

Scripture and Story

*Lent Through
an LGBTQ Lens*



Dignity/Washington 2017

Preface

Never before has it been so apparent that “history is written by the winners.” In this post-truth era, the jarring differences between perspectives of the same event can be dizzying. And so, never before has it been so important to make sure that every voice is heard.

At Dignity/Washington, we undertook this book of reflections because we came to realize several distinct but connected truths:

1. as LGBTQ people of faith and allies, it is important to add our particular voices to the Lenten tradition;
2. as a community in the Roman Catholic tradition but living in exile from the hierarchical Church, part of our vocation is to show the unity between our faith and the faith of other Catholics, as well as the symbiosis between our faith and our sexuality;
3. and most of all, that the number of people suffering because they see their orientation and their spirituality as opposed to each other remains legion, and we have an opportunity and a responsibility to share our stories as a witness that this need not be the case.

Forty-seven different members of our community shared their thoughts on Scripture, their stories, and their faith in order to make this booklet a reality. It stands as witness against those who see people as somehow less due to their non-typical sexual or gender expression. Over and over again, these writers have spoken of how their own experience of oppression and fear, when mixed with grace and with their faith, has helped them broaden their love for all of God’s people and given them courage to speak up not only for the LGBTQ community, but for the dignity of all.

As we invite any who would walk with us to join our journey to the glory of Resurrection, we dedicate this work and these reflections to everyone who has struggled with their own sexuality and faith, as well as to anyone who is struggling with the sense that their lives somehow matter less than others. We offer our stories as they intermingle with the Scriptures to raise up in faith a new generation of journey-ers, having been freed from oppression and slavery by God’s Love, who are walking together in search of (and to co-create) the Promised Land for which we are all destined.

– Jeff V.

Co-chair Dignity/Washington Liturgy Committee

March 1, 2017; Ash Wednesday

Joel 2: 12-18; Psalm 51: 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5: 20 - 6:2; Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

My Father was confirmed as John so were my elder and younger brothers. I, on the other hand, wanted something distinct (OK - festive) Caspian, Boniface, or Bonaventure. But, in whatever discernment I was able to muster at the age of 12 or 13, I decided not to give myself a 'title' but a purpose, a reminder, and I chose the name Matthew. To walk away from a life geared towards personal gain; eschew personal possessions and follow Christ; this was the message I hoped I would carry within me. Trying not to be caught up in the 'things' of the world but instead ferret out the existence of a richer inner life.

But, as a child with attraction to those of my own sex, the shame, guilt and lack of belonging that conflicted with that desired inner life led to years of bargaining with God. A God from whom there were no secrets. I remember thinking about Matthew's words about public displays of piety and charity and considered how cool it was that God approved of stealth. At least if I couldn't be what others expected outwardly, I could somehow find a way to find God's approval in unseen ways. That however undeserving of God's love that I felt, holding a few simple secrets between us somehow made things better.

I know for me that world of possessions, power and influence in the ever-encroaching world of things rushes in at times with such force that the message of the Spirit gets deflected in trying to find its way out. My wish for everyone this Lenten season is that the Spirit finds those ways, stealthy or otherwise, to be nourished and made manifest. Yes, these ashes are an outward sign of our mortality and sinfulness; they level the playing field by once again infusing our humanity with humility; but they are ultimately also a part of what forms a bond between us that also proclaims our redemption. Peace.

– Jeffrey M.

March 2, 2017; Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; Psalm 1: 1-2, 3, 4, 6; Luke: 22-25

Then [Jesus] said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The phrase, “... he must deny himself...,” always gives me pause, and partly because the language is so close to the language often used to defend the right to an LGBT identity—that is, to not act, acknowledge, and/or be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender is to deny one’s very self. And indeed, this is an argument that some opponents of LGBTQ rights, or even an L, G, B, T, or Q identity, would attempt to posit. But it would seem unlikely that Jesus had this in mind when addressing a larger and presumably mostly heterosexual audience 2000 years ago.

So what is he saying to his general listeners, and to us? I suppose that the most obvious way to consider would be to give up material possessions—after all, the words “profit” and “forfeit” appear in a following verse. This is sometimes given an extreme interpretation to give up all worldly and material possessions and cares. But who is this addressed to? Is this for a smaller, and more select group of followers? Or is this being proposed for all—in an ideal world where everyone would behave this way? It’s hard for me to imagine the world as ideal with everyone living with no possessions, no labors, no cares—and difficult to conceive of living with no possessions, not knowing where our next bed or meal is, and all without a care. Taken to its logical but extreme conclusion, the unlikely world where we all live as mendicants, couldn’t sustain itself for very long.

I suppose a softer interpretation would be: don’t be selfish, be generous, don’t take more than your fair share—all admirable advice and stated in other places in the Bible, but these don’t seem to match the language of the verse—the more seemingly severe directive to deny oneself. I think we should interpret this “denying of oneself” in a more general sense of selflessness—not just in not being selfish in a material sense, but in approaching the world in a selfless manner—avoiding our inclination to enter every room, conversation, situation with an eye to ourselves. To avoid meeting every person and event with an evaluation of how these will affect ourselves. I think we are asked to be not only generous with our “stuff” but generous with our “selves”—generous with our time, our presence, in approaching others with an open and generous point of view, sharing our and others’ joy, meeting others’ sorrows in a meaningful ways, as well as with our resources—I suppose the short answer is that we are to be more generous with our love.

– Tom Y.

March 3, 2017; Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58: 1-9a; Psalms 51: 3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19; Matthew 9: 14-15

The clear focus of today's readings is obviously fasting – which along with prayer and giving alms, are three things the Church encourages us to explore during our Lenten journey. In the first reading I think we could agree the Prophet Isaiah is making a pretty elaborate distinction between process and purpose; words and prayer. Sometimes it's easy to think of fasting simply as an act, such as abstaining from meat on Fridays or, giving up one of our indulgences for the entire season of Lent. I'll be the first to admit that I have relied on the simple "process" or "words," because it was easier than fasting by way of "purpose" and "prayer."

In the Gospel, the disciples of John question Jesus and ask why his disciples don't fast the way they and the Pharisees do. In the comparison of wedding guests mourning at a festive wedding party, Jesus reminds us that we shouldn't always let rules and traditions, which humankind has made in our belief that it would appease God, get in the way of actually doing good – by speaking to the Samaritan, or living lovingly and justly, even if it agitates the elders and scribes.

As a queer man I believe it's important to challenge myself to fast more out of purpose and prayer, because I know firsthand how radical acts of love and kindness provided the healing I needed when the words "I love you" didn't quite cut it. Perhaps as LGBTQ Catholics, we especially know this to be true...don't TELL me you love and accept me, SHOW that you love and accept me! I strive to fast so that what I go without or surrender, in turn can be a instrument of peace, love and mercy. In a time when so many of our sisters and brothers are not afforded the same rights and inclusions, fasting is an opportune way to discern how our "giving up" may be a "being given" for somebody in need of the love of God. Surely it is not only fasting, but the fruits which are the result of fasting which is what is most appealing to God.

– *Eddie W.*

March 4, 2017; Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58: 9b - 14; Psalm 86: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Luke 5: 27-32

When I read Luke's gospel, I found it a fitting reminder to continue to be empathetic and compassionate toward everyone, especially those who hold different views and life experiences from me. In today's polarized political climate, I find it increasingly difficult to do so, but it is in moments of adversity that I am grateful for my faith and the values I've learned from the Catholic Church.

In the first reading, Isaiah says, "If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday." I especially like the latter half of the quote. These lines aren't saying to be generous and treat each other kindly so that we may never face darkness, but that in darkness, we will find light. God isn't telling us that by following this command, we won't have any struggles, but that we will grow and find meaning through, and because of, our struggles. I am reminded of my own path in coming to terms with my sexuality and with my Catholic identity. I struggled through this, having been raised a devout Catholic. I went through a phase of denying my own identity, followed by becoming angry with, and retreating from, Catholicism. However, I never felt at peace with the decision to abandon the church. I appreciated being exposed to the teachings of the Catholic church from a young age, especially the emphasis on charity, empathy, and sacrifice. While I was not actively attending mass, volunteering with Catholic organizations kept me connected to the church. By doing this, I felt that I was still trying to embody Jesus's teachings. I had the opportunity to work with homeless individuals as well as those with a past history of addiction and substance abuse.

These experiences had a huge impact on me, and affected my decision to pursue medicine and become a healer. As a medical student, I know that I want to continue to work and advocate for these communities. Eventually, work with these charities led me back to the Catholic church, and thankfully, I've found wonderful communities where I feel welcome. While my faith is continuously evolving, I am thankful for the challenges I've faced because, through them, I've been able to gain new skills and find meaning and fulfillment in my life.

– *Nina A.*

March 5, 2017; First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2: 7-9; 3:1-7; Romans 5: 12-19; Matthew 4: 1-11

Our two readings from Genesis and Matthew are clearly related. Both are thrilling temptation stories and both present bold Satanic forces aligned against the human protagonists. Yet while I have never personally seen such a devil, I admit I have been tempted many times – but by myself through my own thoughts and desires and by my own vanity and laziness. It is easy enough to say, along with Flip Wilson, “the devil made me do it.” But I believe, if we are honest, it is we ourselves who are the tempters, we who lust after things we shouldn’t, we who are our own greatest adversaries. When I read the ancient Mesopotamian story of Adam and Eve, I see that my own primordial parents are just like myself, longing to do what we know we shouldn’t. Adam and Eve long to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge because then they will be “like God.” It is this “apparent good” that they mistake as a “real and attainable good.” Terrible consequences flow from their actions, and they learn some hard lessons for themselves: they are naked, concupiscent, and mortal. The effects of their wrong-headed decision flow down forever into the lives of their descendants. This Old Testament narrative squares with the truth so clearly evident in Greek tragedy: the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Christ is brazenly tempted by Satan during his forty days in the desert (Lent). The three “apparent goods” Satan sets out in stunning imagery are very appealing. (They clearly would seduce some current politicians, who are driven by a laughable superiority, a pretentious self-idolatry and a craven lust for power.) The three temptations might have appealed for a moment or two to Christ’s own “better angels” but ultimately they ring hollow to him as diabolical stage tricks. Adam and Eve were tricked rather easily by just one temptation, but Christ sees through all three seductive proffers to act “like an all-powerful God.” He rejects each of them boldly by assertive citations from the Sacred Scriptures, climaxing in the coup-de-grace: “Get behind me, Satan.” As a good rabbi, Jesus knows he is God’s son and will not sin against Heaven. Like Socrates, he might argue that to know the good is to do the good. But such is not Christ’s method. However, he would concur with the old philosopher, especially during Lent: the unexamined life is not worth living. Is not this our summons, starting today?

