

A vertical, glowing tree root system is the central focus of the image. The roots are illuminated from within, creating a bright, golden-yellow glow that contrasts sharply with the dark, textured background. The roots start from a single point at the top and branch out into a complex, intricate network as they descend. The background is a deep, dark brown with a subtle, mottled texture, suggesting soil or a dark interior space. The overall composition is vertical and centered, with the roots extending from the top edge towards the bottom.

IN
DARKNESS
ROOTS
GROW
DEEP

Crosscreek Lenten Devotional 2020

INTRODUCTION

As we journey forward in this season of Lent, I hope you find the scriptures and reflections written here to be helpful.

As a church, we'll be focusing on two different aspects of the journey of Lent together.

During Sunday mornings, we'll be focused on becoming "Unburdened," that is laying down the things we unnecessarily carry so that we are more able to pick up the cross and follow Jesus.

Of course, even as we are becoming unburdened, we also need to grow more rooted in the grace and mercy of God. The "darkness" of this Lenten season is the perfect place to do just that.

The daily meditations and reflections in this book come from a variety of authors, from some of our more "experienced" members to some of our youngest. They reflect a wide variety of experiences and approaches to spiritual growth. They reflect the beauty of a congregation that is not focused on what divides us, but is focused on what unites us - a desire to walk in the Way of Jesus.

Regardless of where you are currently on your spiritual journey, I hope you will take up the call to approach your faith with intentionality in this season of Lent. I know and trust that in addition to the practice of "giving up" something for Lent, God wants us to all to "take on" a renewed focus in our faith.

My prayer for all of us is that we would enter this season with purpose and exit it on Easter Sunday as changed and matured people of the Way.

Love,

Brandon Hudson

February 2020

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Psalm 51:1-5

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

Ash Wednesday

A Reflection

Mercy cannot be earned. Mercy cannot be deserved. Mercy does not depend on the one needing mercy, but rather on the one in the position to grant it.

There are times in our lives when we find ourselves working - diligently, unflaggingly, with award winning perseverance - towards earning God's mercy.

But here's the thing, we can't earn it.

At all.

Period.

Full stop.

What we can do, as we enter this season of Lent and celebrate our finitude on this Ash Wednesday, is embrace the nature of the Divine - that of mercy. That is what David is writing here, in the midst of his brokenness. He knows that he has sinned; it is undeniable. And yet, even as he confesses his own sin, he professes the merciful nature of God.

Our God is merciful. And while we cannot earn that mercy (it is simply who God is), we can live into it. We cannot earn it, but we can pass it on. We cannot deserve it, but we can find ourselves transformed by it.

May we remember today that we are dust, and to dust we will return. And, may we also remember that we beloved. That love transforms us, turns us from dust into people bearing God's merciful image into a world that hurts.

- Brandon Hudson

Thursday

Psalm 51:6-9

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

February 27, 2020

A Reflection

David's sin struck me harder than it ever has because of today's rising awareness of sexual predation by men in positions of power. David was the king, ruler over all Israel. His might and power was unquestioned.

But he was also God's king. God Himself had chosen him to rule over His people. That choice held David to a higher standard. Instead he saw Bathsheba and lusted after her and took her. He was the king. She was merely the wife of his valiant and principled warrior Uriah the Hittite. A husband whom David murdered.

The language of Psalm 51 in The Message version is graphic in its metaphors of violation, from his imploring of God to "Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in your laundry" giving images of sheets stained after his sinful deed, to David's outright confession that God is the One he's violated. David's words echo the fate of Bathsheba, but with a holy twist. "What you're after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life."

As we begin the season of Lent, no matter what we've done, let us pray the words of David, feel his sorrow and our own, and repent.

What you're after is truth from the inside out.
Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.
Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,
scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.
Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,
set these once-broken bones to dancing.
Don't look too close for blemishes,
give me a clean bill of health.
Psalm 51, 6-9, *The Message*

- Donna Fitch

Friday

February 28, 2020

Psalm 51:10-14

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

A Reflection

For most of us, there are two pathways that lead to guilt. The first and most obvious is to do something we should not have done—the sin of commission. The second is not doing something we should have done—the sin of omission.

David committed both kinds of sins. He did some things he should not have done. He slept with the wife of one of his soldiers. Then he plotted to have that same man murdered.

David also failed to perform his legitimate function as King. God expected the King to care for the people of God the way a shepherd would care for his sheep. David understood this duty clearly and yet failed to do his duty. He did not fulfill his role as Shepherd King.

When David finally faced his failures, the result was a deep and agonizing guilt. Many of us know those feelings of guilt from our own sins of commission and omission. But David becomes our teacher here. He does not passively accept guilt as the last word in his life. He takes definite steps to restore his broken relationship with God.

The language David uses makes it clear that sin and guilt create a deep separation between us and God. That separation creates a series of negative mental and emotional states that only serve to make us miserable. We feel cut off from God, and if we are not careful, we will feel cut off from hope.

This sense of the absence of God in our lives leaves us vulnerable, weak and afraid.

So David asks God to restore “the joy of your salvation.” Not “my salvation,” as if the blessings and presence of God was our possession, but a salvation received and experienced as a gift, an act of Grace.

We cannot know for certain how God responded to the plea of David for a return of the presence. But because of the life and ministry of Jesus in our midst, we get a glimpse into what God is hoping for us. The final word for all our failures—of commission and omission—is the gift of forgiveness. Our challenge is to become aware of the presence of God in our lives.

There is a lot of guilt out there, and for the most part it is not doing any of us any good.

- Jim Evans

Saturday

February 29, 2020

Psalm 51:15-19

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

A Reflection

To gain my own understanding of this passage, I looked at several translations, trying to find the one that spoke the best to me. I would suggest you spend a few minutes today reading through a few translations of this passage.

Our mouths speak out of the abundance of our hearts. How often when you open your mouth does God's love flow from it? God's love is a fondness of everyone and forgiving spirit. "O Lord, give me the words. Then my mouth will praise you." (NET)

The practice of the Old Testament was to do sacrifices of burnt offerings when one messed up, there are pages upon pages of how to do a sacrifice based on the type of sin committed. David is saying God just might be less concerned about the offerings for the atonement of sin and more concerned about what is in your heart.

Again, I like the NET Bible's translation: "The sacrifice God desires is a humble spirit— O God, a humble and repentant heart you will not reject." David is constantly struggling with the sins he carries which has led him to brokenness. A humble and repentant heart, is a heart God delights in. This is a heart that has been a witness to God's grace and allows God's love to flow through it and out of it.

Only when a heart is in a place of brokenness, ready to be mended by the grace and forgiveness of a powerful physician, is when the aroma of your sacrifice is a pleasing one.

- Jessica Haywood

Monday

Psalm 32:1-5

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah
Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

March 2, 2020

A Reflection

This is the second of the seven penitential Psalms. David wrote it after confessing to God his sins of adultery. He vowed to share what he had learned; this costly experience and the Psalm are a part of the fulfillment of that promise. This is the first Machil Psalm. The word had been interpreted many ways: "a skillful song, a song of instruction." The word means "instruction".

The Lord chastened David for almost a year and made him miserable until he stopped lying, humbled himself before God, and confessed his sins. What happened to David during those difficult months? For one thing he became a physical wreck. He was probably about fifty when he disobeyed the Lord, but he began to feel and look like a sick old man. It was worth the pain, for the experience brought him back to the Lord. He said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

The Lord sent the Prophet Nathan to David to confront him and his sins and bring him God's word of forgiveness. David's confession, "I have sinned against the Lord" was answered with, "The Lord also has put away your sin." Psalm 32 is The Joy of Forgiveness.

- Mary Frances Whitmer

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Psalm 32:6-11

Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters
shall not reach them.

You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.
Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

A Reflection

When I was growing up, my church put on extravagant pageants around Christmas and Easter. One year, someone decided that what would make the pageant better than ever was the use of live animals.

Live animals are great when they are pets, bringing comfort and companionship. They are not great when they are required to behave in public in a certain way.

The donkey, the majestic jack-ass, bearer of burdens, and ancestor of the companion of Balaam (see Numbers 22:21-39) decided in the middle of the reenacted Triumphal Entry, that it was uninterested in continuing on towards the stage. In fact, it had only one interest, and that was to relieve itself in the middle of the aisle.

To my knowledge, live animals have never been used again for the Easter program.

