

In His Place

Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing

Seeing through Jesus' eyes

How many of us feel like we are being tempted away from Jesus every day? With the Book of Luke we are given an example for resisting that temptation and living an exemplary Christian life in the person of Jesus. This week's focus will be on how Jesus resisted temptation and the methods that he showed us for living a Christian life.

Take a moment to read Luke 4:1-13. What are the three temptations that Jesus faced? Is there a time in the Gospel that Jesus does do the things that the devil is tempting him to do? Does the temptation have a parallel in the Hebrew Scriptures?

Each of these temptations works on more than one level. The first level addresses abuse of power and the second level is to show that Jesus would not use theatrical demonstrations. In other words, when Jesus performed a miracle it was not for his own gratification but for God's and that it helped those around him.

The first temptation is to turn stones into bread. Remember that Jesus had just spent 40 days in the desert and had not eaten. Jesus had the power to turn stone into bread but he refused to do it for his own good.

Think about the feeding of the 5,000, which appears in Luke 9:12-17 and the other three Gospels. According to Luke, Jesus took five loaves and two fish, "looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them," before distributing them to the crowd. When the leftovers were gathered 12 baskets of broken food remained. But something interesting occurs before this, Jesus tells the disciples: "You give them something to eat."

Inside this temptation is an allusion to Exodus 16:15, when the Israelites are being led across the desert by Moses and they first receive manna from God. Like the Israelites traveling across the desert who were tempted countless times, the 5,000 people who Jesus fed would not be satisfied merely by being fed one meal.

So when the devil tempts Jesus to turn stone into bread, Jesus replies "Man does not live on bread alone," which refers to Deut. 8:3.

In the second temptation Jesus is offered all the kingdoms of the world, if he will just worship

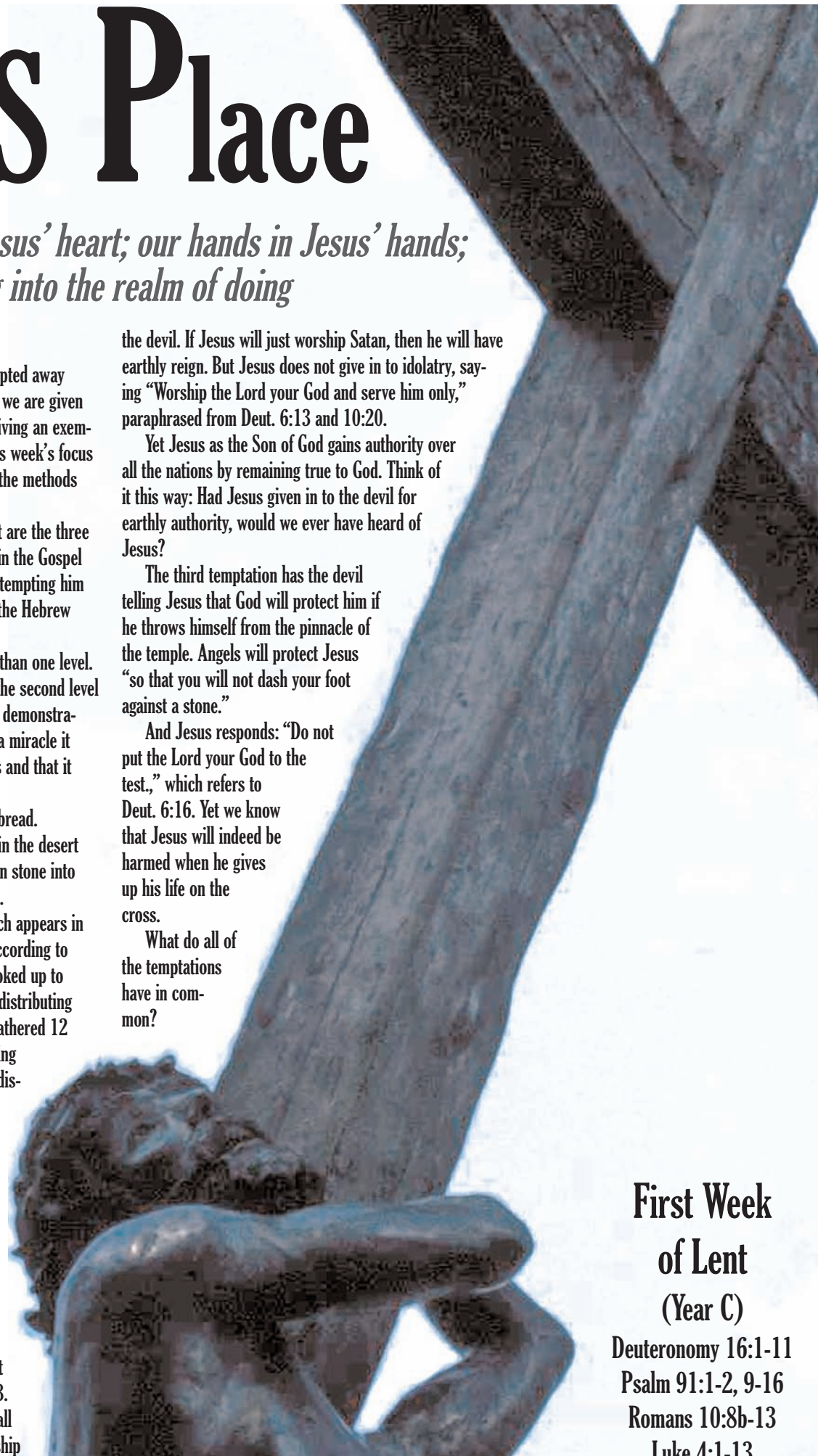
the devil. If Jesus will just worship Satan, then he will have earthly reign. But Jesus does not give in to idolatry, saying "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only," paraphrased from Deut. 6:13 and 10:20.

Yet Jesus as the Son of God gains authority over all the nations by remaining true to God. Think of it this way: Had Jesus given in to the devil for earthly authority, would we ever have heard of Jesus?

The third temptation has the devil telling Jesus that God will protect him if he throws himself from the pinnacle of the temple. Angels will protect Jesus "so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

And Jesus responds: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," which refers to Deut. 6:16. Yet we know that Jesus will indeed be harmed when he gives up his life on the cross.

What do all of the temptations have in common?



**First Week
of Lent
(Year C)**

Deuteronomy 16:1-11

Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

Trust in him and be saved

Deuteronomy 16:1-11

As Christians many of us wonder what observing the Feast of Passover has to do with us. Many of us just know it as the celebration that caused Jesus to travel to Jerusalem and that he was crucified prior to or during. We think that the Lord's Supper may have been a Passover celebration, but leave that to the biblical scholars to determine.

