?

PRAYER:

Dear God – Help us to remember to humble ourselves as children. We are forever grateful for you and your greatest sacrifice, Jesus. Amen

Point to Ponder:

In what ways are we tempted in these modern days and how can we follow Jesus' example in turning from it?

There is a story told of a little boy in a grocery store which illustrates the nature of temptation. The boy was standing near an open box of peanut butter cookies. **"Now then, young man" said the grocer as he approached the young man. "What are you up to?" "Nothing" replied the boy. "Nothing." "Well it looks to me like you were trying to take a cookie." "You are wrong, mister, I'm trying not to!" That's temptation!**

The temptation narrative of Matthew is a powerful story of how Christ struggled **to remain obedient to God and to God's will for his life. As we journey this time of holy week, the scripture of Matthew provides us with a framework on how we are to respond to temptation in our life.** We live in a time that we are constantly being pulled away from our relationship with God and our faith is tested. We experience temptation in our lives in the areas that we are most vulnerable. For some of us we are tempted by technology, possible addictions, lying, inappropriate relationships, materialism, media, and so on. We live in a society by which we are constantly receiving many messages by multiple mediums, which allows us to easily fall into these vulnerable areas in our life.

Jesus shows us ways for how to resist these moments of vulnerability in our life. Resistance starts with us having a life of prayer and being grounded in the Word of the Lord. If someone asks, "How is your prayer life?" how will you answer? If you struggle with one, I invite you to ask someone to be your prayer partner as a way to hold you accountable for this spiritual discipline. In addition, we need to grow in our understanding of the Word by engaging the Scriptures in our daily life. Scripture nourishes us, sustains us, as well as provides us with guidance on how to live a life of discipleship.

PRAYER:

Lord, Please inspire us to commit five minutes or more a day to read your Scriptures in order to build ourselves for these moments of temptation. May we be prayerful and scriptural disciples of your son, Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.

Point to Ponder:

How do we prepare for temptation? What can we do to be ready to stand against temptation and not give in?

Temptation is being persuaded or convinced to do something. A person can be tempted for drinking, smoking, drugs, or many other things. People can also be tempted to skip school or work with no real reason. But is all temptation bad? Can work be a temptation? If you really like your job and the people you work with, how can it be bad? Work is good, until the temptation is to spend so much time there that you neglect your family.

Jesus was tempted. He was tempted with many things: food, power, safety. Jesus knew that giving into this temptation was not his route in life. He knew if he gave in to this temptation he would not be able to perform all the duties God had planned for him.

The next time temptation comes your way, consider if you want to journey on that **path or on God's path.**

PRAYER:

*Lord, help us to remember that crossing paths with temptation is a part of life.
Help us to continue to walk with you in your ways.*

Point to Ponder:

Like the angels that ministered to Jesus after his time of temptation, how has God ministered to you after an intense time of trial?

As I have read the Gospels throughout my life, I seem to have walked the dusty roads somewhat like Jesus. Jesus had on his feet sandals and walked in sand through many towns and villages. Fortunately, I have walked on hard surfaces with good shoes, but that is where the similarity ends.

Jesus taught, healed, and loved everyone He saw. He even forgave the ones that chose to hang Him on the cross. I have not had to endure the hardships that Jesus had in His walk. I have had the opportunity to meet the same kind of people. the ones that need food, shelter, healing and love. On my walk I have at times become complacent to observe those around me. I feel overwhelmed with so much need and the work that needs to be done, but during these periods, a tap on **the shoulder, a touch on my heart or a soft whisper, says, "Joyce you have the energy to help that person." "Joyce, even though you feel you cannot afford to give financial assistance, you have the money to take care of this situation."** I am so thankful that I have had those intimate touches and soft whispers that say, **"Joyce you can do this."**

I am thankful thru my walk that I have had others to show me that I can walk the same dusty roads as Jesus, even though my life and the world have changed, and know that all people I meet and pass are children of our God.

PRAYER:

My Heavenly Father I give thanks that you sent Jesus to show us that we too can walk dusty roads and offer assistance when necessary. I thank you that you have touched me and shared with me the name of our protector and savior Jesus. Amen

Point to Ponder:

*How do can we live out the commandment
"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him"?*

Our fast-paced life is maelstrom of decisions and diversions. We rush through our daily life, grabbing a quick snack, gulping coffee and driving through the fast food window to eat on the go. We forego the true nourishment our body needs and replace it with a variety of foods that have ulterior affects.

As we frequently do not provide our body with the daily bread of life, we also neglect our spirits with the proper diet. Our mind and spirit is frequently routed away to the temptations of modern life. The white noise of society shield the voice of God.

As we move through life, we must alter our diet to meet the nourishment needed for a healthy body. We must also adjust our spiritual diet to fulfill the needs of our soul. The bread of life, in mind and spirit, will foster our growth and well being.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, We give thanks you for the nourishment we receive each day. We pray guide us through the daily challenges that lead us in spirit to worship you and love you as you show you love for us. AMEN

Point to Ponder:
He Is ALIVE

The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

Sometimes we want to be like Mary Magdalene, we want to see angels too. When we are experiencing difficult times, challenging moments, daunting obstacles, we want to see angels. Sometimes we feel, although we do not say it, that as God's children we should be entitled to special treatment; like we should be exempted from suffering and pain, after all didn't Jesus come to take all our tears away.

This reminded me of what I experienced when I went to live in New York. After arriving in New York City in 1984, I spent some time not having a steady place to live; in five months I had "crashed" in five places from Brooklyn to the Bronx. I depended on charity and the love of my family for sustenance, and shelter. There were many times were I only had one meal a day, sometimes no meal at all. There were many times when I did not know what was going to happen with me, many times when I asked God: Why did you bring me here? Why did you want me to live like this? Just like in Mary's story there seem to be no response. She went for the disciples and they were no help. Just like Mary, I could not see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Yet, just like Mary, I bent down to look, but instead of looking down I looked to God. Then and there, I was reminded of God's promises: "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Ps.37:25). I came to understand that in life we will experience challenges, frustrations, pain, and suffering, yet, I came to the realization, like Mary at the tomb, that there are angels around us all the time. I came to realize that God is present even when I cannot see him. I came to understand that the promise of the resurrection is not the absence of unpleasant things, but rather, the ever present presence of God in our lives, at every moment of our lives, and in each one of our lives.

The resurrection is the fulfillment of God's promise that he will be with us forever. Therefore, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior because in his resurrection we all find life forever more, and someday "he will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (Rev. 21:4).

*So, let us declared with our brothers and sisters around the world:
Alleluia, he is risen. He is risen indeed.
Aleluya! Cristo ha resucitado! Verdaderamente ha resucitado! (Spanish)
Al Maseeh Qam! Haqqan Qam! (Arabic)*