



[Abel and Melchizedek Sacrificing,](#)
Basilica di S. Vitale

The idea of losing life in order to save it may sound like a contradiction, but once we allow this week's Lectionary to move us into Jesus' view of things, it makes perfect sense. The struggle, though, is less about understanding what Jesus meant, and more about how we actually find the courage and faith to live his call.

May our worship lead us into losing our lives for the sake of the Gospel so we may truly find them.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Jeremiah 31 : 31-34

Our Lenten readings have illustrated God's historic covenants with his people, Now, we hear Jeremiah's prophecy of an entirely new covenant, not based on ancient Law so easy to break, but written deep in the hearts of everyone who longs to know and be known by God.

The Psalm - Psalm 51: 1-13

A psalm asking for God's mercy and forgiveness, and for God to wash the psalmist clean, restoring to him the joy of God's salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

OR [Psalm 119:9-16](#): A celebration of God's law that keeps a young man pure, that is valuable and precious and that is hidden in the heart, making the person who treasures it happy.

Hebrews 5 : 5-10

The task of the Jewish High Priest was to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of sinful people. This writer says that Christ, by offering himself to God through his life and death, has become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 12 : 20-33

Jesus was human enough to be greatly disturbed at what he sensed lay before him. Yet he will glorify his Father's name, trusting in that power not only to lift him up but draw all people to himself.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

The Fifth Sunday in Lent Year B 22nd March 2015

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Jeremiah%2031:%2031-34%0Acw%20Psalm%2051:%201-13%0A%2BOR%0Acw%20Psalm%20119:%209-16%0AHebrews%205:%205-10%0AJohn%2012:%2020-33

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

We beseech thee, Almighty God,
look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants,
and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty,
to be our defence against all our enemies;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Presider or deacon

God made Christ a high priest for our salvation. As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us earnestly offer prayers and supplications to God through his Son.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsor(s).

Lord, have mercy.

For all the peoples of the earth and for mercy, justice, and peace.

Lord, have mercy.

For the sick and the suffering, and for all who are in danger or need.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying and the dead.

Lord, have mercy.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

Remembering *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Blessed are you, God of eternal life, who lifted up your Son from death. Receive the prayers we offer this day for all who walk in darkness, and make your people children of light; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

A: At the time of the Passover festival, the Greeks gathered and wished to see Jesus. Their coming moved Jesus to speak of his "glorification", his death. Like the seed that must die to itself to bear fruit, a follower of Jesus must lose life to save it. We pray, then, "In dying we live, O Christ," and respond, C: **Amen.**

A: Let us pray for the impenitent and unbelieving.

P: By faithful proclamation from our pulpits, let your Spirit penetrate deep into those who resist your word, O God. Make it known that you desire truth in the secret heart. Convict, cleanse, and counsel by your gospel. In dying we live, O Christ. C: **Amen.**

A: Let us intercede before our God on behalf of those who daily know suffering and death.

P: Bring caring angels to those who waste away in pain and anguish. Grant gifted researchers to uncover necessary cures. Let the light of hope come to those beset by AIDS, cancer, cholera, typhus, leprosy, muscular dystrophy, M.S., Alzheimer's, and other destroyers of life and health. In dying we live, O Christ. C: **Amen.**

A: Let us pray for our congregation and its workers.

P: Guiding Spirit, we commend to you our pastor(s), our counselors, our staff, our committees, and all who pursue a worthy life for our congregation. Let the gospel of Jesus the Christ, motivate and inspire an effective outreach to the unenlightened and unpersuaded. In dying, we live, O Christ. C: **Amen.**

A: Let us pray for those who prepare for membership in the church.

P: Revealing Spirit, open wide an understanding of forgiveness as essential, relational, and continuing in all aspects of the Christian walk. In dying, we live, O Christ. C: **Amen.**

P: Make us faithful agents of your message of life. C: **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

God of hope,
in this eucharist we have tasted
the promise of your heavenly banquet
and the richness of eternal life.
May we who bear witness to the death of your Son,
also proclaim the glory of his resurrection,
for he is Lord for ever and ever.