But there is something very important about the commands given at the end of this passage that have everything to do with us as Christians, inheritors of an Abrahamic faith:

"Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name — you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you."

You see we are to offer ourselves to others in measure to what we have been blessed and we are to welcome "outsiders" into our midst.

In the feeding of the 5,000 this means offering more than just bread — more than the charitable offerings of a baked dish for the soup kitchen or canned food gathered for the food bank. It means working for justice for those who have less than us.

In the United Methodist Book of Discipline 2004, it states "Every person has the right to a job at a living wage. Where the private sector cannot or does not provide jobs for all who seek and need them, it is the responsibility of government to provide for the creation of such jobs. We support social measures that ensure the physical and mental safety of workers, that provide for the equitable division of products and services, and that encourage an increasing freedom in the way individuals use their leisure time. ... We believe that persons come before profits." (BOD 115)

Becoming disciples

Monday

Read Exodus 16:15 and Luke 4:3-4. What is Jesus referring to when he says "Man does not live by bread alone?" According to Jesus is it enough to fill the stomachs of people without filling their souls?

Tuesday

Read Exodus 32 and Luke 4:5-8. Jewish people pray the Shema daily and Jesus refers to it when talking about the "greatest commandment." The Shema is: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone." How can it serve as a reminder for us to not serve idols?

Wednesday

Read Exodus 17:1-7 and Luke 4:9-12. The Israelites tested God by demanding water, Jesus would have tested God had he thrown himself from the pinnacle of the temple. How do you test God?

Romans 10:8b-13

"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

In the United Methodist Book of Discipline section on "The Social Community" there are categories marked "Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons," "Rights of Religious Minorities," "Rights of Children," "Rights of Persons with Disabilities" and "Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation," among others. For pages we go on about how we are all equal before the Lord and how we advocate for equal rights, yet it was put so succinctly in Romans: "There is no difference ... 'Everyone who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

At the General Board of Church and Society a small group of people work to ensure these rights for all people. Yet many people are unaware of the work done by the board or the books that they work from: the Book of Discipline and the Book of Resolutions, which are updated every four years. It is evidence that somebody at your church is aware of the work that the board does because you are involved in this study.

The board works on issues from immigration and worker justice to abolishing capital punishment and the war in Iraq, from health care to Darfur.

Find out more about the work being done by the board by visiting the Web site <http://www.umc-gbcs.org>. While you are there you can subscribe to the weekly e-newsletter, Faith in Action, and sign-on to petitions.

The building is housed across from the Supreme Court and the Capitol Building and offers seminars for people who travel to the building to learn more about the issues and the Methodist theology behind the stances.

Prayer

Morning

Dear God, every day I see temptations around me and I try to resist but too many times I give in. Help me to resist the way that Jesus did. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, who has delivered us from slavery in Egypt, oppression in Rome and temptation through Jesus, help us as we recommit our lives to you so that we are no longer our greatest concern but that justice for others becomes our priority. Guide us as we strive to display the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.

Thursday

"The first step toward authentic social justice begins with personal conversion — a continual growth in knowledge, love and service of Christ. We must become less self-absorbed and our lives more in communion with the poor. Personal conversion and the common good go hand in hand. Injustice is rooted in sin." — Gerard Straub, *When Did I See You Hungry?*

What does this mean to you?

Friday

"We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends." — "Our Social Creed," paragraph 1 from Book of Discipline 2004, page 124.

In His Place



Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing

Seeing through Jesus' eyes

How many people can forget the image of the single Chinese student who stood in front of a tank during protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989? As the tank tried to maneuver around him, he would shift to remain in front of the tank. He stood there with no special weapon and dared the tank driver, who could so easily have run him over.

Read Luke 13:31-35 and think about how Jesus and this lone student were alike.

Pharisees come to Jesus to warn him that the "wicked king" Herod wants to kill Jesus because he was a troublemaker, who might be leading a revolution, and was threatening Herod's reign.

But Jesus could not be detoured from his path, he would continue his mission until it was completed: "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I finish my work."

Through Jesus' faithfulness to God he continues his mission, yet knowing that he will die in three days time. According to The Interpreter's Bible commentary Jesus relied on the doctrine of providence, knowing that those who obey are in God's care and that his appeal in Jerusalem would likely fail but the only honorable choice was to continue on the path set before him.

There is a story that Martin Luther King Jr. was sitting in his kitchen when he realized that if he continued to lead the Civil Rights Movement that he would die. But King continued to be the voice and face of the Civil Rights Movement, knowing that the path he was on was more important than his life.

Yet this call does not always claim the person's life. Think about Rosa Parks, who was just too tired to give up her seat on the bus, and was the spark that King needed to follow. She remained active her entire life and only recently died of natural causes.

It is this kind of courage that Jesus calls us to when he tells the Pharisees that he will continue his mission and it is this call that Parks, King and the Chinese student heard and followed. They are our modern-day prophets and some of us hear their call while others resist them.

Our question for today then is: How do we know who our prophets are? By what do we measure their cause, their courage?

In the commentary it says: "Without them we have no standard from God and no movement toward God; life stagnates into foulness, yet we kill the prophet. (God) would cure us, but we say, with sores upon us, 'We are not sick.'"

Take a moment and think about our society. What are some of the things that are wrong? What are our sicknesses? Is there somebody asking us to maintain the status quo, to "stay the course"? Is there somebody who has a plan to change the world's wrongs?

Now what is your role in changing the world? Are you to be the Rosa Parks, who serves as a spark? Are you to be King, who gave voice to the voiceless? Or are you to be one of the masses who lends strength to the prophets?

**Second Week
of Lent
(Year C)**

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalms 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

We are all gifts from God from family to society

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Abram has responded to God's call and traveled to the land near Jerusalem before God makes a covenant with Abram, who will later become Abraham. God promises Abraham protection reward and a biological heir. Not only this one heir but that Abram's descendants will be as many as the stars. "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. ... So shall your descendants be." But not everybody receives this gift from God like Abraham and Sarah would in their old age.

As Methodists we recognize that "children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We recognize that some circumstances of birth make the rearing of a child difficult." In other words, we realize that there are times that the biological parent of a child may not be able to rear the child and in that instance, for the welfare of the child, the best decision may be to give the child up for adoption. In that case, we recognize the "agony, strength, and courage of the birth parent(s) who choose(s) in hope, love, and prayer to offer the child for adoption."

And we recognize that there are times when families that are capable of receiving this gift from God are not able to conceive or have families that have grown yet still have arms willing to hug a child born into circumstances they could not remain in and because of this we "affirm the receiving parent(s) desiring an adopted child. When circumstances warrant adoption, we support the use of proper legal procedures."

