

Drawing Near to God
Lenten Devotional 2009

National Baptist Memorial Church
Reverend Kasey Jones, Senior Pastor
1601 Columbia Road NW, Washington DC 20009 ♦ Office: 202.265.1410 ♦ NBMChurch@msn.com

Table of Contents

An Introduction to the Lenten Devotional
What is Lent?
Devotionals

Title

Author

"Call on the Lord!"	Pastor Kasey Jones
"The Choice of the Chosen"	Min. Linda Nakpodia
"Keep singing this song!"	Rev. Starlette McNeill
"Powerful and Caring"	Richard Walker
"God is there for us"	Ken Oberly
"When everything has been touched"	Rev. Starlette McNeill

Jesus foretells his Death and Resurrection

"Impossible Expectations"	Stephanie Thomas
"A Covenant with God"	Vivinee' Garner- Jones
"Fixing our thoughts on Jesus"	Rev. Cynthia Turner
"The battle is not yours"	Rev. Gloria Grant
"The Good News"	Dr. Robert Cochran
"He always watches over us"	Theodra Washington
"Breakfast with the Trinity"	Rev. Mary Andreolli
"When the Servant must Suffer"	Rev. Starlette McNeill

Jesus Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

“Stay on the Wheel”	Min. Tanishia Lewis-Lambert
“The Spirit of the Law”	Ken Oberly
“Our Sovereign Lord”	Rev. John C. McNeill Jr.
“What does the Lord require of us?”	Min. Allyson Brown
“The Beneficiary of them all”	Fidelis Nakpodia
“Short Term”	Dr. David C. Laubach
“Face to Face”	Min. Linda Nakpodia
“Jesus, himself”	Rev. Starlette McNeill
“A sheep talks to the Shepherd”	Richard Walker

The Anointing at Bethany

“What will you give me?”	Rev. Starlette McNeill
“Living Stones”	Stephanie Thomas
“A Warning for our leaders”	Vivinee’ Garner Jones
“Remembering what we already know”	Rev. Cynthia Turner
“Keeping Promises”	Rev. Gloria Grant
“The Glorious gift of God”	Dr. Robert Cochran
“Do it”	Rev. Starlette McNeill

Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives

“His actions were louder”	Rev. Starlette McNeill
“He did it for you”	Rev. Starlette McNeill
“What are you saying?”	Min. Tanishia Lewis-Lambert
“Satisfaction for the Famished Soul”	Rev. John C. McNeill Jr.
“Hearing God’s Voice”	Min. Allyson Brown
“Exposing the Thieves of our Lives”	Min. Linda Nakpodia
“Living His Prayer”	Rev. Audrey Wiggins
“Written for our Instruction”	Kelvin Crichlow
“Coming Soon!”	Pastor Kasey Jones

Introduction to the Lenten Devotionals

The devotional book you are about to read is prepared by *National Baptist Memorial Church* family and friends. It is a project of love that is designed to be read during the season of Lent and Holy Week, which is February 25-April 12, 2009. The theme for this Lenten Devotional is “Drawing Near to God.”

During this season of Lent, use this devotional with your favorite Bible. As you read through this publication, you will find wonderful reflections on God’s Word; thought provoking questions and space to journal. The contributors are diverse in gender, ethnicity, age and income. There are a mix of both clergy and laity.

I pray that as you read this devotional that the Holy Spirit speaks to you. I pray that you learn more about the character and nature of the Lord. May God renew you and replenish you. May you be drawn closer to God and inspired to go deeper with your study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the contributors to National Baptist Memorial Church’s 2009 Lenten Devotional. Special thanks to the editor and graphic designer, Reverend Starlette McNeill for her dedication and hard work.

Rev. Kasey Jones, Senior Pastor

What is Lent?

Lent is a period of forty weekdays and begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the Saturday before Easter. Sundays are not counted because Sunday always celebrates Jesus' victory over sin and death.

It is a season of preparation for the celebration of Easter. The word Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon *lencten*, which means, "spring," the time of the lengthening of days. The forty days of Lent are a time for a probing consideration of our human condition, including sin and its deadly consequences for both individuals and society. It is also a time for an equally intense consideration of the new possibilities offered to us in Jesus Christ and their implications for practical living.

The process is intended to engage persons at quite different stages of commitment. Lent came to be formed in relation to converts' final preparation for baptism. For the baptized that are active in the life of the church there is ever the need for reassessment and renewal, lest a lively faith be diminished by an increased conformity to old ways, or simply by the dead weight of unimaginative piety.

Finally, for those who have departed from the faith, "backslidden", the Forty Days can be a time for restitution and restoration.

Sources

¹ Floyd, Pat. *The Special Days and Seasons of the Christian Year: How They Came About and How They Are Observed by Christians Today.*

² Stookey, Laurence H. *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church.*



Call on the Lord!

"I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised"

II Samuel 22.4

This passage begins with David acknowledging the goodness and greatness of God. God is called "Rock", "Fortress", "Deliverer", "Shield", and "Refuge." Not only does David acknowledge the awesomeness of God in his writing, he demonstrates the nature of his relationship with the Almighty by using the pronoun "my." David was protected from the *enemies* that were in conflict with the larger faith community, namely the Philistines. And protection was offered from a personal enemy, King Saul. Time and time again in David's life, he called on the Lord to for help, whether it was in battle while fighting the Philistines or while on the run from King Saul. Every time David called on the Lord, the Lord revealed more of the Lord's self to him. In battle, the Lord was a shield. While on the run from the king, the Lord was a refuge and a deliverer. When fear and loneliness engulfed him, God was a rock and a fortress.

When was the last time you have reflected on what God has done for you? What did God reveal about God's self? Was the Lord, forgiving, compassionate, loving, or maybe the Lord was a mind regulator? God cares about you like he did David and God wants you to continue to know more of him. Draw near to God during this season of Lent by remembering what God has done. Take time to offer praise to the Lord for all that the Lord has done for you. Write a poem, song or letter of praise to the Lord. As you pray, ask the Lord to open your eyes so that you can see him more.

The Choice of the Chosen

This passage is from Moses' farewell song to the Israelites before his death. It was also before they crossed over the Jordan into the Promise Land. The Promise Land was a place where the people had different values, cultural practices and most importantly gods. All were different from that of the children of Israel and practice of such would not be in obedience to the Great I AM, God Almighty.

Moses encouraged them to hear with understanding the One who had created them and had chosen them to be His people. He wanted them to know the Living God—the One who brought them out of Egypt and had provided for them for forty years while in the wilderness.

In the first few verses, Moses reminds them that God is glorious, perfect, just and fair, faithful and righteous. He also reminds that God is the Rock. Moses wanted them to understand that if they chose the ways of other people and as a result, began to worship gods, they would suffer the judgment of God. He also asked the question, "Are they really children of God if they sinned and continued to sin? Is God your Father?"

