

# REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS OF LENT

***The Lord is My Shepherd***

**Cathedral Church of Saint John**

**Wilmington, Delaware**

## Lent 2010

The reflections on the Sunday Lenten Psalms that follow in this booklet have been prayed and written by five members of the Cathedral congregation. You will notice that each is unique, not just because each is a reflection on a different Psalm, but because each author has written from her or his own experience. Some have reflected on the whole Psalm and others on verses from the Psalm.

I am grateful that the five persons I first contacted about doing these reflections all agreed. I hope that doing so was a gift for them. I am sure that the reflections will be a gift to you the reader.

My prayer for all that this be a holy Lent.

The Very Reverend William B. Lane

**The reflections have been written by: Marsali Hansen, Joe Tatnall,  
Linda Whitehead, Roberta Ham Walker, and Anita Manning**

**Marsali Hansen****Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16****1****He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, \*  
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.****2****He shall say to the LORD,  
"You are my refuge and my stronghold, \*  
my God in whom I put my trust."****9****Because you have made the LORD your refuge, \*  
and the Most High your habitation,****10****There shall no evil happen to you, \*  
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.****11****For he shall give his angels charge over you, \*  
to keep you in all your ways.****12****They shall bear you in their hands, \*  
lest you dash your foot against a stone.****13****You shall tread upon the lion and adder; \*  
you shall trample the young lion and the serpent under your feet.****14****Because he is bound to me in love,  
therefore will I deliver him; \*  
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.****15****He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; \*  
I am with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.****16****With long life will I satisfy him, \*  
and show him my salvation.**

**My son, a Marine, was in Iraq during the worst of it. I prayed that God would shelter him, be his refuge and his stronghold. And that my son, an agnostic, would put his trust in God as he lived and faced the unthinkable. He came home safe, wearing a cross one of his buddies had given him there, and agreeing there are no atheists in foxholes.**

**As we pause this Lenten season, we have fresh indelible images of the suffering in Haiti; bodies in the rubble, children wandering the streets. We also receive almost**

daily reports of the bombing of innocent villagers caught up in the crossfire and soldiers in small groups isolated in the mountains of Afghanistan under constant shelling, driving through the deserts of Iraq fearful of IED's. Amazingly, we also see groups in Haiti singing to God, worshiping in the streets. Also continents away, we hear of soldiers and villagers linked by their prayers to the one God. We can join them in worship that connects us all under the shelter of the Almighty. We can pray they, too, shall know his name.

**14 Because he is bound to me in love,**

**Therefore I will deliver him;\***

**I will protect him, because he knows my name.**

---

### **Joe Tatnall**

#### **Psalm 27**

**1**

**The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom then shall I fear? \*  
the LORD is the strength of my life;  
of whom then shall I be afraid?**

**2**

**When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, \*  
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who  
stumbled and fell.**

**3**

**Though an army should encamp against me, \*  
yet my heart shall not be afraid;**

**4**

**And though war should rise up against me, \*  
yet will I put my trust in him.**

**5**

**One thing have I asked of the LORD;  
one thing I seek; \*  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days  
of my life;**

**6**

**To behold the fair beauty of the LORD \*  
and to seek him in his temple.**

**7**

**For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe**

- in his shelter; \*  
 he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling  
 and set me high upon a rock.
- 8  
 Even now he lifts up my head \*  
 above my enemies round about me.
- 9  
 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation  
 with sounds of great gladness; \*  
 I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- 10  
 Hearken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; \*  
 have mercy on me and answer me.
- 11  
 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." \*  
 Your face, LORD, will I seek.
- 12  
 Hide not your face from me, \*  
 nor turn away your servant in displeasure.
- 13  
 You have been my helper;  
 cast me not away; \*  
 do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.
- 14  
 Though my father and my mother forsake me, \*  
 the LORD will sustain me.
- 15  
 Show me your way, O LORD; \*  
 lead me on a level path, because of my enemies.
- 16  
 Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, \*  
 for false witnesses have risen up against me,  
 and also those who speak malice.
- 17  
 What if I had not believed  
 that I should see the goodness of the LORD \*  
 in the land of the living!
- 18  
 O tarry and await the LORD'S pleasure;  
 be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; \*  
 wait patiently for the LORD.

