

# Lenten Devotional

## Daily Guide

### 2023



Baylor University

GEORGE W. TRUETT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## Isaiah 58:1-12

## REPAIRERS AND RESTORERS

*"Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall rise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."*

For many followers of Jesus over time, Ash Wednesday has been a day set aside to fast and receive charred bits of burned wood that remind us of our mortality. We humble ourselves before God together and repent of the ways in which we have not followed Jesus' example.

In recent years, many people have experienced spiritual renewal in Lent through fasts of various kinds, from giving up chocolate to avoiding social media. All our creative efforts to keep turning our attention toward our loving God make a difference in our growth and maturity.

Yet they do not lead us to genuine connection with God if they end only in the self—in our own personal sense of well-being. In Isaiah 58:1-12, the poet-prophet speaks to the essential truth that God hears and responds when our spiritual practices lead to actions for the healing of community. As we draw near to the heart of God, we notice God's heartbeat for the world: for broken relationships, for those lacking basic human needs, and for those suffering from injustice and oppression.

As we enter this season with the hope of Easter, I invite you to prayerfully consider a few important questions with me. Is there an invitation from God for me in Isaiah 58? Could my spiritual practices during Lent involve restoring a relationship? Who do I know that needs help right now? Can I offer care or support to someone who has been treated unjustly? Even more, what might God be calling us together to be and to do as a community? In this season, it is my prayer that God will look at each one of us and see a "repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in (Isaiah 58:12)."

*Lord, I confess my sins to you. Please bring to mind some ways that I might love others well and be a "repairer of the breach" during this season of Lent.*

**Angela Reed, PhD**

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs; Associate  
Professor of Practical Theology;  
Director of Spiritual Formation

T H U R S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 3  
2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-6:10

RECONCILING WITNESS/AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION

*"We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

Paul's words in this passage instruct us twice. First, his earnest plea to "be reconciled to God" is not fossilized in the biblical substratum. Rather, as the "living and active" Word of God, it is a plea which begs us even now, in the voice of our own spiritual fathers and mothers: "Be reconciled" (Heb. 4:12; 2 Cor. 12:14). Paul's plea is a reminder that the Gospel is never not for Christians. There is no point at which we move beyond Christ because it is only in, through, and by him that we "might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Paul warns us that only the truly foolish delay, but those who, like himself, are unafraid of being mislabeled the fool because of the Cross cling to the Gospel of Christ with urgency (Isa. 55:6; 1 Cor. 1;18-31).

Paul also tells us what it is like to be one who is reconciled. First, the reconciled multiply reconciliation as "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). Reconciliation is Cruciformity: a life of Christ-imitating self-sacrifice which is a libation poured out for the reconciliation of others. Secondly, ambassadors exercise their duty by becoming like Christ—disparaged, disenfranchised, disdained, and distrusted—that others might have every opportunity to cling to the same reconciliation and become ambassadors with us as brothers and sisters.

In this season of reflection and prayerful contemplation, we consider what it means for God to so love the world as to give his only Son and what it means to be one who believes in the Son (Jn. 3:16). Do we despise the cross, or do we wear it with joy, like Christ, for whom we are ambassadors unto the world (Heb. 12:2)?

*Lord Jesus, may you reconcile our hearts to you today that we too may be ambassadors for your reconciliation, one to another as brothers and sisters in you before the Father, God Almighty. Amen.*

# FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

## MATTHEW 6:16-21

### EXAMINE THE INTENTIONS OF YOUR HEART

*"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Think back with me to a time when you desperately wanted to fit in with the crowd. What would you have done at that moment to fit in? Maybe you wanted something from the same brand that everyone else had, maybe you tried to throw in a couple of jokes to be a part of the conversation, or maybe you agreed to add more work to your schedule to seem more cooperative and win those people over. I don't know about you, but when I have tried to win people over this way, it didn't ever seem to last very long before I found myself feeling like I had to do it again.

Today's Scripture is Matthew 6:16-21, which is a passage that is a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In the first three verses (16-18) Jesus is telling the people that when they fast, they should not make it obvious that they are doing so. Instead, he wants the people to dress and act as they usually would, and not draw extra attention to themselves. In the second three verses (19-21), Jesus is telling the people to not store up treasures in this world that will pass away, but instead to store up treasures in heaven that will last an eternity.