For those of us in community with either the biological parent who must give up their child or the family that is opening their hearts and homes, we are to celebrate the child as a gift of God just like Isaac was to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. We should share in the grief of the parent giving up their child, the joy of the family receiving the child and nurture that child in the community of Christian love.

¶ Book of Discipline 161-K

Becoming disciples

Monday

Read 2 Samuel 18:33 and Luke 13:34. How is David's lament over his son like Jesus' lament over Jerusalem? What would Jesus lament over if he could see our world as it is today?

Tuesday

Read Deuteronomy 32:11-12 and Luke 13:34. What does this image bring to mind about the relationship of God to us?

Wednesday

Read Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:9 and Galatians 3:6. What does it mean to be righteous like Abraham? Does righteousness come strictly from our faith or through our actions as well?

Thursday

"If it is not a tragic life we live, then I know not what to call it. Such a story as

Philippians 3:17-4:1

"Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." (verse 19)

Paul encourages the Philippians to communal living where they should live considering the welfare of all participants and he admonishes those who strive to live in a world that considers the rewards of an earthly realm above those of the heavenly realm. Paul urges us to dream of a time when our lowly bodies will become like Jesus' glorious body. Paul refers to the prosperous and gluttonous as "their god is their stomach."

But there is another group of people who are primarily concerned with their stomach and that is those people who live in extreme poverty. They are not concerned with filling their stomachs with rich foods but the basic needs to get them through another day. These basic needs are "food, clothing, shelter education, health care and other necessities."

As Methodists we recognize that "in spite of general affluence in the industrialized nations, the majority of persons in the world live in poverty. ... we do not hold poor people morally responsible for their economic state." This poverty often comes from more technology that is then used exploitively so that there are fewer jobs available.

The General Board of Church and Society is empowered by the church to advocate legislators for policies that promote "adequate income maintenance, quality education, decent housing, job training, meaningful employment opportunities, adequate medical and hospital care, and humanization and radical revisions of welfare programs."

The church calls on employers to pay employees a living wage so that they do not have to rely on food stamps or welfare for their livelihood and to this end the board is supporting an increase in the federal minimum wage. Join the effort through the Web site: <http://www.umc-gbcs.org>.

¶ Book of Discipline 163-E

that of Jesus Christ, — the history of Jerusalem, say, being a part of the Universal History. The naked, the embalmed, unburied death of Jerusalem amid its desolate hills — think of it." — Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

Do you agree that life is tragic? What keeps our life from being tragic?

Friday

"We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

"We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family." — "Our Social Creed," paragraphs 2-3, from Book of Discipline 2004, pages 124-5.

Prayer

Morning

Dear God, it is safer for me to consider my self before the welfare of those around me. Help me to have the courage to stand up when you call on me. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, through you great changes can be brought to this world. Help us to take our part in the changes in the way that you call us whether by speaking, standing up for others or helping those who stand in harm's way. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 27

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.

In His Place



Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing

Seeing through Jesus' eyes

Following Sept. 11, 2001, the Southeast Asia tsunami and Hurricane Katrina there were some who said that the victims deserved to die because they were sinners and were receiving divine punishment for their sins.

Read Luke 13:1-5, what does Jesus say about people deserving to die?

There is a common belief that is referred to as the doctrine of retribution. This doctrine states that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. So when something like natural disasters and Sept. 11 occur some people immediately think that the people on whom disaster befell must have done something to deserve it. But Jesus denies this doctrine in a discussion with his listeners by comparing people who had just sacrificed at the temple to people killed when the tower they were in collapsed.

Who could be holier than someone who has just confessed their sins, repented and prayed to God? Yet this is what the Galileans had just done when they were slaughtered by Pilate's troops at the Temple. Between their time of sacrifice and their slaying what could they have done to deserve to be killed and their blood "mingled with their sacrifices"? This would be similar being killed right after communion.

Jesus then talks about people killed when the tower they were in collapsed. Again, they did not die because of something they did but because catastrophe can strike at any time. And Jesus tells his listeners to repent before catastrophe could strike in their lives and it is too late to get right with God.

Read Luke 13:6-9, what do you have to do with the fig tree?

How many of you remember the childhood song "Little Bunny Food-Food"? The bunny hops through the forest finding field mice and then "bopping" them on the head. The good fairy comes down and gives Food-Food three chances with the threat of becoming a goon if the bunny doesn't stop bopping the field mice on their heads. Finally Food-Food is turned into a goon.

The vineyard owner has given the fig tree three chances (or years) to bear fruit and so far it hasn't so he's going to get rid of it.

Yet a worker talks the owner into giving it one more year and the worker promises to give more care to the tree in hopes of it bearing fruit.

This is what Jesus did for us, Jesus gave us "one more year" to repent and bear fruit for God. In Methodist theology, we talk about showing evidence of accepting the Holy Spirit and living our lives on the path of God as the "fruits of the Spirit."

Recently the church as a whole has displayed its "fruits of the Spirit" through its Gulf Coast rebuilding efforts. Through our apportionments and special donations we have funded the United Methodist Committee on Relief, which is still working with churches across the country to help clean up homes in the Gulf Coast. Because we know that a disaster can strike anybody at any time, we work to help when a helping hand is needed. Because it is what Jesus would do.

**Third Week
of Lent
(Year C)**

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

We are all equal in the eyes of God and Jesus

Isaiah 55:1-9

God calls everybody to come to the waters and drink, everyone who hungers to eat. It is easy to hear God saying all those who come “Your money’s no good here. This is a feast open for everybody.”

Yet too often not everybody is given this invitation to a banquet. Howard Thurman remarked that 11 a.m. Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in the United States. One of Thurman’s students was Martin Luther King Jr., yet when we look around at churches across the country many of them are still segregated. The famous study of African American children picking which doll was better was recently repeated by a student doing a documentary and sadly the results showed the children still thought the white doll was the “good” doll, the one they wanted to be like.

We have come a long way legally since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, yet we still have a long way to go.

“Racism is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over the other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others,” is our official statement on racism. We also recognize that racism is both a personal and institutional problem.

Legislation and Affirmative Action have been positive steps toward all of us eating God’s banquet together. Yet personal racism still keeps most churches segregated. “Racism plagues and cripples our growth in Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. White people are unfairly granted privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color. Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life.”

We are called to be one family in Christ and that means that no body is privileged over anybody else based on flesh and bone.

¶ 162-A, Book of Discipline

Becoming disciples

Monday

Read Isaiah 55:7 and Luke 13:6-9. One contains a call to repentance and the other talks about giving us one more chance to repent. Why is it that we don’t repent immediately but have to be given multiple opportunities to come into relationship with God?