**I grew up singing the psalms as a choirboy. To this day the Psalter is the book of the Bible that speaks to me most directly. In the psalms we find the voice of the people: in joy and sorrow, in happiness and anger, in faith and fear; rejoicing, celebrating, pleading, sorrowing. In the psalms we can find ourselves.**

**There is repetition, explication, and qualification in the psalms. But getting to the crux of the matter is not difficult.**

**Verse 1) The Lord is my light...the Lord is the strength of my life...**

**Verse 5) ...one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord...**

**Verse 11) ...Your face, Lord, will I seek.**

**This is a psalm of affirmation, of faith. Not only do we have direction and strength through our faith, but we ask to have it always. To dwell in the house of the Lord is to live by faith. To seek the face of the Lord is to always try to find that of God in all people. Through our lives and our relationships we experience the Great I Am, the Ground of our Being. Amen.**

---

### **Linda Whitehead**

#### **Psalm 63:1-8**

**1**

**O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; \*  
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you,  
as in a barren and dry land where there is no water.**

**2**

**Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place, \*  
that I might behold your power and your glory.**

**3**

**For your loving-kindness is better than life itself; \*  
my lips shall give you praise.**

**4**

**So will I bless you as long as I live \*  
and lift up my hands in your Name.**

**5**

**My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness, \*  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,**

**6**

**When I remember you upon my bed, \*  
and meditate on you in the night watches.**

7

**For you have been my helper, \*  
and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.**

8

**My soul clings to you; \*  
your right hand holds me fast.**

About 5 years ago I was diagnosed with a chronic form of Leukemia (CLL). It is a kind of leukemia which doesn't need to be treated right away. After 5 years of living with CLL, my doctor finally decided that I would need to be treated with chemo therapy for six months starting in the late fall of 2009. Like many things which are unknown to us, I approached chemo with some fear and trepidation. I had heard lots of horror stories. But like a good Episcopalian, I approached treatment with my good, positive face on.

While the first month of chemo lived up to my negative expectations, that month passed quickly and the subsequent two months weren't bad at all. And the doctor was pleased with my body's response to chemo. All looked good at the halfway point. And then the week came when my blood counts weren't so good – chemo was delayed for 2 weeks in a row. I felt discouraged and that good “luck” to date and maybe even God had abandoned me.

In the middle of this, I remember I had been asked to write a Lenten meditation on Psalm 63. Needless to say, I wasn't in my best, most hopeful frame of mind. Of course, as so often happens, the psalm spoke to me. “O God, you are my only God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water.” Hmmm – maybe God has not abandoned me? “. . . For your loving kindness is better than life itself; my lips shall give you praise. “

As I read, I was reminded of God's goodness and larger plan for me and us. “When I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches. For you have been my helper, and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice. “ God has certainly been my helper throughout my life and she was not abandoning me now.

I could feel myself relaxing, re-embracing God and putting myself in her hands. “My soul clings to you; your right hand holds me fast.” How did Bill Lane know I would need this reading at just this time?

We all have many struggles in our lives – maybe you face similar health challenges, or you have recently lost a loved one or maybe school is hard and you feel on your

own figuring it out. A rereading of Psalm 63 and many of the other psalms is worth considering.

My friend, Roberta Walker from the 7:30 am service, sent a wonderful book to me while I was in my home bound period. The book was a new collection of *Children's Letters to God*. These letters have brightened many of my chemo days. I would like to close with one which seems to sum up Psalm 63 for me:

Dear God,

I don't ever feel alone since I found out about you.

Nora

I'm with Nora!

### Roberta Ham Walker

#### Psalm 32

1

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, \*  
and whose sin is put away!

2

Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt, \*  
and in whose spirit there is no guile!

3

While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, \*  
because of my groaning all day long.

4

For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; \*  
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

5

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, \*  
and did not conceal my guilt.