In these verses, Jesus is calling the people there at the Sermon on the Mount, and he is calling us now, to be aware of the intentions of our hearts. Firstly, Jesus is calling the people to be aware of their intentions as they fasted. Were they doing it to honor God, or to receive praise from others? Secondly, Jesus calls the people to be aware of the treasures that they are storing in their hearts. Will those treasures fade and be destroyed, or will they be everlasting? How are these treasures affecting the desires of their hearts?

During this season of Lent, may we pause and examine the intentions of our own hearts and actions— leaving behind our own personal desires for the things that we want or for pleasing the crowd, in order that we might pursue God's desire for our lives and the treasures he has in store for us.

*Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times when my heart has strayed from you and your will for me. Help me to make you the most important treasure of my heart and my life. In your name, Amen.*

**Sarah Zirkel**

Master of Divinity/Master of Business Administration Student  
San Jose, Costa Rica

S A T U R D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 5

# PSALM 51:1-17

## PURSUING GOD

*"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."*

I remember growing up in church as a child, sitting in the pew at my small church and being very confused with what was going on. I was so confused as to why the pastor kept talking about Lent and it being a good thing to practice and live in. I thought, "Why is this guy telling me to practice living in dryer lint? I am so confused! That cannot be comfortable!"

Lent is often perceived as a time of giving something up or fasting from something because that is what we do. Sometimes we become confused about what Lent truly is, like I was. Lent is a time when we are able to really think about the separation which sin causes in our relationship with God and realize how much Jesus did when he mended this separation on the Cross. Lent is a time to remember the suffering of Jesus on the Cross and to choose sacrifices in our lives in order to become more like Christ. Psalm 51:1-17 is a great example of how to pursue Christ during the season of Lent.

During this season we allow ourselves to live into the change which the Lord calls us to. He calls us to live a life of holiness and union with him. Our lives are the sacrifice we are giving back to the Lord at this time. As we see in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Let's follow in the footsteps of Paul and realize we are broken people in need of a Savior and give back to God what is already his: ourselves. In this Lenten season, let us pursue God by giving up things which draw us away from God.

*Pray Psalm 51:10 (NIV): "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

**Kyle Hodge**  
Master of Divinity Student  
Abilene, Texas



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26  
GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7

THE TREE OF LOVE

*"And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'"*

The reading for this first Sunday of Lent takes us back to the biblical narrative that provides the foundational illustration of Humankind's separation from God—the failure of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There are so very many understandings, interpretations, and applications of this familiar story!

But as I have reflected on the Scripture, my thoughts have been captured by a simple reality that for some reason I had never focused on before: Humankind's failure and disobedience in the garden did not take an all-knowing God by surprise. The Gospel was not a reactive response to an event God did not expect but it was in His heart and mind even before he created humans.

As my wife and I decorated our Christmas tree this year, we commented that the lights and ornaments would be a real "temptation" for our 18-month-old grandson. And it was indeed a temptation he could not resist! Knowing with near certainty that our grandson would fail to stay away from the tree, why did we put it up? The bottom-line reason is love...love for family, love for tradition, love for the Christmas truth, and love for our grandson despite his "failure."

Why did God create man when he knew that sin was inevitable? Why did he create you and me when he knew that we too would miss the mark? The answer is the same: Love. There are so many ways that God shows his love for us, but the ultimate expression of his love is the cross. Romans 5:8 (ESV) reminds us, "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

*Father God, in this season of reflection and repentance, reveal to us anew the great depth of your love.*

**Keith Bruce, DMin**  
Acting Director of San Antonio Campus  
Truett Seminary

M O N D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 27

# MATTHEW 4:1-11

## THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

*"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil."*

In Matthew 4, we find the Gospel writer tells us a story about Jesus entering the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. This was a time of testing where he was alone, and over time he even became hungry. Most of us do not relate very well to the idea of traversing the wilderness for 40-day periods to fast—I'm not sure I could even make it 40 minutes! However, we can still find some encouragement from this passage by paying special attention to a few key details.

First, notice Jesus was led by the Spirit, hinting there was purpose for this time. Although temptation comes from the devil and not the Lord, we serve a God who knows how to use temptation to make us stronger. James 1:3 tells us how temptation can lead to perseverance, making our faith more consistent. Certainly, this is a wonderful thing to desire, and by remembering that our Lord also faced temptation, we can take courage knowing he has felt what we feel in those times.