Sometimes, we are like donkeys. In our stubbornness we don't do what we are supposed to do. Even worse, sometimes we don't do that which will actually keep us well and safe.

The Psalmist describes God as the one who is protection personified. God is the place where those in trouble can hide and be kept safe from the rising waters of despair and dismay. God is always there, ready to protect us.

The question is whether we will run to God or whether we will wander astray like so many stubborn mules.
May God overcome our own willfulness until we are surrounded by love.

- Brandon Hudson

Wednesday

March 4, 2020

Matthew 18:10-14

“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

A Reflection

“**Despise**” is defined in the following way:

To look down on with disrespect

To regard as negligible, worthless, or distasteful

Jesus warns us not to have this type of attitude. Sadly that attitude is seen too often in the behavior of Christians. There are times when Christians might look down on another Christian because of the way they choose to live their life, or maybe because of something that the Christian did in the past. When we refuse to care enough to help, or value enough to have compassion for, we are despising that person or those people.

Jesus follows this warning by giving a great example of care and compassion through the parable of the wondering sheep. This parable reminds us that all of God’s sheep—each one of us, are equally loved and cared for by God. It did not matter which sheep went astray. None is more or less important than the others. We are all equal in God’s eyes; we are all equally loved by God. Neither does God make judgment on why the sheep went astray. All that matters is “one of these” is lost and needs to be found. God won’t just seek us out, but will rejoice when He finds us.

Jesus warns us not to despise others. Too many times we despise not by what we do, but by what we don’t do. Who do we look down on? Who do we disrespect? Who do we make feel worthless? When that person is outside the fold, and we do nothing to help find them, we are in effect saying to that person or those people, you are worthless and we despise you. Let’s go get those who are outside “our” definition of saved. Go get them and celebrate when they become part of the fold.

- Wes Jeffcoat

Thursday

March 5, 2020

Psalm 121:1-4

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

A Reflection

Psalm 121:1-4 is a psalm of trusting God in all situations. Verses 2-3 are teaching us that God's help and protection doesn't leave us in both good and bad times.

I have a hard time always trusting God, especially during the dark times. One of the reasons I have such a hard time is because my short-sightedness can't see God. Then I remember I can see God all the time through the people I love, through nature, and through the kindness of strangers. These are only a few examples.

What are ways that you remember to trust God? Do you think about the scriptures to which you can remember that God is with us? Do you find God in your surroundings when trusting Him is difficult?

We are all children of God. Our personal history involves trusting a parent, or guardian, or an adult when we were children.

Let us remember that trust when we struggle trusting our Heavenly Father.

- Ann Bowman

Friday

Psalm 121:5-8

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

March 6, 2020

A Reflection

Jesus prayed the Psalms. Prayer in the Psalms is earthy, honest, true, and personal. It can be easy to think of the Psalms as polished works repeated by good people at their best. They are not. They are really, really not. Prayer is vital, essential, and elemental to who we are as humans, as beings created by the Creator. Prayer is our personal response to God. So the prayers in the Psalms give us a roadmap to forthright and clear communication with God. Yes, God is...well...God. And, of course, we are not. God spoke planets into existence and crafted strands of DNA to make puppies as well as Redwood trees. And, of course, we did not. But I circle back to - Jesus prayed the Psalms. And anything Jesus did, I want to do as well.

Psalm 121 is about God as Guardian God. The writer sees something in nature that is majestic, mighty, or breathtaking and uses the awe of that created thing to remind them of the Creator. The mountains are a finger pointing to God. Verses 5-8 depict a God who is ever-vigilant to protect us. We are protected all day and all night from every evil regardless of where our journey takes us. Can I get a big hearty AMEN with that?

This Guardian God conjures up superhero imagery for me. Specifically, I think of Wonder Woman - a powerful and strong-willed warrior and yet a highly compassionate and calm ambassador, capable of conquering any villain or threat yet a lover of peace who would never seek to escalate a conflict, simultaneously fierce and nurturing, and with centuries of training and experience at handling a variety of threats.

So today I gift you the imagery of Wonder Woman Guardian God clearing the path before and guarding your back as well all while walking with you at your side. You're welcome.

- Jill Hudson

Saturday

March 7, 2020

Luke 7:1-10

A Reflection

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

After Jesus was rejected by the Jews in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30), he moved to Capernaum, a city of great wealth, commerce, and decadence. The city is northeast of Nazareth at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. In the synagogue there he healed a demon possessed man to the amazement of the people and word spread about him through the surrounding area. It says that afterward he went to the home of Simon Peter and healed his mother-in-law's fever. At sunset the people brought to Jesus many who were sick with various diseases and he laid on hands and healed them all. Jesus was a man of great spiritual authority and power and attracted a great following.

In our story, Jesus is returning to Capernaum after delivering his sermon on the mount and approached by a Jewish delegation sent by a local centurion. Keep in mind that the Jewish people live in occupied territory. The Romans and their military administrators could be cruel and oppressive and were generally despised. This centurion however was very different. God had touched him and regenerated his spirit. Perhaps he is the first Gentile convert. Nevertheless, he loved the Jewish people and had helped to build their synagogue and certainly knew about Jesus. He appears to be a man of faith and sent the delegation to request that Jesus come and heal the servant. When Jesus is near to the centurion's home, another delegation comes to him with a message. "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But say the word and my servant will be healed." As a man of worldly authority, he recognizes Jesus' spiritual authority and extends his trust to him. When the delegation returns, the servant is healed.

This tender story reminds me that I can always trust in my Savior. He gave his life on Calvary so that through him I could finally be in right relationship to God the Father. Not only has he paid the price for my sin, but as a child of God, he has adopted me into his family and has made me and all of us co-heirs with Christ. Our place in the kingdom is assured and therefore, our place in this world is as short as well. John 16:33 recounts Jesus telling his disciples, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" This is our blessed assurance.

- Doug Bradle

Sunday

March 8, 2020

John 3:1-17

A Reflection

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

When reading this passage, it always strikes me that Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night. He believes Jesus is from God because of what he has seen Jesus do, but maybe he's not quite sure enough that he wants anyone else to know. How often are we guilty of trying to live our faith while worrying what others will think or say?

Nicodemus is understandably confused by the concept of being "born again". He was a Pharisee for goodness sake. Would he lose his earthly status? Am I guilty of being happy to follow Jesus as long as I don't have to give up anything? That "prosperity gospel" stuff sounds pretty good, actually. Right, Nicodemus?

I shouldn't be so hard on Nicodemus. At least he is there, asking questions, trying to understand. And, isn't that what we all should do?

Then comes the real kicker, John 3:16. Wikipedia says this verse "is one of the most widely quoted verses from the Bible and has been called the most famous Bible verse. It has also been called the "Gospel in a nutshell", because it is considered a summary of the central theme of traditional Christianity."

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." -KJV is the way I learned it as a child.

Beautiful. Powerful. Compelling.

Perhaps even more comforting is verse 17: 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

I'm all about going to heaven and everlasting life. I look forward to reuniting with loved ones who have gone before and to being in God's presence. I don't believe, though, that following a formula to get to heaven is the central theme of the gospel. The kingdom of God is not only in the future and in heaven. The kingdom plays out in our lives here on earth.

Rather than leaving it to other generations or to God, this understanding of the kingdom compels us to act in order to transform the world now, through the power of the Spirit, and through the grace of God.

- Patsy Jeffcoat

Monday

Hebrews 3:1-6

Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.” Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

March 9, 2020

A Reflection

We give a lot of credit to Moses for his faith. He should get credit. He was the one who God used to bring God’s people out of Egypt, out of slavery. He is described as being the “most faithful in all God’s house.” Of course this is worthy of praise.

But Jesus, Jesus built the house in which Moses was faithful. And Jesus is making us into his house! We, his people, are the kingdom Jesus is building.

How amazing is that! Let us be proud of it and live into that responsibility.

- Sophia Hudson

Tuesday

Psalm 128

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways.
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
Thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the Lord.
The Lord bless you from Zion.
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

March 10, 2020

A Reflection

The joy in this Psalm is apparent! Those who fear the Lord, who walk in the way of God - they are happy!!!

Sure. Sometimes this does seem true. Sometimes we walk in the way of the Lord and everything seems just right! All things are working out for us! Nothing can stand in our way!

We should celebrate those moments, because other times it seems we are closer to the plight of Job. He walked in the ways of the Lord, but he wouldn't have said that he was happy.