6

**I said, " I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." \***  
**Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.**

7

**Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; \***  
**when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

8

**You are my hiding-place;**  
**you preserve me from trouble; \***  
**you surround me with shouts of deliverance.**

9

**"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; \***  
**I will guide you with my eye.**

10

**Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; \***  
**who must be fitted with bit and bridle,**  
**or else they will not stay near you."**

11

**Great are the tribulations of the wicked; \***  
**but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.**

12

**Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD; \***  
**shout for joy, all who are true of heart.**

**The first time I had a deep muscle massage, I had no idea what to expect. My limited knowledge caused me unnecessary anxiety and I was almost frozen with the tension of curiosity. I do remember the therapist instructing me more than once to "relax and let me control your extremities". Over the years, I studied the therapy technique, read about the value of such treatment and came to fully understand, participate in and enjoy my treatments. Many years later, armed with knowledge, I am totally mellow during therapy and Beth ( my therapist) knows that I am like a wet noodle by the end of the session .I trust her. I delight in her services and enjoy her presence in my life.**

**In its simplest form, this is analogous to my spiritual journey .It is quite similar to my ever-growing faith and more defined trust in God to direct my life. At the beginning of my walk as an adult, I was curious, uncertain, and insecure. However, I spent time reading and studying my Bible, meditating on spiritual writings and seeking answers to my questions. Now ,at this point in my life, I am fully confident of my faith and comfortable with my beliefs. I have come to know that God stays by my side. He steadies me if I stumble. He reinforces my steps. He strengthens my strides. He watches over me. He never leaves me. Whenever I approach Him with trepidation , He soothes my fears with His**

promise to instruct and guide me .He gives me direction and walks beside me on my journey. I need only relax and allow Him to direct my life. I admit that some times I do not "get it" the first time but He continually teaches me until I know clearly the way I should go. He leads me to my blessings. If I go astray, He finds me .

Amid the clamor, noises and incessant technological intrusions in daily life , it is sometimes hard to hear His directives. However, I am comforted in knowing that I am totally familiar with the sound of His voice. It is a familiarity which comes from continual interaction with Him , reliance on His direction and knowing His word.

I have come to know that there are no shortcuts to accomplishing God's ultimate purpose in my life. As I come to accept His will and submit to His ways, I become stronger, more secure, gentler and more sensible. My prayer is that I try to exemplify the light of God in my life, follow His counsel, listen to His instructions and walk in His ways. Knowing that He is watching over me soothes my soul.

## **Anita Manning**

### **Psalm 126**

1

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, \*  
then were we like those who dream.

2

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, \*  
and our tongue with shouts of joy.

3

Then they said among the nations, \*  
"The LORD has done great things for them."

4

The LORD has done great things for us, \*  
and we are glad indeed.

5

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, \*  
like the watercourses of the Negev.

6

Those who sowed with tears \*  
will reap with songs of joy.

7

Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, \*  
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

**There are two voices, two perspectives reflected in this psalm. In the first four verses, the speaker is recalling a time of deliverance from misfortune through the good graces of the Lord. A period of bondage, trouble and sadness miraculously was over – it was like a dream come true, and the people laughed and shouted with joy. They were seen to be specially blessed: “The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad indeed.”**

**A different tone is expressed in the last three verses. The second speaker is in a place of trouble and sadness. He or she asks the Lord to “restore our fortunes” again. If that were to happen, sufferers would sing songs of joy and reap a bountiful harvest.**

**This psalm put me in mind of times we all experience throughout life when we’re afraid and the future looks dark. Troubles such as financial insecurity, health problems, addiction, job loss, domestic or community discord, even pandemics and natural disasters seem always to plague someone, somewhere. During such times we call upon God to deliver us, to “restore our fortunes.”**

**In times of great distress, in the darkness of my own, personal Lent, I have wondered where God is. How can children suffer? How can the innocent die? But even in despair, we are reminded that God is right here with us. God is working in Haiti through the rescuers and the doctors. God is right there in the homes and hearts of unemployed parents who are sleepless with worry about the next rent payment. God is working through the adults in this church and Choir School who take time to support and encourage children.**

**During Lent, we reflect on Christ’s time of trial. We can be comforted in knowing that with God’s blessing, we will emerge again at the resurrection, into the light. The psalm helps us remember that fortunes change for all of us. We can resolve to allow God to work through us by doing what we can to ease each other’s burdens. Even in times of grief and struggle, God, the only constant in our lives, offers hope.**