You see, God had already told Moses that when they entered the Promise Land they would disobey God and adopt the ways of the land. Still, Moses encouraged them to remember who God is and what God had done for them. He wanted them to remember that they were the chosen people of God. He wanted them to understand that God is just and fair and that they would pay the price for being disobedient.

We too are people chosen by God and must remember who God is. We must live in this world but not adopt its values, beliefs, and teachings that separate us from God. Or, we too will pay the price. Also remember that God is our rock. He is able to protect, shield and transform. Who will you choose?

Keep singing this song!

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Psalm 46.1

Because we read them, it may be easy to forget that the book of Psalms is a collection of songs. Today, the book would be a hymnal. Consequently, the first sentence of Psalm 46 is actually the initial verse of a song. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”* I have heard it said that one’s hymnology is one’s theology. Simply said, we sing what we believe— about God, ourselves, and the world in which we live. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”*

Now I am not certain of the original tempo of the song, the key in which it should be sung, or whether it was a solo or group performance. But, I do know that its lyrics are true. And it is easy to believe and sing this song when you have been without refuge and when you can remember times of weakness. God has been for many of us our safe haven, the only Person whose presence did not cause us to feel threatened or in danger. He has been a place of retreat and a name that we can hide in (Proverb 18.10). But with the combining of refuge and strength, the composer has suggested that when we hide in God, that we are strengthened. It’s a strange truth for some that when we hide in Him, we are protected and that a successful defense strategy is to go into hiding. Similarly, it is odd to fathom for many that as believers, we become strong through the confession of our weakness and our need for God. But that should not keep us from singing this song: *“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble.”*

Dear God, help me to sing this song boldly, acknowledging my need for You and declaring your ability to be my refuge and strength. Give me the hope to believe it when trials seem to pour from the sky and the Sun is all but forgotten. Give me the peace to hum it when it seems as if the foundation of my life is quaking. Give me the courage to sing it when society’s forecast causes some to fear: “God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Amen.

Powerful and Caring

“But the Lord sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment. He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the people with equity. The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.”

Psalm 9:7-10

A Jewish philosopher once defined the basis of biblical faith as the belief that the power that runs the stars is the same as the power that tells our souls what is right and wrong. This is not always obvious in our experience. In the realm of human power, the world is full of tyrants and autocrats, exercising power arbitrarily and for their own benefit. Many religions, such as the old Greek mythology, saw the gods as amplified human beings, doing what they wanted and often acting cruelly and capriciously. Ethics can seem to be weak; morality a tactic for losers.

For the psalmist and for us, God is both Sovereign and Righteous. We actually have passages in the Bible where God limits Himself for the benefit of us, withholding deserved punishment, yielding to the petitions of God’s followers, even enclosing Himself in human flesh and living with us, sharing our circumstances and even death. The Ultimate Power actually cares about doing the right thing!

Truly this is a God who can be trusted to be a “refuge for the oppressed.” Whether as individuals facing life’s challenges, or as persons facing disapproval and discrimination from society, we can believe in God who is both powerful enough to do anything and caring enough to use that power for healing and to create community. May we be true children of God and use our personal powers to build and not to destroy.

Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, Creator and Sovereign Lord, I am in awe of Your greatness and Your love. I am comforted, protected and renewed by Your Holy Spirit, and strengthened to go out to proclaim and to live out Your care for those who are not valued by the world.

God Is There For Us

“they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them.”

Nehemiah 9:17

Nehemiah brought the Hebrews back to Jerusalem from the area around Babylon where they had been taken. Nehemiah, cup bearer to King Artaxerxes, had the king's authority and backing to bring them back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and walls around the city. They had done it and Nehemiah had Ezra and the priests read the Book of the Law of Moses to the people. They all saw that they were not following the law and were repentant. The priests explained to the people how their forefathers had acted. Verses 16-18 told some of the things that their forefathers had done, how they had forsaken the law and did evil things. These were the reasons God allowed them to be taken away. Even so God was with them waiting for them to come back to him.

God is there for us too. But it is up to us to do what God wants us to do. God is there for us whenever we decide to be obedient. It doesn't matter how far we have strayed, he is still there. We need to be his follower while we still have time. He does not force us to follow him. This is especially true for following Jesus for eternal life comes only by following him.

When everything has been touched

The prophet Joel begins with a scene of unimaginable devastation. He describes destruction in seemingly every sphere of life: agricultural, political, spiritual, and personal. He informs us that “What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. (1.4). “The fields are devastated, for the ground mourns” (1.10). He continues now recording the voice of the Lord who says, “A nation has invaded my land” (1.6). But this not all, the ruin extends to the household of faith: “The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord” (1.9). Still, there is more. “Joy withers away among the people” (1.12). There is famine, oppression, hopelessness, and uncertainty all around. The people cannot cover up their fear with food and drink. They cannot hide in their homes and pretend they are not affected. They cannot go to the temple and feign spiritual amnesia. They cannot even conceal it in their own minds. It is all useless and subsequently meaningless.

Everything has changed. Nothing is unaffected by this seeming chain of events. What do we do when everything has been touched? *When everything has been touched, remember the One who touches everything.* Realizing their sinful choices, the children of Israel reached out to God and repented. In response, God healed the land and restored them.

In chapter three, after restoring the Israelites, God cuts off all the lights in heaven—the sun, moon, and even the twinkling stars. It is a foretelling of what is to come. God will punish all the nations who oppress God’s chosen people. Yes, despite all that they have done and gone through, they are still chosen. In the end, “The Lord dwells in Zion” (3.17).

Does it seem that everything around you is changing for the worse? Remember that God is in control and no matter what is being touched in your life—be it mind, body, or soul, God can touch and subsequently change anything for His chosen people. *When everything has been touched, remember the One who touches everything.*

Jesus foretells his Death and Resurrection

“As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.’ And they were greatly distressed.”

Matthew 17.22

Jesus knew that his time on earth was limited. At the age of twelve, he told his parents during a trip to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover that he must be about His father’s business (Luke 2.49). Jesus came to die but while on earth taught us how to live. He did not run from death but embraced it for the sake of our salvation, in order that we not only have life eternal in heaven but have life more abundantly while on earth. He came to earth knowing when, where, and how he would die but most importantly, he knew *why* he would die. And the why was more important than all the other specifics. During this time wherein we remember the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made, write about what the sacrifice of His life means to you.

“Impossible Expectations”

*"Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."
Jeremiah 32.17*

Do you recall a time in your life when the circumstances did not seem to align with the anticipated God-given outcome? Maybe, you are struggling to believe and take God at His word. Or perhaps, you are second-guessing whether or not the actions taken were correct because you cannot readily see the end result. "How is that going to happen, Lord?! Seriously, look at the situation. How can this occur? Show me, how YOU are going to work this out!"

In the text, the prophet Jeremiah struggled with a similar issue. The Lord had delivered a word—a promise—that Israel would never again be captured or destroyed. Yet, Jerusalem was occupied for over a year and the prophet, himself, was imprisoned in the King of Judah's palace. The Lord had made a request of Jeremiah: He was to purchase a plot of land on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Not exactly an odd request, right? One small note: the land was under siege by the enemy soldiers. The Lord told Jeremiah that His people will own property, live in the land and buy and sell houses and vineyards in this same land, once again.