Second, it is important to notice how Jesus responds to temptation. Each time, Jesus quotes Scripture back to the devil. This is such a simple and yet powerful strategy. When we face temptation, it ought to be God's Word which we go running to. It is in dwelling on his Word that we truly find the strength to endure.

Lastly, the most important detail in this passage hides in plain sight, especially if you are familiar with the passage. This glaring detail is found in the truth that Jesus is victorious over temptation. There is not a Christian alive today who has not battled with temptation and yet come up short. The good news of course, is that we worship a Savior who did not.

*Lord, help me to remember that you sustain, preserve, and strengthen us in trial and temptation. Please provide what is needed for me to remain faithful to you. Amen.*

**Nathan McEndree**

Master of Divinity, Dec. 2022

Watauga, Texas

T U E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 8  
ROMANS 5:12-16

A SHARE IN HIS LIFE

*"Sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned...  
But the free gift is not like the offense."*

Paul opens this passage with "therefore," so what he tells us here is following and drawing on his statements that we have been justified through faith, that we have peace and hope in Christ, and that we have been reconciled to God. In light of that reconciliation, Paul reminds us of our sin and that death has come to us on account of that sin. However, he doesn't stop there. He tells us that we had no guilt of sin until we were given the law, but we were still dead even without that guilt. So, even if we are not guilty of sin, we are still dead because of it, but the gift which we have received by Christ has brought us justification and new life.

Sin, then, is more than a transgression or guilt, according to most concordances, the Greek word for sin, "ἁμαρτία," means "to be without a share in." So, the problem of humanity which Christ came to address was not merely that we had disobeyed and needed to be forgiven, or that we had a debt and needed it paid, but also that we had no share in God. This may be what has brought us death, As John 1:4 says, "in [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of all people," so if we have no share in him, we do not have his life either. Christ, then, did not come to merely forgive us of our guilt, but to give us a share in his life and restore our relationship with God.

*Lord, help us to move beyond our guilt and offenses, enable us to seek after you, to worship and serve you, and to faithfully engage in a relationship with you full of peace, hope, love, and life.*



W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 1  
ROMANS 5:17-19

MUCH MORE SURELY

*"... much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."*

My family recently started playing this game called Dominion. It is a long-haul game, and you don't know who wins until the very end. You play the best you can and hope you collect enough points at the end.

Sometimes in life, we get overwhelmed by circumstances. We see things working against us, and sometimes we are the ones working against ourselves. We don't always know what the right move is. We make mistakes. We don't know how things will turn up in the end.

The Scripture passage today is a helpful reminder from Paul that the end is not up to us. The work of the cross redeems us all: Jew and Gentile, man and woman, wealthy and rich, etc. We live in the hope of that which was accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though we miss the mark in our human condition, we are not abandoned to live out these consequences. "Much more surely" we receive "the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" because of Christ's obedience.

While the trespass of man led to death's dominion, Jesus answered with an abundance of grace and righteousness.

When trespassing led to condemnation, Jesus' act of righteousness led to justification and life.

When disobedience led many to exist as sinners, Christ's obedience allowed many to be made righteous.

For today, remember that the end is not up to you. We get to live in the "much more surely" state because our King Jesus is the true victor.

*Almighty God, thank you for this gift of life. Help me to remember that the end is not up to me. All I have I give to you with thanksgiving and praise. Amen.*

**Jordann McMahan**

Master of Divinity Student  
Richmond, Virginia

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

# PSALM 32:1-2

## PREMIUM AMENITIES

*"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit."*

Recently I discovered that my gym offers premium amenities. They are extra spaces and activities offered as a bonus to the weight room. I had been a member of the gym for a few years and had not heard about this.

I asked the attendant at the front desk about access to these current and upcoming amenities. I wanted to know how much it would cost me, and how I could gain access. He swiped my access card, looked at me, smiled, and said, "You already have access with your membership. The amenities are included." I discovered the membership I was paying for granted me access to premium amenities that I was unaware of.