St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans states unequivocally his belated yet highly original insight about the connection between Adam and Jesus, the very man whose teachings Paul had wanted to stamp out. After his “miraculous” conversion and personal healing in the weeks and years after, Paul comes to see Christ as the new Adam. One man, Adam, had lost paradise but another man, Christ, had regained it. Through Christ’s victory on earth, heaven is restored to humanity. The fall of Adam, as John Milton says, is the “felix culpa” – a happy fault, not to be regretted or bemoaned. Why? Because by Adam’s fault, Christ, the Savior, has come into the world and saved us. Thus, Paul sets up the first literary links between the Old Testament and the New. It is Saul/Paul who becomes the leading intellectual creator of an attempted whole-world synthesis under the resurrected Christ. *Fiat lux. Alleluia.*

– *Thomas H.*

March 6, 2017; Monday of the First Week of Lent

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 11-18; Psalms 19: 8-10, 15; Matthew 25: 31-46

As LGBTQ folks, I think a lot of us have a great awareness of God as Love. The Catholic tradition has always pushed us to remember that truth, and our everyday experiences validate that—to love is holy, and God’s Love for us is holy most of all.

Today’s readings feature love in its many facets. The psalm and the verse both speak of God and the ways that God loves us—the Lord as a rock, a judge, the bringer of justice. And in pursuit of that justice, both the reading and the gospel spell out in no uncertain terms the ways that we, as God’s children, must bring justice to others. The rules are concrete: Feed your neighbor. Clothe them. Treat them fairly in business. Don’t gossip about them. Don’t tell lies. All of these are concrete actions, things we can measure our successes by.

But then our God tells us to “love your neighbor as yourself”. Some days, that feels like the world’s biggest contradiction to me. After all, it seems fair to offer sustenance to others. Often, I am more than ready to give others the benefit of the doubt, or to realize that my words or actions harm them. But am I always willing to give the same considerations to myself?

The answer is...no, not always.

There have been days where the dishonest judgment that I render against myself in my own head is harsher than any I might render against others. Some days, the question of whether to offer myself food, shelter, or welcome is harder than it ought to be.

I don’t think I’m the only one who experiences this disconnect.

Our God reminds us to extend love to our neighbors and to ourselves. God reminds us that loving ourselves is not the same as egoism, but is in fact the daily care for the physical and spiritual needs of others. God also reminds us that that same love needs to be extended to ourselves.

And when we can’t, and when we fail, as we sometimes do, we have the reciprocal love of our neighbors and the incredible love of our God to remind us that we, too, are deserving of divine justice.

– *Rory H.*

March 7; 2017; Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

Isaiah 55: 10-11; Psalm 34: 4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19; Matthew 6: 7-15

These readings start with Isaiah revealing that God will provide for our physical and moral needs. And echoing the first reading, Matthew gives us the prayer we have come to know as the Our Father. Here are Christ's words assuring us of the new covenant with God's creation promising "our daily bread," asking that we be as gracious with those who "transgress against us" as we will be forgiven, and asking that we not be put in a position to sin or to be sinned against. It is a reminder of the complete love God has for all creation. God gives us bread, but the absence of fear comes with a demanding challenge: forgiving someone who really does not want you to exist asks for a real change within us and them. It is easy to try to separate ourselves from those we find offensive, but there is no peace in that and living in peace is exactly what Christ wants for us.

A wall of bricks or laws or insults says one side or the other does not want to deal with anyone who is different, not our tribe (poor, different skin color or language, just not us). Just as the Jews of Jesus' time wouldn't accept the Roman's tribal gods, so the Romans would only accept those who wouldn't step to the beat of their own drum. Now, as 2,000 years ago, humans want the same goals - enough to eat and to live without fear. There are two ways to live with a secure feeling - domination of the other which has never worked, or the very hard effort to mutually trust each other in friendship. If built, any wall will fall in time, but trust will result in mutually solving common problems and lead to a comfortable life for both.

Regarding both hunger and fear, Christ is asking us to have faith in our God's generosity and protection. One of the great examples of this growth of trust is the way LGBTQ individuals have come to be more accepted by general society in the last generation. We are born like any others, but as we mature, differences appear and we no longer follow the traditions of our birth tribes. Whatever physical love is we have it for those of the same sex which puts us at odds with the majority of the world, but those differences which are revealed when we come out become very minor and not a threat to others, and an occasion, not of sin, but of celebration. To quote Teresa of Avila, "Let nothing upset you...God alone is enough."

– Tom B.

March 8, 2017; Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

Jonah 3: 1-10; Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Luke 11: 29-32

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls his audience "an evil generation" and compares it to the people of Nineveh, to whom Jonah preached a message of repentance several centuries earlier. "An evil generation" is a pretty harsh turn of phrase, similar to what we in the LGBTQ community might have heard flung our way a time or two. And in the name of religion no less. We've been called evil, abominations, disordered, you name it. Because of the harsh language that mainstream religion has used against us, many LGBTQ Christians never find the strength to come out of the closet or find peace and acceptance with their true identity. They live in denial and shame. Those who do come out, often leave the Church and never look back. It's too unwelcoming.

For some of us, we've been able to do both: we've come out and accepted and learned to love the truth about ourselves. It took hard work and it requires support, but we've been able to find peace, love, acceptance, and God through a spiritual home in Dignity. We've gotten over the guilt and the stigma of the so-called sexual sin that many would rub in our faces.

But this passage can still be chilling. It reminds us that we are still humans and that we still have some kind of repenting to do, much as Jesus' followers and the people of Nineveh did. It may not be the sexual sins that others point to. It may involve being uncharitable to a partner, neglecting the less fortunate, being too judgmental towards others, being less than honest; looking the other way when others are experiencing injustice. If we examine our consciences thoroughly and honestly, it may not be the sexual sins from which others say we need to repent, but being the complex human beings that we are, there's surely something.

– *Mike O.*

March 9, 2017; Thursday of the First Week of Lent

Esther 12: 14-16, 23-25; Psalm 138: 1-2ab, 2cde-3, 7c-8; Matthew 7: 7-12

“Help me - When I called, you answered me ... For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened...Our God will complete what God has done for me...I will give thanks to you, O God....”

These excerpts from the readings do not seem to flow with a common Lenten theme of mindful personal sacrifice – giving up chocolate, coffee, the use of smartphones/electronic gadgets for personal matters during core hours, etc. Neither do they resonate with the other end of the Lenten behavioral spectrum: the practice of self-examination, looking within ourselves to see how we can treat ourselves and others better and strengthen our relationship with God. Yet, on the other hand, when we think about the major turning points in our adult life, this triad rings true: 1. turning to God for help 2. believing God will make us whole and 3. giving God thanks. Doesn't this call to mind our personal struggles as LGBTQ individuals when we wrestled with reconciling our faith and sexual identity?

We all remember what this lonely and at the time, seemingly insurmountable coming out process was like. As believers, we needed God's help big time. We needed to feel comfortable with who we were. We needed to believe that God would always love us. It wasn't clear to us at the time. Yet, we now know: God will always love us. Always.

We also sought direction to continue our spiritual growth, to complete what God had started. We are now convinced: We were indeed made 'this' way. Our individual faith and sexual identity struggle is a common thread that connects all of us in our Dignity faith community. Our presence here in this Dignity community is proof that we have met success in our coming out experience. We knocked. God answered. A door was opened. We eventually found our own pathway.

Of course, with all due respect, perhaps your experience was not as neat and simple as presented here. Surely, your experience had its unique elements and challenges. But it all eventually ended with us being here in this Dignity community: coming together to celebrate our faith, being at peace with who we are and giving God our constant thanks together. Sisters and brothers, as we proceed on our faith journey, may we always experience a Lent that reminds us of, and reaffirms, our special connection to God and each other. Always.

– Mark Q.

March 10, 2017; Friday of the First Week of Lent

Ezekiel 18: 21-28; Psalms 130: 1-2, 3-4 5-7a, 7bc-8; Matthew 5: 20-26

In Matthew's gospel Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites and only observed the externals of the law but not the ultimate law of love that God has planted in each of our hearts. God isn't interested in a performance. Jesus further commands us not only not to kill but to control the anger that is in our hearts that leads to such acts. It is in our hearts that the real evil lies. But the God who made us knows well our weaknesses and that despite our best intentions, we will sin. That is why God is so willing and anxious to forgive us. "Do I not rather rejoice when one turns from their evil that they may live?"

Yet sometimes I find it hard to ask for forgiveness. Often times I am my harshest critic and put myself down for not living up to my own expectations. Why is that? Is it because we as LGBTQ people have been labelled "disordered," been rejected by our own families and treated as second class citizens or worse? As an LGBTQ person it is sometimes hard not to have a negative self-image and feel unworthy to receive love and forgiveness.

I think Jesus offers us a clue to finding our way back to God in the Gospel reading when He says, "Go first and be reconciled with your brother (or sister), and then come and offer your gift." When we reconcile with one another we feel joy and relief. We feel that a great burden has been lifted from our hearts. It makes us more willing to approach God to find that same kind of peace. We may have asked for forgiveness in the past from those we have hurt and been rejected, but God does not operate in that way. As the psalmist wrote, "For with our God is kindness and with God is plenteous redemption; And God will redeem Israel from all their iniquities." In this Lenten season, let us ask God to help us overcome our pride and fear and to take God's Word to heart, asking for the forgiveness God is so willing to bestow upon us.

– Dave O.

March 11, 2017; Saturday of the First Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 26: 16-19; Psalm 119: 1-2, 4-5, 7-8; Matthew 5: 43-48

Moses and God were the original BFFs. They were on a first name basis, even though, technically, Moses was not allowed to say God's name - first OR last. But they could tell each other anything frankly, without a lot of formality. One thing that God made clear and wanted Moses to convey to the people he was leading was that they were special - "peculiarly" special in the English translation. I think a modern version of the ancient Israelites are LGBTQ Catholics. We are exiled, condemned, marginalized, and pushed around like the Jews were - and that's true whether we do the right thing or not. Yet, however much it seems a puzzle, God has a special place for us, and God wants us to see that we are part of a solemn covenant: "Stay with Me and I will protect you." In the last 30-some years we have seen the fruits of this bargain - emerging proudly from the closets, succeeding in court, watching age-old barriers fall, even seeing the rise of a pope who maybe has our backs once in a while.