Jeremiah exhibited a great amount of faith in God and His promise and continued on to fulfill the demand. The circumstances of the time did not align with anticipated God-given expectation. We find the prophet praying to the Lord, questioning his actions and presenting his doubt of the outwardly "impossible" answer in the midst of the situation. Yet, even in the midst of the prayer, Jeremiah utters these words: "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."

If the circumstances of life do not seem to support and you doubt the Divine expectation, follow Jeremiah's lead. Fulfill the demand, bring your concerns to the Lord, draw near to Him in prayer and remember that NOTHING is impossible for God.

A Covenant with God

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, to him ‘I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless.’”

Genesis 17:1

Who is this God Almighty that made Abraham promises? In this instance, a promise denotes a covenant. The Bible says that God Almighty was capable of, able to perform and did keep the promises that He made to Abraham. What do the promises God Almighty made to Abraham have to do with us?

A covenant is a contract or agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *berith* is always translated this way. *Berith* is derived from a root, which means “to cut.” Hence, a covenant is a “cutting,” with reference to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts and the contracting parties passing between them in making a covenant.

The Bible says when “GOD ALMIGHTY” spoke to Abram he fell on his face—the attitude of extreme reverence assumed by Eastern people. It consists in the prostrate body resting on the hands and knees, with the face bent till the forehead touches the ground. Abraham’s posture expressed conscious humility, worship, awe, profound reverence and total surrender to the will of God. While Abram was on his face before God, God reminded him of the covenant promise He had made him.

Dear Lord please help me to walk upright and blameless before you and let my attitude and posture please You when You speak to me.

Fixing our thoughts on Jesus

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.
Hebrews 3:1

It is easy, if we are not careful, to get sidetracked in our faith by becoming enamored with all of the byproducts of following Jesus. We can fall in love with the law, because it is a measure of how good we are. We can fall in love with church and our titles, because it demonstrates how committed we can be. We can fall in love with God's Word, because we can memorize it and calculate how good we are through the memorization and understanding of Holy Scripture. We can even fall in love with God's pastors and spiritual leaders here on earth, because they represent God to us. But none of that is our goal.

Our goal is to fix our thoughts on Jesus, the One who was and is and is to come. Getting sidetracked on other things never happens intentionally. It is a subtle, insidious thing to settle for what's close, while neglecting to go all the way to what's True. It's the compromising belief that the knockoff of the original is just as good, because it looks and feels and smells and tastes close enough to the original that we can get by. When the truth is the knockoff is just that. It's a knock away from the real thing. It's good enough to fool most people, but two primary people can identify a knockoff without blinking: the originator of the real thing, and the one who settles for the imitation. Both know they are dealing with a cheap substitute that cost less to obtain, and required less to create.

As we draw near to Jesus, let us not settle for less. Let's go all the way and remember to fix our thoughts on Him as our One and Only true goal.

The battle is not yours

"The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name."

Exodus 15.3

While Moses was leading the people of Israel out of the land of bondage, Pharaoh had a change of heart when he realized that his free labor was gone. His pursuit of the Israelites gave God a wonderful opportunity to show His might and His power. Moses positioned the people as the Egyptians approached and all seemed hopeless. However, God's mighty power parted the Red Sea and allowed His people to cross over to the other side. This body of water that was the escape route for God's people became the waters of death for the Egyptians.

When times of trouble enter our lives, we don't need to feel hopeless or defeated. Our rescue, deliverance and salvation depends on the reality that God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Just uttering the name "Lord" can be a defiant challenge to any power that might try to undo our liberation and send us back into bondage. As the Israelites and Egyptians came to see and understand, the battle is not ours, but the Lord's.

Whenever we have a battle to fight, be faithful and be strong in the Lord. Just trust Him and the victory will be yours!

Oh Lord, help us to be still, leaning on your everlasting arms, believing and trusting that you are our warrior and that you will protect and defend us in every situation. Keep us strong. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

March 8

Reflection

How has God spoken to you so far? What have you learned about the Lord? What have you or will you do differently?

*Grow
in Christ*

The Good News

*“For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”*
Psalms 91.11-12

Famous are these words which the Tempter quoted in an effort to lure Jesus. The same words surprise us in this Psalm which promises God’s faithful care for human friends. The **Good News** is *God’s friends, those linked in loving relationships, never have the need to fear.* God protects these friends from every terror.

A most deceptive terror is confusion. Confusion catches each human spirit unaware. Surely, a half truth could trap God’s Son, too. The temptation at the Temple (Matthew 4:5-6) played on every human’s fear of death. The astonishing Wisdom of Jesus, both God and human, surprises both Satan and us. Jesus demonstrating that He understood the priority of one’s spiritual death over the physical death no doubt surprised Satan. The tables turned on the Tempter. It became clear; in Satan confusion reigns.

May I never become so confused, whether due to human frailty or because of the lures of Satan. During the season of Lent, Christ’s friends remind me that I, too, have human limitations. I am susceptible to my confusions, but I also can choose to love God even while circumstances around me cause disarray.

Psalm 91 hints and the experiences of Jesus reveal: Spiritual death is the greatest catastrophe! Individuals and congregations alike need protection from such an end. The **Good News** is *God’s friends, those linked in loving relationships, never need fear.* God protects friends from every terror, and, most importantly, from spiritual death. Let us choose to be friends with God, who gracefully extends the hand of friendship already to each of us.

God call me by Your Spirit, encouraging me to reach beyond my confusion and fear to take Your hand as friend.

He always watches us

Psalm 121 is a song of ascents. The word ascent is defined as an “upward slope”; upward means “a higher place or position” and a slope is defined as “an incline causing higher ground.” God does reside over us in a higher place and position. It is because of this higher place and position that he is able to watch over us the way he does.

Psalm 121 is about knowing where your help comes from, knowing who watches over you and who protects— not just some times but at all times. Knowing that the God we serve does not slumber or allow us to slip because he is always on the watch for us. He is our protector.

Are there times when we feel that God is not watching over us? If so, what are we doing differently when we experience these feelings? What does our prayer life look like? Who are we going to for advice? Are we spending time in the Word of God?

Do you ever feel that God has gotten too busy to watch over us? God never takes his eyes off of us. Perhaps, we have moved out of His sight and into our own vision because of what we are feeling or thinking. But God is the same today as He was yesterday. His love and vision for us never changes.

Dear God,

Help me to realize that circumstances and situations around me will always change. But, you Lord are not a circumstance or a situation, you are God. You see and know those things around me. Help me Lord to keep my eyes on You, the way You keep yours on me. Amen.