Tuesday

Read Proverbs 9:5 and Isaiah 55:1-5. Compare the invitation to God’s banquet with the invitation to Wisdom’s banquet. What does it mean to take part in a holy banquet?

Wednesday

Read Exodus 32:6 and 1 Corinthians 10:7. What is a common practice that is missing in the description of action of the people who are being admonished? Why would neglecting this practice be an allusion to idolatry? Hint: What is the first

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

“Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons.”

Paul writes to the Corinthians to warn them that they are risking God’s wrath and includes a “vice list” that serves to differentiate the Christian Corinthians from the pagan Corinthians that surround them. In the list is included idolatry, sexual immorality, putting Christ and God to the test and complaining.

Of these only one has a Scriptural reference: idolatry in Exodus 32:6, which indicates that this is Paul’s major focus of the passage. Yet some people gloss right past Paul’s emphasis and read “sexual immorality” as a reference to homosexuality.

But this is not what Paul refers to, what Paul is actually writing about is a man living with his father’s widow. (1 Cor. 5:1)

The Book of Discipline states that this is a “clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims ... Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against gays and lesbians. We also commit ourselves to social witness against the coercion and marginalization of former homosexuals.”

We are called to accept people who are different than us. Yet we often try to distance ourselves from those we think are “other,” whether the differences be economic, racial or sexual.

God welcomes “those who thirst” to come and drink at the banquet; Jesus ate dinner with taxpayers, prostitutes and sinners. Who are we to deny what God and Jesus have freely offered because it makes us uncomfortable?

“Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others and with self.”

¶ 162-H and 161-G, Book of Discipline

commandment?

Thursday

“We are called on not to mirror but to challenge culture, not to sustain but to upend the status quo, and if that to some sounds overly bold, isn’t it true that God is always beckoning us toward horizons we aren’t so sure we want to reach?” — William Sloane Coffin

What does this mean to you? What are some of the horizons that God has beckoned us to in the past? What are the horizons we are currently being beckoned toward?

Friday

“We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.” — “Our Social Creed,” paragraph 4, from Book of Discipline 2004, page 125.

Prayer

Morning

Dear God, we worship you with joy, gladness and singing each day. Thank you for taking care of us in troubled times. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, you are gracious to all of your people whether we pray to you constantly or not. Help us to care for people who have been struck by disaster in the same way you care for us. Helps us realize that we are all the same in the eyes of God whatever our differences may be in our eyes. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 63:1-8

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

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In His Place

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Seeing through Jesus' eyes

The Parable of the Prodigal Son has probably received more analysis than any other passage in the Gospels. It has been depicted in art, literature, music and ballet and there is even debate over what to call the parable. We are going to look at it today in the context of what each character has to teach us and some would recommend we call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Waiting Father and the Elder Brother.

Read Luke 15:11b-24, think of people you know who are like the Prodigal Son. Could it be you?

The younger son of a wealthy man asks for and receives his inheritance and then follows his dreams to the big city. While there he gives in to the temptations that he sees and loses all the money he came with. Finding himself impoverished he finds employment with someone who is very unlike himself. He is employed doing something that his family would find very offensive so on top of the poverty he is feeling shame because they will not approve of him should he return. But one day he comes to himself and realizes that he would be better to be a slave in his father's household so he decides to return.

Upon returning the son wants to confess his sins to his father, state his unworthiness and ask to be treated like a hired hand. But the father sees his son and recognizes him from afar, he runs out to greet him accepts his confession and statement of contrition before cutting him off and welcoming him back into the family.

Some people would say that the son had been born again and turned toward God, who accepted him without having to do penance for his misdeeds. Do you agree?

Read Luke 15:25-32, think of people you know who are like the Elder Brother. Could it be you?

The Elder Brother watched his younger son walk away down the road chasing his dreams and wished that he could go along, but somebody had to stay behind and work the farm for the father. His only reward is that he would be treated well by his father for remaining faithful and because of this he started to feel pride in staying behind and being the "good

son."

Then one day he returns from the field to hear music playing and to smell meat roasting. What could be the reason for the celebration? A worker tells him that his brother has returned and his father is celebrating. He reacts by refusing to join the party. Why should he celebrate his brother's return? Why hasn't his father celebrated his presence every day?

His father comes out tells him that he is cherished and that he will not lose out on anything because he was good. But the father must celebrate because he had thought the younger son was dead.

Do you agree with the father?

What is our role as the father in the parable? Jesus is telling this parable to the scribes who disapproved of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Who would you consider the outsiders in today's society?

As Jesus and the father, shouldn't you be reaching out to them?

**Fourth Week
of Lent**

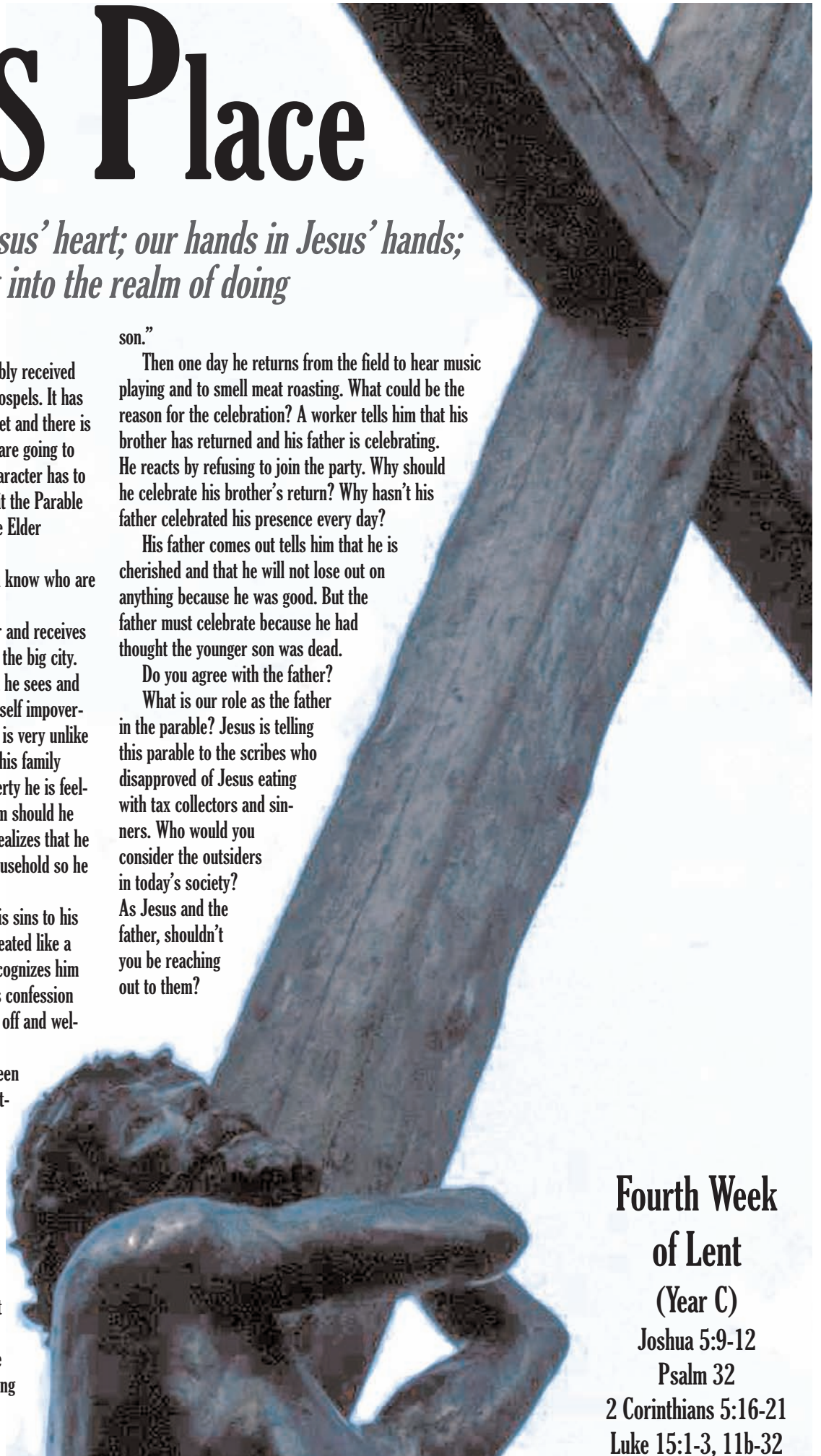
(Year C)