Matthew's gospel reminds us that, despite the good news and the advances for our causes, every day is not a walk in a rose garden. The recent transition from a gay-friendly administration to something far from it makes that quite clear. We still have plenty of enemies. Bad stuff still happens. Rain falls on the just and the unjust, those who work to uphold equal protection under the law and those who want to re-litigate the Civil War or redefine who were the heroes or villains in the cold war. The evangelist is underlining a core message from Jesus, one that upends conventional wisdom whether two thousand years ago or two weeks ago: Love our enemies. It is easy to embrace our allies, but loving our enemies is an equally real obligation for me if I want to be a good follower of Christ. I am finding it extremely difficult to think kindly, let alone love, this new crowd in charge. One of my Lenten resolutions is to embrace the path Christ laid out for me in the very odd admonition to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." It will be way harder than giving up chocolate, but I can and will try.

- *Mark C.*

March 12, 2017; Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12: 1-4a; Psalm 33: 4-5, 18-19, 20, 22; 2 Timothy 1: 8b -10;

Matthew 17: 1-9

When asked to reflect on these readings from my LGBTQ perspective, I couldn't help but identify with the first reading, in spite of the fact that I usually find the Old Testament rigid, obtuse, and frankly, hard to relate to.

This is the beginning of the story of Abram/Abraham, and we all know how it ends so it is hard but necessary to read it as though we know nothing about what comes next. At this point in the story, God is asking/calling Abram to give up probably forever the embrace of his kinsfolk, the people he knows and know him, and leave the place he is familiar with, that he knows how to navigate and negotiate. Abram is asked to trust in God, risk life as he knows it, and go to a place unknown and unfamiliar, probably with no turning back. I immediately identified with this passage because it closely matched how I felt approaching "coming out" to my friends and family and everyone I new. It felt like I was risking life as I knew it, potentially being rejected by the people I loved or being treated like a stranger or strange thing by the people who knew me.

In the next passage God promises Abram not only his place in the world, but more importantly the place in the world his new life will create. If he accepts God's call, the new way of life created through him will be accepted by "all the communities of the earth" to be a blessing to the world. I can't say that I felt called at the time I came out, or that I, or the new life I was entering, was going to be a blessing, but I did feel like it was a place that God, at long last, was pointing me to - showing me. I feel that through accepting this new life, I have been blessed much more than I could have ever expected.

If God's call to Abram through this reading is a call to each of us, then it gives me hope that my journey is on a road that God has called me to, and that it may be a small part of an effort to make "all the communities of the earth ... find blessing in" the LGBTQ community.

– Larry R.

March 13, 2017; Monday of the Second Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 9: 4b-10; Psalm 79: 8, 9, 11, 13; Luke 6: 36-38

Justice and Mercy. Once again we are reminded that we have not lived by the law given through the prophets, and then Jesus tells us to be merciful and stop judging and condemning.

Lent is a time set aside in our religion, as it is in many spiritual traditions, to examine our lives, our beliefs, our actions, our relationships and to recognize our shortcomings and seek ways to do better. We acknowledge that we are not perfect, that we are sinners. It is good that we do this, but of course, not all the time. We don't need to develop a debilitating inferiority complex. And, I hope we also find a little time during the year to give thanks for what we are doing that is right and good.

A challenge arises when we have to discern who are the prophets, or teachers if you will, through whom God gives us the knowledge of right and wrong. We are warned to beware of "false prophets." We LGBTQ people have had a particular challenge in determining the true voice of God in dealing with our sexual and gender identity. The widely anointed teachers or prophets in our church and society have often spoken a law that does not ring true to us. I hope all of us have found gurus whose teaching has led us toward a healthy understanding of how we should be living our LGBTQ lives. My point is that just because we are convinced that the predominant teaching may not be right and that God speaks to us in some other law that is right for us, Lent is a good time to review our disagreement with one and our adherence to the other. Are we still on the right path?

And in all of this self-flagellation, we take comfort that our God is "compassion and forgiveness" and that our "God is merciful." We strive to better know what is expected of us, to do it better, however feebly, and because we are not perfect, we take comfort in a God, who if we but try, forgives our sins and shows us compassion.

– *Bob M.*

March 14, 2017; Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

Isaiah 1: 10, 16-20; Psalm 50: 8-9, 16bc-17, 21, 23; Matthew 23: 1-12

These passages from Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew are reminders for us as we struggle to find grounding and direction as LGBTQ Catholics and as American citizens in the midst of the divisiveness, turmoil and lack of moral leadership in our country today. The directives of these passages give us guidance in our worship together as well as provide ways in which we should live the message of Jesus in our daily lives with our family, co-workers, enemies and friends.

These readings challenge us as followers of Christ to look closely at our worship practices. Is our worship acceptable to God? What makes worship acceptable to God is not the motions we perform in our sanctuary (though they are helpful to our own spiritual growth and commitment to God's purpose), but how we take God's message to the world through our acts of justice for all people. When our first inclination is to isolate ourselves in our own cares and concerns and take care of "No. 1," we actually all lose. In Isaiah, Jehovah is telling the people of Judah that what they need is a new heart; a new attitude and actions that truly honor God; actions of justice for the immigrant, orphan, lonely, hopeless, fearful and lost. This repentance, or change in attitude, will bring forth goodness that will constitute real worship of God through our real sacrifices, prayers and celebrations. The existence of justice can be measured by whether the weakest and most vulnerable in our society are being attended to and provided for. In the Gospel, we hear that the faith of Jesus is about finding ways to serve others. When we help others find joy, they in turn help us find joy. Jesus sets the example for us: He was flogged, mocked, tortured and executed for God and for us. It wasn't some selfish ego-maniacal stunt to gain fame and fortune. He loved God and us with his life and his death, and that is exactly what he is asking of us. When our Christian faith is lived out in our world, God is praised and exalted. May God bless us on our journey and give us strength to live as Jesus did.

– *Christopher S.*

March 15, 2017; Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

Jeremiah 18: 18-20; Psalm 31: 5-6, 14, 15-16; Matthew 20: 17-28

The common theme of these three Scripture readings is the persecution of the main characters. Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet,” had warned the Israelites about the destruction of Jerusalem as a result of their idolatry of false gods. In turn, they wished to plot his death to silence his entreaties. The Psalm again references the crowd plotting to take the life of the subject and their appeal to God for rescue.

In the Gospel, Jesus matter-of-factly foretells his crucifixion and also asks the sons of Zebedee, who seek divine redemption, if they will “drink the chalice that I am going to drink,” the chalice being a symbol of Jesus’ sacrifice of his human existence to provide for the forgiveness of our sins.

As a transgender person, I feel a connection with the rejection, violence and discrimination directed at our community because we don’t conform to societal expectations of how we should present/conduct ourselves. Indeed the latest proclamations from the Vatican continue to deny that there is such a concept as gender identity beyond the physical characteristics with which we were born. In Matthew, God is asking if we will “drink the chalice,” which I interpret as enduring the attitudes of society and the rejection of the hierarchical Catholic Church by keeping our faith in God and hoping for eventual justice. In the Bible there are a number of passages where Jesus expressed awareness and acceptance of different kinds of genders and that the salvation of these individuals rested on their own faithfulness and not on their physical characteristics.

– *Linda R.*

March 16, 2017; Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

Jeremiah 17: 5-10; Psalm 1: 1-2, 3, 4, 6; Luke 16: 19-31

The Old Testament readings for today seem to make clear that if we trust or follow humans, cursed, dry hungry barrenness is the result. Conversely, if we follow God, we will be blessed and prosper. The gospel reading seems to throw in a monkey wrench. Lazarus, who apparently trusts in God, certainly doesn't seem to live a prosperous life; he is hungry, covered with sores, lying at the rich man's door and hoping for scraps of food.

I've often thought that, of all people, gay folk should be the most loving, open and accepting of difference. After all, we have all felt or lived from an outsider's perspective in some way. It's remarkable how many times I've noticed how judgmental and rigid our community (even people of faith) can be. Numerous examples abound. If one isn't familiar with gay icons, pop culture, terminology or dress code, one is judged as less than. If one stumbles in liturgy or prayer, people act offended. If another admits to an STD or a struggle with drugs or alcohol, people act aghast.

Today's readings direct us to trust in God, rather than in human beings. Just how did and does God come to us, and how do we trust in God? God came and comes to us through the Word - most remarkably the Word made flesh in the fully God yet fully human Jesus. God is experienced through hearing Jesus. We "hear" Jesus as we literally hear God's word and receive sacraments. Those experiences always involve other humans. God most remarkably comes to us in community, not in isolation. God comes to us, and to the world at large, through humans!

All of Scripture is a continual challenge to the people of God to be "God" to the world - that all may know God's love. Our challenge as people of God is to live our lives sacramentally: as open, forgiving, loving vessels of God's grace to our world; that, surprisingly, others may hear and experience God in and through us. Like Lazarus, we may not literally prosper, yet we can be rich in love which we've received from God through the People of God.

—Joel B.

March 17, 2017; Friday of the Second Week of Lent

Genesis 37: 3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Psalm 105: 16-17, 18-19, 20-21;

Matthew 21: 33-43, 45-46

In today's Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the theme of rejection is prominent. In Genesis, Joseph's brothers reject him because they believe that their father favors him more than themselves. In the Christian Scriptures, the tenant farmers reject the landowner's servants and his son. As a closeted, gay man, I struggled to accept my sexuality within a Church and society that I believe was unaccepting of my homosexuality and therefore I felt rejected.

I take solace in the Matthew's gospel when Jesus states, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Within my own life, I rejected a significant part of myself when I would not openly embrace myself as a gay man. Since coming out in mid life, I have worked hard to love and embrace myself. Additionally, there have been significant people who served as cornerstones to me as I learned to accept and embrace being a gay man. I have come to realize that the part of me that I kept hidden for so long is indeed a gift to myself and to the world. My experience as a gay man has shaped me into a person who cares for others, supports the downtrodden, and works to be accepting of all people. In coming to accept and love myself more completely, I am grateful for this gift that God has bestowed upon my friends, all LGBTQ persons and me.