PRAYERS

God of wilderness and water,
your Son was baptized and tempted as we are.
Guide us through this season,
that we may not avoid struggle,
but open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance
and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God of the covenant,
in the glory of the cross
your Son embraced the power of death
and broke its hold over your people.
In this time of repentance,
draw all people to yourself,
that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may put aside the deeds of death
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.
God of the living,
through baptism we pass from the shadow of death
to the light of the resurrection.
Remain with us and give us hope
that, rejoicing in the gift of the Spirit
who gives life to our mortal flesh,
we may be clothed with the garment of immortality,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,
as Jesus, in the days before his passion,

offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears,
let us pray for those who suffer, those who are in need,
and those who seek reconciliation...

... God of compassion,
you know our faults and yet you promised to forgive.
Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom.
Open our hearts to gladness,
call dry bones to dance,
and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.

God of suffering and glory,
in Jesus Christ you reveal the way of life
through the path of obedience.
Inscribe your law in our hearts,
that in life we may not stray from you,
but may be your people. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"new covenant" - I wonder how many times in the scriptures God tries to renew a covenant with God's people. How many times would you try again with someone who had betrayed, neglected, hurt, or forgotten you?

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This is God wanting a real relationship with people, for God to be the one to whom the people belong. Imagine, if God's law is on our hearts, within us, perhaps we can learn better to live by its *spirit* and not by its *letter*. God is trying a different approach in this new covenant - a law of love we carry inside of us.

"they shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest" - God is for all - not just for the knowledgeable and educated, who have power to teach others - God is for all.

Psalms 51:1-12:

Ah, a favourite psalm. And like Joel, an element of confession. This psalm is one I'm mostly likely to use if I'm feeling the need to come before God in a confessional mode. Do you have a confessional prayer in church every week? We do not, and I think as Protestants, we sometimes get nervous about confession, even corporate. But even if we don't share sins with a priest, confession is a necessary part of our relationship - any healthy relationship, really.

Where I disagree with the psalmist, (thought to be David writing after the sin with Bathsheba) is in his claim: "against you, you alone, have I sinned." Rarely do our sins only affect God - that's the worst about them - our sin hurts others. David's sin, for instance, resulted in a man's death, and a child's death, according to scriptures.

Hebrews 5:5-10:

Check out Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4 for context about Melchizedek.

I don't usually think of Jesus as a "high priest." What priestly functions do you see Jesus filling? How is Jesus priest? The author gives his answer in verses 7-10.

:8 - I also don't think of Jesus as one who had to "learn" obedience, but as one who simply was obedient. But maybe there is more power in thinking of Jesus learning to obey God through his faithfulness to God's plan for him. What do you think?

John 12:20-33:

:24 - This verse is often used in funeral liturgies/readings. We probably don't think of grain dying when we plant it, but grain becomes something entirely different when it is planted. Are you willing to be planted, to become something entirely different?

:25 - Compare this verse to Mark 8:35 - Is Jesus saying the same thing in each passage?

:27 - "Now my soul is troubled." I think the only other place Jesus makes a similar statement is when he is praying in the garden before his arrest. I think it can be a brave thing to share when your soul is troubled.

:27-32 - Jesus makes so many "grand speeches" in John's gospel, so different than his style as recorded in the Synoptic gospels. What do you think John is trying to communicate to us about Jesus?

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The Lectionary, in this last week of Lent, brings together some thought-provoking Scriptural teachings. In Jeremiah there is the promise of God's new covenant, in which the law is written on the heart. Both Psalms echo this promise, with Psalm 119 celebrating the blessings and wisdom of God's law, and Psalm 51 (David's confession song) expressing the prayer that God would bring about a change of heart which would restore David's relationship with God and enable him to obey God's law again. In the New Testament readings, the focus is on Jesus in his high-priestly role. In Hebrews, the mysterious figure of Melchizedek is used as the metaphor for Jesus' pleading and action on behalf of God's people in order to bring them salvation. Finally, in the Gospel reading we have the closest thing in John to Gethsemane and the closest thing to the transfiguration. Jesus has a moment when he considers asking to be freed from his time of suffering, but then he acknowledges that it is in his suffering that his mission is fulfilled and God is glorified. Then, God speaks to Jesus affirming him and assuring him that his work will bring glory to God. But, then the question of suffering is expanded to include followers of Jesus, who must inevitably give their lives up – like seeds falling into the ground – in order to find God's life and bear fruit for God's Reign.

