

Lenten Devotional

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Baylor University

GEORGE W. TRUETT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 2

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

RETURN TO ME

"Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing."

Today we join with sisters and brothers from around the world as they pause to receive the imposition of ashes and as they lean forward to hear whispered over them, "Remember that dust you are and to dust you shall return." This shared confession, however, is not simply a reminder of human mortality alone; it is in fact much more. In this simple act and in these hushed words, we are confronted with who we are, who we truly are. We are sinners who have no hope, save that of Jesus Christ alone. The very ashes that mark our sinful self are used to point to that which is our only hope—the redeeming work of Christ on the cross.

And this is where the Lenten season begins, certain of our need, but even more, of our hope. It is this acknowledgement of our human estate that launches us into a lengthy season of repentance, a season in which we long for nothing more than to align our lives with the only One who can save them.

The prophet Joel directs our thinking in this season. In the opening lines of chapter 2, he declares the "the day of the Lord is coming, it is near." So great is this day that the prophet laments, "who can endure it?" (v. 11) There is seemingly no hope—we are but ashes and surely to ashes we will return.

In response to this seemingly irreparable predicament, verse 12 begins, "Yet even now. . ." It is this divine "even now" that changes everything. The reality of a coming judgement is met with an inconceivable invitation: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

The invitation remains; it is the way forward in our Lenten journey.

O Jesus, call us to this journey of repentance because we long for nothing more than to return to you fully.

T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 3

Psalm 51:1-17

THE HEALING POWER OF GOD'S LOVE

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

Psalm 51 is traditionally thought to have been written by David following the rape of Bathsheba and the confrontation of Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 11-12). The psalm models the practice of confession. But this psalm is about more than an individual's sin. This is a psalm about God's love.

The first verse opens with an affirmation of God's love, God's never ending and faithful love. It's only after establishing the fact of God's love that the psalmist begins to speak of their sin. By verse three, we find brutal honesty as the psalmist begins to name their own actions. Surprisingly, the psalmist only spends a few verses talking about their sin. The psalmist demonstrates personal responsibility while acknowledging that sin is a problem bigger than individual choices and is a condition outside of their control.

Yet even in this grief over sin, the psalm does not end in despair. The acknowledgement of sin calls the psalmist to turn towards God. Instead of ending in grief, the psalm concludes as it began, with a celebration of God's mercy and redeeming care. Part of this celebration is a desire for all people to know about God's love.

While sin was introduced in a tone of shame, now the psalmist wants nothing more than for all people to experience the healing power of God's love. Yet within this commitment to new action, there is still complete reliance on God's love and faithful care. The final verses of the psalm affirm that all God asks for is a humble and repentant heart. Yet instead of gritting their teeth and willing themselves to be a different kind of person, the psalmist goes straight to God and asks for a new heart.

From beginning to end, this psalm demonstrates that healing and renewal can only come from God.

God, help me to experience the healing power of your love. Help me to celebrate that love, to confess my sin, and to receive the restoration that you offer through Jesus. Amen.

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F R I D A Y , M A R C H 4

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

REMEMBER WE ARE RECONCILED

"... but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way..."

As we continue through this Lenten season, today's reading begins with a powerful truth; God was the reconciler through Christ's death on the cross. The weight of that alone should cause you to pause and think. God sent his Son to be beaten, mocked, and to suffer an excruciatingly painful death on a cross. God sent his Son in order to be reconciled to us.

Paul wanted his hearers to let this reconciliation have its intended effect, urging them to "be reconciled to God." Are we allowing ourselves to be reconciled to God daily, or do we lose sight of it? As we read further into this text, Paul lists hardships faced by the early Christians. Paul says, "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way." No matter the situation, we proclaim what God has done and is doing.

This is often easier said than done, especially when we consider these hardships—and experience them ourselves. We might proclaim God's goodness in the good times without a second thought, but this list of hardships reminds us that there are difficulties in our lives.

Do we see the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in those moments, too? Do we remember that God reconciled us at great cost to himself? If not, what keeps us from knowing God's love for us in all of life's situations? I invite you to reflect on God's love for you and what that means in all circumstances, both in good times and in bad.

Father God, help me remember daily that You have reconciled with me, as well as my neighbor, because You love us. Amen.

S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 5

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-20

SECRECY, OR LOOK AT ME?

"... your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

In Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-20, Jesus speaks to the religious followers in the crowd. He calls out their public displays of "righteousness" in the synagogues and on street corners. Their prayers, service to the poor, and fasting are all done in order to be seen and honored by men. Jesus sees these pious pretenders and recognizes their "holy" acts only take place where they will receive recognition.

Jesus understood that the reward they sought was the adoration of their peers over the gratitude of their Father.

On paper, many would choose the heavenly reward Jesus raises in this passage as a welcomed alternative to the temporary reward man offers. The heavenly reward won't be destroyed or stolen like the earthly one will. But, in reality, the trumpet has a nice sound to it as it announces our good deeds to a room full of people.

It turns out that many of us are not that different from those listening to Jesus's words over 2000 years ago. Our culture is obsessed with influencers, platforms, and followers, and we easily become enticed by it as well. So instead of practicing the discipline of secrecy, we practice the discipline of "look at me."

The words of Jesus in response are clear: Love me as much in the secret place as you do in the public space.

In growing the discipline of secrecy in our lives, the sound of man's trumpet might die down, but the words from our father grow increasingly louder: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Dear God, forgive me for the ways I have used serving you to gain glory for myself and help me to worship you and serve others from a pure heart. Amen.

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Luke 4:1–13

LET THE SPIRIT LEAD YOU

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan
and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness...”

Luke’s account of Jesus’s temptation is, as is most of Luke-Acts, filled with the Holy Spirit. The passage begins by observing that the newly baptized Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” and that it was the Holy Spirit who led him into the wilderness (4:1) where he would endure forty days of temptation (4:2). When Jesus finally leaves the wilderness—triumphant over his tempter—he does so “in the power of the Spirit” (4:14).

The devil tempts Jesus to live the sort of life to which he’s entitled as the Son of God (3:21–22). He entices Jesus to produce a meal from what doesn’t seem enough (4:3). He offers Jesus dominion (4:5–7). He calls upon Jesus to overcome certain death (4:9–11). But Jesus is already the Son of God and the King of Kings, and he will demonstrate his power not by grasping it as something to be exploited but by renouncing the structures that tempt us to rely on powers and strategies that will not save us. In the Holy Spirit, the power of God is made great in weakness (2 Cor 12:9), and this calling is as countercultural and challenging today as it was two thousand years ago.

Yesterday’s text (Matt 6:1–6, 16–20) didn’t question whether God’s people would pray and fast, it clarified how we should pray and fast. Tomorrow’s text (Deut 6:1–3) will remind us to live in the ways that God calls us to live—because living this way leads to life and joy. As you prayerfully turn to that passage and seek to follow God’s commandments, remember the lesson of Jesus’s temptation: let the Spirit lead you and not pride, ambition, or impatience. The how of your life of faith matters just as much as the what.

Holy God, we thank you for the gift of your Spirit and ask that you help us to live, serve, and love through your power and to your glory and not our own. Amen.

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M O N D A Y , M A R C H 7

Deuteronomy 6:1-3

WHERE LIFE IS FOUND

"Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy..."

The Lord our God has been known in many times and in various ways. By the Spirit, God's perfect goodness, order, and beauty have been evident within creation and the teachings and practices of God's people, yet Divine Love is not content with being our God at a distance, he has come near to every one of us in Christ.

Jesus is the Logos, the Divine Word of God who is the personal Logic and Wisdom of all existence. This Word did not reveal something external from himself when he showed us how to live life to the fullest, enmeshed in God's perfect decrees. The Logos is himself the eternal well-being he gives. When following God seems too abstract or moralistic, we can rely on the perfect example of Christ, who embodied and fulfilled the ideals of Torah in his love for God and neighbor.

Our Triune Lord does not command unnecessary rules or meaningless repentance. These are not side issues for seeking the good life, for it is only in the obedient imitation of Christ that we begin to learn what humanity fully alive truly is. Enjoying long life in lands flowing with milk and honey is not a reward held back until we fear God correctly. Rather, flourishing and divine reverence are inseparable because God is this very Life himself—the light which his images are designed to reflect.

God is not a means to an end in the cosmic quest for meaning and fulfilment; God is simultaneously the means and the End—the Alpha and Omega of all things. Life is found only by participation in the One who is Life.

Jesus Christ, Lord of Life, lead us in your wise ways. Teach us to imitate you and become the persons you designed us to be. Amen.

Solomon Svehla

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T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 8

Deuteronomy 6:4-11

IMPRINT GOD'S WORD ON YOUR HEART

"Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart."

Picture in your mind indicators that announce the blossoming of love. One sign is the tremendous number of references made in recognition and appreciation of that special person, usually with a face that lights up. I remember vividly how as an engaged man, conversations would rarely end before I burst in delight, looking forward to the joy of living life with the love of my life. Love that consumes is hard to hide and is followed by action.