As LGBTQ people, our perspective and presence within our society and Church is an integral part of life. We experience life differently, we offer a unique experience and therefore we must challenge ourselves to share those experiences in both public and private forums. How does being gay today shape you as an individual? How can you or do you serve as a cornerstone to other gays and lesbians, the Church and our broader society?

– *Patrick C.*

March 18, 2017; Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

Micah 7: 14-15, 18-20; Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

Like most children, I liked a good story. Most of those were told in school. Looking back I remember that they were usually told by a dedicated group of young nuns who taught in my elementary school. I am sure, to their dismay, that the concept of the parables was lost on this first grader. However, I do remember The Good Shepherd, The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son. They were about animals, muggings and getting a lot of money to spend as you wanted. Fortunately, my perception and understanding of these allegories evolved under the patient Sisters. I came to see them as representations of parental love and selfless caring. They became even cooler when I saw my first production of Godspell at Ford's Theater in seventh grade. Over the years their messages were never lost.

When I first saw that my scripture selection was The Prodigal Son I was annoyed. It has been one of my favorite stories since grade school. "How can I tie this into my experience as a gay man?" I thought. This further annoyed me. Finally at a loss. I put it aside. Then I thought some more, as a parent. I clearly understood the father wanting the best for his children. I understood the joy of the repentant son returning. I understood the anger of the "good" son. At some point after much more thought I realized that I was very much the "good" son. Angry that my younger brother caused a lot of heartache and disruption to the house for my mother when he came out in college in the early 1980's. He did what he wanted to do. Damn everyone else. Angry that she eventually came to understand and welcome him. But I did what I was supposed to do and followed the "correct" path. It was not a bad path and it did give me many blessings. But it was not my true self. And that led to anger and resentment, "It was ok for him to come out, but I was just the good son."

Unfortunately, the resolution never came in her lifetime. But as I look back now, having had the experience of being a parent and seeing the relationship she had with my brother, I can't help but think she would accept me also. In my mind, the other Prodigal Son could be welcomed home. The love of a parent would always understand and be happy for their child.

– *Kevin T.*

March 19, 2017; Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17: 3-7; Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8; John 4: 5-42

Today's readings hold both promise and command for believers, and none more so than queer Christians. The writers all demand a radical faith, one which requires us to hear and accept the hardest kind of truths: the good ones.

Paul reassures us that the feelings of love with which we have been entrusted are beautiful, and sacred. Jesus shows us that he cares more about love than social convention when he befriends the Samaritan woman. The writer of Exodus reminds us that God's love for us is unflinching, even when we rail against it in doubt. And the psalmist reminds us that we are duty-bound to really listen to these decrees of God's boundless love: "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts."

I have read and sung those words so many times, and as a child they always confused me: Who would hear God's voice and respond with anything but delight? But as I grew older and became aware that I was not straight, the Gospel seemed less and less a cause for delight, and the prospect of hearing God's (likely disappointed) voice, more alarming. According to the Church, there were rules and doctrine and dogma, and through my very existence as a queer Catholic, I was contravening them. I tried to fracture those two halves of my identity, queer and Catholic, eschewing them each in turn. To my disappointment, this turned out to be quite impossible.

Amidst the vulnerable quiet of that failure, I went to confession, a rare event for me. I so wish I knew the priest's name, to be able to thank him for giving me the kindest penance I have ever heard of. "Go," he ordered, "and find a way to be happy." In that command I finally heard the exhortation of today's psalm: "Instead of hearing the bad things you expect to hear from God, listen to the beautiful, wonderful, affirming things I'm actually saying. Really listen to me, with an open heart, because the good news really is for you, too."

– *Anne K.*

March 20, 2017; Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

*2 Samuel 7: 4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Psalm 89: 2-3, 4-5, 27, 29;
Romans 4: 13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1: 16, 18-21, 24a*

God speaks to us in many ways and the scriptures for the Solemnity of St. Joseph are wonderful stories of how God enters people's lives. Like all relationships, someone has to make the first move when a loved one needs clarity and support. How God intervenes is very fascinating and sometimes unexpected because only God knows our heart and mind.

God speaks directly to Nathan and says, "Go, tell my servant David." Nathan becomes the mediator of God's message. Why didn't God go to David? Was David unwilling to listen to God or was David more open to a mediator to proclaim God's message? Whatever the reason the ultimate goal was that David hear God's message of comfort and assurance: Everything is going to be alright, hang on, and I'm with you.

In many ways, this is the same message from the angel of God who appears in a dream to Joseph which begins with the powerful words, "Do not be afraid...". The social and cultural norms of Joseph's times, primarily fear and shame, played an important role in Joseph's decision to divorce Mary quietly. As a gay man, I can recall the social norms which told me how I should think, act and live. The pressure of these external values that prevented me, and probably many LGBTQ people, from living an authentic life. We are told in the last verse of the Gospel passage that, "when Joseph awoke, he did as our God had commanded him and took his wife into his home." What God commanded Joseph and all of us is let go of shame and fear with these simple words: "Do not be afraid." The message is to trust in God, trust in yourself, and be a messenger of love and life in the world.

– Denis P.

March 21, 2017; Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

Daniel 3: 25, 34-43; Psalm 25: 4-5ab, 6-7bc, 8-9; Matthew 18: 21-35

The message I get from the readings is God's expectation that when it comes to forgiveness, it's all about sincerity and – the hard part - paying it forward. As the Psalmist says, "Remember that your compassion O Lord and your kindness are from old" ... and not only from of old but for always. Ours is a God who cannot NOT love. Even in the face of great sin, our God embraces us warmly if we come with a humble and contrite heart, relying on God's promise, "Return to me with your whole heart for I am gracious and merciful."

I remember as a teen trying to understand what was going on inside me when it came to my sexuality. I came from a strict lower-middle class Irish/German/Italian Catholic family in Philadelphia. My Dad was a Philly cop (as was my Grandfather) and Mom was a sales clerk at Sears to make ends meet. Like most Catholic kids in Philly, I went to my parish's elementary school. Wonderful as it was in so many ways, there was no one to turn to for help in dealing with my emerging sexuality. The Church was no help – worse, it was a primary source of the confusion and emerging self-hatred, as I began to realize that, according to it, part of me was a sin – and a BIG one. It was very much like being stuck in the furnace with Azariah and his two brothers – destruction looming all around me. Like Azariah my prayer was "Do not let me be put to shame Oh God, but deal with me in your kindness and great mercy."

Yet, in spite of itself, that same Church also consistently reminded us that God is LOVE. And that all that God created was good and made in God's own image ... even me with my confusing and emerging sexuality. Then one day I said, "Enough is enough! If it's true that 'Those who trust in you cannot be put to shame' – then God I trust you – gay as I am and sinner as I am – I trust YOU" - and I have not looked back in shame since. I've accepted who I am and gratefully received God's embrace and forgiveness as a proud gay man.

But there is also today's pesky Gospel story. In it, the forgiven debtor when given the chance to pay it forward and forgive his debtors turns into an unforgiving jerk. Unfortunately, that's not how forgiveness works. Remember that part about "...as we forgive those who trespass against us?" What we are willing to receive we must also give forward to others ... 7 times 70 times. I have a few of those people in my life who I can't seem to reconcile with. And I fear that as we enter this era in our country where hate begins to trump (pun intended) love, that the need to forgive will grow exponentially. I can only hope and pray with the Psalmist "Your ways Oh God make known to me; teach me your paths."

– *Al R.*

March 22, 2017; Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9; Psalm 147: 12-13, 15-16, 19-20; Matthew 5: 17-19

I am a gay Catholic who still struggles to accept his God given sexuality and I have always found today's readings troubling. It is not the 10 commandments I find troubling as much as the 600+ strictures of the Mosaic law. The ancient Hebrew law expressed in the Pentateuch expressly prohibits homosexuality; it also prohibits tattoos, consuming shellfish and pork and condones slavery and prostitution. In today's reading, Moses does not refer to Yahweh as the only God but as "our God," i.e. the only god worshiped by the Hebrew people, not the universal single Deity of monotheism that we understand today. It is an expression of the Hebrew xenophobia and tribal customs of his time.

If one accepts evolution, as I do, it makes sense that human understanding of a single God, of morals and of ethics, continues to evolve. No sensible person today condones slavery and prostitution nor sees tattoos, shellfish and pork as inherently evil or sinful. The Mosaic prohibitions are, in many cases, expressions of Hebrew tribal identity rather than eternal moral strictures. Our modern, deeper understanding of science indicates that homosexuality is and has been a naturally occurring variation of animal and human sexuality throughout evolutionary history.

The evolution of our understanding of God's will took a great leap forward in the teaching of Jesus Christ who confirmed that the greatest of the ancient commandments is "Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10: 27). How can one love one's neighbor as oneself if one does not value his or her own divinely made human nature?

There is no record of Jesus having made any mention of homosexuality.

– Jim S.

March 23, 2017; Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

Jeremiah 7: 23-28; Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Luke 11: 14-23

Today's first reading from Jeremiah reminds me of the times God sends me messages and yet I opt either not to hear them or if I do hear them do not heed them. Jeremiah starts on a such a positive note: "I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper." What a wonderful promise.... And of course then comes the reality of being human. The rest of the reading points out how the people did not listen.

So while I fully admit to not always following what God has in mind and acknowledging the special messages that come my direction in so many different ways, every Lent I try to be more attentive to God's call – to not necessarily give up something for Lent but to practice random acts of kindness so that maybe God will work through me to deliver a message of hope to others – a message I hope they will hear and follow so that more people will walk in prosperous ways.

In Luke, Jesus comes across as angry after healing the mute and being accused of invoking Beelzebub. The one theme that jumps out at me is Jesus' reference to "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house." My first image is of President's Lincoln's reference during the American Civil War. But also from what I have observed in our LGBTQ community, often times we are our own worst enemies. Whether it's gay men excluding women, women feeling threatened by gay men, gays and lesbians not liking people who identify themselves as bisexual or many people not understanding our transgender community – it all leads to our entire community having to work that much harder to promote who we are. It makes it harder to work for equality, not just for us but for other communities with a history of exclusion from our societal norms.

I pray that more of our community follows Jesus' command to gather rather than scatter!