He was faithful. Yes, he was exceedingly faithful. But that faithfulness didn't equal happiness.

In this season of penance, let us not be slow to celebrate the joy and happiness when we feel it. But let us also not equate faithfulness with unbridled joy. Our Lord, the one who was tempted for 40 days and gave his life away shows us a different way than that. He shows us a way of contentedness and faithfulness in the midst of trial. He was happy to celebrate life with his friends, *and* he was faithful to give his life away for the sake of love.

May we also be ready celebrate and sacrifice, following the One who knows the Way of Life.

- Brandon Hudson

Wednesday

Psalm 51:15-19

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

March 11, 2020

A Reflection

This passage is missing in most of the old manuscripts, according to various study Bibles, but it is consistent with the personality and character of Jesus. But rather than focus on the technicalities of this passage—What did Jesus write on the ground? What about death penalty issues here versus those of Paul in Romans 13:4? Where was the man who was also committing adultery?—look at the bigger picture.

A group of scribes and Pharisees condemned this woman for a physical act for which we may or may not ever be guilty. But we have all committed spiritual adultery at one time or another—forsaking our Lord for the pleasures of the world or for personal weariness or for a myriad of other reasons. None of us can say truthfully we've lived a blameless life. We stand condemned before Jesus for our sins.

But He writes His grace on the stony ground of our hearts. He could rightfully accuse us and cast us out, but instead He loves us, wraps His arms around us, drapes our sinful nakedness in His cloak of righteousness.

Our accusers melt away, and we are left with new hope, a new opportunity to start over. We have that new chance every moment of every day in Jesus.

Lord, may we renew our devotion to you every day within your infinite grace and mercy. Amen.

- Donna Fitch

Thursday

March 12, 2020

Exodus 16:1-8

A Reflection

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?” And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.”

The story of “bread from heaven” that we read about today is a case study in how people are prone to forget what God has done, while at the same time impose unattainable expectations on people we care about.

The people of Israel did not really want to go back to the tyranny of Egypt. But they were afraid of an uncertain future. They were frightened rather than angry. But their complaints came across as belligerent and caustic.

God was fully prepared to take care of the people, and was probably planning to send the bread from heaven whether they complained or not. But the bitter complaints hurt Moses and Aaron. These two had faithfully done all they could, yet the people did not appreciate it.

We wonder why we do these things. We become anxious about one thing, but complain about another. Like a student who is having trouble with a course of study. It is easy to fall into blaming and complaining about the teacher. What the student wants to say is “I am having trouble with this course.” But what he ends up saying to the teacher is “I am not learning and it is your fault. Your methods or mastery of the subject is inadequate. I would be better off with a different teacher.”

Not only does the student fail to get the help he needs, but the teacher becomes angry and defensive. Overall an adequate teaching environment is broken.

If we are not careful we will inflict criticism on those around us about something they did or did not do. Realistically, however, what is really going on is an internal struggle with our own fears and needs. Rather than asking for help, we let loose the dogs of complaining.

With Israel, God intervened in such a way that His people had a chance to grow. The provisions God made for them may look different from what they had in Egypt, but their deep needs for security and safety were calmed by the bread of heaven. The lesson for us is faith and prayer rather than angry complaints are the best way to experience the presence of God.

God is always with us, but sometimes when we hurt that presence is hard to see. But complaining and blaming gets us nowhere. It is in waiting and trusting that our eyes are opened to the peace and presence of God.

- Jim Evans

Friday

Psalm 95

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!
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
O that today you would listen to his voice!
Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your ancestors tested me,
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways."
Therefore in my anger I swore,
"They shall not enter my rest."

March 13, 2020

A Reflection

I love to snorkel coral reefs! My favorite way to take in a coral reef is to watch a particular area for a few minutes. All I can hear are the waves that are pushing and pulling me, the faint sound of parrotfish munching on dying coral parts, and my own breathing through the snorkel. I lay there completely still and just watch the critters below. This is my own moment of "be still and know," this is one of the only moments I can focus without a million thoughts or interruptions playing through my brainwaves. I have seen giant rays, bull sharks, sea turtles, barracuda, and hundreds of fish species; somehow, this is when I have found myself most in worship of our Creator .

When snorkeling, I become an onlooker of a beautiful dance. It is a dance I cannot take my eyes off of, a dance God created to show off his glory, a dance that captivates all of my senses and points me to an intelligent, creative, playful God.

When do you see God's glory the clearest? Where do you find yourself in awe of the Creator? Where do you truly worship?

Creator God, help us to have our eyes opened to your majesty. Help us to truly worship you in our sacred places and in the everyday. Amen.

- Jessica Haywood

Saturday

March 14, 2020

Exodus 16:27-35

On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. The Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations.” As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant, for safekeeping. The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

A Reflection

Rest already! I’ll take care of it. Then you can tell others the story.

That’s my “Cliff Notes” summary of this passage. The Israelites were supposed to gather the manna they needed for one extra day a week, and then they were to rest and enjoy the provisions on the Sabbath.

Prepare. Enjoy. Tell the story.

In the Old Testament, God tells the Israelites several times to do things that will prompt the sharing of their stories. Keep the law, and when your children ask, tell them how you were slaves of Pharaoh. Take twelve stones from the river and stack them, and when your children ask, tell them the river’s flow was cut off so you could cross on dry ground. Celebrate Passover, and when your children ask, tell them you worship the Lord because he spared your homes when he struck down the Egyptians.

Do this because it creates an opportunity to tell the story. Remember me.

When we tell our stories, we are our most authentic selves. Our stories carry our identities. They reveal what’s important, what’s unusual, and even what is humorous about us. The stories we tell brand us, bind us, and bare us.

Little is as attractive as authenticity. Our light may shine brightest when, like the Israelites, we create and take advantage of opportunities to tell our stories.

Rest. Trust. Tell your story.

- Kevin Washburn

Sunday

March 15, 2020

John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."



Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Sunday

March 15, 2020

A Reflection

When Jesus compared life with Him to a never-ending, thirst quenching spring, the image resonated with a hardworking Samaritan woman. Water got her attention, for she was thirsty. Though she had come to the well to draw water, Jesus knew she needed more than physical water; she needed Him. She had tried to find satisfaction drinking from wells of water, but no man had truly quenched her thirst. Then she met Jesus, who knew everything she ever did. This man became a wellspring of life-giving truth that overflowed to her community.

What are you really thirsty for? Do you long to know the meaning of your life? Are you longing for the kind of love that fills you up rather than drains you? Are you forever trying to find acceptance and respect? Or are those longings so deep and buried that you can't even say what you want or need? Perhaps you can't even get beyond just feeling.... Empty.

Only Jesus can identify those deep longings and fill your thirsty soul. Seek out the One who offers you living water, come to Him. He won't be surprised at how empty you are. He knows everything you ever did. He's the wellspring who will fill you to overflowing with His goodness and love. When you are thirsty, meet Jesus at the well of the world.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the eternal spring of life within us. May we drink daily of its refreshing, life-giving waters in order to keep our spiritual lives healthy and happy. Amen.

- Mary Frances Whitmer



Monday

Psalm 81

O Lord, open my lips, Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.
Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our festal day.
For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
He made it a decree in Joseph,
when he went out over the land of Egypt.
I hear a voice I had not known:
“I relieved your shoulder of the burden;
your hands were freed from the basket.
In distress you called, and I rescued you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

Hear, O my people, while I admonish you;
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
There shall be no strange god among you;
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.
I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
“But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.
O that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
Then I would quickly subdue their enemies,
and turn my hand against their foes.
Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him,
and their doom would last forever.
I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

March 16, 2020

A Reflection

Initially, this psalm seems odd, disjointed. The first half is about a statute to praise God with instrumentation, in remembrance of God's deliverance of God's people. The second half, is an “admonishment” of God's people, a call to listen and cease stubborn ways.

The two halves almost seem to have nothing to do with one another.

But let's stop and let them soak in for a moment. Let us breathe in these words, their memory, their intent. Let's read them again and be honest with ourselves.

Aren't we often at this intersection, seeking to keep our promise to worship our Deliverer while at the same time failing to follow as we have promised? Do we not need to be capable of celebrating deliverance while admitting we are not yet where we need to be?

This is our tension, our milieu. We are rescued, redeemed! May God be praised. And we are still wandering, not yet fully transformed by God's grace. May we listen to the admonishment when it is offered.