Breakfast with the Trinity

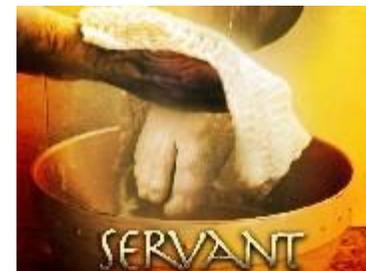
On any given day people define us in many different ways. We may be deemed “the man who just lost his job”, the “welfare mom”, the “conservative in the group”, or the assistant who always “has it all together.” Daily, we are perceived and experienced in unique ways. Our hope is that those who are supposed to know us best have some sense of who we really are. Do they? We are not alone in the struggle to be understood.

Although some may say, “I don’t care what other people think about me.” I would dare say more people care than don’t. Some of us carry around a fragile sense of identity readily shaped by the voices and actions of others. We may be insecure, afraid to make waves, or to express a thought we feel needs to be shared with a friend, because of fear of what others may think. I believe in some ways we are quite simply afraid to be the beauty children of God we were created to be. *Now this isn’t finger pointing, unless you see the finger that is pointed at me.*

In his book *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*, Henri Nouwen reflects on the entrancing beauty of Andrew Rublev’s icon, the Trinity. If you haven’t seen this icon before it is an idyllic depiction of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sitting around a table with an open seat at the front. Nouwen describes the holy circle of the Trinity as the house of love. He says:

We can be involved in struggles for justice and in actions for peace. We can be part of the ambiguities of family and community life. We can study, teach, write, and hold a regular job. We can do all this without ever having to leave the house of love. Fear is driven out by perfect love.

This Lenten season I encourage you to contemplate giving up the insecurities and fears that prevent you from shining like the beautiful child of God you are. Dream big! For forty days, let yourself step out into the world as the woman, man and child you know in your heart you are, without ever leaving the house of love. Picture yourself each day sitting at the table with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There’s plenty of eggs and bacon to go around. With much love.



When the servant must suffer

"He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised and we held him of no account."

Isaiah 53.3

We praise him every Sunday morning, preaching about his life, reflecting on his death, and celebrating his resurrection. He is Jesus, our Lord and Savior, our Lily in the valley, our Rose of Sharon. He is the Son of God, our Kinsman Redeemer who defeated death, hell, and the grave. But there is another side of Jesus, another attribute of him that may not be talked about as often. Jesus was also a Servant. This title, above all others, seems to be most fitting when we consider what he did for us, serving humanity even unto death on the cross.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a man whom we may not recognize. It may be hard to imagine that anyone would despise or reject Jesus. It can be difficult to fathom that persons turned away from Jesus and that anyone could not value him. We celebrate the miracles he performed, we teach the doctrine that he inspired, we preach the message of his life, but we don't often talk about his suffering. Jesus came and suffered for us. He took our punishment and subsequently, the pain of sin.

Jesus taught that "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20.26). When asked by his disciples if he wanted something to eat, he said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish his work" (John 4.34). He came to serve and he did not think about what others should do for him. His entire life was focused on doing the will of his Father, which was to sacrifice his life as our Servant. He was not only a Servant to God, his followers, and future believers but he was a sufferer. When the servant must suffer... As his servants, there will be times in our lives when we must suffer as believers— rejection, attack, and isolation. In those times of suffering, remember that Jesus is acquainted with this part of life as well.

Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Jesus came not for himself but for us. He came not to be famous but to bring God glory. He came not to take from the world but to give his life so that we might live. Meditate on this awesome scene and sobering truth.

Stay on the Wheel

"But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

Jeremiah 18.4-6

Jeremiah was commanded by God to visit the potter's house. While there, Jeremiah was to observe the work being done. God used this illustration to show Jeremiah the backslidden state of Israel. Like the children of Israel, what has God asked of you that you have failed to do? What is it in your life that God is giving you the opportunity to change?

Your life may seem to be spinning out of control. Don't give up! Stay on the wheel. Just know that you are in God's hands and you are able to start all over again.

As you continue in this season of Lent, take some time to reflect on your life. Allow God to reshape your thoughts. No matter what you have done, God is able to renew your state of mind and being.

Dear God, I take this opportunity to say I am sorry for any wrong I have done and for not following your plan. Create in me a clean heart and renew the right spirit in me. I have decided that I will allow you to do what you want in my life. Lord, make me into something useful and beautiful so that I may do what you have purposed me to do.

The spirit of the law

“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.’

Matthew 12:6-8

Matthew 12:1-8 is about work on the Sabbath. The Pharisees and other church leaders had elaborated on the Mosaic laws with laws to try to cover all situations. In so doing they forgot what the law was supposed to do. This passage is about Jesus and his disciples going through a grain field and the disciples being hungry took some of the heads of grain getting the grain out and eating them. The Pharisees told Jesus this was work on the Sabbath and unlawful. Jesus pointed out that David and his companions went into the temple and took the consecrated bread to eat. They were trying to escape King Saul. This was only lawful for priest. The priests work on the Sabbath to get ready for the services and are innocent. Then he tells them someone greater than the temple is there. If you know that God wants mercy and not sacrifice you would not condemn the innocent for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. This scripture tells us that how we treat others, mercy, is more important than rules and laws. It is the spirit of the rules and laws that is important. It also tells us that our Lord and obedience to him is more important than the literal translation of the law.

Ask the Lord where you need to work on to be merciful.

Our Sovereign Lord

“...they raised their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and earth the sea and everything in them...”

Acts 4.24

Child of God, smell the sweet fragrance of God on this bouquet of beautiful testimonies; hear the striking tones of the saints' voices as they form a choir of victorious witnesses; see the acts of the Holy Spirit after it has been welcomed in the hearts of Christ's disciples inspiring them to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel...” Peter and John had the same message in the world of their enemies and in the world of their friends: God is our Sovereign Lord.

Peter and John had just returned to their friends with the still fresh images of opposition to the Gospel on their minds. They shared how impossible it was to keep silent in arm's reach of their unbelieving enemies and it would be no different in the company of their believing friends. Luke reveals to us, in fine detail, that the Council that would judge Peter and John were subject to the fickle opinions of the people, like Pilate who had permitted Jesus' persecution without finding any fault in Him but was swayed by the crowd. Amidst the repeated threats by the unfit judges, Peter and John when questioned about the man God had used them to heal, boldly declared, he stood “...in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” The Council could not find a way to punish them; consequently, Peter and John were released and returned to their friends.

On one accord, Peter, John and their friends gave praise to the “Sovereign Lord, who made heaven, the earth and the sea...” They announced that human schemes are no match for God's ultimate plan. They proved that against hostile crowds and corrupt orders, we serve a Sovereign Lord and we are not alone. We can live courageously, assuredly and triumphantly.

What does God require of us?