– *Daniel B.*

March 24, 2017; Friday of the Third Week of Lent

Hosea 14: 2-10; Psalms 81: 6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14, 17; Mark 12: 28-34

The symbolism in the first reading reminds me of being the light and of the benefits of finding a way out of our darkness. I feel I can relate to this in my coming out journey, wherein prior to coming out of the closet I was hidden in the dark for a long time. I finally accepted for myself that I was indeed a gay man. Coincidentally, it was at an HRC National dinner in 2009, where President Obama spoke so supportively of his belief and commitment to our rights as members of the LGBTQ community that I felt safe and proud to be not only an American Citizen, but a Gay American citizen!

What an amazing feeling! Being a foreign national emigrating to the US in 1978, at only four years of age, it was a challenge to stay interested during my US History classes. It wasn't until 1991, my senior year of high school, that I became a naturalized US Citizen. I was taught to feel proud of my US citizenship, but it wasn't until 18 years later on that night in 2009 that I truly felt like a proud American citizen. My president was speaking about my rights as a gay man, and that gave me great strength and pride in my citizenship and in myself!

Then fast forward another 5 years to 2014 when that same president declared gay marriage to be not only legal, but a right under the Constitution's Equal Protection clause. That weekend just so happened to be the wedding of one of my first cousins! Of all the countless weddings I had attended, that wedding was different, because I saw it finally as someone who also had the right to commit myself to another. In the gospel, Jesus talks about loving God and one another with our whole hearts, now I felt like that whole-hearted love was finally being acknowledged and affirmed in the laws of my adopted country.

– *Raphael O.*

March 25, 2017; The Feast of the Annunciation

*Isaiah 7: 10-14; 8: 10; Psalm 40: 7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11; Hebrews 10: 4-10;
Luke 1: 26-38*

In today's Gospel, Luke presents us with a conversation between Gabriel and Mary, which I find fascinating. Mary's emotional state goes from fearful, to doubtful, to questioning, to courageous. She is at first afraid at the idea of an unwed pregnancy, which was completely unacceptable in her time and culture. Her common sense leads her to doubt the angel's word, and she goes so far as to question him: "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" Mary's decision to question and almost to argue with Gabriel reveals a personality and independence much different from the traditional portrayal of her as a passive, almost robot-like character in this story. To Mary, God's request that she give birth to a child is far removed from the "sacrifices and offerings" that were the usual religious actions that God required, and that were mentioned in the second reading from Hebrews. However, Gabriel's promise of the Holy Spirit's action and his mention of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy enable Mary to find the courage to accept and actively take part in the mission God has asked her to embrace.

Mary's emotional and spiritual journey in this passage seems similar to the journey I (and many other LGBTQ people) have traveled towards accepting our sexuality as a gift and mission bestowed by God. My journey toward this acceptance took many years (just as Mary's journey may indeed have taken much longer than it appears from this gospel passage). My journey began as a young child when I became aware of emotions and desires different from those of other children, and then passed through phases of fear, doubt, questioning and courage, just as Mary's did. Eventually as a young adult I was able to accept my sexuality as this great gift of God that is an important part of who I am and how I live out in the world the mission to love my neighbor.

This feast is also known as the feast of the Incarnation, that is, that the God of love became truly and completely revealed in a flesh-and-blood human being. The love and the mission that Mary found in giving birth to her son is like the gift and mission that LGBTQ people accept when they finally see their love of the minds, spirits and flesh-and-blood bodies of other human beings as a blessing from God.

– Peter S.

March 26, 2017; Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Psalm 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9: 1-41

The two themes that jump out at me in today's readings are discernment and trust. We are being asked to trust even when authority figures would prefer that we not share our truth with others. Samuel had to worry about Saul's reaction to his anointing David. The blind man's parents did not defend him to the Pharisees because they were afraid. The Pharisees, in turn, threw the blind man out of the community.

The blind man's lived experience did not fit into the world view of the Pharisees just like my lived experience as a gay man doesn't fit into the world view of many leaders of the Catholic church. It is not too difficult imagining some of them asking, "...who sinned...that he was born gay?" Of course, they may not believe that I was born gay, but I know that I was, and that inner truth is part of what I now share with them and others.

For most of us, and certainly for me, coming out is an ongoing process of discernment. I wasn't very trusting of the process when I started. I felt like I had been led into the dark valley that today's psalm talks about. Today, I know that "everything visible becomes light," as St. Paul says. Coming out makes me, and everyone else who comes out, visible. It is in the light that I am able to express my truth, and to begin to trust that God's love is leading me out of the closet.

In today's readings, Samuel and the blind man find themselves in new communities because their discernment changed them, and led them to new places. After I started to come out, I found the community of Dignity/Washington. Here I discovered a Catholic community that celebrates being LGBTQ and Catholic in a way that is authentic. Becoming a part of this community allowed my soul to heal from the injury created by those who believe that my life, my truth, creates confusion and must be wrong. I will always be grateful to God, and to the people of Dignity, for helping my fractured and bruised psyche mend and heal. Thank you, Dignity!

– *Allen R.*

March 27, 2017; Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Isaiah 65: 17-21; Psalm 30: 2, 4, 5-6, 11-12a, 13b; John 4: 43-64

The readings today speak of "new heavens and a new earth," where there will be "rejoicing and happiness," no longer shall there be the sound of "weeping," and all will enjoy a long life. In the Gospel, Jesus was announcing this new life, but in Samaria, Jesus was treated like a prophet with "no honor in his native place." In Galilee, he cured a "royal official" whose son was near death as part of the Good News for the new 'heavens and new earth."

As an LGBT people with our unique spirituality, we announce the Good News to the People of God and the clerics in the Church that God created sexuality for love and commitment between two individuals, whatever gender, and not simply as a mechanism for reproduction. It is this love that recreates the "new heavens and the new earth," the new Jerusalem where all peoples of different ethnicities and sexual orientation live in community and happiness. Jesus proclaimed this Gospel of love, curing a royal official's son who would have been from the ruling class. But even as Jesus proclaimed this Gospel of love, he experienced rejection for he was without "honor in his native place."

With this new administration, we are heading into difficult times. But we are comforted by the fact that Jesus already traveled this road. By Jesus' example and proclamation, we also are called to proclaim our love for each other to the People of God, the clerical Church, and the present governmental structure. Rejection is part of the course. However, it does not end there. Love and commitment are our strength as well as the seeds of renewal for the People of God, no matter how far the clerical church and governmental entities may have deviated from the Gospel.

As a gay man, I have found that my gay spirituality of love, which leads to social justice and is nourished by the Eucharist, has given me the strength to take risks in representing the poor through legal advocacy with a zeal that I would not have otherwise had. The proclamation of this Gospel of love and social justice is truly a Catholic enterprise. When will our Church recognize our gay spirituality? Seeking such recognition is one of the many challenges of Dignity, which we embrace as a community. Many young Catholics who are spiritually homeless and rejected by their families are counting on us.

– *Pierre B.*

March 28, 2017; Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 47: 1-9, 12; Psalm 46: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9; John 5: 1-16

The image of water figures throughout all three of today's readings. It is water of cleansing and healing, helping to bring forth abundant life. It is also powerful and symbolic.

In Ezekiel, it is the life-giving water flowing from the temple—a healing savior in a desert climate. Psalm 46 speaks of the stream of water running through the City of God, abundant and refreshing, reminding us of all the amazing things God has done. In the Gospel of John it was not the water from the pool of Bethesda that healed the man afflicted for 38 years, rather, it was done by the Word of Jesus who is Living Water. We don't know how old the man was when he became ill. All we know is that he had been sick for 38 years. He hopes to find healing in the waters at the pool of Bethesda. But, Jesus says to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." It is Jesus who gave this man's life back.

It was the passage in John about the man's total healing from a physical illness that got me to thinking about how these readings can speak to the LGBTQ community. A number of people today, unfortunately, still believe Jesus can "heal" the LGBTQ population of their sexual orientation. They point to Jesus' miracle healings as proof this can happen. They support "conversion therapies" that are neither evidence- nor scientific-based. How would Jesus respond to this thinking? I don't believe Jesus focused on sexual orientation. Jesus welcomed those who were marginalized and alienated by society. He gave two basic, all-inclusive commandments:

Love God with all your heart and love others as you love yourself!
Sexual orientation is not a barrier for God. God saw that all of creation was good (Genesis 1:25).

Jesus, Living Water, invites us all to take our lives back by loving God and loving others as we would love ourselves—no more, no less. "Rise, take up your mat, and walk"—the talk. Jesus is the Living Water who restores and refreshes us to better love and serve God and others as well as to love ourselves. During this season of Lent all of us are invited to take the plunge into Living Water and immerse ourselves in the water of life.

– *Ann P.*

March 29, 2017; Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Isaiah 49: 8-15; Psalm 145: 8-9, 13cd -14, 17-18; John 5: 17-30

The first reading speaks to me about trust – in God, in other things and ultimately in myself. For me, trust is hard – sometimes very hard. God has not given me any reason not to trust. I think of my trust in God as the same things as my faith.

The first reading says that God will never forget us. God is looking out for us 24 hours a day. As an LGBTQ Catholic, I needed to learn (and sometimes still do) that God loves me as I am. I have to trust God in order to believe that. I still have some internal dislike for myself as a gay person, but I am working on it. God says I am OK so I am learning to believe that – and as the Pope said, “Who am I to judge?” – and the Gospel says that God will be the judge. The second reading says, “The Lord is near to all who call upon him” and “God is gracious and merciful.” So, when I need God in my life, God is close by – handy, if you will – easy to find, and, when found, God is gracious and merciful.

In my relationships with others, trust is important to me. Trust is also important in my relationship with God. Without trust, we have no relationship with others. These readings remind me that God has my back – that I can really trust God. I frequently ask God for help with my earthly problems and I really trust God to help me. I know that sometimes I may not get the resolution to the problem that I want, but God is still there for me. I do try to remember to say “Thank you, God.”

I am working on trusting myself, others, and God. These readings remind me to keep working on it – and that God is trustworthy, merciful, and gracious. If God can offer all those qualities to me, (in fact, even if he/she/it doesn't), I will trust. Sometimes when everyone around you is telling you the same thing (in this case, to have faith and trust in God), it is a good idea to listen, to really believe, and to act upon that advice.