What kind of love does God invite from his people? What actions demonstrate our love for him, and how do we live in a love for God that consumes our entire being?

Moses outlines for Israel how a covenant relationship with the one true God is reflected in daily life. The key verse in our reading today is referred to as "the Greatest Commandment," to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might, echoed by Jesus in Matthew 22:36-38 and Mark 12:28-30.

Moses directs God's people to remember and commit the commandments to heart. It is important to note that the word for "heart" in Hebrew usually implies activities of the mind rather than emotions. This understanding is essential because a posture of love is not always the easiest and most comfortable thing to do. To base your love of God solely on emotions without seeking growth in knowledge of his will is a recipe for staggering your faith in harsh and inconvenient conditions.

Knowing the human nature of forgetfulness and what lay ahead of Israel, God outlined ways to commit the Law to memory—meditation, teaching at home, documenting, and making his dictates readily and visibly available. One of the things I am grateful for in my seminary education is the amount of dedication to going through the "ins and outs" of the Scriptures. It is not always easy, but it is worth it!

While it would be impossible to ask everyone to get a seminary education, it is possible to take steps to receive, study, and communicate God's words in our circles—like you are doing going through this devotional. Spending time diligently in God's word is one sure way to imprint God's word in our hearts.

But one might ask, why must we strive to remain constantly conscious, reflecting on God's word? What possible difference does it make? Rather than offer a challenge, I would ask why not? Remember our exercise earlier? True love in the heart creates outward ripples of action that are hard to ignore.

Love is demonstrated in action as much as it is professed in words. When we become bearers of God's holy word, we bear witness of the one we confess love to and call Lord.

Father, thank you for the many opportunities you give to learn and grow in your word. Please grant me the grace to pursue you diligently and consistently. Open my heart and mind to receive, understand, carry your word to light up the world around me. Thank you for loving me in your precious son's name, Amen.

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W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 9

Romans 10:8-10

THE WORD IS NEAR

"... if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Yesterday, Deuteronomy 6 reminded us how to love the Lord internally and proclaim him externally. Romans 10:8-10 builds on this theme.

In verse 8, Paul quotes from Moses' final address to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land (Deut. 30:14). After 40 years of wandering in the desert, they are on the precipice of the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise. In Moses' context, the word that is near to them is the law that will guide them into righteousness. Paul deepens this message and now proclaims this word that is near is "the word of faith" (v. 8). It is faith in Christ, not the law, that leads us into righteousness.

Just as the law was in the hearts and mouths of the Israelites, Paul explains that salvific faith is now found in the hearts and mouths of Christians. "For it is with your heart you believe and are justified, and with your mouth you believe and are saved" (v.10). Jesus fulfills what God foreshadowed through the law so long ago. He is the ultimate Promised Land, the place of our blessing.

As we identify with the wilderness in the Lenten season, like the Israelites we can take heart in knowing that "the word is near." Jesus is the better, living Word. He is the righteousness we need and provides the nearness to God we long for. He meets us in the wilderness and guides us into relationship with Him.

As you go about your day today, may you know his closeness you. In the wilderness of loss, sin, and difficult circumstances, may you trust the one who guides you through it. May your life be marked by heart-felt profession and confidence in the salvation you have received.

*Jesus, I thank you for your nearness to me in the wilderness and the salvation you have provided for me.
Amen.*

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T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 1 0

Romans 10:11-13

A SEASON OF REMEMBERING

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Many mornings before I even have a chance to put an ounce of coffee in my mouth, my phone begins to remind me of events on my calendar, e-mails and texts I missed during the night, and to-do items that seem to need my immediate attention. Most days I am thankful for this technology because I often forget what I need to remember.

In a similar way, Romans 10:11-13 helps us remember what we often forget.

First, we are reminded that God is faithful. Our redemption through Christ's death and resurrection has always been God's plan. Verse 11 points us back to Isaiah 28:16, where God's people are given hope that Christ will come to redeem them. As we look forward to celebrating Easter, we must remember that the cross of Christ and the empty grave are shining examples of God's faithfulness. God has made good on his promise to send Jesus for our redemption, so we can safely place our trust in God.

Second, we are reminded that redemption is for everyone. Verses 12 and 13 demonstrate that no one is exempt from the grace of God. While the Jewish people were the original inheritors of God's presence, Romans 10:12 shows us there is no longer any distinction between who has access to the presence of God. While none of us are deserving of God's grace, grace and redemption have been made available to all of us.

While work, school, relationships, and family threaten to occupy all our attention, this Lenten season we are called to stop and remember. Remember that God is always faithful to fulfill God's promises, and that no one is exempt from the grace of God.

Lord God, in light of your faithfulness and impartiality, would you reveal to me how I might trust you more fully and abound in grace to all those I encounter? Amen.

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F R I D A Y , M A R C H 11

Psalm 91:1–2, 9–16

GOD, OUR DWELLING PLACE

"Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place..."

Psalm 91 is undoubtedly one of the most potent and relevant passages of Scripture, especially significant for us today. It beautifully portrays the "life of a New Testament Christian who wants to follow God to the fullest extent possible" (Areon Potter, Psalm 91: The Dweller, 17).

The Psalmist states that the person who "dwells" in the "secret place of the Most High" inevitably becomes saturated with deep peace, wondrous joy, and divine security because the Kingdom of God is ever-present within them. We are to dwell – the whole Psalm is contingent on it—in the present tense, now, continuously, consciously—with God. This "secret place" God's people longed for in the Old Testament is found in Jesus Christ.

The results of this dwelling are amazing and limitless. We find assurance of absolute victory over all spiritual enemies, who attack believers in many ways. Regardless of whether we acknowledge it or not, Christians are caught up in an invisible warfare in the spiritual realm. These enemies employ the world and the flesh to undermine followers of Jesus. But those who dwell in His presence can access miraculous power to "trample the great lion and the serpent." We are divinely protected, delivered, honored, and satisfied as God shows us His salvation.

A Christian's journey is not a stroll down a tranquil path, it is a narrow road that requires faith, commitment, and perseverance. Choosing to dwell in God's presence brings us abundant life on earth and leads us to behold the salvation of God.

Lord, thank you for making me a spiritual warrior who can stand sure in Your promises and access every kind of spiritual weapon. I am victorious because of Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray, Amen.

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S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 1 2

Psalm 142:1-7

GOD, MY REFUGE

"I cry to you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"

Out of the depths of a cave, shrouded by fear and the threat of execution by his pursuers, came this prayer of David. Seeking refuge in a place that was like a stone prison, David comes to the horrifying realization that no person is coming to save him. He is utterly alone. Yet from this cave, a prayer of hope is borne.

Chances are you have faced something you needed deliverance from. Perhaps you need deliverance today. Think of that event, the trial that comes to mind. I invite you to "pour out before God your complaint." Whether you've done this before or not, allow yourself the freedom to lament over the situation and ask God for mercy.

One of the most liberating moments of my life was when I finally allowed myself to actually lament to God. I sat in my dark, empty church on the one-year anniversary of my little brother's passing and I cried aloud. That day, the church building became my cave. Surrounded by the pain and grief of my brother's fleshly death I finally let go of the deepest wounds I carried in full, brutal honesty and vulnerability.

You see, behind every lament is the recognition that God truly is our refuge and place of dwelling. What greater hope is there than knowing that God provides such incredible deliverance? While the pain of our trials continues, the hope of God far outweighs what we face, and, brothers and sisters, this is most certainly a hope worth sharing today.

Lord Almighty, hear my cry for help, bring hope as only you can, and give me the strength to see and share the incredible story of your boundless deliverance today. Amen.

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S U N D A Y , M A R C H 13

Luke 9:28-36

THE MOUNT OF DIVINE REALITY

"Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'"

There they were—Peter, James, and John— three of Jesus' disciples following him up the mountain to pray but they didn't expect what would happen next.

The three disciples were minding their own business praying when suddenly their hike was interrupted by heaven. Unexpectedly, their campsite was filled with eye-piercing light. Jesus' face changed and his clothes became bright and white flashes of lightening punctuated their presence.

The tired disciples were joined by Moses and Elijah who glimmered with the same bright light. They talked with Jesus about his mission on earth. All the while this was happening the disciples were half awake most likely exhausted from the hike. Soon they heard in the midst of this lightshow a heavenly conversation. It was overwhelming for them, confusing, too.

Can you imagine how you'd react if the light of heaven pierced your camping trip? You'd probably act like I would—scared, frightened to the tips of my toes. My body would quake and my tongue would be tied. I know it!

And there Peter was, body shaking and tongue tied. He blurts out, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The writer, Luke, sees what's happening. He comments: "He did not know what he was saying." That would be me. That would be you. We would be scared out of our wits if heaven's light pierced into our darkness.

On top of this, to shake them up even more, a cloud surrounds them. Then, a voice cut through the cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." Then suddenly they were alone.