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6.8

What does God require of us? The prophet Micah gives us the answer in this Scripture. God requires we act justly, love kindness and walk humbly with Him. Let's look at these requirements more specifically:

- To act justly, we need to be honest and fair with every person, and seek to bring justice for those who are mistreated or taken advantage of.
- To love mercy: We all mess up and when we do we sure appreciate someone who is compassionate and forgiving. Forgiveness doesn't mean consequences are removed. Forgiveness, though doesn't seek revenge. Compassion is an attitude of the heart.
- Walk humbly with your God: Walking is the opposite of running. Walking is a slow deliberate pace. It requires you focus on the Word of God. It would mean to sacrifice your busy and self centered self and focus on someone other than yourself and your desires and/or pleasures.

What God required of the people of the days of Micah are the same things God requires of us today.

Father God you are the Supreme Authority, I submit and commit to your requirements to do justice, to love mercy and walk humbly with you God. In those areas that I may falter, God, please prick my heart until I am aware of those areas. Please then God teach me to alter them so that I am able to fulfill your requirements. It is in the Name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

The Beneficiary of them All

*... "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.
Revelations 15:3*

Great and marvelous are the best adjectives to describe what God has created. In the first chapter of Genesis, God created the heavens and the earth, which was formless, empty and dark. Then, He created light that separates night from day. This was followed by the creation of water, seed bearing plants, trees, and animals. Finally, God created man. Now follow the order of creation and the significance of its chronology. Like a great inventor, God had to think of the project. The result of His thinking is the creation of man in "God's own image". Being omnipotent, all-wise and loving, He decided to first put in place all the necessities and comforts that a man needs.

He reasoned that a man must have a place to stay and roam; hence the creation of the heavens and the earth. Remember that there was nothing. So the concept of formless, empty and dark is understandable. And in order to make this place habitable, one must at least see his surroundings so He brought in light. It seems that light in this sense is not only the ability to see but also to discern and judge.

Water is one of the building blocks of life. God knows that without water man cannot survive. We need it for drinking to sustain ourselves, to bathe, for our crops and plants to grow. The importance of water cannot be overemphasized. Seed bearing plants and trees, livestock and animals provide man with food, beautiful sights and companionship. All these things God created were to nurture one another, but He created man to be the beneficiary of them all.

How would you respond if someone you have never met sends you a note (The Bible) telling you that he has built a house for you, stocked it with good food and water that will never run out? Would you obey his instructions written in that note? Would you love Him? Would you draw nearer to him?

Short Memories

The Israelites had very short memories. They kept forgetting the promises, power and presence of God. They came to the Jordan River looked across to the land God promised and doubted that the God who led them out of Egypt, fed them in the wilderness and wrote the Ten Commandments could overcome the Canaanites on the other side of the river. The river is a physical and a psychological barrier. Will they have the same faith their parents had to cross the Red Sea?

To remind them of the promises, power and presence of God, Joshua summons the people to hear the words of Yahweh, the Lord God. When the feet of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant touches the Jordan the water upstream will “stand upon an heap” and the Israelites will safely cross over. God who created the seas will build a dam to stop the flow of the Jordan so the ancient promise to Abraham can be fulfilled

In this Lenten season, Christians also can have short memories. We too can doubt the God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ, died for our sins and was resurrected. We too can stand at a crossing point and see the real world obstacles, resist the call to enter new territory and lack the faith that God will provide a way. Our fears are not called Hittites and Amorites but have other names.

Lord, help us to listen to your words and remember your promises, power and presence; that you can still make obstacles “stand upon an heap.”

Face to Face

*"On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."
Revelations 19:16*

Do you ever think about what it will be like to see Jesus face to face? Verse eleven starts with "Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war." We will wait a lifetime to actually "see" our Savior. Can you imagine what it will be like for you? What do you think you will do?

What will you say? Will you immediately start to question and ask God to explain all the things that happened to you? Will you keep quiet and stand in awe? Will you be able to speak at all? Will you be terrified by what is about to occur?

I am not sure how I will react. But one thing I am sure of is that I want to be prepared for that meeting. Our time on earth is preparation time to meet the Savior face to face. God continually seeks a relationship with us that is real and personal. If we have never allowed him to come into our hearts and transform us into who He wants us to be, then that face to face meeting will not be a pleasant one.

Let's commit to seek and draw closer to God each and every day. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. If we seek Him, we will truly find Him. As we obey Him, He will transform us into His likeness.

Take some time today to imagine what it will be like. May your face to face meeting with God be one of praise and rejoicing!

Jesus, himself

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.”
II Thessalonians 3.16

This verse is the benediction or the blessing that Paul used to close his letter to the church at Thessalonica. Like the church at Thessalonica, believers also receive the benediction or the final blessing not in a letter but after the sermon during a Sunday worship service. The letter to the church is much like a sermon in that it contains instructions on and encouragement while living a Christ-driven life. But, the benediction, the blessing, particularly the one found in this letter, is very important.

The Apostle Paul asks that “the Lord of Peace himself give you peace at all times and in all ways.” This is a request for the personal attention of Jesus Christ. Paul is not just calling on one of the abilities of Jesus Christ as the Lord of peace but he is asking that Jesus, who is peace and the prince of it, would give you peace. Paul is not asking the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus left as the Comforter, to give you peace. But Jesus himself—the One who while on the cross was so at peace was able to forgive while still being offended, who extended a pardon with hands outstretched and nailed, who made sure that his mother was taken care of. Surely, he had peace at all times and in all ways.

This is the request that Paul is making for the church at Thessalonica and my prayer for you: Jesus, give us peace at all times and in all ways.

Reflection

How has God spoken to you so far? What have you learned about the Lord? What have you or will you do differently?

ADVENTURES
WITH
CHRIST
CONTINUE

A sheep talks to the Shepherd

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Psalm 23:4

In the middle of this most familiar Psalm, an important shift takes place that challenges us to deeper spirituality.

From the beginning of the Psalm, David talks about God. He describes God in moving terms as his shepherd. Who is David talking to? Perhaps, the congregation, helping them to understand who God is. Perhaps to himself, reminding himself of the many blessings of God. Both testimony and contemplation are important parts of our faith experience.

Then, in verse 4, David moves beyond talking about God to talking directly to God. It is no longer “He” but “You”. Beyond our talking and thinking about God, we need to have a personal relationship with the Lord of all life that allows us to talk with God.

It is probably no accident that David is led to this shift by the circumstance of facing the possibility of death. When we realize that our lives are contingent on powers beyond us, the door is opened to a relationship with the Gracious Power above all other powers. In the Lenten season, we are shown how Jesus maintained His relationship with his Father while preparing for death.

Father in Heaven, I praise You for Your loving care. It is so incredible that I can talk to You, King of the Universe, source of both the energy that creates galaxies and the still small voice that accompanies my days. Keep me ever mindful of Your ways, ever vocal in telling others of Your blessings, and ever careful to stay in relationship with You.

The Anointing at Bethany

“While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly oil of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, ‘Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they scolded her. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly, I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done be told in remembrance of her.’”

Mark 14.3-11

The story begins in the house of a leper. Culturally, Jesus was where he should not have been. The leper was considered to be unclean. Because of this condition, he was ostracized by the community and in many cases, cast out. Still, this is where Jesus wanted to be.