By God's grace may we live in this tension, in this paradox. May we be stretched and grow. May we celebrate and repent.

- Brandon Hudson

Tuesday

March 17, 2020

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

A Reflection

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.



Too many times I (we), find ourselves in a place where we think we are all alone and hopeless. When we find ourselves in these, times these verses give us hope. The first verse says all were under the cloud that passed through the sea. All. The cloud represents God's presence. The presence of God is available for all just as it was for our forefathers. The cloud provided "divine guidance" wherever they went. The Greek verb tense here indicates that the clouds were constantly present. That same guidance is constantly available for us as well. As they passed through the sea, we witness God's power and grace. Once again we will find ourselves in impossible situations and only by God's power and grace are we able to overcome.

We see that our forefathers were people of God's community. One definition of Baptism is "an act or ordeal by which one is purified, sanctified, initiated or named". Through this baptism they were made members or initiated into God's nation. They were a community of people who shared God's presence and power. The last part of these verses speak of manna and water-the necessities of life. God has provided for them all the way; as he does for us.

We need not to be "ignorant," but remember that God is present in the past, is present in the now, and is present in the future. God is present in our lives today - everyday. We are all members of God's Kingdom. He provides guidance, power, and grace.

*Dear Lord, give me the courage to face my obstacles, knowing that you are present today and will provide the guidance and the strength I need to endure.
Amen.*

- Wes Jeffcoat

Wednesday

March 18, 2020

John 7:14-31, 37-39

A Reflection

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.

"Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Glorify (verb) To make glorious by bestowing honor, praise or admiration

Glorification (noun)

- 1 Praise and worship of God
- 2 The practice of acknowledging and revealing the glory of God by one's actions

The theme of John is about Jesus' glorification of God. In fact, John always shows Jesus pointing to the glorification of God and not himself. In verses 15-18 and 28-29, Jesus glorifies God for his teachings and his identity.

When questioned in 15-18 how he received his learning without being taught, Jesus replied that "...he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him." Jesus did not give himself credit for speaking and teaching God's word.

However, Jesus' glorification of God has consequences, as seen in verses 28-29. As the people of Jerusalem question Jesus if he is the Messiah and the one who will be killed. Rather than protecting himself and telling the crowd who he was, he once again reminded them that he was sent from God.

We live in a world, especially in the Western culture, where everyone is seeking self glorification. We have to be careful not to only see that in other people, but in ourselves, too.

What are ways we apply self-glorification in our everyday lives? Are there any instances that we can rethink and rephrase those moments?

- Ann Bowman

Thursday

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

March 19, 2020

A Reflection

What could possibly be said about this famous Psalm that has not already been said? Therefore I offer you an alternate translation to prayerfully read through today. May the words sink into your heart and seep deeply into your soul.

God, you are my Shepherd and I am your little lamb! You feed me and guide me and look after me. I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows; you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Inside, my heart is very quiet. Even when the way goes through the dark and scary places, like Death Valley, I'm not afraid because You know where I am. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. You are here with me. You keep me safe. You rescue me. You make me strong. And brave. You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head. You fill my heart so full of happiness I can't hold it inside. My cup brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. Wherever I go I know God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love will go too! (a compilation of the Message and The Jesus Storybook Bible)

- Jill Hudson

Friday

March 20, 2020

1 Samuel 15:10-31

The word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands." Samuel was angry; and he cried out to the Lord all night. Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, and Samuel was told, "Saul went to Carmel, where he set up a monument for himself, and on returning he passed on down to Gilgal." When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, "May you be blessed by the Lord; I have carried out the command of the Lord." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle that I hear?" Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed." Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night." He replied, "Speak."

Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?" Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But from the spoil the people took sheep and cattle, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." And Samuel said,

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obedience to the voice of the Lord?
Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is no less a sin than divination,
and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has also rejected you from being king."

Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin, and return with me, so that I may worship

the Lord." Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind." Then Saul said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." So Samuel turned back after Saul; and Saul worshiped the Lord.

A Reflection

If I could write a song about King Saul, the lyrics would go as follows:

Old Saul who came from Benjamin
Was a full head taller than all the men.
God told His prophet, Samuel
To anoint Saul king of Israel.

Saul started strong with great success,
But in due time made a hopeless mess.
Though God had made him spirit hearted,
In his rebellion that power departed.

God told Saul how we should obey,
But old King Saul went his own way.
His recklessness led him to disobey and
Brought demons home and there to stay!

Through this tale our God shares His advice:
To obey is better than sacrifice!

- Doug Bradle

Saturday

March 21, 2020

Psalm 51:15-19

A Reflection

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Word. Life. Light.

The Gospel of John is the only Gospel that does not begin with the story of the birth of Jesus. As a seriously left-brained, analytical sort, I tend toward order and logic. Creativity and visualization are, let's just say, not my strong suit.

Starting a New Testament Gospel with the birth of Jesus and following his life and ministry in a more-or-less chronological order is logical. I like it! The pure beauty and depth of the opening of the Gospel of John is inspiring, though, even for someone like me.

Word. Life. Light.

On closer analysis (warned you), starting with "In the beginning..." makes even more sense than starting with Jesus' birth. "In the beginning" conjures up thoughts of Genesis and the beginning of time. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" shows us the origin of Jesus, his relationship with God, and his identity as God.

Word. Life. Light.

His life is a light to all people. The Word gives light and life, and the darkness did not overcome it. John was sent from God, before the birth of Jesus, to witness to the light, "so that ALL might believe through him." The Word of God is for ALL regardless of race, status, age, sex, gender orientation, culture, citizenship, ableism... regardless.

Whether we are left or right brained, rich or poor, old or young, male or female... God's Word, life, and light are available to us. And when we claim it, we are called to share it.

Word. Life. Light. Thanks be to God.

- Patsy Jeffcoat

Sunday

March 22, 2020

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Sunday - Continued

A Reflection

The first thing this scripture made me think of was the song *Amazing Grace* because of how the healed man says, “I was blind ... now I see.” This reminded me of the line “I was blind but now I see” in the song. It made me feel in awe that even Jesus’ spit mixed with dirt was able to make someone born blind able to see.

Something wonderful I found in this scripture (and is found in a lot of other scriptures) is the fact that even though someone may be disgraced and rude or even a tax collector or a sinner - Jesus still loved all of those people, he even loved them enough to sacrifice his life for them and others. He loved them enough to spend his entire life helping them, healing them, and teaching them. He loved them enough to fast for 40 days and 40 nights and be tempted by Satan.

God the Creator of everything loved us humans in all our flaws and imperfection enough to send his one and only son down to earth to walk among us and live as one of us and then be killed so we could be free of our sins.

God did all of that for us. He loves us enough to do anything for us, so the least we can do is love and respect one another like he does everyday for us all.

When Jesus came to that blind man, the disciples immediately started asking who sinned and made him blind - was it him or his parents? But Jesus told them to look for what they can do to find the solution and not just identify the problem. I love this because Jesus is essentially telling us to do what we can to help, not to look for someone to blame. In this passage Jesus also says “I came into this world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.” This is just another way of Jesus saying “the first shall be last and the last shall be first.” He’s telling us to be humble not vain and to show compassion for everyone else in the world. All in all this scripture was long but full of amazing feelings and made me think of how we can be better people to those around us.

- Quinn Hudson

March 22, 2020 - Continued



- Art by Maya Jeffcoat

Monday

Isaiah 59:9-15a

Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us;
we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness;
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.
We grope like the blind along a wall,
groping like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among the vigorous as though we were dead.
We all growl like bears;
like doves we moan mournfully.
We wait for justice, but there is none;
for salvation, but it is far from us.
For our transgressions before you are many,
and our sins testify against us.
Our transgressions indeed are with us,
and we know our iniquities:
transgressing, and denying the Lord,
and turning away from following our God,
talking oppression and revolt,
conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart.
Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands at a distance;
for truth stumbles in the public square,
and uprightness cannot enter.
Truth is lacking,
and whoever turns from evil is despoiled.

March 23, 2020

A Reflection

In the past few weeks, I've come across the following quote from Maya Angelou when she was giving advice to a young man interviewing her:

“What I know is that it's going to be better. If it's bad, it might get worse, but I know that it's going to be better. And you have to know that. There's a country song out now, which I wish I'd written, that says, 'Every storm runs out of rain.' I'd make a sign of that if I were you. Put that on your writing pad. No matter how dull and seemingly unpromising life is right now, it's going to change. It's going to be better. But you have to keep working.”