This hike up the mountain turned into a clear lesson about Jesus—a divine reality.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are the divine Son of God whose mission was to save people like me.

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M O N D A Y , M A R C H 1 4

Luke 13:31-35

CHRIST'S CARING LOVE

"Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow,
and on the third day I finish my work."

Once upon a time in a Sunday School classroom, a child asked, "What is sin?" Her teacher answered, "It's anything that we do that makes God sad." Albeit correct, that answer begs yet another question: What makes God sad?

In Luke 13, Jesus is told that Herod seeks to kill him. Despite knowing that death is coming, Jesus shows no trace of sadness. It is true that when death gets closer, Jesus will be greatly distressed, as we see in Gethsemane. But at this point, when his life is threatened by a local authority, Jesus shows no grief. Rather, he boldly asserts the necessity of fulfilling his mission.

However, the Master's tone changes dramatically when he speaks of Jerusalem and its children. Jesus says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." Jesus grieves because he was rejected by those he came to save. The imminent physical pain of the cross will be compounded by the emotional pain represented by the figure of a mother who is scorned by the very children she is trying to protect.

So, what makes God sad is not the obstacles from his enemies but the rejection of his children. As Mark Tew puts it, "to open opposition, Jesus affirmed the inevitability of the Kingdom...but in response to lack of interest, Jesus showed his broken heart." Therefore, our greatest calling is not to fight against evil, but to receive and to be transformed by the caring love of Jesus Christ, the one whose Kingdom has already prevailed.

Lord, forgive our rejection, come into our hearts, and teach us to become more like you. Amen.

T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 5

Genesis 15:1-3

THE SELF-REVEALING GOD

"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.'"

These verses place the reader in the middle of the narrative of Abram. God has already made his presence known by breaking into Abram's life and reality. Here again, God is seen to reveal himself to Abram in a vision that offers comfort, protection, and the truth that Yahweh is Abram's great reward.

However, Abram responds to God's revelation with a question of concern about his heir. It is here where the reality of a distracted, preoccupied, and concerned Abram hits close to home for us today. Like Abram, we go about our days in a hurried pace that sometimes feels like God's presence is only found in moments that are too few and far between.

It is easy to feel close to God when it seems like everything is going the way we want. However, we often find ourselves looking like Abram, who is unable to take delight in God's miraculous revelation by focusing more on unfulfilled promises. One of the greatest truths we proclaim is not that we know God, but that God chooses to know us. God chooses to reveal himself to us. God could just as easily keep himself wrapped in mystery, distancing himself from Abram. Yet, God does not. Instead, God moves closer to Abram—and closer to us—to reveal himself more and more to those who are called children of the Almighty God.

In Lent we are reminded of God's most tangible revelation to all creation in the person, life, and work of Jesus Christ. In Christ, all of creation rejoices because it is made new as it is redeemed and restored. It is my prayer that the Lenten season offers us invitations from the self-revealing God to be fully present to him even as we grow increasingly mindful of God's holiness through Christ the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord Christ, help us to hear your invitations and to respond in faith. Redeem and restore us, alongside all your creation. Amen.

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W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 6

Genesis 15:4-12, 17-18

CONSIDER GOD'S COVENANT

"He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'"

When was the last time you went outside? When was the last time you heard from God?

Take a moment and consider the noise level in your life. Are you in a space to meet with and hear from God? The LORD brought Abram to a place to receive the word God wanted to give him. If you connect with God in nature, go outside. As you consider this passage, consider both its meaning and importance.

Genesis 15 is foundational for understanding God's plan of redemption. Where you read about the slaughtering of animals, it is easy to continue and never give the text a second thought. Yet, God is making a covenant with Abram that has earth changing ramifications. The LORD is willing to pass between halved animals, agreeing to make the descendants of Abram as numerous as the stars in the sky. In the ancient world, the consequences of breaking a covenant were severe. In this covenant making ceremony, the parties passing through the slain animals are saying, "If I don't keep my end of this covenant, let my life be like these slain animals."

Consider who YAHWEH is, and then consider the covenant he makes. God shows Abram that his promises will be kept, even at great cost to himself. God will never leave you, fail you, or break his promises. He is trustworthy. In what ways can you take a step forward in trusting God? Take a piece of paper and write one step of faith God wants you to take. Share this commitment with a friend or family member.

Lastly, get outside. Experience God in a way that is different from your normal routine. Cancel out the noise for the day. Make a commitment to go one full day with no social media or cable news, and consider the ways God is pouring out his love.

Lord, help me to consider your covenant, and to see the depths of your love for us in Christ. Amen.

Jonathan Taylor

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T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 17

Psalm 27

WAIT CONFIDENTLY

"Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!"

It seems paradoxical to speak of confidence and fear or hope and terror in the same sentence. Typically, we think of these realities as forces that in opposition to one another. However, that is the strange beauty of the Lenten season. In a time when we are called to embrace sacrifice and suffering, we are bolstered by God's powerful presence at the same time.

Psalm 27 is filled with evildoers, adversaries, armies, and enemies that assault God's faithful servant. The psalmist asks, almost tauntingly, "Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?"

As I picture this scene in my mind, I have an image of a small child beneath her covers hiding from the monster in the closet saying, "I'm not afraid...I'm not afraid." Yeah, totally not afraid. But my imagined scene isn't an exact parallel. The psalmist really, truly does have confidence that even though those around him are "breathing out violence," the Lord is his light and salvation, the stronghold of his life, the One in whom he can find shelter. It really is possible to be afraid or in great difficulty and still be totally confident in the active presence of the Lord.

The psalm ends with waiting. The psalmist boasts of God's power, pleads for God's present help, and waits for God's response, confident that he will see the goodness of the Lord. You, like me, may have many backlogged prayers, unfulfilled promises, or fears and worries looming over you like an enemy that plagues you both day and night. As we journey with Jesus to the cross, I invite you to wait. Your hardest days are never the end of the story — they are seldom even the whole story. God is with you. God is walking with you. God is taking you up in his arms and holding you. Wait confidently.

Lord, our Light and Salvation, give us strength as we walk this long road. Give us shelter. Give us your strength and courage as we wait for you. Amen.

F R I D A Y , M A R C H 18

Philippians 3:17-4:1

TO SHARE IN CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS

"He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself."

One of my 8th grade teachers offered me high praise at the end of what I now know must have been a taxing year. She said, "you're a bright spot in a vat of mud." As I read Paul's letter to the Philippian church, I have half a mind to think he's saying the same.

It seems Paul's gratitude for the faithful in Philippi has been amplified by the betrayal, pettiness, and selfishness of just about everyone else. Paul faces the disappointment that while he talks of unity and sharing the "mind of Christ," many are working for their own gain and prosperity. While calling the others to freedom, he himself is in chains. While proclaiming the majesty of the Church and the coming of the Lord he stares at a wall of impotence and impatience. While calling others toward righteousness, he himself is far from the goal.

Strangely the answer for this disappointment isn't to reform others as much as it is to trust the way of Christ. God seems intent on bringing heaven into the world rather than having a few escape into heaven.

We imitate Christ toward this end. Perhaps this is why suffering with Christ is a primary posture of faithfulness, because Christ's suffering was for others. If we choose to share his suffering and live for another, the worst of us is necessarily stripped away. We are transformed into a higher being and more beautiful body by practicing the selflessness that Christ modeled for us.

Let us not forget that the beatified, transformed, heavenly body of Jesus has nail holes and a pierced side. Perhaps the sharing of Christ's suffering is the way our own lowly bodies are being converted into the heavenly.

Christ who came to suffer for all, help us to suffer like you. Amen.

J. D. McDonald

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S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 19

Isaiah 58:1-12

EMBODY THE KINGDOM

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

Lent is a season in which we meditate on Christ's suffering and partake in practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. While many interpret almsgiving narrowly as a monetary practice, it can alternatively be interpreted as acts of service and physical charity – leaning into perfect love of neighbor.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us, along with his own community, that our sins against each other pile up as condemning testimony despite the outward appearance of piety. The entire testimony of Scripture cries out for sincerity and authenticity in the life of the believer. The faithful are called to rend their hearts rather than their garments. God seeks a community of believers who are wholeheartedly sold out to him and actively participating in his kingdom work.

Like the Israelite community, we stand under judgment when our outward piety seeks to mask our crimes against one another.

During this Lenten season, as we practice walking alongside Christ in his suffering, may we, like the Israelites before us, have our own prophets who would call us to recognize those who suffer unseen in our communities, our inauthenticity in our worship, and the hardness of our own hearts.

Let us understand the call to almsgiving in the broader sense which draws us into Christian acts of service for those in need. Let us seek to embody the righteous kingdom of God.

Lord Jesus Christ, prepare us and move in our hearts from this season onward. Teach us to recognize the waywardness of our own desires. Correct our hearts, open our eyes, and make us sensitive to the suffering of our neighbors. Lead us to walk alongside them, bearing their crosses and partaking as Christ's vicars in their pains and sorrows, bringing comfort in their time of need. Amen.