And then there is a woman who does something that many people feel that she should not have done. To the men, she had wasted costly oil by pouring it on the head of Jesus. But in Jesus' sight, she has prepared his body. The men did not know what was really going on and so they began to scold her. But she did not have to part her lips and utter a word. He spoke for her and defended her actions. He said that she has performed “a good service for me.” We do not know her name but we cannot forget what she did. She is a part of the gospel story.

During this season of reflection, meditation, and thanksgiving, consider what you have done for Jesus. What did it cost you? What have you done for Him that will be told in remembrance of you?

What will you give me?

“Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.”

Matthew 26.14-15

No matter how often I have read this story or heard it told, I am still shocked at the choice of Judas. Even though Jesus said that it must be so that the Scripture is fulfilled and I know the outcome is my salvation, the action is still troubling. Not only that, Judas was “one of the twelve.” He was one of the persons that Jesus chose to walk with him so that He might instruct them and then later commission them to tell his story, the Gospel. He was “one the twelve,” one of the close companions of Jesus during his earthly mission. And just as Jesus chose to die, he had to choose one who would betray him.

“What will you give me if I betray him to you?” What will you give me if I am no longer loyal to Jesus Christ? With this question, Judas had only considered what he could gain from betraying Jesus. He had not fully considered the cost. He had not thought about the potential loss. He had not fully weighed the impact of the ministry of Jesus Christ. He did not consider who Jesus had been to him and so many others. He had taken his eyes off of Jesus and was now being led by his appetite. What will you give me?

He betrayed the Savior of the world for material gain, for money. But Jesus’ life could never be measured in dollars and cents. Surely, he is worth more than what can be created as he was with God when all things were created. So, before anything was, he was worthy of everything. So, Judas’ question seems outlandish. What will you give me? Surely, he did not know who He had. Do you?

Living Stones

"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

1 Peter 2.4-5, 9-10

First things first, a stone is a non-living (read: dead) object. It has no abilities of its own. It is built, formed and eroded by the sands of time. It is at the mercy of the stonecutter who may deem it unworthy of use and cast it away.

To be chosen by God does not mean the world's strike marks upon our vessels are removed or forgotten. Quite to the contrary! To be chosen by God, in spite of ourselves, means we have chosen to set aside our Self, our own strengths and abilities and all our natural resources that will crumble away to trust God to use all of "us", for His eternal glory.

Before we came to accept Jesus Christ, the Living Stone, as our Savior and foundation, we were dead and at the mercy of the natural world. Also, we were subjected to the whims of our mortal stonecutters to be carved out by a hand adept to flaw these precious earthen vessels.

In many aspects, we are no longer acceptable building material to the world. However, as Believers and the receivers of the Living Word, we must never forget that even though we are rejected by men, we were chosen by God to be the living stones of His church set upon the foundation of Christ.

You, my friend, are a stone called from dead place into a new life in Christ and built upon the eternal Rock. Today, remember that we are called to be Divine monuments: a living testimony of the Living Word on a fallen world.

A Warning for our Leaders

*Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Says the Lord.
Jeremiah 23.1*

The shepherds on whom Jeremiah pronounced "woe" were not only kings but the leaders of Judah—the civil and spiritual leaders, the prophets and priests. The leaders were guilty of gross dereliction of duty. By oppressing the people and shedding innocent blood, those in authority destroyed the flock. Those who were not destroyed were driven away, to wander without protection. Consequently, the leaders were guilty of the very things the shepherds were charged with preventing!

Jeremiah was subject to persecution, imprisonment and even death threats because he was outspoken and capable of strong denunciation of evil and hypocrisy. He wept over his people's apostasy; he interceded for his enemies as well as his friends.

What does Jeremiah's faithful ministry despite personal suffering teach us about how to deal with our countries current woes and our responsibility in these difficult and parlous times?

If our under-shepherds (pastors) and our elected officials take poor care of the people, mismanage money, betray God's people, and the charge God has committed to them: He The Chief Shepherd will judge them and care for the people Himself, because people belong to God, not to under-shepherds or elected officials.

Dear Lord, let the spirit of council, might, and wisdom rest upon those you have given charge over me, and those you have given me charge over. Help us see and meet the needs of the homeless, the hungry, and the broken hearted, the sick and shut-in and those in prison. Help us tend your flock in a manner that pleases you. Bless the United States and our elected officials.

Remembering what we already know

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

II Peter 1.12

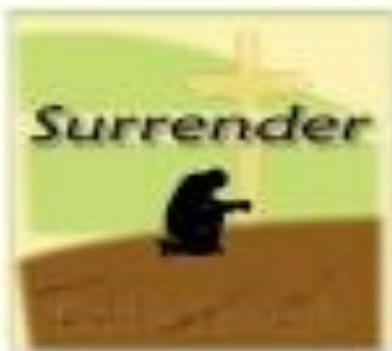
We are daily bombarded with so much that is false, yet attractive and alluring in its appeal, that we must constantly plumb the depths of our souls to recapture what is true. I have coined a word recently. It's all mine. You won't find it in the dictionary, but it makes perfect sense to me. It's re-remembering. It's that act of remembering a deeply set truth that I already knew but had forgotten, until something happens – either to me or somebody else – that requires me to re-remember it. It cannot be confused with simply remembering; that is, according to Webster, “the act of thinking of something again, holding a thought, or recalling something into memory, like a distant friend's name.” Re-remembering is more than that. It deals with the cycles of life that roll around again and again and the lessons they raise for us that we may have lost sight of. Peter, of all people, knew that believers did not need to be saved just once, but many times, into the faith that they claim. Preachers know this. We are not just called once. We are called many times over the course of our lives to carry out God's purpose. It is the ongoing mission of the preacher, teacher and believer to help themselves first, then to help others, re-remember what they know in a world that remains deliberate in defying, negating, and declaring Truth to be irrelevant. In the days ahead, let us re-remember and be firmly established in the truth we know to be true.

Rev. Cynthia Turner is the pastor of Dayspring Community Church.

March 29

Reflection

How have you been challenged by God? Are you willing to face those challenges?



Prayer: *Father, help my unbelief and help me to be obedient.*

Keeping Promises

“For in Him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through Him that we say the “Amen,” to the glory of God.”

II Corinthians 1.20

How many times has someone promised you that they were going to do something at a certain time? Did they follow through on that promise? Probably not. It seems that today, people have no concern about keeping promises. Gone is the time when your word was your bond and you took pride in doing what you promised to do.

The Corinthians accused Paul of not keeping his word to visit Corinth. Paul insisted that he changed his plans out of consideration for them. He assured the Corinthians that he and his companions always acted with the integrity of Christ, in whom there is always a “Yes”.

God’s promises became “Yes” in Jesus Christ. For Paul, God’s promises had been made to Abraham and to his offspring and then to all believers. Therefore God’s promises are always true. Jesus was completely faithful in His ministry and because Christ was faithful, Paul also wanted to be faithful.