When we bring all of these threads together, we are faced with the surprising and disturbing challenge that God's new covenant is appropriated for us through the work of Christ as both priest and sacrifice, and also through our own willingness to lose our lives for the sake of the Gospel. This makes sense, since it is impossible to enter a new life unless we are willing to release the old one, and a new covenant cannot be written on the heart if we remain obsessed with the externals of the old covenant. The call to die in order to live may appear at first as a "works-based" theology, but to view it as such is to misunderstand what it means to die. Dying is not something we do. It is, rather, a release, a ceasing to strive and live, and a submission to the inevitable. In the same way, once we

have recognised the inadequacy of the old way of being – the old "covenant" with its external law – we can do nothing other than release it, to die to it, and to submit to the coming change, the inevitable transformation from who we were to who we are to become in Christ. We cannot make this transformation happen, anymore than the seed can make itself sprout. However, we can, if we so choose, resist the death and cling to the old way. This is where Christ's example is crucial for us – as we witness Jesus' willingness to die and trust in resurrection, so we are given the grace and the faith to follow.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The idea of a new covenant, a new way of being, that calls us to die in order to live may sound too "spiritual" and esoteric to have any relevance in the "real" world, but it is, in fact, exactly what we need as we face the major crises of our generation. We need to die to the economic systems built on unlimited greed and consumption, in order to find a new way to live and use our wealth to build a more sustainable society. We need to die to short-sighted, expedient exploitation of the world's natural resources for our own gain, in order to make a new covenant with the earth, and find a way to live on our planet with responsibility and restraint. We need to die to our false sense of disconnection with others, and die to our aggressive, protectionist tribalism in order to build a new connected, respectful and equitable world. We need to die to our lack of compassion for the poor, the sick and the oppressed in order to work more intentionally and consistently for justice for all. In so many ways the world as we know it – our current "covenant" with each other, with God and with the earth – is inadequate. Our current "laws" and "traditions" are unable to deal with the challenges we now face. Our organisations and institutions are hopelessly ill-equipped to navigate the complexity of our society. However, to bring about the needed change will require a death. We cannot build a new way of being without letting go of the old. We cannot just "tweak" the systems. We need to release them in some significant ways, and endure the pain, the death, that will result. Death, birth and change all result in times of chaos before order emerges. Unless we can embrace this chaos, this "dying to live" we will just continue to do things as we always have done, and in the process, we will lose our lives. But, if we are willing to follow Christ, risk the new "covenant" and lose our lives, we will discover a new life – a new world – waiting for us.

LOCAL APPLICATION: No relationship can be sustained without fairly regular "dying" experiences. The single person must die to become united in a relationship or marriage. The couple must die to give birth to a family. The family must die to release the children to their own journey into love and growth. The same is true for community. The small group must die to become a community. The community must die to become an organisation. Every season of growth, creativity, change or re-orientation, requires a losing of life in order to save life. In ministry, this call to die is, perhaps, most keenly felt. The church cannot hold on to its own life if it is to be Christ's instrument of healing and justice in the world. Rather, the church must die to its own needs, to its own agenda, and to its own self-preservation, giving itself for the sake of those around it, or it loses its life and becomes an irrelevant "club". But, if we embrace our deaths, following Christ to the cross, we discover true, abundant life as we serve others. On a personal, individual level, the same principles apply as well. When we seek to save our lives – refusing to become vulnerable to others, refusing to release our own desires, agendas and perspectives – we lose our lives, and end up alone and bitter. But, when we willingly let go of our own life – giving ourselves for the sake of connection, family, friendship and intimacy – we find ourselves rich and alive with connections, love and support. It is, perhaps, one of the greatest challenges in our

increasingly individualist and self-centred world to learn to die to the false life of idolised self in order to find the true, lasting life of intimacy and community.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

Frederick Buechner Weekly Sermon Illustration: Salvation

John 12:24-25 - Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Here are Frederick Buechner's thoughts on salvation, originally from [Wishful Thinking](#) and reprinted in [Beyond Words](#):

<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustration-salvation>

Day 1 - A Blip in the Plan - John 12:24-25 - Relationships are complicated, aren't they? Parents, siblings, friends, in-laws, boyfriends and girlfriends, husbands and wives, co-workers, children. In quarrels and contradictions and controversies, we seek easy reconciliation. In the midst of the complications, we take them all for granted. In the middle of conflict, we imagine other possibilities. And we are kidding ourselves if we think that it is any different for our relationship with God.