S U N D A Y , M A R C H 2 0

Luke 13:1-9

REPENT, OR PERISH

"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did."

I attended a Good Friday service when I was in seminary I will never forget. I entered seminary knowing next to nothing about the church calendar and had just taken a class on pastoral liturgics with Dr. Larry Stookey, who is a legend in United Methodist circles. As strange as it may seem, because of Dr. Stookey's class, I was hungry to repent. I was ready.

I walked to the church expecting to be confronted by my sin and my need for repentance, because I thought that was largely the purpose of Good Friday.

Instead, we confessed other people's sins. We confessed the world's injustice. We were not faced with our own injustice. The service only got more partisan, which further insulated the congregation from conviction of the ways we had each given ourselves, willingly, to sin.

We would have done better to have read today's Scripture and listened to Jesus: "Unless you repent, you too will all perish."

It is easier to preach repentance as an invitation to judge, condemn, or even hate those we have labelled as sinners. But that kind of response is an adventure in missing the point.

"Unless you repent, you too will all perish."

You cannot repent for someone else. You cannot confess and receive forgiveness for other people's sins. Jesus confronts each of us with our own need for repentance. Indeed, you and I must repent, or we will perish.

Even here, Jesus ends with a word of hope. The barren fig tree, the one that seems to be useless and taking up valuable space, is not only given one more year to bear fruit, but also extra attention and assistance. May he do the same for us, leading us to bear good fruit.

Lord Jesus Christ, give me the grace to repent and to bear fruit of repentance in this coming year. Amen.

Dr. Kevin M. Watson

Wesley House of Studies Acting Director and Affiliate Research Professor
Truett Seminary

M O N D A Y , M A R C H 21

Isaiah 55:1-5

COME TO THE WATERS

"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters..."

Today's passage is an invitation to all people. Everyone is thirsty for something. We are always seeking satisfaction, looking to fill the hole that is in our heart that only God can fill.

As I reflected on this passage, I was reminded of Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The woman came to the well to draw water, which would satisfy her until her thirst returned. She sought to meet a physical need, but Jesus provided a spiritual, lasting resource that met an even deeper need. Jesus offered her living water. In John 4:13-14, Jesus says, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

How often do we try to satisfy our thirst with things like earthly water? When we are stressed out, empty, weary, burdened, and in need of love, too often we turn to the things of this world. Netflix, stress-eating, social media, gossip, material things...the list is endless. Why do we seek worldly things when we know it is only Jesus who provides us with water that eternally satisfies?

God invites us to come to him. Our hearts are never fully and finally satisfied apart from the love of Christ. Let us answer God's call to us, to attend to God and hear His heart. Let us reject everything that fails to quench our deepest thirst, those things which will always leave us looking for more and turn to Jesus.

*Almighty God, let me seek you above all else, for you are the living water and the One who fills my heart.
Amen.*

Isaiah 55:6-9

HIGHER WAYS

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Our expectations are easily thwarted. Even if we have strong faith and the word of God firmly in mind, there are many times when what we hope for turns out to not be God's design. The long-awaited healing of cancer, the conversion of your family, and the relief from suffering seem not to be His plan. We often suffer in our experience of God's silence and our perception that God is not acting. In this regard, that His thoughts and ways are different from ours, we find God to be frustrating. It is as if God's ways are designed to shatter our hope.

In hindsight, however, this turns out to be hope. When God says, "my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways" (Isa 55:8), he indicates that His salvation must come in his own way. The mystery of the gospel is that he is not in consultation with us mortals in scheming his gracious redemption. His ways are high above our ways. Even his foolishness is wiser than our wisdom.

Even though Israel in exile would have hardly made sense of the promise that his salvation will certainly come in his time and manner, God wanted to encourage those who had difficulty trusting him. Pointing out the boundless horizons of his plan, he seeks to overcome our weariness and helplessness. Not only does the greatness of our Creator deliver us, but his highness also comforts us.

What about people who were looking at Jesus being trampled down? In the suffering of Jesus, all kinds of expectations are shattered. Things go in a direction where they cannot expect anything from God. However, the mystery of the cross comes to light in the very ignorance of everyone. This is because His ways are high above our ways.

Lord, help us to trust you in all circumstances, remembering that your ways are not our ways. Amen.

JT Chae

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Psalm 63:1-8

FROM WAITING TO PRAISING

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you."

Lent is upon us once again. It seems to come so quickly after the season of Advent, a season of joy, anticipation, and the celebration of the birth of Christ. There is a stark contrast between these two seasons. Lent, while still a season of waiting, is more somber, more melancholy, as we remember the sacrifices Jesus underwent for us when he was tempted in the wilderness for forty days, and when he was ultimately crucified.

However, there is hope in this season of waiting and remembering. We can look back in the Old Testament to see this hope. In Psalm 63, for example, we find a psalm of confidence, most likely written by David when he was in the wilderness in Judah and fleeing from Saul.

Psalm 63 can be broken into two parts. Verses one through four talk about David's longing to be in the presence of God. Verses five to eight describe David's joy of living a life with God.

David provides a strong example of how to live one's life in the season of waiting like we experience in Lent. We can continue to seek after God. We can remember and thank Him for the life He has given us. We can be reminded of all the things that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, suffered to continue living in relationship with us. We can praise the Lord with our lips, we can lift our hands, and we can continue to call on the name of the Lord.

I pray that this season of waiting, which can be incredibly difficult, will instead become a season of praising and remembrance for all of us, especially in the turbulent times we now live in.

Lord, may we remember who You are, and all that You have done for us. Amen.

Rebekah Graff

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T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 24

1 Corinthians 10:1-9

HEED THE WARNINGS

"Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did."

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-9, Paul addresses the church at Corinth. The Corinthians had allowed worldliness to come into the church. Church members engaged in things they had no business engaging in, such as sexual immorality and idolatry. Paul rebukes them and calls them back to holiness.

This passage reminds us that the church is susceptible to being affected by worldliness. We must stay on guard and put our hope solely in the One who protects us from sin and darkness, Jesus Christ.

Though we are prone to fall into worldliness, we must remain vigilant. We should not willingly succumb to our fleshly desires. There are consequences for our actions. God disciplines those he loves. Since the Israelites disobeyed God, He disciplined them accordingly. Why? Because he loved them and wanted them to walk in righteousness. The Apostle Paul points to the Old Testament narratives to make his point clear for the Corinthians, and for us today. Just as loving parents discipline their children when they are disobedient, God also disciplines us when we go our own way, for our own good.

There is a standard God calls his followers to found in 1 Peter 1:16, which says, "Be holy because I am holy." As followers of Jesus Christ, we can live holy lives solely because of the transformative work done on the Cross of Calvary. If God's grace, extended on the cross, is life-changing and makes possible the forgiveness of our sins, why wouldn't that same grace empower us to overcome worldliness? It can. And it does. Receive God's grace and walk in holiness.

God, help me to receive your discipline when I go my own way, and to trust in your grace to help me to walk in holiness. Amen.

F R I D A Y , M A R C H 2 5
1 Corinthians 10:10-13

STAND FIRM

"God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

This passage reminds me that we are to take God seriously. The "fear of the Lord" can be understood as reverent respect, and Paul's instructions remind us to refuse the impulse to grumble and cautions us against following the example of generations who failed to trust God fully.

These warnings help us see that living righteously is the better path. Often, in our fleshly nature, we tend to deviate from the notion that living for God is the best choice. This could be because of our inability to relinquish control and submit to God. In addition, our own sinful and fleshly desires might be hindering us from consistently pursuing the holy life that God desires us to live, not only for our sakes, but also for the sake of the people around us.

This passage instructs us to stand firm, to ground ourselves in hope. The imagery of not falling helps us to see that we must remain alert spiritually in the same way we remain alert physically. Life brings temptations that can trip us up, both schemes of man and of the enemy. Be aware and beware!

However, we know that we have victory because our confidence does not depend on our own righteousness but on Christ's righteousness alone. We should not grow weary. We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, who helps us in every situation.

Hold fast to the promise of God. He is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can endure. He will provide a way out for you so that you can make it through a difficult situation. So, take heart. You are more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. You are a child of God.

Lord Jesus, help me today to stand firm, remain alert, and trust you in every situation because I know that you are faithful from the beginning to the end. Amen.

S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 26

Psalm 78:1-8

TELL THE COMING GENERATION

"We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."

As seen throughout Israel's history, God was faithful to his people and gave them responsibilities, just as God has given us responsibilities today. In this passage, God has "appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children."

The writer, Asaph, makes it known that God intends for his truth to be passed on from generation to generation. Asaph obeys God's call to faithfully tell of God's work and will to the next generation. He also encourages his hearers to do the same.