How faithful are you? Can people depend on you? Is your yes, yes and your no, no? As we continue on our spiritual journey, let us strive to live a life of integrity where we are known to do what we have committed to do. Amen!

Faithful God, we thank you for the example that you sent for us to follow embodied in Jesus Christ. He was and is faithful, so help us to make our yes, yes and our no, no just as Christ did. In Jesus Christ we pray, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Glorious gift of God

“Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Hebrews 13.20-21

The Church, during Lent, reminds all humans, especially those within Christ's fellowship, of their limitations. Each of us has our own failures and shortcomings, and even when we group together we continue to wander aimlessly and carelessly. Experience teaches humans that we too often fall short, lose our way or simply make a wrong choice. Even our best human leaders find plans fall short of what is right or perhaps they simply fall short of what we desire. On our own, we, humans, may well appear like a herd of sheep with neither shepherd nor sheep dog imperiled by either the cliff or the wolf.

The glorious gift of God, however, is Jesus the Christ. Jesus has the role of Shepherd for those who hear and follow his voice. Jesus provides His flock with safety, from danger and from avarice.

The glorious gift of God, however, is Jesus the Christ. Jesus is the process through which humans can live out righteously, completing us. He is actively working among the flock so that we can discover and follow His will, leading us to righteousness.

The glorious gift of God, however, is Jesus the Christ. Through Jesus, we can find peace knowing every power used against Christ's flock, even that of death, will be checked by God. We can live in peace, for there is no reason to fear, even any power of death.

Praise God this day for reminding us of our limitations as well as for promising our completion through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“Do it!”

“O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalm 95.1-2

Clearly, this is not written just to be read. They are instructions. “Come, let us sing to the Lord.” So sing. It doesn’t matter how you sound; God is your audience. Your heart is what He is really listening to.

“Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” This was not said in a whisper as the exclamation point indicates. The writer is excited as he shares with the people. He says that God is the rock, the unmovable foundation of our salvation. It cannot be taken away. It cannot be pushed aside. We are saved forever because God is our rock.

What God has done for us is something to celebrate and to be excited about so “make a joyful noise.” It doesn’t have to include four verses and a chorus; you don’t need a director or any musical instruments. You don’t have to say what everyone else is saying. Make it personal. The writer calls for your mouth. Make noise with it.

We can scream really loud when we are in pain or are excited about our favorite team winning or finding a dress on sale. Now, this of course cannot be compared to the joy of finding the Savior who takes care of all of our needs. This is cause for celebration. “Thank you Jesus for saving my soul! Thank you Lord for healing my body! Thank you Almighty God for delivering me time and time again from the hand of the enemy! You are so worthy! You are so great! O, how I love You!” When you read the psalms, don’t just read them but do it.



Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives

“He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’ Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’”

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?’ When those who were around saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, the power of darkness!’”

“This is your hour.” Jesus finds the disciples asleep and while speaking to them, he is interrupted by Judas who has come to betray him. Violence erupts and a man is injured. There is a crowd to witness what Jesus knows must be. Despite all these distractions, He is focused, knowing that this moment is not about Judas, the priests, or elders but the power of darkness. Despite what is happening, he is still able to say that this is only for a moment. “This is your hour.” Reflect on this happening.

His actions were louder

“Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him to the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then the servant girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not!’ Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, ‘Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.’

But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about!’ At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.

The writer tells us that Peter followed Jesus at a distance. He was close enough to see what was happening to him but far enough away to not be affected by it. Or, so he thought. Peter went to the high priest’s house where they made a fire and sat down together. He “sat among them.” He did not stand next to Jesus or with the other disciples but “sat among them,” those who had come to condemn Jesus to death and those who wanted to be entertained by his suffering.

Still, a servant girl was able to identify him. He had tried to hide, to blend in with “them” but she knew that Peter had been with “him” (here being Jesus). Some time had passed and again, he was identified as being with those who had followed Jesus. The man was saying, ‘You are not one of us but you are one of *them*.’ Finally, he was identified a third time as a follower of Jesus and again he denied him, saying, “I don’t know what you are talking about!” Peter thought that in changing his location, he could somehow change his affiliation. When that didn’t work, he thought that in changing his words, it would somehow change all of the work that he had been witnessed doing. The people had seen him with Jesus and there was no place he could go and no word he could give to change it. Jesus’ actions spoke louder than Peter’s words.

He did it for you

“Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, ‘Prophecy! Who is it that struck you? They kept heaping many other insults on him...When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left... And the people stood by watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’”

When we think about all that Jesus did for us before we knew him, it is unbelievable. Jesus suffered and died for us before we accepted him. He was insulted, mocked, beaten, taunted, and crucified for our salvation before we knew that we needed to be saved or desired to be. He gave his life for us before we decided to live it for him. What an amazing and inspiring love that he demonstrates toward us.

And quite simply, he did it just to be close to us. He died so that we would not be separated from God because of our sins. He did it all just to be close to us. Just to be near us. He did it for me and he did it for you. He did it not because of something that we had done but because of his desire for us to have life and to live it abundantly. He did it for you. He had your best interest in mind not his. Jesus came to earth, blessed and healed thousands only to be cursed and killed by a few. And he did it for you.

Remember him today and all that you mean to him.

April 5

Reflection

How is God drawing you near to him? Are you willing to go? What possible challenges will you face?

Prayer: *Dear Lord help me to go where you want me to go. Help me to do what you want me to do. Lord help me to overcome any and every challenge that may come my way.*



What are you saying?

“They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said. We have heard for ourselves. We know that this man really is the Savior of the world.’”

John 4.42

This passage of scripture is a model for effective witness. The Samaritans were led to Jesus Christ based on the woman’s testimony. Because of her testimony the Samaritans sought to have their own encounter with Jesus. This encounter caused them to strengthen their own faith.

What are you saying? As witness of God’s grace and mercy, are others being draw into wanting a relationship with God?

Your words and your life should draw others to Jesus. You are to proclaim the goodness of God. Be an effective witness. Every time you speak, someone should have an encounter with God that will cause an unforgettable experience.

As the season of Lent is nearing its end, make your mind up to share in the matters of the heart. Choose to reveal the unseen Jesus Christ in others’ lives so that they may know the love of God through the gift of salvation.

Dear God, please to help me have more confidence to share the good things you have done in my life. Help me live in a way that demonstrates your love. Lord, I pray the people will see my life and listen to my words that they may desire to be saved. I pray that you will get all the glory.

Satisfaction for the Famished Soul

The Jews began to complain about Jesus because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." But, bread falling from heaven was a not new occurrence. This was not the first time heavenly provisions straight from God's hand had been provided a people. Moses spoke to the Israelites, sharing that God would provide bread from heaven. Manna would address their needs in the wilderness. When Jesus said "I am the bread of life," our text shares that the first responses were complaints and before prayer. The next response was a logical reason as to why Jesus could not be from heaven. They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose mother and father we know?" We see here that it is an old wall that blocks their ability to receive God's unexpected moves. Like the Jews in this story, we let our limited and earthly experiences keep us from seeing the vast and heavenly realities around us.