– *John F.*

March 30, 2017; Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Exodus 32: 7-14; Psalm 106: 19-20, 21-22, 23; John 5: 31-47

Today's first reading is striking in that it portrays God as someone who grows impatient and is tempted to lash out. We normally think of impatience as a human rather than a divine emotion. God is clearly angry - disgusted even - by the moral corruption, obstinacy, and idolatry of the people in whom so much has been invested. These are the same people that have just been freed from Egypt. God is frustrated and ready to wipe them out and start over with Moses and a new set of followers. Yet this Old Testament God is open to Moses' reasoning, to his appeals for mercy. Moses' response is, essentially, why give up now? Surely you, God, didn't ask me to lead your people out of Egypt only to gather them together for slaughter. If you establish that precedent, will others follow you in the future? What sort of triumph is the flight from Egypt if it ends in a bloodbath? We are told only that God then relents.

The impact of Moses' plea is awesome and an example of the power of prayer. Realizing that God can grow impatient makes God more human to me. I can no longer assume that God must be eternally patient because, well, 1) God is always patient, 2) God is perfect, and 3) God has got all the time in the world. This divine example makes me think about the times that I've closed doors on people in my life because they've acted in ways that I considered wrong and deliberate. When I have closed my heart to someone because I experienced them as bigoted or homophobic. I've made black or white judgments assuming that I have all the information I need to ascribe motives to others' actions. But if giving up on people is something that God is tempted to do but never does, how can I stand resolute and do so to others? What right do I have to be less patient than God?

– *Bob S.*

March 31, 2017; Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Wisdom 2: 1, 12-22; Psalm 34: 17-18, 19-20, 21, 23; John 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30

For three short years Jesus publicly proclaimed the coming of God's reign by teaching, healing, and loving people – often at the expense of conforming to the social and religious norms of his times. His nonconformity for the sake of love set a lot of people against him who were turned off by his acceptance of outcasts and who resented his freedom to live his own truth. Jesus must have found a sobering preview of the misunderstanding, rejection, and death he would eventually suffer in these chilling words from the book of Wisdom: "...merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways... With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience."

In living out my own calling as a bisexual person, as a woman, and as a person with disabilities, I've known misunderstanding and rejection as I've sought to discern and faithfully live out the truth of who I am. The pain of being misunderstood and rejected, even at times by my own self, led me finally to seek refuge and healing in God. Over many years, the words of the psalmist, "God is close to the brokenhearted," have come to resonate deep within me as I have seen again and again, in my own life and in the lives of suffering people around me, that God hears us when we cry out, saves those who are "crushed in spirit," and redeems us in countless ways. God saves me through the love and kindness of my friends, family, and even strangers, through a deepening awareness and gratitude for this beautiful earth and all its gifts, and through constant daily invitations to open my heart and my mind to greater love and compassion for everyone and everything. Knowing that God is always present to me, always accepting and holding me up, gives me courage to face and eventually to embrace what is true for me, even if that truth may bring rejection from others and suffering for a time. It has freed me to accept the inclinations of my heart, even when I do not understand them, as gifts from God and to wait patiently for God to reveal the path I am to follow.

– Kathleen R.

April 1, 2017; Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 11: 18-20; Psalm 7: 2-3, 9bc-10, 11-12; John 7: 40-53

As we read through today's scripture we can see where one might believe in them only to get to the end and be told "April Fool's." From Jeremiah, we are taught to be trusting but learn that we have been fooled. The Psalm suggests that although we may be attacked, we can find refuge in God. With Luke, we learn to persevere with our faith. We often find situations when we may have been fooled by those we trust. With all that can happen to us despite our belief – Catholic and LGBTQ – our leaders only fool us. However, we continue to persevere and find strength in our faith...faith in God, faith in friends, faith in our Dignity community. Thus, through our faith, we find the strength to survive and persevere.

When we look at John's gospel, we see people question Jesus. Is he the Savior or not? The crowd was divided in their belief. The Pharisees asked, "Have you been deceived?" but they did not know. Had they been fooled or merely failed to believe?

For nearly 50 years as LGBTQ Catholics, Dignity has continued to have faith in God and our Church. While the hierarchy may be more or less accepting of us as a part of the faith community, their actions frequently ring hollow. This makes me wonder about the question, "What Would Jesus Do?". Are we being fooled by our faith? Our faith suggests that our God loves us. Our God cares for us. Our God has faith in us. So, does the hierarchy attack us because they fail to understand us? Do they attack us so that we would lose faith? Whatever their reasons, we still hold fast to our faith and persevere. We have made many strides but there is still more to do to ensure that those - Catholic and LGBTQ - who follow us continue to have faith.

So have we been fooled or maybe merely tested by those who would prefer us to lose faith? Regardless of their efforts, it is still up to us to remain faithful, to believe, and to persevere.

– Ray P.

April 2, 2017; Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37: 12-14; Psalm 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; Romans 8: 8-11;

John 11: 1-45

There was a time when I was so depressed that I could not pick up the phone. Ring, ring, ring... Let the message machine take the calls. Day after day, I listened to friends leaving messages of comfort, with their phone numbers, and asking me to call back; but I had no energy to talk with them. To those I saw daily, I appeared “normal,” but my feelings were numb, frozen, anesthetized. I had received a notification to cease a ministry to LGBTQ Catholics that I felt called by God to do. I felt abandoned by the religious supports that had sustained me for almost 40 years. I felt alone in a world that I had called home.

Today’s scriptural readings took me back to that devastating period of my life. Ezekiel speaks of open graves and Paul talks about Christ who is “dead.” The Gospel tells the story of Lazarus in the tomb. Doom and gloom is what caught my attention. Have you felt gloom and doom? In thinking, “If God hadn’t made me gay, my life would be so much easier?” In struggling to remain in a church that does not treat women as equal to men or transgender persons as equal to cisgender persons? In being harsh and critical of others? In feeling fearful or insecure?

But today’s Scriptures also offer hope in the midst of doom and gloom. God can bring life out of what seems lifeless. Ezekiel declares that God “will open your graves and have you rise from them.” Paul says that the Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. All three readings tell us that God indeed can dispel the gloom and doom. Jesus calls to me and you, just as he called “Lazarus, come out!” Jesus is asking us to come out of our closets of depression, self-pity, worry, phobias, insecurity—all of the many closets in which we hide.

Jesus says, “Come out and see me. Even though you do not recognize me when you are in a crisis, I am there. I am with you all the time. Even when you feel down, I can pull you up to life.

“When you think I am late, I am already there, waiting for you to see me, to call me, to talk with me. I can lift you up to life, even when you have hit rock bottom with self-pity or fear. I can haul you up out of any sinfulness or cruelty or foolishness.

“Just talk with me. Come and waste some time with me. I can banish gloom and doom. I can bring life out of what seems lifeless.”

– *Jeannine G.*

April 3, 2017; Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 13: 1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; Psalm 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; John 8: 1-11

As a counselor at a community corrections program, where folks were on an intensified type of probation, I was fortunate to meet a great number of people from all kinds of backgrounds. One encounter in particular revealed to me the same message that I believe Christ is trying to convey through the parable in today's Gospel.

This encounter began as I met a female client for the first time in the waiting room and I noticed her numerous tattoos of dragons along with hair dyed multiple colors and piercings in various places I did not know could be pierced. This appearance which violated my middle-class upbringing combined with the knowledge I had of her participation in the "oldest profession," from reading her file set my attitude toward her. To take the image from the Scripture passage, I was throwing stones at her (metaphorically) during our intake session. Despite the fact that I am confident she could sense my harsh judgement towards her, she asked if it would be ok to speak of an experience she had while in prison and how that affected her spiritually. At my affirmative nod she described a day that she was taken to the doctor outside the jail and as she was sitting in the waiting room wearing her orange jumper, hands in cuffs, legs in shackles and closely guarded by the officer attending to her, she experienced something life changing. A little toddler, age two or three, was playing on the floor in the waiting room next to the child's mother. The child wandered over to my client, jumped up on her lap, wrapped her arms around her, hugged her while smiling and giggling. The woman said that she had felt such significant shame and self-loathing as she sat in that waiting room but that in the embrace of that little kid she had experienced the love of God. To her, the little toddler was a face of unconditional love and acceptance.

As the woman told me this story, I sat slack-jawed in amazement. While I, the "know-it-all" counselor sat judging the woman for how she looked and what she had done, this woman was experiencing a true sense of worth and value from an encounter with love embodied in a little child. My only option at that point was to drop all the "stones" I was ready to "throw" at her and realize what I should have known all along - that woman was a child of God and this was all that mattered!

This event took place over ten years ago yet I reflect on it quite often. The original lesson I learned was about judging others, a worthy lesson. However, in the time since this encounter my reflections have opened my eyes to the experience of the woman loathing herself for who she was. This challenges me to consider my negative judgement of self. This shame is an emotion that I too have experienced. The true message of that toddler hugging the woman that day, the true message of Jesus lifting up the woman in the town square that day is the same. It is a message of acceptance of others and self just as God accepts us - and loves us - as we are.

- R. S.

April 4, 2017; Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Numbers 21: 4-9; Psalm 102: 2-3, 16-18, 19-21; John 8: 21-30

The two readings for today offer a remarkable contrast into God's relationship with us and ours to God. The Old Testament depicts an unruly people openly complaining to God about their plight in life without food, water, and facing imminent death in the desert. Because of their discontent and ungratefulness, God punished them with a plague of serpents. Moses intervened with God, the people repented, were saved, and received another chance to be faithful followers of Yahweh. The God of the Old Testament is depicted as revengeful, vindictive, and retaliatory.

The gospel reading speaks in John's mystical language about the unique relationship between Christ and God and what it means to believe by following the example of Christ. God is love, compassion, and forgiveness. The challenge for us is to examine our relationship to God, the God of the Old Testament or the New, especially during personally challenging times.

For me, my relationship with God has evolved over time. Earlier in life I thought that if I were good and avoided evil, I would be rewarded. But when confronted with the reality of sexuality and sexual orientation, I complained and believed that God was punishing me for my sinfulness. By remaining bitter and resentful, my relationship with God and others was bleak and I lived a life in fear, shame, and guilt, believing I was objectively disordered.

Fortunately, giving myself the freedom to come out of my own self-imposed darkness, speaking to others who already saw the light and love of Christ, I realized that my relationship with God couldn't be defined in terms of punishment and reward. It was at that point that I began accepting life on life's terms and saw the infinite love of a God in relationship with me, a God who does not make mistakes, and is a faithful, unconditional lover.