Long before Asaph wrote this Psalm, God had been revealing himself to the people of Israel. God has been faithful and gracious, despite their rebellious hearts. Like the Israelites, we are rebellious in nature and need to acknowledge God's grace and mercy in our lives each day. It is because of God's grace that we receive forgiveness and live in hope.

God is the God of all people, all time, and all places! He is bigger than we can imagine, and he desires us to be faithful to his call—to share his truth! We need to take this command to heart and think about our responsibility in God's Kingdom—to tell the coming generation of the great things God has done.

As you reflect on this passage and on God's call on your life, I ask you to think about ways you can share God's praiseworthy deeds with another generation.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your provision and faithfulness that you continue to show to your people. Give me courage and the desire to obey your commands. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 27

Luke 1:26-38

GOD'S GRACIOUS ACT

"Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her."

The most common question people are asked during Lent is, "What did you give up?" This is a reasonable question since the practice of fasting during Lent is well established in the Christian tradition. The prevalence of this custom, however, can obscure the fact that the Christian journey through Lent is rooted in God's self-determining grace.

The annunciation to Mary follows the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Luke mentions that Zechariah is a priest with an esteemed pedigree ("order of Abijah"). He also tells us that Elizabeth has a prestigious genealogy ("descendant of Aaron," 1:5). Furthermore, the narrative highlights that they were "both righteous before God, living blamelessly" (1:6). Yet they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both getting older. The declaration that Zechariah and Elizabeth will finally bear a child can often be read as a way of righting the moral order of the universe. The blameless couple is vindicated as righteous, yielding fruit, and prospering (Ps 1:3).

By contrast Luke makes no mention of Mary's lineage (only her fiancé, Joseph, receives that treatment) or her social status. She is not from a famous family; she holds no special position. Mary is not important. Yet the angel's first words to her tell her that she is "favored" by God and that the Lord is with her (1:28). Mary is not described as being blameless or righteous, but she is told that God has found favor with her (1:30). There is no sense that the announcement to Mary rectifies some great wrong or is any way a response to Mary's moral status. The journey to Lent begins with God's free and gracious act.

Mary's story is an important reminder for us during Lent that whatever we choose to give up or fast from ought to be understood as a response to God's prior act of grace and not an attempt to demonstrate our righteousness to God (or others). Or, as Luther puts it, that our fasting and spiritual disciplines are always "because of" God's grace and never "in order to" prove our worth.

Lord, help me to act in response to your grace and to rely fully on your righteousness. Amen.

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M O N D A Y , M A R C H 28

Isaiah 7:10-14

GOD DESIRES TO BE WITH US

"Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

In 1854, Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached:

"God with us." It is the laborer's strength – how could he preach the Gospel, how could he bend his knees in prayer, how could the missionary go into foreign lands, how could the martyr stand at the stake, how could the confessor acknowledge his Master, how could men labor if that one word were taken away? "God with us," is the sufferer's comfort, is the balm of his woe, is the alleviation of his misery, is the sleep which God gives to His beloved, is their rest after exertion and toil."

"God with us" is eternity's sonnet, is Heaven's hallelujah, is the shout of the glorified, is the song of the redeemed, is the chorus of angels, is the everlasting oratorio of the great orchestra of the sky!

It can be hard to ask for help. Just as Ahaz hesitated to ask the Lord for a sign, I often find myself waiting idly by, not wanting to present God with another request. Thankfully, however, we serve a God that is not dependent on our invitation.

As we go about our daily lives, the name "Immanuel" reminds us that there is never a moment that we are alone. "God with us" paints the picture of walking hand-in-hand with God toward truth. May we find comfort in knowing that, because he is with us, God understands and responds to every petition and need, regardless of if they are voiced or not.

How lucky we are to serve a God who desires to be with us!

God, thank you for your friendship and your guidance. Please help me to recognize your presence in every moment of my life, both mundane and extraordinary. Amen.

Brooke Reid

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T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 29

Psalm 45

DELIGHTING IN UNION

"I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations;
therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever."

Psalm 45 feels expensive. It rings through my mind as a vivid drama. I can imagine the luxury of the affair, can hear the hum of the music, and feel the excited buzz of energy in celebration of the couple. Praise and admiration fall like confetti on this glorious event that will unify this blessed couple. However, in reading this Psalm, I find myself perplexed. Why Psalm 45 in the midst of this anticipatory Lenten season? As I lean into this feeling of dissonance between this passage and the Lenten season, I found myself in a hurried state of anticipation, aching for the awaited celebration season of resurrection, knowing of God's fulfilled promises in the embodiment of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Often our view can be fixed and focused solely on the future of what is next and what has been promised. However, engaging Psalm 45 in this season draws me back and slows my racing pace towards the tomb and begs the question, "How do we approach the cross in this season?"

The beautiful thing about Psalm 45 is that it meets us in a multitude of spaces and gives us an invitation to praise and adore the faithfulness of God. Psalm 45 is an illustrious prophecy echoing a Davidic kingship, reflecting God's cosmic encounter and the anticipation of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to David. The Psalmist directs readers to the glory of the messianic groom, to the glory of the bride who can be interpreted as the Church, and to the legacy of their enduring relationship.

The groom, the king, is painted as honest, wise in speech, and as a just protector. This king does not wage war to gain personal power for imperial gain, but stands in truth, equity, justice, righteousness, anointed with oil of joy. The bride is striking. She enters her wedding with splendor, joining in powerful accord with the king, her groom.

As we journey in this season approaching the cross, while our minds are filled with many of our personal and private involvements, may we seek together to center our thoughts and feelings, our aspirations and our desires, so that we may be attuned to the wisdom, endurance, faithfulness, justness, forgiveness, mercy, and love of God. Let us offer our lives, splintered as they are, fragmentary as they may be. May we offer our lives to God and delight in our union.

God, may we have the eyes to seek and know you more. Guide us in our eagerness to lean into the cross, the tomb, and who you are. Thank you for your love that constantly claims us. Amen.

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Psalm 40:5-10

REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

"I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD."

REMEMBER.

One of the overarching themes throughout the biblical narrative, particularly in the Old Testament, is the call to remember the Lord and all he has done for his people.

In this psalm, the response to this call to remembrance is heard through the proclaiming of the Lord's faithfulness, steadfast love, and saving help. Here, the psalmist bears witness to the wondrous deeds of God even as they acknowledge their own inability to adequately articulate the magnitude of them. In speaking of what the Lord desires, the psalmist reveals an intimate relational knowledge of God that only comes through time spent listening.

Our lives are full—full of to-do lists, work, errands, school, deadlines etc.—and it can be easy to not remember what the Lord has done in the past. However, recalling what he has done in the past enables us to be more intentional in noticing the ways in which we are currently experiencing the goodness, love, and faithfulness of God in our daily lives; to listen and come to know God's desires.

This psalm models for us a prayer of remembrance, an encouragement not to doubt in the dark what one knows to be true in the light. When we share what God has done and is doing in us, we participate in bearing witness to who God has revealed himself to be. By listening to one another's experiences of God, our own knowledge of Him deepens. Sharing one's story requires vulnerability and carries inherent risk. May we, like the psalmist, be bold in proclaiming God's wondrous deeds and in providing spaces for others to share.

Triune God, embolden us to have unrestrained lips in telling of your faithfulness and steadfast love, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 3 1

Hebrews 10:4-7

WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

As Christians, we continuously recall the sacrifice of Christ—his atonement for our sins.

We remember not because we are good but, as in the Lord's Supper, to feast upon that which is good. Our inadequacies reveal our sin, an illness in need of a physician. But Christ is no ordinary physician. He provides a cure for the disease, not merely medicine for the symptoms. He is proactive, not reactive. As author of Hebrews writes in verse four, the blood of the bulls cannot take away sin. The Old Testament animal sacrifices were insufficient to permanently remove the stain of sin from the people. The blood of animals was powerless, but Christ's blood is sufficient.

By quoting David in Psalm 40, the author of Hebrews shows us that the cross accomplished what the sacrificial system could not. We contribute nothing to our salvation. And yet, we often falsely believe that to be saved we must do more, be more, or be good. We say things like, "If only I prayed more than God would accept me."

This idea is not new. The great theologian and Reformer Martin Luther practiced an ascetic life for a time. He slept on the floor, fasted, and fervently prayed. What he discovered was not greater piety, but vanity. What this tells us is that the measure of the Christian life is predicated on neither being a good person nor living a good life. The work on the cross reminds us not that we are good, but that God is good, and because God is good, we are saved.

Lord, help us to remember afresh what Christ has done on our behalf. May we remember the sweetness of his mercy and the hope of his resurrection. Amen.

F R I D A Y , A P R I L 1

Hebrews 10:8-10

THANK YOU, JESUS

"And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

When I was in undergrad, I had a professor say in an Old Testament survey course that his primary takeaway for Leviticus was "Thank you Jesus." I chuckled at what was partially a joke, but also held a lot of truth. However, reading through the dietary regulations and guidance for animal sacrifices seemed so far from my 21st century American mind that the truth of that statement didn't really hit home.