She sums up well the tension we experience in our lives, the tension that Isaiah espouses when he says “we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.” We seem to know that things can't be bad for ever, but sometimes that knowing doesn't move down from our head into our heart. We can *know* that things won't always be like this, but we can still *feel* hopeless.

In this, we are never alone.

And yet, let us hear the words of Dr. Angelou. Even when we are drenched in the downpour of despair, may we know that every storm runs out of rain. May we work while we are soaked, knowing that someday the sun will shine again, bringing the warmth for which we long.

- Brandon Hudson

Tuesday

March 24, 2020

Psalm 51:15-19

A Reflection

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

These verses in Isaiah provide me some comfort when I despair at what I see around me—the poor unfed, the naked unclothed, the powerless bullied and denigrated by those in power. The Lord sees the situation when there is no justice, and when there is no one to intervene.

I'm not entirely sure, though, that these verses reference the “sweet by-and-by” when we “meet on that beautiful shore.” God sent His Son when there was no justice, when there was no one to intervene. Only Jesus Christ could wrap Himself in those garments of righteousness and salvation, vengeance and fury. Only our Lord God in the flesh could repay with wrath and requital.

Through His own death, He put all the adversaries and enemies and unrighteous to shame. Through His own resurrection, He burst forth like a pent-up stream, driven by the wind of His glory, the wind of the Holy Spirit blasting away what came before and heralding a new life and a new hope.

He inspires us to become His hands and feet, to defeat the forces of injustice and evil through our identity with Him, our Light and Salvation.

Jesus, help us to be the instruments of your justice and grace and mercy on this earth, as these have so freely been given to us. Amen.

- Donna Fitch

Wednesday

March 25, 2020

Psalm 146

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.
Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

A Reflection

Who tells you who you are? All of us have been influenced by parents, family, friends, teachers, co-workers, and so on. In one way or another, all of these influence what kind of person we will become. We add to this list the larger than life influences that we come into contact with. Political figures, media stars, music and motion picture influences—like it or not, we are partly who we watch, listen to and admire.

The psalmist offers some important insight regarding the character of the people we choose to place our trust in. The psalmist warns us, “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals in whom there is no help.” (Ps. 146:3)

The psalmist insight actually cuts two ways. On the one hand we are called to be responsible for finding and following “mortals” who are helpful. The psalmist is not saying that mortal humans fail to offer help, only some do.

We depend on these moral influences to guide us. These are the teachers and role models who shape and mold us. These are the ones whose life and memory we will celebrate throughout time.

The other side of this, of course, is the recognition that not all mortals are helpful. The psalmist zeroes in on “princes.” The reason why should be obvious. People of wealth and power can take on a “larger-than-life” status. In our day these people would include politicians, the very wealthy and pop stars.

They walk among us as giants. If we are not careful, we will grant them respect and awe beyond what they really deserve. More than that, because of their stature, we may allow them to shape us and mold us into their image. And this is dangerous. People who seem larger than life often have influence that far outreaches their character. The psalmist warns us that we should not be overawed by people in the limelight. They are mortals like the rest of us and are not necessarily the best teachers.

The psalmist challenges us to join in a song of praise celebrating the goodness of God. God cares for the weak and oppressed, God cares for the prisoner and sets them free. God gives sight to the blind (vv. 8-10).

In other words, while we are standing star-struck by the “princes” who walk in our midst, God is standing with the poor and the needy. God stands where the righteous before us have always stood, and where we are challenged to stand as well.

- Jim Evans

Thursday

Psalm 130:1-4

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

March 26, 2020

A Reflection

Back in the days when cities were fortified with walls, there were watchmen. These were men that would stand atop the towers and stare into the night, remaining alert for enemies or messengers. When morning light burst onto the horizon, it signaled the end of their shift; it was time for rest. But most importantly, it signaled that no ill threats had come upon the city while everyone slept.

Much like the watchmen, we are often looking for the next thing, that moment of rest or release. But David writes that his whole fiber, his soul, waits on the Lord. In the time of waiting, David puts his hope in God. When he longs more than the watchmen, he puts his everything in God.

He goes on to say that hope in the Lord leads to the experience of a steadfast, immovable love and the redemption of ourselves through God. Through the period of waiting, David still sees God, feels God's love, and still is redeemed by God.

God, help us to feel your closeness in our waiting. When we long for something more or the next thing, quiet our hearts and remind us you are the great I am, the one who is an immovable love. Open our senses to your presence. Amen.

- Jessica Haywood

Friday

March 27, 2020

Psalm 130:5-8

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.



A Reflection

“O Israel, hope in the Lord!”

Complete this statement without quoting someone or something else: Hope is _____.

If you found it challenging, take heart. Dictionary gurus probably do not do much better. Hope is “to look forward to with desire and reasonable confidence.” So many questions: to look forward to? *reasonable confidence*?

The second definition does not clarify much, if at all: “to believe, desire, or trust.” So hoping is believing or desiring or trusting?

Our notions of hope are too squishy to serve us...

Hope is not an emotion, and those with the courage to hope are not passive, waiting with fingers crossed for things to magically improve. Hopeful people work to make a vision reality. Hope:

- carefully considers possible futures
- chooses a vision that, while challenging, is possibly attainable
- develops plans likely to move the vision closer to reality
- keeps its eyes open, adjusting plans and work as needed
- is not surprised but is delighted by positive outcomes
- knows that setback and discouragement are likely but temporary
- recognizes failure as an opportunity to learn (i.e., look inward), adjust, and keep working (i.e., look and work outward)
- is not fragile but can be both lost and bolstered

Hope that is action-focused is not easy to break. That does not mean it's immune to influence. On your own, you establish a baseline hope, a focus and strategy to move forward in your chosen arena. The people whose voices you allow to linger in your thoughts can move the needle lower to a decreased hope (and often decreased focus and effort) or bolstered to an increased hope (and often a greater focus and effort.)

This is true of all of us, the extroverts and the introverts.

It's comforting to think of ourselves as immune to the influences of others, but it's an unfounded consolation. We are social beings, even we who recharge best with solitude. Rubbing elbows leads to exchanged words, which become the content of our thoughts. How many times have you found yourself mentally rehearsing an upcoming social interaction or rehashing a recent conversation? Our interactions with others become contributors to our inner dialogues. As a result, people can tamp down or fortify your hope.

Beware. Many people, often unknowingly, diminish hope. It seems almost instinctual to temper people's hopes. Perhaps we're protecting them from over-hoping and underperforming. Perhaps our pride will take a hit if they are successful. Perhaps we're just oriented toward the negative. Whatever the reason, more of us weaken than strengthen the hope of others. The friend who hears you are taking up a new fitness routine and proceeds to tell you how he injured himself doing something similar is, probably unintentionally, (cont'd)

Friday, March 27, 2020 (continued)

squashing your hope. The colleague who hears you are taking a class and tells you how she found a similar class boring and unhelpful is, probably unintentionally, compressing your hope. The Facebook “friend” who suggests your recent setback is probably the best you can hope for is obviously dousing the flames.

Several years ago, I worked with a coach who told me my lack of recent success was caused by my fear of success. (I’m sure that’s a thing, but I have no idea what it actually is.) My mental blindspot was making my feet act up during races, and if I could just get my head together I’d be a consistent success.

I believed this bologna right up to my appointment with a physical therapist. It turned out that I had plantar fasciitis, and aggravating injury to connective tissue in the arch of the foot. My feet had been acting up because they were injured. It took months to physically recover, and several more months of adjusting my running form to prevent further injury.