The bread of God or manna served to expose the true nature of their relationships with God. The impoverished nature of their hearts with God was exposed through the manna. Would there be absolute trust in God or would they fearfully hoard what was given? Do you pray for understanding? Are you open to what God has in store for you? Fresh revelation? New Mercy? Faith in Jesus satisfies the famished human soul.

Jesus, to a lost humanity languishing in sin, is the cleanser of sin, our Savior. Jesus, to those with thirsty spirits, is living water. Jesus, to those who hunger for righteousness, is the righteous One. Jesus, to the exiles of the dispersion, is the Way to the Heavenly Kingdom. Jesus, to the famished soul, is the only One who brings satisfaction.

Bread of Life, Jesus, You promised that we might have life and have it abundantly; incline our hearts to only sit at the table that God has prepared; clear our eyes of any sinful delights that keeps us from knowing who you are, give us only appetites for Your bread and Your blood from Your hands, so that we may faithfully serve and eternally live. Amen.

Hearing God's Voice

"And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."
John 1.4

When the true shepherd, Jesus Christ, brings out His own sheep, he does not drive us but He leads us. Jesus Christ does not ask us to go anywhere that He Himself has not gone first. Everything that we will encounter in this life, Jesus Christ experienced it first. Therefore, He is ever out in front of the sheep as our Savior, Guide, Protector, Healer and Deliver. Christ desires that we know his voice. In order to know the voice of God, one must accept him as your Lord and Savior.

Perhaps, you have accepted Christ as your Savior and now you find yourself in a place where you are having trouble distinguishing your voice from the voice of God. In order to hear the voice of God, we must position our hearts and minds to hear him. There are biblical accounts recorded in the scriptures that will help us to understand that God does speak to those that are his sheep. Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord (Genesis 3.8). The Lord spoke to Elijah in a still small voice (I Kings 19.11-13). Every one that is of the truth hears my voice (John 18.37).

As we approach the end of this season of Lent and you find yourselves longing to hear from God, make a commitment to walk in humility, have faith, search your heart and be committed to doing God's will.

Lord, open my ears and my heart so that I can hear and obey your voice as you lead me into my destiny.

Exposing the Thieves of our Life

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

John 10.10

Who or what is the thief in your life? What are the things in your life that are stealing from you? What have you allowed in your life that has killed and destroyed your hopes and dreams? Most importantly, what have you allowed in your life that has killed your relationship with God?

Thieves are very sneaky and dishonest. Many have very smooth and believable stories that allow them to enter into our hearts and lives. Once they are in they have an advantage that allows them to steal, killed and destroy us. Many times we don't know what has hit us until it is too late.

Our Bible passage for the day tells us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd stands at the gate, keeping watch over everything that comes near. He is able to keep out all those things that He knows should not enter in. He is also able to let in those things that need to enter in. The Holy Spirit is a watchman and guard over our hearts. We must let Him do His job. We have to recognize His voice and obey His instructions, so that we are protected from the thief.

The Good Shepherd can clear out those things that have sneaked into our hearts and lives that should not be there. He came so that we can have an abundant life. We must listen and obey His voice. Out of love and obedience to the Father, Jesus gave His life for us.

Jesus, help us to confess those things that have prevented us from experiencing the abundance that You have for us. May we hear Your voice and allow You to be our Shepherd. Amen.



Living His Prayer

“The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

John 17.22-23

Jesus recognizes His time has come, so He spends His last days in prayer. He first prays for himself, then for the disciples and ends with a prayer for all believers. Jesus’ prayer is that the glory of God passed to Him is passed to all believers and that we might become one as He and God are one. We are partakers in the glory as we unite with one another. In drawing near to Jesus, we draw near to God. However, as we draw near to God, we must draw near to one another.

Jesus’ prayer for us is that we not simply draw near to God as individuals on an isolated journey, but rather as a covenanted community. As God’s people, are we connected breast to breast and heart to heart with our church, community, family and friends? Who on this journey have you ignored, not forgiven, left behind, disregarded, or mistreated?

The glory of God is manifested ever so brightly as the love of God is expressed, shared and proliferated throughout the community. We are reminded that salvation is not a selfish act but a communal celebration. Drawing near to one another, exemplifying the glory of God and demonstrating the love of Christ is experienced in our communion with one another. It is the tangible and beloved answer to Jesus’ prayer, “that they may be one, even as We are one.” How can we draw near to God and be distant and isolated from each other?

Good Friday is about sacrifice. Jesus laid down his life so that those whom He loved could be free—free to love, free to live, free to share, free to give. Let us examine what we must crucify within ourselves so that we might be one with each other, draw nearer to God and being free.

Written for our Instruction

“We know that the whole of creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Romans 8.22-27

The book of Romans presents a logical basis for beliefs in God. Letters from Paul and a study of the Bible shows it is a discourse with a purpose and a theme. No one part can be fully understood without a study of the entire book and knowledge of its purpose. His letter was not merely written to the Roman congregation with no specific aim toward them as some suppose. But it evidently dealt with the things they needed under those circumstances. The Roman congregation would be able to grasp the full meaning and force of the apostle's counsel with matters he considered most vital. One of which was to settle the difference in viewpoints between Jewish and Gentile Christians and to also bring them toward complete unity.

Paul's letter also enriches our minds in the knowledge of God and the position of Jesus Christ towards the Christian congregation and all humankind. The words of wisdom spoken to the Romans were good at the time and they are also good today. We know that God's Spirit acts as a Helper for the Christian. God's Spirit not only brings revelation and understanding of God's will but it also energizes His servants to accomplish things in accord with that will. The Spirit acts as a driving force, moving and compelling us.

In closing, I quote the Apostle Paul: “All the things that were written aforetime were written for our instruction.”



Coming Soon!

“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work.”
Revelation 22.12

I have always found it intriguing when I saw a sign that read, “Coming Soon!” The sign captured my attention and sparked my curiosity. When the name of the retailer was displayed with or near the “Coming Soon” sign, I started to imagine the restaurant or store in that particular space. If the “Coming Soon” sign was not accompanied by a retail name, my mind begins to speculate on what should open in that particular space.

In the full biblical passage today, it is declared that the Messiah is coming soon. There is nothing left to the imagination. The One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End is coming. The One who is the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star is coming. Jesus is coming soon!

When Jesus comes, he is bringing his reward. It will be the time when Jesus gives to each one of us our reward according to what we have done. This will be the moment of truth.

Jesus told his disciples and the crowds that the temple, his body, would be lifted up in three days. After his crucifixion, Jesus arose three days later. God always fulfills God’s promises. Are you ready for his return? If Jesus returned tomorrow, what reward would you receive?

Dear Lord, prepare me for your return. If there is anything you require of me, help me to fulfill it.