That was until I remembered my mom painting the most vivid picture imaginable for me when I was about six or seven. After seeing a Christmas pageant which had a scene implying a young boy sacrificing a sheep, she made that scene relevant to me by telling me to imagine having to kill my dog because of how I had sinned. My sister and I had gotten said dog for Christmas a couple of years prior, and I can't emphasize enough how much six-year-old me loved him. This thought stuck with me. It helped me to better grasp life in the Old Testament but has also very much deepened my love for Christ.

Too often people can only see Jesus as the one, true sacrifice. Yes, but this idea is only heightened when one realizes that he came into the world introducing love and God's kingdom; leaving the throne to do so. Verse eight of this passage makes it clear that there needed to be a God level sacrifice to atone for sin, and Jesus says, "Here I am." ¹

Because He came to do God's will, we have been made holy. The old is gone and the new has come. So, to the one who came to Earth introducing love and the Kingdom of God and made the ultimate sacrifice to make man holy once and for all: thank you, Jesus.

God, please remind us, and do not let us take for granted, the gift of Your Son.

S A T U R D A Y , A P R I L 2

Psalm 40:9-10

TELL OF GOD'S LOVE

"I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation."

Socrates argued against the written word. He thought it was more effective to communicate face to face. He believed writing would lead to forgetfulness. He thought that if we wrote things down, we wouldn't have to remember them, and so we wouldn't commit important things to memory.

Socrates had a point. We write down what our pastors say, and then forget. We write down what we are grateful for, but then don't talk about it. We write down our prayers, but never speak them out loud to God.

Don't get me wrong. I think writing is a good thing. Consider what I'm writing now! It is helpful to look back at sermon notes, gratitude lists, and past prayers. However, there is something different about talking out loud about God's love. Talking helps us remember, it helps others learn, and it creates space for God to respond.

In Psalm 40, David appears to agree with Socrates, at least concerning our need to speak about God's faithfulness. Later in Scripture, Jesus offers us the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), which is among our most important and pressing tasks. We are called to tell the story.

Sharing the gospel with unbelievers helps us remember how radical it is. Talking with other Christians about God's faithfulness adds to our faith. It highlights his love and action in daily life. Whether sharing the gospel with an unbeliever or telling a close friend what God is doing in your life, proclaim God's faithfulness. Speak about his saving help. Tell others.

Dear Jesus, present me with an opportunity to talk about your love today. Amen.

Bethany Dickerson

Master of Theological Studies, Aug. 2021
Bentonville, Arkansas

S U N D A Y , A P R I L 3

Luke 15:1-10

LOST AND UNAWARE

"Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

America. A largely identifying Christian nation. According to a Gallup poll, 74% identify with a Christian religion.

Growing up, my parents often made me participate in deep cleaning. We would reorganize, throw away, donate, dust, and take inventory of the materials in our home. During this process, we would often find items we didn't remember we had misplaced. Items we had lost and were unaware about.

I often wonder how many of us, Christians living in America, read the parables of the lost sheep and coin, lost and aware ourselves.

Unaware of the hidden sin that is consistently separating us from Christ.

Unaware of the enemy's deception in our lives.

Unaware of the distractions we love.

Unaware of our deep daily need for God's grace and mercy.

As Christians living in America who easily profess our identity in Christ, there is a danger of missing a critical lesson in this parable. We struggle to see ourselves as the lost, desperately in need of God's daily grace. This, I believe, is the lesson. May we never forget our position before a Holy God. We are only found in the finished work of Christ. I believe Jesus is teaching us that we must consistently find ourselves in a posture of humility; repenting of our sins and depending on His daily bread to find us again and again and again.

Today, take a moment to examine your heart.

We serve a God attracted to the lowly, needy, desperate, and the lost. He has promised to never leave nor forsake us, whether we are aware or unaware of our need for Him.

Lord Jesus, help me to be the one repenting from my sins and accepting my desperate daily need to be found by You!

Denisha Akpan

Coordinator of Recruitment
Truett Seminary

M O N D A Y , A P R I L 4

Luke 15:11-32

A FATHER TO BOTH

"Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons.'"

I love seeing freshly cut stripes mowed into a baseball field. There is something so satisfying about patterns.

Jesus offered a satisfying pattern of repeated events in Luke 15. First, He told his listeners about a great joy over one lost sheep being found. He then shared a story about a woman's joy at finding her lost coin. Then, he told a beautiful redemption story about a prodigal son being welcomed home by his Father. He was lost, but now he was found.

However, Luke 15:25-32 breaks this pattern. How so?

Here, Jesus tells his listeners about the prodigal son's older brother who was anything but joyful to see his brother showered with love. "How could Dad accept him back?" The older brother's pride kept him from rejoicing at his brother's homecoming.

Why does Jesus share the older son's narrative? Why not end the parable after verse 24?

Jesus knows that we are often like the older son —struggling to rejoice at the salvation or forgiveness of those whom we have deemed undeserving of God's grace. Jesus knows that our hearts are prone to wander. We fall into self-righteousness and pride. We may not be prodigal sons, but we certainly have some "older son" in us.

But the story does not end there. The Father is gracious with the older son, redirecting his heart towards love. The Father's arms are just as open towards the older son as they are towards the prodigal. Likewise, when we are like the older son, the Father welcomes us into His sanctifying arms as we learn to rejoice when those that are lost are finally found.

Father, give me Your heart to rejoice at the homecoming of every lost daughter or son. Amen.

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T U E S D A Y , A P R I L 5

Joshua 5:9-12

STOP AND REFLECT

"The Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.'
And so that place is called Gilgal to this day."

Coming out of a tradition that didn't celebrate Lent (or Advent, for that matter), I am a late comer to the practice of observing Lent. It always seemed "ritualistic" for my parents, and thus, I missed out on the benefit of slowing, focusing, and receiving the message God wanted to impart to me during those times.

But here, we see the Israelites stopping. They camped. They focused and remembered. They "kept the Passover." And then they received—"on that very day"—God's bounty.

Rituals by themselves can become sterile and meaningless. When rituals and observances are merely traditions that we follow without thought or reflection, they serve no better purpose than to become one more activity in the living of life.

Rituals that cause us to stop and remember, however, that cause us to focus and to reevaluate our lives in relation to God can draw us into a deeper, more meaningful, more Christ-like commitment and obedience to the Father. The Israelites who were transitioning from the wilderness into the Promised Land were called by God to stop and remember. They had just obeyed the first command given through Joshua (to be circumcised), and now continued in that obedience by observing the Passover as God had commanded them when He brought them out of Egypt.

These rituals, circumcision and observance of the Passover, do two things. As verse 9 states, God "rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." They no longer had to carry the baggage and shame of slavery or disobedience. This, in turn, released them to celebrate at the proper time. By stopping, reflecting, and obeying God, the Israelites were able to enjoy the blessings of a covenantal relationship with God.

We too can stop and reflect during this Lenten season, obeying the call of God on our lives, and celebrate the blessings of a covenantal relationship with God. Our celebration of the resurrection becomes a deeper one, one based on our observance of rest and obedience. Then, we too, can eat of the produce of the land that God has provided for us. We too can experience what we look for in the coming resurrection.

Father God, help us stop and observe your rests. Help us to commemorate your past relationship with us and your continued blessing upon us as you call us into a deeper relationship with you. Amen.

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W E D N E S D A Y , A P R I L 6

Psalm 32:1-5

BACK TO BELOVEDNESS

"Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

Guilt is something we are taught to flee from in our modern culture.

From viewing it in courtroom dramas on television to experiencing that squirmy feeling in our guts when we know we've done something wrong, guilt is uncomfortable and causes tension in our lives. We'd rather not deal with it. It would be so much more comfortable and convenient to waltz past our sins and pretend that they don't affect us or others. As we know from experience, and as the writer of Psalm 32 explains, that's just not the case.

The psalmist first tells us how good it is to be forgiven. But then, he reminds us what happens when we ignore our sins: wasting away; groaning; feeling like we have no strength left. Guilt is capable of trapping and consuming us.

The good news is that we've been handed the key to be released from guilt and healed of sin. Verse 5 reminds us that in confession and repentance we lay our sin down and are reminded of who we are and who God is. At any time, we are invited to return to the blessed state of verse 1, by asking God to forgive our transgressions and to rest secure in the knowledge that in Jesus Christ grace is abundantly given.

Friends, Psalm 32 is a reminder that confession – no matter how hard it feels – is a gift. In this season of Lent, may we be a people who get comfortable with the idea of reflecting on our actions and acknowledging the places where we fall short. In that process, I hope God reminds us again that confession is holy and leads us back to our beloved-ness.

God who is our rock and our redeemer, receive our confession, free us from our sins, and remind us that your steadfast love will always be enough. Amen.