We want simple reconciliation with God. When there are complications, we take God for granted. When we don't get along with God, we wonder who else there could be or what else we could do. What else can give me what I need? What else can satisfy my wants? Who else can answer my demand to see? For some sort of clarity, especially when my soul is troubled and when I feel like I am losing my life and myself and my purpose. Save me. Somebody. Please. I wish to see.

Relationship is at the heart of our Gospel text from John on this last Sunday of Lent, not only for us, but also for Jesus. Ours with God. God's with Jesus. Jesus with us. Because it's about to get a lot more complicated. Really complicated. And really, really hard.

http://day1.org/3636-a_blip_in_the_plan

Day 1 - Breaking news - on the passage from Jeremiah. At the core is this illustration - "I don't know why Jeremiah chose to temper the good news with the heartbreak of the past, but it reminds me of a story of a man who wakes every morning and sees the faded color photo of his wedding day. Every morning he wakes to this photo. It isn't a great photo, not even done by a professional, just a mere snapshot taken by someone in the congregation precisely at the time when the bride and groom were looking intently into each others eyes, and it echoes with the words, "Do you promise to love one another in joy and in sorrow, in plenty and in want, sickness and in health throughout all your days?" Many years later that man still hears his voice every morning saying, "I do." The man said that "this snapshot photo went up in our bedroom soon after my wife, by her grace and the grace of God, let me back into our marriage. I made a mistake."

"He said, 'I have not dared to ask my wife why she put that photo up on the wall. Maybe she likes it, but maybe she also knows that I will see it and be reminded of the promise. The promise I broke.'"

"When Jeremiah wrote down the words of the Lord to share with the people, the people weren't just waking to the reminders of the covenant that they broke, they had the reminders all around, every moment of every day. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the temple razed, people were pulled from their families, their homes, their worship and dragged to a foreign land."

Concludes with the text - "'The days are surely coming,' says the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant...I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' says the LORD; 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more.'"

http://day1.org/1239-breaking_news

Sermons that work - Sir, we would see Jesus - Phillips Brooks, author of "O little town of Bethlehem," and briefly Bishop of Massachusetts, was also responsible for one of the masterpieces of American nineteenth-century church architecture: Trinity Church in Boston's Copley Square. Brooks played a very direct role in Trinity's design. However, there is one feature of Brooks' design that is visible only to those who preach in Trinity church. Brooks had these words carved on the inside of Trinity's pulpit: "Sir, we would see Jesus." They are, of course, the words that "some Greeks" spoke to Philip when both they and Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. (I have been in this pulpit - HMCK).

Concludes... "Sir, we would see Jesus," the Greeks said to Philip. We, too, need to see Jesus, so that when others want to see Jesus, they can see him in us. As the old spiritual puts it:

In the morning when I rise,
Give me Jesus.
When I am alone,
Give me Jesus.
When I come to die,
Give me Jesus.
You can have all the world,
But give me Jesus."

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2009/03/?cat=7>

America - What would Jesus do? - John R Donahue. Introductory paragraph : "In these last two weeks of Lent, the readings draw our eyes to the crucified one, with a focus on what God has done for us. The promise of the new covenant embodies the aging Jeremiah's spiritual testament to an exiled people: that even though they have sinned in the past, 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' It will be written on the hearts of the people, and their acceptance will not be taught but will arise from their deep experience of forgiveness, 'for I will forgive their evil doing and remember their sin no more.' Though the term 'new covenant' appears only here in the Old Testament, at the

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Last Supper Jesus will describe his self-offering as a new covenant (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).” As always Donahue deals competently with the bible passages and shows how they are related in a subtle, winsome way.

http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=654

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#), Lent 5B, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown, 2012.

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/year-b-fifth-sunday-in-lent-march-25.html>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[When I Survey The Wondrous Cross](#)

[Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind](#)

[My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less](#)

[We Sing The Praise Of Him Who Died](#)

[Jesus You Have Called Us](#)

[I Will Offer Up My Life](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Once Again](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Jesus Messiah](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[O The Wonderful Cross](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[I Give You My Heart](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[However](#)

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title