Lent is a wonderful time in the liturgical year to revisit my personal relationship with Christ, embracing myself and being open to the multiple ongoing challenges of my life and journey towards Jerusalem.

– Jerry F.

April 5, 2017; Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Daniel 3: 14-20, 91-92, 95; Daniel 3: 52, 53, 54, 55, 56; John 8: 31-42

In today's first reading from Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had erected a golden statue and ordered all his subjects to bow down in reverence before it as a test of allegiance. Three young Jewish men in the service of the royal court, who were particular favorites of the king for their exceptional qualities, refuse to worship the statue. They would rather die than turn their backs on their God. This reading centers on the question: what is freedom? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego know that freedom is more than living whatever way one pleases. For them, freedom is the ability to do what one knows is right, regardless of the consequences. They were willing to risk their lives on the desire to live as free people.

When I was a young man growing up in the 70's, we heard a lot about the "gay liberation movement." In my teens and early twenties, I felt anything but free. I was locked in fear and sure that I would always feel inhibited in being who I was. I longed for a companionship I was certain would elude me.

While many use religion to rally against the goodness of same-sex attraction and gay orientation, I was gradually able to distinguish between the words and actions of the hierarchy and the love of an all-knowing God. My path to freedom came not in spite of my faith, but because of it. I never felt the desire to leave the Church because I was able to look beyond the pronouncements and declarations of the official Church, much as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were able to see past the idolatry of a golden statue. I realize that has not been the case for everyone.

In the reading from Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego put their hope in God and are faithful to the very end in the face of torment and death. In their suffering, God comes to comfort and free them from their enemies.

This scripture raises many questions: How does my affliction allow me to enter into the mystery of Christ's suffering? Encountering Christ at the cross, I find consolation and hope in the overwhelming realization that God has not abandoned me in my suffering and brokenness. What are the idols in my life? Is there anything in my life which I would find very challenging to sacrifice if God asked me to give it up? Is there anything or any person in my life which comes between God and myself?

Those who accept the Word of God and live by it will be saved. In today's Gospel, Jesus reassures his disciples, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." What am I willing to lose in order to be free?

– Jim L.

April 6, 2017; Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Genesis 17: 3-9; Psalm 105: 4-5, 6-7, 8-9; John 8: 51-59

In John's Gospel reading, Jesus answers the Jews saying, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my God who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'This is our God.'" Jesus understands that God extols him. I believe Jesus is also saying that while he is the Son of God, God praises him, as well as our humanity. For God created us in the Divine Image, thus elevating us to be with God. So does this mean we too are God? No, I don't confuse that only Jesus and our God truly hold the power. Yet it is God who grants us free will. And with that free will, we choose to follow in love and faith. The reading continues, ". . . whoever keeps my word will never see death." Thus, in our faith, God opens the door to the promise of life everlasting.

In the first reading, God praises Abraham, making the covenant that has never been broken. We, as his faithful descendants, believe in that promise, and have witnessed it actually happen. In Genesis, God states, "I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." In this lifetime, we have survived oppression and violence, but God has shown actual glimmers of hope and love. Who knew that I, a gay Latino man, a son of immigrants, would find myself in many ways, in a position of privilege, able to marry the man I love, and worship with LGBTQ friends, families, and allies who also work hard to assure that this pact is never broken. Therefore, here and now, I stand proud, to be able to say, "I believe." We extol God, and God blesses us for that act of faith. For God is always here, with you, me, us, always.

--*Jaime C.*

April 7, 2017; Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 20: 10-13; Psalm 18: 2-3a, 3bc-4, 5-6, 7; John 10: 31-42

In the gospel today, we have one of the first indications that a group of people is trying to put Jesus to death. What is the sin that warrants this punishment? His accusers say that Jesus has committed the sin of blasphemy.

It has been many years since I read the short story, “The Lottery,” by Shirley Jackson. But I still remember being absolutely horrified by the twist at the end. How could a “civilized” society resort to stoning a person to death? I’m not even sure that stoning was in my consciousness at the time I read the story.

The punishment of stoning may not be particularly important in our modern world. We occasionally hear a story where Sharia law has been invoked and a person has been put to death in this manner. But is the imposition of the death penalty in our country any less gruesome or objectionable? Life is precious in all respects – from conception to old age. Then surely any taking of life, even as punishment for an egregious crime, is wrong.

Today, when we recall that Jesus’ own life was threatened in this way, let us pray for everyone to support a philosophy of life in all aspects of our society, and that the lives and dignity of all be respected and protected.

– *Jake H.*

April 8, 2017; Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 37: 21-28; Jeremiah 31: 10, 11-12abcd, 13; John 11: 45-56

As a member of the LGBTQ community I have often pondered about where I belong in the community of Christ Jesus. We indeed must ever be mindful that as a loving member of the Church we are still a community loved by Christ. We are still in our eyes and those of many in our community, a people set apart, scorned by some, feared by others, pitied by others, and yes even hated. Nonetheless we are loved by our Savior, Jesus Christ. As he said with the woman caught in adultery, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

As we enter this holy season of Lent, we must never forget the bounteous and unending love that Christ and our God have for us all. Do not forget that Jesus also was reviled by some of his peers as well. They were afraid of Him. He did things they did not understand, He loved people that they thought he should not and yet something changed their hearts. Just as we must never forget that God will change the hearts of those among us who still do not understand us. Jesus' passion and death proved to the doubters and haters of his time that there was something people recognized about Him that they could not deny. It was love and mercy and it endured right up until he died on the cross. As they witnessed these events, so will our detractors realize that there is something about the LGBTQ community that cannot be denied. That is love and unity of purpose. And so we can have the courage to stop apologizing for who we are and be grateful for our sexuality and all of the blessings we have been given. Though we still strive to prove that we are worthy, that we belong, that we should be gathered by Jesus on the last day as his own. Loved and treasured, God will now gather us and guard us all as a shepherd guards a flock. We will be rewarded, mercifully judged and presented to our God as we have lived. Christ will be our witness. We must never forget that God has always loved us. We are God's beloved children. At last our doubts and fears will be turned into joy and we will be gathered into God's loving arms where we will all be one. No discrimination, no hate, but love and eternal happiness.

– Len L.

April 9, 2017; Palm Sunday

*Matthew 21: 1-11; Isaiah 50: 4-7; Psalm 21: 2, 8-9, 17-19, 23-24;
Philippians 2: 6-11; Matthew 26: 14 - 27: 66*

Paul reminds us, through the Incarnation, that God loves us so much! God, as Jesus, was willing to forego limitlessness to interact with us in our limitations, accepting even the greatest ones: physicality, rejection, suffering, and death. As God, Jesus could have stopped the Holy Week proceedings at any point: the perfidy, the Garden, the trials, the punishments, even during the Crucifixion. Instead, Jesus remained true to his expressed core values, used each situation as a “teachable moment,” and aligned himself with all who are outcasts, betrayed, falsely-accused, maligned, tortured, executed. Suffering such a painful, unmerited and dishonorable death, God expresses understanding, empathy, and solidarity with everyone in their travails, no matter how extreme.

Psalm 21, when parceled, presents an image of wretchedness and abandonment in agony. In its entirety, especially verses 23-27, faith, hope, and commitment supersede the horrors of the previous verses and remind us that a glorious Resurrection through God’s love awaits those who trust, regardless of what else occurs.

Matthew’s Gospel readings relate how malleable life can be. In the week prior to his burial, Jesus learned that a good friend had died, and gave him back alive to his sisters; Jesus experienced the exaltation of the procession; Jesus expressed compassion and support for the woman who washed his feet and transferred this act into an example of humility and service at a later dinner; Jesus continued to teach publicly and in private, even when challenged by supporters as well as opponents; Jesus celebrated and dined, especially the Exodus re-enactment, which he also transformed into a new covenant; Jesus exhorted his followers to give, and demonstrated through his words and actions, abundant love and loyalty. Intermingled with these, defection and regret, sorrow, fear, disappointment, incomprehension, hatred, political expediency, desertion, loneliness, and pain are woven: the depths of the Passion could not have been anticipated by the original participants, even days before. Our lives are not much different: cycles of joy and trial that can exhilarate and crush. Perhaps Jesus’ greatest gift was the consistency of his life and message: share in God’s abiding love in all circumstances.

– *Daniel H.*

April 10, 2017; Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42: 1-7; Psalm 27: 1, 2, 3, 13-14; John 12: 1-11

Entering the final days of Lent we are invited to meditate on these stunning scripture passages which reveal remarkable characteristics of the mission of Jesus. The Baptist utilized harsh words: “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Jesus also preached repentance but gently, like an invitation. Throughout his ministry he noticed the brokenness of his listeners, especially outcasts of every sort: those deemed sinners, the infirm, foreigners, lepers, publicans, even those given up for dead. He brings the prophecy of Isaiah to life in himself: “A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench.”

At one time or another, each of us LGBTQ persons has no doubt identified with that “bruised reed” or “smoldering wick” having experienced rejection or living with the expectation that we will be broken-off or snuffed out. But underneath our brokenness and smoldering Jesus recognizes our need, our measly spark of faith and trust, and unbends us and rekindles us. Could this be how he saw Mary who anointed his feet and wiped them with her hair when he defended her extravagant gesture against her critics? Did he learn something important from her kind-heartedness? At the Last Supper Jesus replicated the gesture to the astonishment of his disciples and bequeathed them this directive: “You also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example...” May the mind and heart of Jesus be mine/ours, that we might eagerly continue his mission in our needy world despite misjudgment and criticism. May we continue to convincingly cry out: “My God is my light and my salvation, there is nothing, no one I shall fear...”

Dear Jesus, you have washed our feet and invited us to wash one another’s as a way, like Mary, of washing yours, for what we do the least of our sisters and brothers we do to you. Grant us the willingness to accept your mercy and the generosity to share it. “Meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto yours.” For you are gracious and full of love for humankind, and to you we render glory, now and forever. Amen.

– Alexei M.

April 11, 2017; Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49: 1-6; Psalm 71: 2, 2-4a, 5ab-6ab, 15, 17; John 13: 21-33, 36-38

Our Gospel reading is set during the Last Supper, Chapter 13 in John's gospel. It marks a low point in the long narrative, one that begins with Jesus deeply troubled. This descending mood continues as Jesus recognizes Judas in the act of betrayal, and makes note of the fear and cowardice that will soon overtake Peter. All that Jesus has attempted to achieve is coming undone. "And it was night," the Gospel says, setting the stage for the Passion and Crucifixion to come.