T H U R S D A Y , A P R I L 7

Psalm 32:6-11

RESTORED TO GOD

"Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."

In Psalm 32, I was struck by David's difficulty drawing near to God after having sinned. But this psalm contains a sudden turn. In Psalm 32:5, David writes, "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." David shows us that we can reach out to God even in our weakness. Confession is an important step toward the restoration of a broken relationship with God. But why do we even need to draw closer to God, especially after we have sinned?

Psalm 32 is King David's plea to get closer to God, to be forgiven and to find deliverance. In this psalm we see the enormous benefits of being in God's presence. No one is perfect. We all have some failing we can confess before God. When we make an honest confession, God helps us deal with our problems and sins.

Confession strengthens our relationship with God. Closeness to God requires the godly person to seek God, always. Those who love God take refuge in him and they find protection, as we are told in Psalm 32:7. Sin renders us helpless. But Psalm 32:8 reminds us that God is our faithful guide, and that we all need God's wisdom and counsel when facing challenging circumstances.

Let us be glad and rejoice in the Lord, because he preserves our lives and makes us upright in heart. Let us be joyful in him because God works in the lives of godly people to bring us to maturity, and to make us holy and increasingly faithful to Him.

Lord, I confess my sins to you. I confess my inability and brokenness, my failure to live according to your way. I want to be holy and blameless before you. Help me to understand that I'm forgiven and healed because Jesus died for me. Lord, thank you for your amazing love for me.

F R I D A Y , A P R I L 8
2 Corinthians 5:16-17

INVITE OTHERS TO KNOW CHRIST

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

Those who are in Christ are a new creation and prove the reality that God has and is making all things new. Regarding others in a heavenly way allows us to look past a person's sins, faults, and rough edges. It enables us to see Christ in them, or the potential for Christ in them, rather than their humanness. The cross rightly becomes the new foundation for not only how we know God, but how we know each other.

This profound truth begins to reshape how we relate to, talk to, serve, and love others. For when we engage with a newly created person, we interact with Christ in them. A wise way to know Jesus better would be to spend more time with His people, His new creation. Moreover, those not in Christ truly can become in Christ by God's grace. We are not to regard those out of Christ as unworthy castaways. No, may it never be, for Christ died and was raised for all (1 Cor 5:15)!

All people are God's beloved creation and are either in Christ or have the potential to be in Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well, writing, "Christianity preaches the infinite worth of that which is seemingly worthless and the infinite worthlessness of that which is seemingly so valued."

Today, consider those around you who are in Christ. How does this knowledge change the way you see, relate to, and pursue them? Who are those around you who are not in Christ? How can you purposefully and prayerfully engage with them so they too might receive Christ, as you have?

Almighty Father, renew our heart's eye to see others, communally and individually, the way that You see them so that we might care for one another as we truly are, Your very own. Amen.

S A T U R D A Y , A P R I L 9

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

RECONCILED TO GOD

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation..."

Reconciliation is defined as "the act of causing two people to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement." Reconciliation is the act of forgiving and righting the wrongs that have been done. It is making a way to be friends again after one has wronged the other.

Have you ever been wronged by someone? Think back to a time when someone did you wrong. Consider the experience. What emotion do you associate with that experience? Anger? Hurt? Pain? Sadness? Disappointment? Loneliness?

Press into that emotion. Think about how difficult it would be to reconcile with that person right after they wronged you. Consider the emotional struggle. Maybe you have reconciled with that person. Maybe you have not. Reconciliation is not easy when a person has wronged you.

But that is what Jesus did for us. God reconciled us back to Himself through Jesus. I cannot imagine how grieved and angered God is by sin, but that did not keep God from reconciling us back to Him. God made us his friend even though we wronged Him. We were never a friend to God, but God befriended us first.

God declares us his beloved and his friend even though we wrong him daily. Choosing Netflix over time with God. Cussing. Lustful thoughts. Neglecting the homeless. Pride. Cheating. Lying. Not loving our neighbors. Sin after sin—and yet God still loves us. Our sin does not draw God away from us. But rather God's love draws us back toward God, as we are invited to receive the reconciliation that is ours in Christ.

As 2 Corinthians 5: 21 says, Jesus came to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. God does not count our sins against us because Jesus is the forgiveness for our sins. Jesus came as the way--the only way--to right all our wrongs. He is our forever friend who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Dear Lord, remind us that we are forgiven of our sins. Just as you have forgiven us after having wronged you, I pray for the courage, strength, and boldness for us to forgive those who wrong us. Help us to be reconciled, and to be reconcilers. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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S U N D A Y , A P R I L 1 0

John 12:1-8

FRAGRANCES OF LIFE AND DEATH

"Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial."

The Gospel reading for the fifth Sunday of Lent zooms in on a dinner party just a week before Jesus enters into Jerusalem en route to his death and burial. Sitting around the table with Jesus and enjoying the sights and scents of good food are a company of people whose character and conduct possess their own distinct smells of either life or death.

The scene is set in Bethany. Previously, the corpse of Lazarus had laid rotting and smelling foul until Jesus raised him to life (Luke 11:38). Now the family joins together with others in Lazarus' very home to honor Jesus and celebrate this miracle over a banquet style meal.

Mary, the beloved friend of Jesus, suddenly anoints Jesus' feet with "costly perfume," equal to a year's wages. Her act demonstrated extreme gratefulness for Jesus' gift of restoring her brother's life (v. 3). We are told that this perfume's fragrance filled the house. This literal fragrance evidences the spiritual aroma of Mary's selfless charity and generosity as life-giving.

In stark contrast, another smell is present, though masked, at first by the pleasant fragrance of Mary's act. Judas protests Mary's wasteful devotion. Judas ethically calculates that the cost of her perfume could have been sold and converted in order to help the poor. Initially, Judas "smells" righteous for his motives are like a prophet of social justice; however, the narrator informs our noses about a quite different smell regarding Judas' actual motivation. Rather than sincerely caring for the needs of the poor (vv. 5-6)—something we should not neglect—we discern the true scent of his actions. Like the foul smell that emanated from Lazarus' tomb, the spiritual stench of greed, smugness, and pride emitted from the tomb of Judas' heart. John tells us that Judas would eventually betray Jesus, and as a thief, he stood to benefit again, for if the perfume was sold, Judas would have stolen and profited from the proceeds, since he kept charge of Jesus' money.

Jesus then responds by defending and praising Mary's generosity, detecting even greater smells in her actions. We learn from the Gospel of Mark that the fragrance of an extravagant act of love like this will diffuse into the future and be remembered (Mark 14:9) and that this perfumed anointing was in preparation for Jesus' impending burial (12:7).

Jesus' praise of Mary and rebuke of Judas remind us how our daily actions witness to either life or death, each with their distinct fragrance. This fifth week of Lent directs us to sniff out where we fall short and how we need the power and presence of Jesus to offer the gospel fragrance of the resurrected life.

Lord Jesus, we ask that you strengthen our love and devotion to you so that the sweet fragrance of the gospel fills the rooms and places we live and work. Amen.

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M O N D A Y , A P R I L 1 1

Isaiah 43:16-21

INTO THE PRESENT WITH GOD

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Israel's faith was grounded in the "former things" (v. 18) such as the creation and Exodus. These events are miracles proving Yahweh's presence and activity in the lives of his people.

Remembering the ways Yahweh acted on their behalf gave Israel a faith full of hope. As people of God, we also must embrace a faith of deep remembrance. Recalling his goodness reminds us of his steadfast and unchanging character. We remember what God has done in the past as hope for how he will continue to work in our lives. This faith is the foundation for our future.

Yet, God tells his people he is about to "do a new thing" (v. 19). He is pushing Israel towards fresh challenges and new miracles. Though the past reveals God's presence, Israel cannot stay there. Yahweh is at work in the present, and he calls his people to move forward with him.

Therefore, we are also called to step into the present alongside God. We participate in the ways God works in the present, and we anticipate the ways God will work in the future.

God, may we be grounded in a faith of deep remembrance as we step into the present and look to the future with you. Amen.

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T U E S D A Y , A P R I L 1 2

Philippians 3:3-14

FOCUS ON CHRIST

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."

Time and time again, Scripture stirringly reminds us that the God of the Old Testament, who brought salvation to Israel, is the same God who continues to bring salvation to his broken creation. While we continually seek to forge our own path or succeed under our own strength, God never leaves our side.

In Philippians 3:3-14, Paul speaks to his own past, one full of righteous judgment and persecution of the church. In these verses, Paul acknowledges his self-righteous and judgmental nature. His story emphasizes the need for a relationship with God and a yearning to know him fully. While on the surface Paul's life seemed complete and full, without Christ he was lost and filled with possessions that were meaningless. If his story ended here, the message of Paul's life would be one of hopelessness and despair.