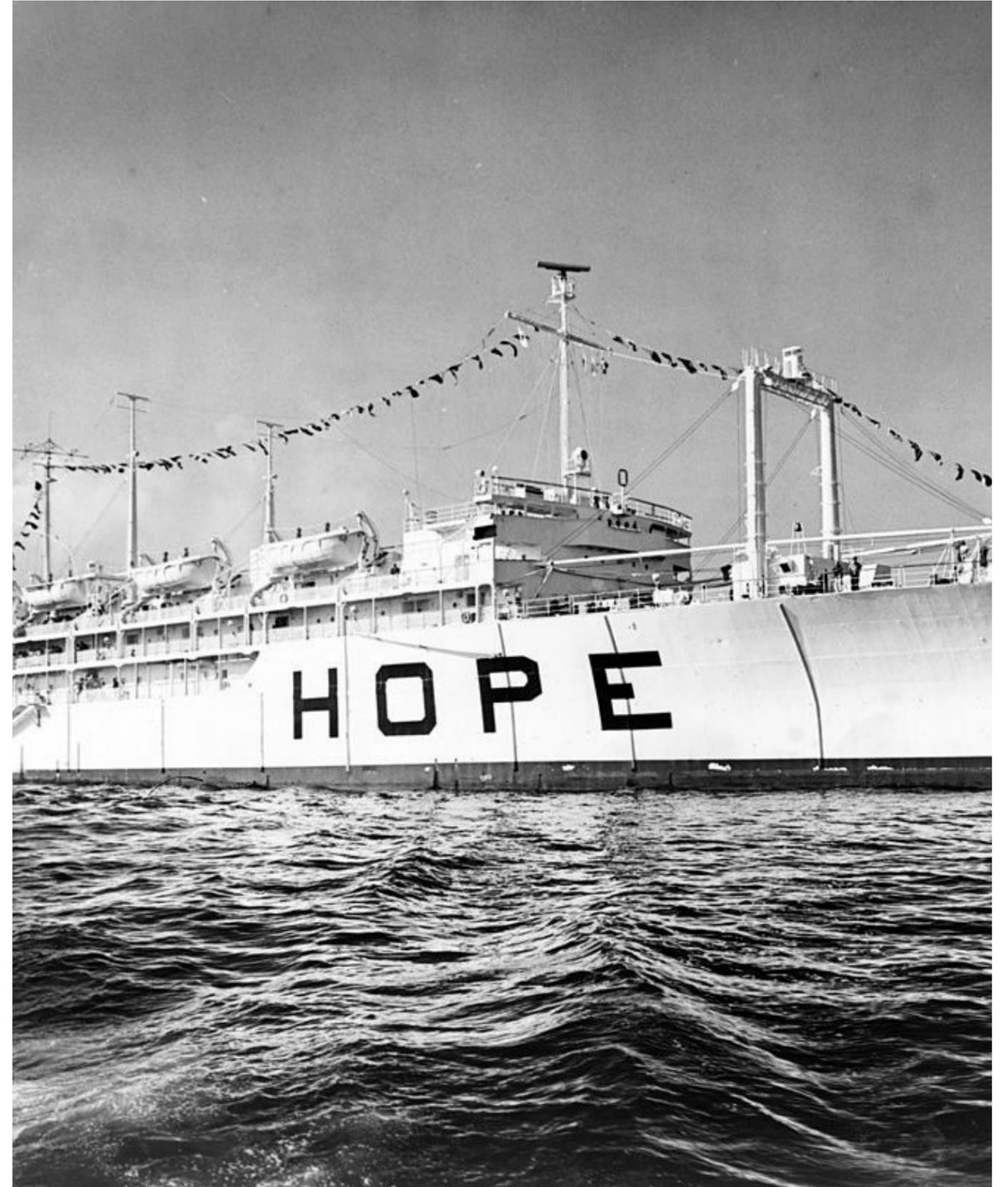
Still, the damage had been done. The idea that I had a mental blindspot haunted me. I didn’t run well because I was mentally weak. Funny, that soon became an excuse. Now I could abandon hope, blame it on some vague mental condition, and avoid the work of growth and progress. Hope lost due to a voice I allowed to echo down my mental hallways.

However, the opposite is (thankfully) true. Our interactions with others can bolster hope. And hope is attractive. Those who reinforce the aspirations of others are magnets. We are drawn to them because they reinforce our potential and our best efforts. Hope thrives because they believe in us, even in those times when we lack such faith in ourselves.

“O Israel, hope in the Lord!” Note the communal emphasis—Israel, do this! The nation’s hope would be bolstered, in part, because the people they were with the most were (hopefully) living the command. May we be a people who hope while waiting, a people whose relentless hope draws others into the community, a people who hope in the Lord!

Find these people. More importantly, be these people.

- Kevin Washburn



Saturday

Luke 24:4-53

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

March 28, 2020

A Reflection

Jesus led them toward His favorite place, the city of Bethany, across the valley north of Jerusalem where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. He prayed for his followers and asked God’s blessings on them.

Then the unexpected came. Jesus disappeared. This time He disappeared for good. He ascended to heaven. Luke gives no detail of this; He simply ends Christ’s earthly ministry with simple words. He left them and was taken to heaven. Jesus had said He would enter his glory. Here He fulfills His word. Now the church cannot expect to see the resurrected Christ again. They must wait for the promised Spirit.

The church no longer grieves, Jesus’ final disappearance does not bring mourning and sadness. It brings joy and worship. The church has heard the resurrection story. His followers have seen the resurrected Lord. They can tell the story of the resurrected Messiah. They can show that scripture prepared for the Messiah to come to earth, minister, be betrayed, suffer, die, and be resurrected. They can promise forgiveness. But only after the Spirit comes. Until then, stay in Jerusalem. Stay at the temple. Yes, work from the center of Judaism to preach Christ. Pray. Give thanks. Express joy. Worship. Wait for the Spirit. He will come in Volume Two, the book of Acts.

SUMMARY: Jesus Christ rose from the dead, appeared to many of his followers, promised the Holy Spirit and ascended to the Father.

PRAYER: Resurrected Lord and Savior, I commit myself anew to you today. Thank you for forgiving my sins and saving me. Thank you for dying and rising again for me. Thank you for the great joy that fills my soul each time I think of you or hear your name. Send the power of your Holy Spirit upon my life so I may witness to others about your love and grace and lead them to repentance and forgiveness. Yes, Jesus, I praise your holy name. Amen.

- Mary Frances Whitmer

Sunday

March 29, 2020

Ezekiel 37:1-14

A Reflection

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

In some ways, this passage from Ezekiel is like a horror movie. Graves are opened, bodies long dead are reconstituted - the sounds and sights and smells of this vision are beyond frightening.

The message here, is one of hope - utter and ridiculous hope.

How often do we feel like Israel - dried up, hopeless, cut off? In that darkness and despair God promises restoration. It may not look pleasant or like we thought it would, but the promise remains.

How then, do we live into this restoration? Do we languish? Or do we know that even now we are in the act of being restored, of being made whole?

May we live into this reality. May we lift our eyes up and see our help coming, even as we find ourselves lifted from our despair. And then, may we become a force of hope in a world that has lost hope.

- Brandon Hudson

Monday

March 30, 2020

1 Kings 17:17-24

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my son to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!"

But he said to her, "Give me your son."

He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again."

The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive."

So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

A Reflection

There are two important points made in these verses. One, only God can save us from death. As pointed out here when Elijah cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him". Elijah did not ask God to help him revive the boy, but trusted God to intervene. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we too have been saved from our eternal death. The second point is that the woman said to Elijah following the life returning to her son, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the words of the Lord from your mouth is the truth". What greater complement can we receive from some than "I know you are a man of God and that the words from your mouth are the truth"? Therefore, we must be very careful of what we say and do, for each is our witness of God's love, power, and grace. At the same time, we find peace and comfort in trusting that God still promises life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- Wes Jeffcoat

Tuesday

March 31, 2020

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

A Reflection

Anne Lamott is one of my favorite authors. Her quote “I do not know the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us.” is a powerful reminder to me that grace is a gift.

Ephesians 2:1-10 tells us that we are dead in our transgressions and sins when we live in the “ways of this world”.

God loves us, his imperfect, flawed children, so much that he gave us (“made alive” per Verse 5) the gift of Jesus even though we are sinful. Through God’s mercy, He gave us the gift of grace. It is through grace we are saved. We cannot earn grace through our service, offerings, quotes of scripture, and good behavior. The gift of grace allows us to receive mercy. The gift of grace also results in our service, offerings, and behavior which exemplify Jesus.

The gift of God’s grace changes us. In turn, grace finds us and we are forever changed.

- Ann Bowman

Wednesday

Psalm 143

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;
answer me in your righteousness.
Do not enter into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.
For the enemy has pursued me,
crushing my life to the ground,
making me sit in darkness like those long dead.
Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.
I remember the days of old,
I think about all your deeds,
I meditate on the works of your hands.
I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah
Answer me quickly, O Lord;
my spirit fails.
Do not hide your face from me,
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.
Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,
for in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.
Save me, O Lord, from my enemies;
I have fled to you for refuge.
Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
Let your good spirit lead me
on a level path.
For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life.
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.
In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am your servant.