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32



A new way to look at traditional problems

Joshua 5:9-12

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years relying on God for manna, quail and water but now they are in Canaan, the land of their ancestors. They celebrate the Passover harvest festival and eat the crops of Canaan and on that day God quits sustaining them with manna. Now they will provide food for themselves from the land.

For most of us we get our food from the grocery store and if we are lucky enough to have a bit of land we might keep a vegetable garden. But most in America have lost touch with the agricultural system that gets the food to our table. We don't even think about it, we just expect it to be on the store shelves. And we expect that what is on the shelves will be safe for us to eat.

In the last year our food has been threatened by E. coli in spinach and reports of mad cow always make us question the safety of beef. While those threats to the food we eat grab headlines because there is an immediate cause and effect there are other things to think about when it comes to food safety:

"We support policies that protect the food supply and that ensure the public's right to know the content of the foods they are eating. ... We urge independent testing for chemical residues in food, and the removal from the market of foods contaminated with potentially hazardous levels of pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides; drug residues from animal antibiotics, steroids, or hormones; contaminants due to pollution that are carried by air, soil, or water from incinerator plants or other industrial operations. ... We oppose weakening the standards for organic foods."

There was a time when our food was only threatened by the dangers of drought, flood, locusts and various bugs but when we industrialized we created more dangers to ourselves. The loaves of bread on the shelves may seem like manna but we have work to ensure that the food is really safe for us to eat.

¶ 160-F Book of Discipline

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

This short passage is referred to as Jesus' ministry of reconciliation in part because some form of the word "reconciliation" appears in this passage five times. But how is this ministry of reconciliation applied to our society?

One of the ways is through restorative justice, which works to hold perpetrators of crime accountable for their actions to the person(s) victimized by that crime. The church endorses this system of justice that tries to bring healing to all of the parties in the crime: the offender, victim and families and the community.

"In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole." This does not mean completely replacing our current retributive justice system but working in concert with it.

Restorative justice is just one of the measures that the church recommends in regards to the criminal justice system. The church also pushes for preventative measures such as "social conditions that to crime." The church also endorses community policing where the members of the community work with law enforcement members to reduce crime in their neighborhood.

This can be as simple as Neighborhood Watch and complex as community leaders meeting with law enforcement officials to let them know who are dangerous criminals and who needs help to be turned away from the "wrong path." A troubled neighborhood in Boston worked with police in the latter way, including weekly meetings with law enforcement, that lead to a drastic decrease in violent crime in the 1990s.

"The church is transformed when it responds to the claims of discipleship by becoming an agent of healing and systematic change." When we approach of problem with only one set of solutions the problem continues but by approaching from many angles there are more possibilities for actual change.

¶ 164-F Book of Discipline

Prayer

Morning

Almighty God, I have sinned, I am no longer worthy of being your child, treat me like one of your hired hands. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, you have forgiven me for everything I have done, help me to forgive those around me for what they have done and welcome them into my heart as members of your family. It is only when we welcome everybody that we are truly your children. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 32

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.

Becoming disciples

Monday

Rivalry between brothers is a common biblical theme, read Genesis 4:2-8; 25:27-34; 27:1-36 and/or 37:1-4. Why do you think siblings are so often depicted this way? What does it mean for the larger family of God?

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Isaiah 43:18-19. What does "new creation" mean? What are some things that need to be created anew or looked at in a completely new way?

Wednesday

Read Genesis 1:28-30. Some Bible translations have God giving "dominion" over all living beings and some "stewardship." What does the different translations imply to you? Which do you prefer and how does that effect how you treat the earth?

Thursday

"My days are in the yellow leaf;/The flowers and fruits of love are gone;/The worm, the canker, and the grief/Are mine alone!

"The fire that on my bosom preys/Is lone as some volcanic isle;/No torch is kindled at its blaze —/A funeral pile." — Lord Byron, "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year"

In baptism we are "born anew." How does this partial poem relate to the Younger Son and the practice of baptism?

Friday

"We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress." — "Our Social Creed," paragraph 5, from Book of Discipline 2004, page 125.

In His Place

Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing

Seeing through Jesus' eyes

"You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me," Jesus said in response to Judas' condemnation of Mary anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. It's a difficult passage because it seems to say that Jesus did not really care about the poor, that it didn't matter that money had been "wasted" on perfume instead of using it to feed, house and clothe the poor.

Read John 12:1-8 paying close attention to what Jesus is saying in word and action.

Throughout this study two commentaries have been used, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary and the Interpreter's Bible Commentary from 1952.

The new commentary focuses on the perfume replacing the stench of death with the fragrance of love and devotion through Mary's selfless act. We are to see two sets of characters in opposition to each other Jesus and Lazarus and Mary and Judas.