What immediately follows this account is Chapters 14-17, where the tone becomes entirely different. Just as the Passion and Crucifixion serve as place of passage to Resurrection in the story of Jesus, so too the night evoked in one chapter is followed by the light in the next.

Jesus again re-asserts the sovereignty of God in the midst of these events. There is an extended discourse throughout these three chapters, where Jesus urges his followers not to be troubled, but to be sustained in their faith, to know that they are not abandoned, because it is love that overcomes the world. (In fact, love is cited 10 different times in John 14 alone.)

For Chapter 13, the context is everything ... not just in what it contains, but in what comes next. Responding to a physical and spiritual dark moment - and before proceeding on to his suffering and death - Jesus offers hope. He says that such a moment is a place of passage, not a destination, and he reminds us that darkness is a preface to light. Faith gives us that hope - to look beyond the present with trust in the future, believing it to be a place where God is both present and active.

These days many of us in this country can also find ourselves in a physically or spiritually dark place. We can feel unmoored by the rush of change, the uncertainty of the present, a sense of deep and sudden rupture in space and time. Where is all of this going? What will happen next? What will happen to me and those I love? Faith gives us hope in God's continuing command over mystery in world affairs, and hope in God's redeeming love - which, as this gospel asserts, will prevail against whatever we experience as night.

And night by night, down into solitude,
the heavy earth falls far from every star.
We are all falling. This hand's falling too -
all have this falling sickness. None withstands.
And yet there's One with gently-holding hands -
this universal falling can't fall through.

- Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

- Joe O.

April 12, 2017; Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Psalm 69: 8-10, 21-22, 31, 33-34; Matthew 26: 14-25

“GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, That I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. ... And I have not rebelled, have not turned my back. I gave my back to those who beat me, My cheeks to those who plucked my beard; My face I did not shield from buffets or spitting.”

Having achieved a certain level of success over the years as a public speaker, I have long identified with these words from Isaiah - grateful for my “well-trained tongue.” However, too often I have precisely not given “my back to those who beat me,” nor “my cheeks to those who plucked my beard.” One of the great traits of the prophets was the ability to peacefully, yet forcefully, speak out when those in power were either ignoring them or (usually) actively opposing them. While I have seen that trait too in myself from time to time, as I look back, fear has so often turned my tongue timid. Where is my well-trained tongue now when it seems so badly needed?

When I think of the bravery of the generations of LGBTQ heroes who spoke for the truth of my human dignity - against the American Psychological Association in the 1960's and 70's; in the face of vicious “buffets and spitting” from the Family Values factions in the 1980's and 90's; against the bigotry of some military leaders in the 2000's; and in the face of the hypocrisy of most church leaders even to this day - I am awed at the cavalcade of courage on which my (relatively) comfortable rights rest. How can our tongues - well-trained or not - join this tradition of prophetic voices working for the dignity of others? How can I take my own small place in the great prophetic movement that both wants and works not just for my own rights, but even more so for rights of more marginalized brothers and sisters? These can feel like dark days for anyone who disagrees with the power brokers *de jour* in Washington. And so, Love demands speaking out for the dignity of all peoples even though in the short-term all that will achieve is derision and denial from the decision-makers. These Scriptures, this Lent, this moment in history is Love's call that we join the ranks of the prophets from whose accomplishments all current LGBTQ Americans benefit. Here may be our chance not to celebrate our own victories but to - even more importantly - lay a foundation amidst “buffets and spitting” for the future victories of others.

In the gospel today, all of the disciples are aghast that Jesus thinks one of them might betray him. “Surely, not I,” we join them in reply. But maybe betraying Love need not take the form of 30 pieces of silver, but instead entail only our failure to speak out for the dignity of those whom others would cast aside.

– Jeff V.

April 13, 2017; Holy Thursday

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116: 12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18;

I Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-15

We in the LGBTQ community often feel powerless. In our society we are a minority, the subject of discrimination. Many of us find it difficult to speak our truth and to be heard and valued much less act as leaders, yet over the past fifty years our acceptance in society has grown. That growth was not without hardship and trials; we stand on the backs of those brave people who have fought and paid dearly for our rights: Harvey Milk, Frank Kameny, the Stonewall Rioters, Edith Windsor, Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Harry Hay, John McNeill, Leslie Feinberg, and many more. We recognize how far we have come and whom we have to thank during Pride each year. Pride allows us to reflect, to be grateful, and to celebrate. Likewise, the Jews celebrate Passover with reflection and gratitude, but they are instructed to eat the meal as if in haste – not relaxed, not comfortable with the status quo. While we celebrate our achievements during Pride, we too are called away from our complacency, reminded that our work for equality is not done.

Because we experience life as a part of a minority group, we have an opportunity to share our unique stories and talents, encouraging others like us and educating those in the majority. As we seek to continue that work, to have a voice and power in society, Jesus shows us a powerful example: leadership through service. We serve one another when we examine our own motivations and make sure that what we do is of value to the community and not just ourselves. We serve one another when we use our talents for the greater good. But Jesus's example seems to go two ways: we are to serve others (“as I have done for you, you should also do”), and we are to allow ourselves to be served (“unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me”). There will be times when it is appropriate for us to lead and times when we must give others a chance to do their work, times when we can teach and times when we need to stop and listen. When we cooperate using a sense of balance and mutual responsibility, we all rise.

– *Chris H.*

April 14, 2017; Good Friday

Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12; Hebrews 4: 14-16, 5: 7-9; John 18: 1 - 19: 42

In the first reading, Isaiah writes “He was despised and rejected by men ... and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” In many ways this is the LGBTQ experience: rejected by humankind; having others look away and regard with no beauty or majesty. The first reading gives way to Jesus in the gospel going through this struggle; being condemned by a society that would rather hurt him with faces turned than look upon him and acknowledge his truth. The passion of John’s gospel tells of Jesus doing the will of the Creator and taking on his truth.

In reflecting on my coming of age as a gay man, it is easy to look back on the social and normative pressures. As queer people, we are often looked away from, despised, or looked on with low esteem. People often find it easier not to acknowledge that part of our existence. Just as the readings are a message to the greater Christian body of inclusion and beauty in the outcast, it is a message to the queer outcast to accept our truth. Just as the one true savior was cast out to the point of crucifixion, despite multiple opportunities Pilate gave for the crowd to save him, we have been cast out by society. Jesus can be a call to our lives to carry our truth despite those around us that turn heads and do not offer love and affirmation.

Isaiah uses the image of seeds growing up from dry ground. Growing up a gay male in a society that did not acknowledge the existence of queerness was that dry ground in which we struggled and that ended up bringing us closer to Christ. The seed springing forth from dry land is my coming out and becoming the me God intended. That me of love and truth is the most important thing I can be. It can be a heavy cross to bear; before my coming out I was in that garden asking it be taken away; but God has a plan and being true to oneself is central to it. Who am I to deny the truth God created in that seed?

– *Christopher F.*

April 15, 2017; Holy Saturday

Among so many rich readings for this Easter Vigil, I want to focus on just one image, one phrase, one set of emotions.

In the gospel, Mary and Mary Magdalene find Jesus' empty tomb and are told by an angel that Jesus has risen and to go tell the other disciples. The women "went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. They were fearful, but overjoyed. Despite the fear of the unknown, they were overjoyed at the prospect that the messiah, their teacher, their friend, Jesus, had risen and was still among them. I'm struck by the juxtaposition of these two emotions.

But we as queer Catholics know contradictory emotions all too well. Despite the church's admonishing of who we are, we still love our church — its values, its ritual, its community. Despite our families rejecting us, we can still love them. Despite society casting us out, we strive to make it better.

And joy and fear were precisely the emotions that I felt earlier this year as our country transitioned to a new president. After being overjoyed at the progress we were making, now I am fearful about the future. I fear that progress for the LGBTQ community will be rolled back. Instead of celebrating our right to get married and moving to seek justice in other aspects of our lives, we may have to defend our marriage rights. The discussion may change from how we can protect trans rights to having to assert that trans people even exist.

I also fear for others that are vulnerable. I fear that we're disregarding people's right to access to health care, education, and their most basic human needs of clean air, water, food, and shelter. I fear for the rights of our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters to be accepted and safe in their new homes in America. I fear that we're destroying our beautiful earth without regard to future generations.

But we cannot sit in this fear alone.

In this time of uncertainty — just as the women didn't know what was coming next — we must still find joy despite our fear. Amid so much prejudice, hurt, and fear, there is much need to make sure we are accepted, safe, and loved — and joyful. We must practice self-care. We must find community despite our isolation — lift each other up, seek love and support from friends and loved ones. This caring for each other and ourselves will help us defend against the assaults and continue to work for progress.

May we hold on to what we know is true. May we celebrate our diversity even when others try to tear us apart. May we be overjoyed in the promise of resurrection, that LIFE conquers death. That LOVE conquers hate. That JESUS has risen. Alleluia!

— *Martín W.*

April 16, 2017; Easter Sunday

Acts 10: 34a, 37 - 43; Psalm 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Luke 24: 13-35

In Luke 24:13-35, we learn that two of Jesus' disciples were walking from Jerusalem and came upon him, risen from the dead, though their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. They walk with Jesus, telling him of the events leading up to his own death, and they give him a place to eat and rest his head. Only then does Jesus reveal himself and cause them to hurry back to Jerusalem to relay the news to the apostles and other disciples.

How often are we blinded by hatred, depression, or feelings of worthlessness? How often do the words and actions of others cause us, as LGBTQ-identifying people, to feel as though hope is lost and that faith can no longer save us? On the contrary, what can we do or say when others are blinded by their hatred or ignorance toward our community?

If anything, the reading from Luke teaches us that, in the face of tyranny and a feeling of crucifixion, we should always keep faith alive and continue to be kind to one another – not just to members of our own community, but also to members of other vilified communities – so that we may come out stronger together on the other side. For every discriminatory law or ruling, there is an exponentially greater amount of support shown to repeal it. For every tragic event or act of hatred committed against our community, there are acts of unity and reinvigorated feelings of love that shine through. I think back to the way thousands gathered after the tragedy in Orlando – specifically at the fountain in Dupont Circle – and I regain hope for the future, pride in who I am. I regain the energy to keep spreading our own Good News, in addition to the Good News we have always been taught to share.

– *Vin T.*