April 1, 2020

A Reflection

This Psalm tires me out. It feels so frantic and hectic and dramatic - all the ics! I feel myself wanting to read it fast and get it over with. I feel suffocated by the drama and wordiness of it all. To be fair, I did major in math in college and our whole goal was always to boil large amounts of information down to the smallest possible nugget so that could be part of the issue. I think also I want to give the writer of this Psalm a really big hug and then hold them at arms length and say, "Breathe" and then "Be still." (Does anyone find it ironic that my reaction to this dramatic Psalm is to respond dramatically?? Believe me, it's not lost on me.)

I guess if you've lived long enough you've had moments where you have felt like this Psalmist. "Help me, Yahweh. You're my only hope! I've been hunted down, kicked, stomped on, and buried. I've despaired and felt my spirit draining away from me. But I've also remembered the ways You've worked in the past. So, hurry and answer me. You are famous for Your answers! I'm at the end of my rope. Don't turn away or ignore me. Point out the road that I must travel. I'm all ears and eyes. Lead me to the green grass. Get me out of trouble. Keep up your reputation, God. Give me life!"

As I look back through my journal, I see moments that are speckled with this kind of dramatic language so let me not be too harsh to judge another. I think the important message for me is to get to the end and realize that God will always be God. It is important for the author to bear these grievances to God because God is the person we should take everything to. Remember the pray without ceasing wisdom from 1 Thessalonians? Well if we are going to pray without ceasing then we better be willing to take our whining and drama and frenzy to God and not polish our words so nicely and present a better-than-reality version of ourselves.

So let's shout it out together when the time feels right. "Help me, Yahweh. You're my only hope!" My prayer is that we will resolve to the place of taking a big breath and remember the days of old when Yahweh worked all things for the good.

(cont'd)

Wednesday, April 1, 2020 - Continued

As Katharina von Sahlegel wrote,

“Be still, my soul. The Lord is on your side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to your God to order and provide.
In every change God faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul. Your best, your heavenly friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul. Your God will undertake
to guide the future as in ages past.
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake.
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul. The waves and wind still know
the Christ who ruled them while He dwelt below.”

To listen to this song be sung, visit: bit.ly/BeStillMySoulHymn

- Jill Hudson



Thursday

1 Samuel 16:11-13

Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

April 2, 2020

A Reflection

King Saul has been rejected by God and Samuel is busy mourning for him. The Lord says to Samuel, in essence: "Quit your mourning, fill your horn with oil and get crackin'!" The prophet is sent to Jesse of Bethlehem and told that His anointed one is already chosen. If I were in Samuel's place, I would have gotten pretty excited. How cool that the Lord has supernaturally chosen a new king and that He has given specific, detailed instructions for Samuel to carry out. There are many times in my life that I long for a very specific word from my Maker to guide me through difficult events. Fortunately, our God is always sufficient to meet my needs. I know His will for me is perfect as He is perfect.

As a sidebar, God has told Samuel not to consider the appearance, nor the height of the one to be chosen. Then, we read the wonderful words: "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Jesse calls each of his seven sons to pass before Samuel, but none are God's chosen. Samuel inquires if these are all his sons, to which Jesse replies, "There is still the youngest who is tending the sheep." Samuel calls for the youngest to be brought to them and that no one shall sit down until he arrives.

We were told the youngest is ready, with a fine appearance and handsome. So, in spite of that, the Lord had seen deeply into his heart. Samuel took the horn and anointed the youngest in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him in power. Though not a king yet, David would begin his amazing sojourn with his Father God.

This story brings to mind the wonderful way of our Lord as declared in 1 Corinthians 1:27-31. "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." It is our God who drew us to Him and quickened our hearts to the Savior. We have been anointed with the Spirit of our Lord. Now, we have hope and purpose and joy in life. This is the real treasure that we can harvest forever. Amen.

- Doug Bradle

Friday

Psalm 31:9-16

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.
I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.
But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, “You are my God.”
My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

April 3, 2020

A Reflection

The pain and suffering the psalmist describes here is heartbreaking. I find myself wondering if I have ever felt this kind of sustained, overwhelming grief and angst. I also wonder how common this kind of despair is among those I love, those I know, and those I don't. I do know that depression, persecution, and pain are more common than we like to believe, and more real than what we see portrayed on social media and in casual conversation.

Of course, Jesus experienced this kind of sorrow in the days leading to his crucifixion. This passage seems to describe the nature of his suffering and emotional turmoil while being rejected, betrayed, and crucified. The psalm is a prayer by one who suffers unjustly and in that suffering puts complete trust in God. What a beautiful reflection as we prepare to enter Holy Week.

While some associate God's presence with material blessing, which implies suffering and hardship is a result of God's absence, that theology is not reflected in this passage or the New Testament. Instead, the association of Jesus' suffering with the psalmist's reflect that where there are cries of grief, where there is pain, where there is hardship, where there is fear, that is where Jesus is. Christ joins us in our suffering, taking our pain upon himself.

While we live in a troubled world plagued by fear and insecurity, violence, apathy, racism, homelessness, disease, and senseless death, we also live in a world in which Christ suffered and died on a cross so that all could be made new.

May we join the psalmist in saying, “I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’... Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.”

- Patsy Jeffcoat

Saturday

Mark 10:32-34

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

April 4, 2020

A Reflection

Jesus warns the disciples about his death but they don't seem to understand. These are his best friends, yet they still don't understand how wise he is.

We as humans need to learn to listen as well. Put down your phone, computer, homework, book, etc., and pick up a bible or just go outside.

Listen to how the leaves rustle against the trees. Jesus was crucified on a cross made of wood, made of a tree. The trees are still beautiful, and so are we.

Judas lied to Jesus, but Jesus forgave his sins and everyone else's. Pray to God to thank him. Be thankful for everything we have instead of wishing for more and more. Some have nothing, but still find hope in God.

Be the person who brings them out of their darkest places.

- Sophia Hudson

Sunday

April 5, 2020

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

“Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

A Reflection

Matthew’s version of the Triumphal Entry is amazing because of the image the author describes. Unlike the other gospel accounts, here we find two animals for Jesus to ride. In this way, Jesus is the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 - the humble and peaceful king.

This idea of the peace is particularly jarring given the geographical setting. Jesus is arriving at The Mount of Olives, a place where a battle was expected to take place at “the end of the age.” In this backdrop where a battle is expected, Jesus rides in as the king of peace. He is not, nor has ever been, the warrior concerned with decimating his enemies. He is, and always has been, the humble servant, showing us the way to love our enemies.

Of course, the crowd and the disciples don’t seem to understand this distinction. They know he is king. They know he is prophet. But they only have a small box in which those two positions can fit. They cannot imagine a prophet of love and a king of peace.

What boxes have we built for Jesus? What ways do we ignore the reality of God’s Son among us so that we can continue on in the way we think things should be?

May God’s grace allow us to drop our preconceived notions. May we be unburdened from our baggage until we are free to pick up the cross. In this way, may we follow Jesus into Jerusalem and into Holy Week.

- Brandon Hudson

Monday

April 6, 2020

Psalm 51:15-19

A Reflection

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Within a week, Jesus would be dead, seized by His enemies and tortured in one of the cruelest methods possible. This seemingly peaceful dinner was fraught with tension and subtext among Jesus' followers and friends. The verses contrast Mary, whose brother Lazarus was raised from the dead by the Lord, and Judas, whose close association with the Master did not prevent him from betraying Jesus Christ.

Both the sisters brought gifts to Jesus. Martha's gift was serving the meal, a role she often performed. Mary's gift reflected the deep affection and respect she had for the One who restored to wholeness her beloved little family. In gratitude and love, she performed a servant's task—washing Jesus' feet—but not with water. Jesus knew that soon He would be leaving these beloved friends and gratefully accepted her gift.

Judas, too, was aware that Jesus would soon be leaving them, as he was the instrument of betrayal. His gift to the Lord was criticism and scorn, a bitter spirit, ready to tear down and question the motives of those taking action. Jesus rebuked him for this gift, reminding him of the impermanence of life.

Lord, help me to give you the best of gifts—my devotion to you and following your Ways. Help me not to scorn those who are acting in your name, because it's not the way I would have done it. Forgive my weakness and support me in loving You and those I encounter. Amen.