Lazarus died and was buried, Jesus was warned to stay away from the burial site because of the stench. Yet Jesus entered and raised Lazarus from the dead. It is said that the perfume Mary uses on Jesus had originally been purchased for Lazarus but had not been used. So now Mary is using it on Jesus to prepare him for his crucifixion. Through Mary's love and devotion the stench of death is removed.

And it is also Mary's love and devotion for Jesus at the heart of her comparison to Judas. Out of love and devotion she pours out the oil on Jesus, Judas does not object to the oil based on his love and devotion for the poor but based on his greed — as keeper of the money purse he was stealing from the common purse that he controlled.

In the 1952 commentary, Mary wasting the perfume is compared to the church wasting money on buildings and celebrations instead of taking care of the poor. In Karl Marx's famous quote is the charge against the church: "Religion is the opium of the poor. ... to suppress religion, which provides an illusory happiness, is to establish the claims of real happiness."

And oddly, it is to Marx that Jesus ultimately responds: "You always have the poor with you,

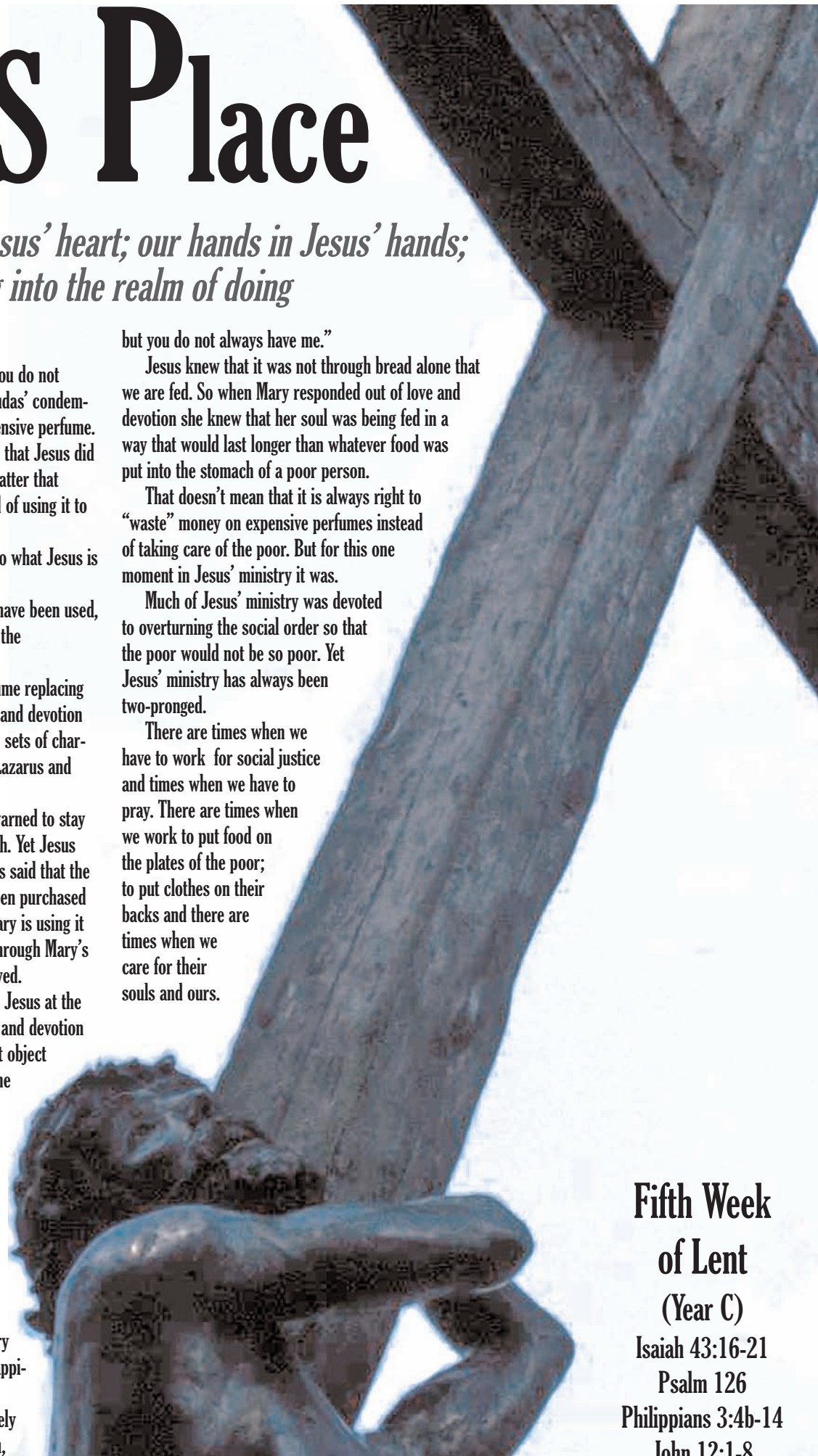
but you do not always have me."

Jesus knew that it was not through bread alone that we are fed. So when Mary responded out of love and devotion she knew that her soul was being fed in a way that would last longer than whatever food was put into the stomach of a poor person.

That doesn't mean that it is always right to "waste" money on expensive perfumes instead of taking care of the poor. But for this one moment in Jesus' ministry it was.

Much of Jesus' ministry was devoted to overturning the social order so that the poor would not be so poor. Yet Jesus' ministry has always been two-pronged.

There are times when we have to work for social justice and times when we have to pray. There are times when we work to put food on the plates of the poor; to put clothes on their backs and there are times when we care for their souls and ours.



**Fifth Week
of Lent
(Year C)**

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

Taking a stand against the majority, law

Isaiah 43:16-21

Most people when reading the Hebrew Scriptures are struck by two things: the family tensions and all the killing in the name of God. Many Christians differentiate the Jewish god as being a god of vengeance and the Christian god as a god of love. But that is too simplistic and ignores passages like this one.

James Wm. McClendon, Jr. in *Ethics: Systematic Theology* discusses the exodus from Egypt noting: “Their formative ‘military’ event was a withdrawal, accompanied by a natural disaster — the wind and waves — falling upon the pursuing Egyptians that God substituted for the military victories other nations have always looked to as their formative events. Subsequently, the people chose the way of military exploits, and heard the voice of God commanding them to those exploits, but in doing so characteristically forgot their origins, and the different pater (trust in God, not in arms).”

Furthermore the Isaiah passage calls us to a new way of thinking, we are told to turn away from our traditional way — the choosing of war over peace. Through Isaiah we are told “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” God is telling us that we are being directed to think differently so pay attention.

As Methodists we “reject war as a usual instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them; that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities.”