But Jesus saves! Paul's story does not end in hopelessness and death. In fact, it demonstrates that life in Jesus ends with resurrection as final hope not just for Paul but for all who believe in Jesus. This hope, in turn, is a central marker of faith for all Christians to rely on Jesus, not because he will make their situation easier, but because life with Jesus leads to immeasurably more than we could ever hope for or imagine.

In this time of Lent, leaning into the promises of Easter, Paul reminds us of the eternal promises Jesus imparted with his death and resurrection for all creation. Paul, through his life and in Philippians 3:3-14, reveals how living a life focused on Christ, rather than a life focused on the things of this world, empowers believers to embrace the obedience necessary to carry out tangible acts of ministry for and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, we pray for strength from you to press on in hope and assurance of your love for us as we seek to make your name known in this world. Amen.

W E D N E S D A Y , A P R I L 13

Psalm 118:1-2; 19-29

THE GATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD."

In this Lenten season, the church prepares itself for the coming of Easter. We fix our eyes upon the Lord and his Cross with renewed focus, and many faithful Christians fast, imitating our Lord Jesus Christ, who fasted in the wilderness prior to being tempted. This time of remembrance and preparation provides us with an opportunity to reorient our lives and reflect upon the righteousness that comes only as a gift of God.

The psalmist calls out to us in exhortation, telling the people of God to give thanks for the Lord's goodness and everlasting lovingkindness (Ps 118:1-2). In Psalm 118, the words of the speaker make clear that God is the one who can open the gates of righteousness so that we may enter into his holy city (Ps 118:19-20).

In light of the revelation of Jesus Christ, Paul proclaims the fundamental truth that our righteousness is not from the Law, from good deeds, or any standard of ritual purity. Instead, Christian righteousness comes from God on the basis of faith in Christ (Phil 3:9). He is the cornerstone of God's plan for our salvation. He is the way by which the gates of the Lord are opened. We give thanks to the Lord, because his everlasting lovingkindness shines forth from Calvary as an eternal beacon, a signal fire of God's goodness throughout the ages.

Whenever we partake in the Lord's Supper, we remember and embody this faith we have in Christ. In the Eucharist, in this Lenten season, and every day, let our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ lead us toward greater righteousness.

Lord God, strengthen our faith, that we may enter through the gate of the Lord, drawn forward by the righteousness of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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T H U R S D A Y , A P R I L 1 4

Luke 22:7-23

THE FEAST

"Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"

It is difficult to imagine a richer, fuller, and more remarkable final feast than the one Jesus celebrates with his closest followers and friends. The table is set. All are gathered. This is no ordinary Passover.

This is the Passover meal to which all previous Passovers pointed. With bread and cup, Jesus gave a gift, a symbol, that would remind us of his body and blood, broken and poured out for us, along with the promise of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), which God establishes in and through him. God is doing a new thing that fulfills an old thing. He is keeping a promise and accomplishing a purpose.

On Maundy Thursday we are invited to remember Jesus' last earthly meal with his disciples. We are invited to contemplate what it meant, and what it means. Jesus offered bread and cup to his friends, symbols of body and blood. But he stood before them as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

While God had delivered Israel from bondage, Jesus accomplished an even greater act of redemption. A small wafer and tiny cup are but signifiers for a salvation beyond measure. And think! This salvation has been extended to finite and fragile yet eternally significant people, precious to God. You. Me. Us.

Jesus invites us to commune with him today. And there is a future feast to look forward to, an even richer, fuller, and more remarkable meal, the day the Lamb of God will be joined to his bride, the church (Revelation 21-22). Anticipate that day. Through bread and cup, receive a foretaste. Jesus has prepared a place for us in God's house, at his table. Let your heart be glad!

Lord Jesus, help me remember your sacrifice, revel in your grace, and to live faithfully in keeping with your new covenant. Amen.

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F R I D A Y , A P R I L 1 5

Luke 23:26-43

BEHOLD THE KING

"There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'"

Jesus is crucified between two men guilty of their own crimes – mingled among true sinners even in his hour of death. In the midst of mocking rulers, Jesus movingly petitions, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

What should not be missed in this passage is the depiction of Christ as King. The beginning and the ending are connected. The one for whom the Magi came first in Matthew's Gospel inquiring, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" is found at the end in the gospel accounts with a crown of thorns and here with a sign unwittingly pronouncing the truth, "This is the King of the Jews." Indeed, through all his ministry, Jesus spoke more of the Kingdom of God than any other topic. It was akin to a farmer, wheat and weeds, a mustard seed, and yeast, hidden treasure, a pearl, a fishing net. The theme had been prophesied by John, Jesus' cousin, and God is pronounced as King throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

And yet all along, his followers misunderstood. "My Kingdom is not of this world," Jesus tells Pilate in John's Gospel. Indeed, Jesus' reign came through humility, making "himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name... (Phil. 2).

There is a great paradox here, missed by the soldiers, rulers, weeping women, disciples, and most of us alike. God's Kingdom does not come by means of political power or according to terrene definitions of glory. His Kingdom enters as a vulnerable man dying on two beams. And his message to us was clear: "Anyone who wants to be great among you must become your servant" (Matt. 20:26).

Lord, forgive us for we know not what we do. Preserve us from temptations to worldly power, self-help, and cheap grace. Help us this day by your Spirit to live into your Kingdom by humbling ourselves in love for one another as we follow our Lord. Amen.

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Luke 23:44-49

THE CRUCIFIED SAVIOR

"Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last."

Luke concludes the crucifixion narrative with ominous signs and words, "darkness fell over the whole land" (v. 44), "the veil of the temple was torn in two" (v. 45), and Jesus prays, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit." Then Luke punctuates these with the declaration, "he breathed his last" (v. 46).

In those words, at that moment, the faith of Abraham, the hope of Israel, and the temple's system of feasts and sacrifices all culminate. The redemption of all humanity is accomplished. In the death of Jesus, the iniquity of us all falls on the Son of God and crushes him for our salvation. He is "pierced through for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" (Isa 53:5, 6). Both the darkness of noonday and the ripping of the temple veil underline the gravity of our sin, and they point to the depth of God's sacrifice. Divine love conquers our rebellion and rescues us from judgment.

In the passion, we witness Jesus as more than a babe in a manger, a miracle worker, or a wise teacher. He is the crucified Savior, the supreme sacrifice for our sin and the sins of world. At the cross, in that moment, we receive divine love, obtain forgiveness for sin, and find our way out of rebellion and back to the Creator. The shouts of 'He is risen' and the celebration of resurrection are coming but first we must sit in the darkness, hear Jesus' pray of commitment, and see him take his last breath, if we are to know love, forgiveness, and wholeness.

Lord Jesus, focus my attention on the cross and your death. May I not look away from or quickly move past it but dwell on it, lest I miss the depth of your sacrifice, forgiveness, and love. Amen.

S U N D A Y , A P R I L 1 7

Luke 24:1-12

HE IS RISEN!

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

After narrating Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial (Luke 23:26-56), Luke records the initial announcement of Jesus' resurrection in Luke 24:1-12 (cf. Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-6; John 20:1-13).

At the conclusion of chapter 23, Luke notes that the "women who had come with him from Galilee" saw where Jesus' body had been lain on "Holy Saturday" and that they departed the rock-hewn tomb, which Joseph of Arimathea had provided, to prepare spices and ointments so that they might return to attend to Jesus' corpse subsequent to the Sabbath (vv. 50-56).

At the outset of chapter 24, Luke informs that "on first day of the week," just as soon as there was a hint of daylight (i.e., "at early dawn"), these self-same women, some of whom are noted by name in 24:10 (to wit, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James), came to Jesus' tomb bringing the spices that they had prepared (v. 1).

Upon arrival, they discover that the stone which covered the opening of the tomb had been rolled away from it (24:2). As is sometimes observed, the stone was not rolled away not so that Jesus could get out but so that they women could get in. Upon entering, they do not see Jesus' body, but they do encounter two angels (note 24:23), who ask these perplexed, now terrified, women why they are seeking the living among the dead. The angelic messengers then declare (in English translation) the seven most hope-filled words ever recorded: "He is not here, but has risen!" (24:5)

The angels then encourage the women to remember that Jesus had told them when they were still in Galilee how he would be handed over to sinners, crucified, and raised on the third day (24:6; cf. 9:22). Even as they remember, they return from the tomb to tell the eleven disciples (Judas is no longer in the picture [see Acts 1:16-26]) and other Jesus-followers what they had seen and heard (24:8-9). Although their report is met with (understandable) skepticism (24:11), Peter made his way to tomb to discover that what the women disciples had reported was in fact the case, supported by the "linen cloths" that he saw all by themselves (24:12a).

Luke reports that Peter went home amazed at what had transpired (24:12b). Peter would not be alone. Other disciples of Jesus, both initial (see 24:41) and eventual, continue to "stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene," even as we declare with full-throated praise, both on Easter Sunday and every day, these seven most significant words, "He is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Loving and Living Lord, help us to embrace your resurrected life for the living of these days and in steadfast hope of our resurrected life with you. Amen.

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