- Donna Fitch

Tuesday

April 7, 2020

John 12:20-36

A Reflection

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

The Greeks in our reading today simply wanted an audience with Jesus. They wanted to check him out, to hear for themselves what he was teaching. “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” is the request they made.

But Jesus took the request as much more than what the Greeks intended. He framed his response as if they were seeking the most important thing anyone could ask for. Not just to “see Jesus,” but to understand the meaning of his appearance in our world.

Every day, in one way or another, people are still expressing this desire. It is our job to show them the way. This expectation may seem more than we are capable of fulfilling. How can we, with the limitations of our lives, help others to see Jesus? Happily, Jesus himself has shown us the way.

In the great judgment scene in Mathew 25:31, Jesus says that when we seek to minister to the broken and downtrodden people in our world, we are ministering to Jesus himself. “I was hungry, and you fed me.” And “When you have done this to the least of these, you have done it to me.”

Jesus is visible in the weak and hurting people of our world. As we seek to care for them and help them, we also help the world to see Jesus in them.

With humility we learn to see our world through the eyes of Jesus. In our acts of kindness and forgiveness, in our wisdom and maturity, in our efforts to be peace makers and as we seek to care for the least of these in our midst, we make Jesus visible.

This is not an occasion for spiritual boasting. If we live faithful lives, Jesus makes himself known to others. The possibility for this comes from God not from us. Our lives are merely conduits through which the true meaning of Jesus may appear.

As we enter into the possibilities of “the presence of Jesus” in our midst, we find that we are finally ready to the invitation he gave to his disciples.

“Follow me,” he said. And the world waits for us to respond. It is as if the world came to us and said, “Excuse me, but can you help me see Jesus?”

- Jim Evans

Wednesday

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

April 8, 2020

A Reflection

Since December, I have heard this set of scripture quoted surrounding a scene from *Star Wars: Episode IX - The Rise of Skywalker*. (This is your warning of spoilers!) In the final face-off between Rey and Palpatine, Rey is on the brink of death. Palpatine has electrocuted her with his force-lightning and she is unable to move, sprawled on the floor, hope dwindling. She is face up watching her friends struggle in the air battle above her personal battle. In that moment, all the Jedi that came before her began to speak to her, they call her name. They show up in spirit and they are within her as she rises and strikes down the Sith.

Rey is surrounded with her cloud of witnesses, the Jedi. She is able to beat the unbeatable through the strength of those before her mixed with her own might. We have the lessons and experiences of those that came before us, that often enwrap us and give us hope to push on when we are broken and empty.

Sin clings closely to us, just like Rey's self-doubts were clinging closely to her. It took those around her to remind her who she is and whose she is to persevere. I pray you have people in your life that are there for you; to help you push on to what you have been called to do.

Jesus took our shame and our punishment because he is love. Even in those last moments he forgave all those in attendance or participation at his crucifixion. Consider this. When you feel unable to persevere, consider what our God did.

- Jessica Haywood

April 9, 2020

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Maundy Thursday

A Reflection

The moments are few. The time you have to convey messages, values, and principles to loved ones is limited. Within days, it is likely that you will be physically separated from them. And some things are too important for email, a phone call, or even FaceTime. What and how you communicate now can make an impression or can be missed because there are other things that could be done.

Christ knew his time with the disciples was growing short. Everything from here forward would fit nicely onto a plot line with an unforgettable climax and denouement. But before all that, Christ pauses to convey and illustrate an important message.

One by one, Christ washes the disciples' feet. Dirty, sweaty, and probably odoriferous feet cleansed by the Creator. (A stroll through the dirt that cakes crud between the toes is no match for a loving Savior's cleansing touch.)

The act was so unexpected that the disciples could not help but pay attention.

This—the humble act of caring for each other's needs—is important. Follow my example. Love enough to serve. Love so much that dirty feet do not keep you from serving. People will recognize that you love beyond the norm, that you serve without regard to status. And by this, not your large print Bible or fish bumper sticker, by your love and service people will know that you love God.

In this quiet moment, we hear the heartbeat of Christ. It's a rhythm we're still called to keep today. Love, serve; serve, love

- Kevin Washburn

April 10, 2020

John 18:1-19:37

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby

Good Friday

struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept

Friday, April 10, 2020

coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless,

Good Friday - Continued (Pt. 2)

woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

Friday, April 10, 2020

Good Friday - Continued (Pt. 3)

A Reflection

Main Idea: East of the city of Jerusalem one can see the Mount of Olives on which were located many elaborate gardens. To this place, at this time, Jesus took His disciples for the betrayal and arrest that would lead to the cross.

Life Application: “Dr. Williams is Upstairs” I found this story and would like to share it. It goes with our scripture reading today in John 18: 1- 19: 37.

‘Dr. Williams is Upstairs’

A Doctor who had devoted his life to helping the underprivileged lived over a liquor store in a poor section of a large city. In front of the store was a small sign reading “DR. WILLIAMS IS UPSTAIRS”. Patients knew the place by the big neon sign, and they were directed to the location by the small sign and the bottom of the stairway.

When the doctor died, he had no relatives and left no money for his burial. He had never asked payment from his patients, so friends scraped together enough money to bury him. But they had insufficient funds for a tombstone. For a time, it appeared that the grave would be unmarked, and then someone came up with a great idea. They took the old sign from the front of the liquor store and nailed it to the post over his grave. There it remained as an appropriate epitaph: “DR. WILLIAMS IS UPSTAIRS”.

In this chapter, Jesus was rapidly moving ‘upstairs.’ In spite of the confusion of the disciples and the interference of the people like Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate the plan of the Father unfolded in His perfect timing. Jesus heads for the cross, the empty tomb, and the ascension.

In this chapter, four people had the opportunity to respond to the Lord correctly- five if we count Caiaphas, Yet, there is no record that any, but Peter changed from negative to a positive commitment to the Son of God. Everyone who reads this record stands in the same position as these witnesses. We have the opportunity to see Jesus through John’s words. He calls us to respond to what he had written- to believe and obey.

Supporting Idea: God’s holiness and justice made the cross an absolute necessity. Events at the crucifixion happened as they did so “the scripture might be fulfilled” (v. 24). No fewer than twenty Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled within twenty- four hours at the time of the Lord’s death. Some have speculated that the Lord mediated on Psalm 22 while on the cross, an idea perhaps suggested by the traditional “Seven Last Words.”

Prayer: Father, thank you for bringing your Son through the agonies of these final days to a place of glory and honor in heaven where we will see Him some day. Amen.

- Mary Frances Whitmer

April 11, 2020

John 19:38-42

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Holy Saturday

A Reflection

Holy Saturday is a day of sorrow, of mourning, of uncertainty. We've journeyed so far with Jesus, and yet where is he?

Dead.

In the ground.

Beyond our help and beyond helping us.

We need to live in this space. To see this despair and own it. Sometimes, even on the other side of resurrection we can feel this way. That God is gone. The body is laid to rest. The stone is blocking our sight of the Savior.

This despair is also a part of our story, a part of our faith, a part of our humanity. When we don't deny it, when we let it belong, we can begin to see that it is not the absence of belief - it is the groundwork for belief. Even in our despair, we can hold out hope. We can still look to the closed tomb, knowing that powers beyond us can roll that stone away. We can mourn, and we can wait.

So today, we wait. We wait and feel the weight of sorrow.

And yet, somewhere in the middle of that sorrow, that pain that also belongs to God, we can feel a little tremble. Like the earth is moving beneath our feet. Like stones are not as permanent as they seem.

And so we wait. And we hurt. And we hope.

- Brandon Hudson

Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

April 12, 2020

A Reflection

Resurrection: In Matthew's gospel, the first words spoken by Jesus following his death and resurrection are: "Greetings" followed by "Do not be afraid".

Greetings = welcome. Welcome to what Jesus has been promising, eternal life; a gift from God.

"Do not be afraid", followed by "they will see me again". Do not be afraid, be at peace. Death cannot separate us from Jesus. Thanks be to God!

This is the "Good News" Jesus has been proclaiming throughout his ministry. Verse 8 says the women "hurried away afraid yet filled with joy..." The women ran with great joy to tell the others that Jesus was alive and that they would see Jesus again.

Do I share the same great joy of being able to share with others that Jesus is alive? Am I ready to go quickly to share that "Good News" with others?

- Wes Jeffcoat