President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his address to the United Nations talked about the cost of maintaining a military on the society as he looked at how the money spent on war could be spent on infrastructure like highways and schools. Eisenhower was not just a politician but had been the commander of Allied forces in World War II, the leader of the D-Day Invasion — who better to understand the costs of war?

¶ 165 - C Book of Discipline

Becoming disciples

Monday

Read John 12:7. How does that relate to Wordsworth’s sonnet, “Inside of King’s College Chapel, Cambridge”: “Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore/Of nicely-calculated less or more.”

Tuesday

Read Matthew 5:9. With our nation at war, do we treat our peacemakers as blessed or as enemies? Why is it that we find it difficult to hear the voice of dissent when we are involved in war?

Wednesday

Read Acts 9:1-2. Saul did not see himself as guilty or incomplete until his encounter with Jesus, yet after the road to Damascus experience he became Paul and went from the chief persecutor of the early church to its most successful missionary. How do you see this change taking place in you?

Philippians 3:4b-14

I visited Ground Zero on Thanksgiving weekend in 2005 and at that time there were two things that I would have loved to gotten into a single photograph but was prevented by the construction fencing. The first was the steel I-beam cross that so many of us have heard about and have seen in photographs. But what would have fit in the upper right hand corner of the photo were window decorations in two windows. One was a peace sign and the other was words: “Dissent is Patriotic.”

Paul was a follower of the laws when he was a Pharisee, he was so good as following the law that he was a persecutor of the early Christians. As Saul he was present at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, not in sympathy with the Christians but against them. He tells the Philippians that “as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ... For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.”

Growing up Saul learned the law and followed it to the letter yet after the Damascus road experience, he realized that being in relationship with God was not about the law. He was born anew as Paul and realized that faith lead to righteousness — Paul had to follow his conscience after regaining sight in Damascus.

“Governments and laws should be servants of God and of human beings. Citizens have a duty to abide by laws duly adopted by orderly and just process of government. But governments, no less than individuals, are subject to the judgment of God. Therefore, we recognize the right of individuals to dissent when acting under the constraint of conscience ...”

Sometimes dissent is not only patriotic but the Christian thing to do.

¶ 164 - E Book of Discipline

Thursday

“What can I give Him,/Poor as I am?/If I were a shepherd,/I would bring a lamb;/If I were a wise man,/I would do my part;/Yet what I can I give Him —/Give my heart.” — Christina Rossetti, “A Christmas Carol.”

What does this mean to you?

Friday

“We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.” — “Our Social Creed,” paragraph 6, from Book of Discipline 2004, page 125.

Prayer

Morning

Dear God, sometimes when I see the poor I turn away because it seems that they are ever present. Help us to open our hearts to their situation. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, who offers us renewal when we are tired, help us turn to you with love and devotion for all of your family. Help us to stand against the powerful when our conscience tells us that they are in the wrong. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 126

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.

In His Place

Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing

Seeing through Jesus' eyes

In this final week before Easter, we return to the problem of temptation, specifically the temptations of greatness and cowardice. The disciples knowing that Jesus would be leaving them try to figure out who would lead them, who would be the greatest among them. And poor Peter, who pledges to follow Jesus to prison and to death, will succumb to the temptation to deny Jesus before following him again.

Looking back with nearly 2,000 years of hindsight we can be tempted to look down on the disciples and how they just didn't get it but there are many times when we are trapped by the same temptations they were so long ago.

Read Luke 22:24-30 and think about when you have been tempted to claim the throne instead of the serving tray at a banquet.

Jesus reminds the disciples, who are dreaming of greatness, that his has been a mission of service and not of being served. It is often hard to remember that some of the best service for Jesus is done by those who get their hands dirty and not those worried about dirt on their robes.

Think of the ladies at your church who serve meals at funerals, fundraisers and conferences. Year after year they provide fellowship for the bereaved, money for missions and special needs like medical bills. How many charge conferences occur without at least a dessert? You'll find them clearing the tables and washing the dishes long after the speaking is done, but you won't find them trying to gain a piece of the spotlight. Like Jesus they are among as ones who serve.

This is the type of service that Jesus wanted the disciples and us to hold above service that gains the spotlight. Jesus wanted us to remember that the greatest service was that done without hope of recognition.

What other types of service does Jesus call us to?

Read Luke 22:31-34 and 54-62. Think about why Peter denied knowing Jesus.

Jesus tells Peter that he has prayed for him that his faith not fail. Yet he knows Peter will deny him so Jesus' real prayer is that Peter will be strengthened in his faith by failing the test of acknowledging Jesus when he thinks his life is

on the line. And we know that Peter denies Jesus three times before the cock crows. We may think it understandable that Peter would deny Jesus because he thought he would be killed beside Jesus if he admitted knowing him. That's a safe assumption, but there is a legend that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome because of his preaching of Jesus' word after Jesus ascended. The legend says that Peter asked to be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as Jesus did.

Peter knew before Jesus was crucified that following Jesus could lead to prison or death but it wasn't until after Jesus was crucified that Peter was willing to give his life for Jesus.

So what changed in Peter that he went from the model of the weak disciple to become the leader of the disciples?

What kind of changes does Jesus require of you to be a true disciple?

Sixth Week
of Lent
(Passion Sunday)

(Year C)

