



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

***"Let go...you'll be fine."***

***The Rev. Sharon Gracen***

***March 27, 2011***

Our journey through the desert of Lent has taken us to the sands of silence. There we let the noise of the world fade and were wrapped in an ominous quiet. Only when the din was gone could we begin to hear our own voice and God's. Who are you? I Am; I Am. That single thought became the armor of solitude protecting us from all that would deter us from going on and growing up. It took a while to overcome the strangeness of no longer being defined by the world but by such a simple answer, I Am. The solitude, at first so difficult became solitude that we needed, for the next part of our journey was out and through the valley of testing.

This valley was a fearsome place where we struggled to discern the difference between mirror and mirage. We flinched at the mirrors that were held up for us to see ourselves. The reflections showed our imperfections, the unfinished work of our hearts and souls. In such a looking glass we may appear unkind, indifferent or frightened and angry. As we averted our gaze, not really wanting to see those things within us, suddenly there was a shimmering oasis of rationalization and we ran to it. In its shady comfort we told ourselves, "well, no one really expects me to be perfect," "I can't actually be my brother's keeper," "Why should I care about people and things that have nothing to do with my life?" Just as we started to feel relief, the mirage evaporated around us and we were left with the uncomfortable awareness of why we were in the desert in the first place – to face these tests, these demons and tempters.

Once we had accepted that work, we headed out to our next destination. The cliffs, high up on the edge of mountain. It is here that we empty ourselves of all that we discovered in the Valley of Testing. There was a man who made it this far only to lose his footing and as he started to tumble over the edge of cliff, he grabbed a branch and held on for dear life. The branch wasn't very big or sturdy and the dirt around it kept shifting, sending pebbles all the long way down. He was afraid to make too much noise, so he carefully called out, "Help, help me, is anybody up there." To his great relief, a voice said, "Yes, I'm here." He sighed, "Thank God!" The voice said, "You're welcome." A little surprised, he said, "You're God!" "Yes, I Am, that I Am and I'm here to help you." "Great, can you pull me up?" "No I can't, I don't actually have hands, but I'll tell you what to do." "OK, what do I have to do?" "Let go." "What?!" "It's easy, just let go, you'll be fine." The man thought for a moment and said, "Umm, is there anybody else up there?"



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As trying as it has been in the desert up to this point, this is the hard work, letting go of all that keeps us so comfortable in our human experience, starting with certainty. We hold on tight to what we think we know; we are so sure and rarely do we want our minds to be changed. We hear the words of Jesus and the wisdom of the prophets and somehow think that we know better. Thomas Merton says, "What is the use of praying if at the very moment of prayer we have so little confidence in God that we are busy planning our own kind of answer to our prayer." "Is there anybody else up there?" The desert survival kit contains first and foremost, humility. Many of the voices in the *Lenten Anthology* point this out. Abbot Alonius said, "Humility is the land where God wants us to go and offer sacrifice." And Theophan the Recluse said, "What have you to fear above all else? Self-satisfaction, self-appreciation, self-conceit, and all other things beginning with *self*. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, kindle and maintain a contrite spirit, a humble and a contrite heart." Jesus taught us and showed us how to die to self. However, this desert's invitation to let go of our certainty and our focus on ourselves is contrary to everything that life teaches us. For those willing to open hands and let go, this self-emptying rids us all that turns our focus inward allowing a fresh view onto who we are. Some of us are freed from the undeserved privileges that simply came with the circumstance of our birth and the arrogant way we live on this planet. Some of us are freed from the belittled image of ourselves we have been taught. All of us are freed to love fearlessly those with whom we share kinship in Christ.

Genuine kinship with our neighbor reinforces the letting go of certainty; as we learn the stories and needs of our neighbor, our attitudes and experiences are seen along side of theirs, right and wrong no longer enter into it. We loosen our grip on being right because we see that they are too. The anger that we hold so tightly, that has kept our vulnerability hidden from others is hard to relinquish, but little by little as it slips away, the lightness that remains is a new gift. And the last thing dislodged by our new humility is fear. Humility allows us trust God to keep us safe, to give us wings when we let go. The self-emptying from the edge of the cliff leaves us ready to receive and to be filled.

There was a woman, a Samaritan who seemed to spend her life in that desert valley of testing. Everyone was willing to hold up a mirror to make sure that she knew what she was. The many men in her life had never wanted to stay and so she was always vulnerable and outcast. All of the other women went to the well in the morning. She had tried that but their disdain and insults were too hurtful so she waited and took her bucket to the well when no one else would be there, in the heat, at noon. Hoping to draw her water in peace, her shoulders slumped when she saw the man of Israel sitting there. She steelled herself for the inevitable encounter which would leave her feeling worthless. But instead he saw her bucket and he asked her for water...he didn't snarl or leer, he asked politely. She hadn't



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expected that. Without thinking, she spoke to him, "You would take water from me?" He smiled and said, "If you only knew, you would ask me to give you water, living water, water of forgiveness, water of peace. And he said it all like he wanted her to have this amazing water. He thought she was worthy of it although she couldn't possibly be with the life she had lived. But apparently he knew all about that and it didn't matter. And she felt herself let go of the years of shame and guilt and loneliness. He saw her as she wanted to be seen, good and clean. Yes, clean, as if she had been dipped in his wondrous water. And just as he knew who she was, this Samaritan woman, suddenly clean as a newborn baby, knew who he was. He was the one. Even the appearance of the other men who appeared at the well, who knew him too, couldn't undo what had happened. She felt like she could fly, so she did, straight to where the other women were and she told them what had happened. And they believed her.

The power of letting go and emptying ourselves cannot be overstated. It's true that often we are afraid to let go of things that are familiar and that keep us where we are. Jesus helped the Samaritan woman let go of so much baggage and when she did, there was room for the water of new life to fill her up. Maintaining the status quo in our lives may seem like the smart thing to do. So a trip the desert is in order to give us a new perspective and the courage to create space for something more wonderful than we can imagine. It is after all, a journey to Easter, it may not be easy but it is worth it.