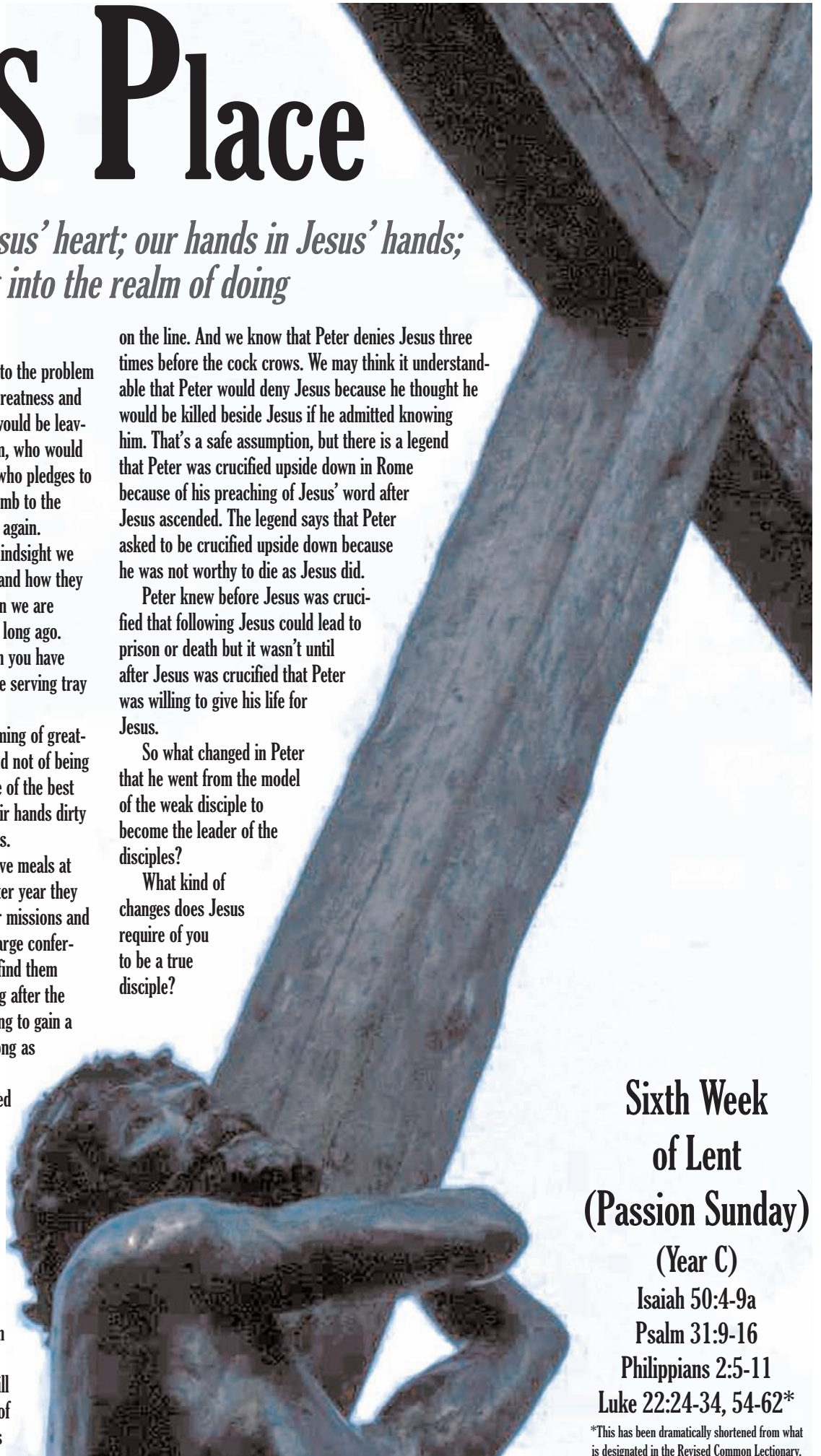
Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 22:24-34, 54-62*

*This has been dramatically shortened from what is designated in the Revised Common Lectionary.



Urging responsibility through boycotting, letters

Isaiah 50:4-9a

“The job of newspapers is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.” This is a paraphrase of a John Peter Finley quote that I kept by my desk while working at newspapers for many years. The other important task of newspapers is to inform the public so that we send an “educated populace” to the polls, this educated populace being the key to democracy according to Thomas Jefferson.

But too often the “media” does not fulfill these higher purposes. “The unprecedented impact the media (principally television and movies) are having on Christian and human values within our society becomes more apparent each day. ... the entertainment industry often advocates the opposite, painting a cynical picture of violence, abuse, greed, profanity and a constant denigration of the family. The media must be held accountable for the part they play in the decline of values we observe in society today.”

We are called “to support and encourage parental responsibility” in regards to TV, movies, radio and Internet usage. We are also called to express opposition to the needless portrayal of “violent and sexually indecent shows” by writing to the shows and their sponsors. And we are urged not to buy the products of sponsors of the offensive programs.

It is not enough to simply stop purchasing products, you have to write them and tell them what they are doing wrong by supporting the programs. It is easy to dismiss this issue as one that is “silly” when the best way to avoid the programs is to turn the TV off, don’t attend the movies or monitor children when they are on the Internet.

But with enough resistance to the images then the media may choose to once again speak with “the tongue of a teacher,” the duty that was deemed so important as to have the right to a free press included in the First Amendment with the right to free expression of religion.

¶ 162 - Q Book of Discipline

Becoming disciples

Monday

Read Isaiah 50:6 and Jeremiah 20:1-2. These prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures had to endure pain for standing up to spread the Word of God in regards to overturning the social order, yet they did it.

What keeps you from standing up for God?

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. What kind of response do you have to this passage? What does this say about the theology of Paul in regards service to others?

Wednesday

Read Philippians 2:5. What does it mean to have the “mind of Christ?” What does this say about Paul’s understanding of the life of Christ versus the divinity of Christ?

Philippians 2:5-11

In this passage Paul holds Jesus up as a figure who “became a servant to the lowliest on earth, whom we would consider beneath us; and who, by enduring all that the typical sins of men can do, revealed how respectable people (with whom we would feel quite at home) may be the chief enemies of the living God who seeks their liberation,” according to The Interpreter’s Bible commentary.

It is when the powerful and privileged realize the damage that they may be causing and act responsibly that the greatest changes can be seen. Often it isn’t until the people on the margins find a way to speak that the powerful are even aware of a problem.

“Upon the powerful rests responsibility to exercise their wealth and influence with restraint,” is written in the church’s call to powerful countries. The church calls on the powerful countries to “use their nonviolent power to maximize the political, social, and economic self-determination of other nations rather than to further their own special interests.”

As citizens of these countries we are to “encourage the governments under which (we) live and the economic entities within (our) societies to aid and work for the development of more just economic orders.”

This is an appeal not just to our governments but to the companies that make products by paying pennies a day and dump chemicals into the rivers and ground because they don’t have the Environmental Protection Agency looking over their shoulder.

This urging needs to take place through letter writing and product boycotts. While we are urging our government and companies to be more responsible it also requires us taking more responsibility for our actions in grocery and retail stores.

It is through these seemingly small acts that we can make great change for people being taken advantage of by the powerful.

¶ 165 - B Book of Discipline

Thursday

“Alexander and I both founded our empires on force. Jesus alone founded his on love. And to this day countless thousands would die for him.” — attributed to Napoleon.

Why do you think this is?

Friday

“We believe in the present and final triumph of God’s Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.” — “Our Social Creed,” paragraph 7, from Book of Discipline 2004, page 125.

Prayer

Morning

Dear God, we often dream of greatness yet when the time comes to stand up for what is right, we run away. Help us to find our feet to stand for what is right. Amen.

Evening

Almighty God, who strengthens us to resist temptations, help us to see how our actions effect others and open our hearts, minds and lives to those that we have thought ourselves better than. Make us servants as Jesus served. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Psalm reading

Psalm 31:9-16

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.