In our text today, David, the writer of this psalm, is expressing his joy about premium amenities he has discovered in his relationship with God. This psalm is about healing after forgiveness. David confesses his sin hoping for forgiveness, only to discover forgiveness comes with premium amenities. He says blessed or happy are those that get this forgiveness because it is compassionate. Forgiveness wasn't earned, it was given. He is happy because God's forgiveness covers his sin. Not only does God wipe my slate clean, but God also seals my record. This forgiveness does not keep count. There is no running total in heaven for the mistakes that we have made. Finally, it does not corrupt. It draws me close to God. It doesn't push me away.

The gift of this season is these premium amenities come as a package we did not even pay for. The Crucifixion gave us this kind of forgiveness. It is a forgiveness with premium amenities in our relationship with God.

*Lord, help me to receive your forgiveness and all of the benefits that come with it. Let your forgiveness draw me closer to you. Amen.*

**Ralph. S. Emerson**  
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Fort, Worth, TX

FRIDAY, MARCH 3  
PSALM 32:3-5

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

*"I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the guilt of my sin."*

When we keep our sin and our mistakes to ourselves, it can eat away at us emotionally, mentally, and sometimes even physically. Whether it be a small embarrassing mistake or a large failure, we are not designed to hide it away inside. It is because of love that the Holy Spirit will rest on us and bring conviction. Imagine your father's hand on your shoulder, causing you to pause. He longs to save you from being sucked dry by guilt and shame. What a privilege to confess our sin and our transgressions directly to God!

David knew God's forgiveness. As New Testament believers, we know forgiveness comes through the blood of Jesus shed for each of us. Notice that David writes that God forgave the guilt of his sin. While the guilt is forgiven, our failings often leave a mess we need to clean up. If we have hurt other people, we need to be ready to make reparations and graciously accept the fallout of our mistakes.

Receiving forgiveness and the relief from guilt empowers us to make those repairs and move forward. Ask God to reveal any weighty things you have tried to hide (even from yourself) so that you may find freedom through confession.

*Lord, help me see clearly my sin, so I may confess each one, receive your forgiveness, and live free from the weight of guilt. Amen.*

S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 4

# PSALM 32:6-11

## WHILE YOU STILL MAY BE FOUND

*"Surely in a rush of great waters, they shall not reach..."*

Verse six starts with a shift of perspective. Previously in the Psalm, we see that David was overcome by his sins. He had become withered and dry. But in verse five there is a turn: he acknowledged and confessed his sins before God and was forgiven. David opened his sins bare before the great healer and redeemer and found deliverance. Now, in verse six, he calls all people to do the same.

The scene is dire. The great waters are rushing. The sinner is soon to be overcome by their sins. Will they call out while he may still be found?

David's description prompts us to look at our own lives. Are there sins in your life that you are attempting to sweep under the rug? God will not shame you. He desires to be your hiding place, your preserver, your deliverer. Better yet, merciful deliverance is not where our God's salvation ends. His grace goes with us. When we open ourselves to God's forgiveness, he lovingly surrounds us and counsels us, he watches over us and instructs us.

God offers you forgiveness and deliverance right now. Call upon the Lord while he may be found.

*Holy Spirit, help me confess my sins so that there may be nothing keeping me from your presence. Then, Lord, instruct me to walk in your grace so I may rejoice in your forgiveness and steadfast love.*

**Joshua Wagner**

Master of Divinity Student  
Port Orchard, Washington

# SUNDAY, MARCH 5

## JOHN 3:1-17

### FEAR AND REBIRTH

*"He came to Jesus at night..."*

Nicodemus meets with Jesus because of the miracles; he gives credit to Jesus stating he knows Jesus to be "a teacher from God, for no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him (v. 2). But there is an interesting thought here: he came to Jesus at night. We might infer that he was interested and also afraid. Fear kept Nicodemus from meeting with Jesus in the daylight. John continually utilizes a motif of darkness and light—walking in the light, be in the light, etc. —and juxtaposes it with darkness: the darkness of night that Nicodemus comes to Jesus.

It begs the question: "What makes you afraid to come to Jesus?" Fear is like a hole in the heart that prevents it from being filled with the love of Jesus. Fear keeps you from embracing the new life Jesus has for you. What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of Jesus asking you to give up more than you are willing to sacrifice?

Jesus does ask some crazy things of us, like being born again. It is an incredulous statement for people who are not followers of Christ. It sounds as ridiculous to non-believers as it did to Nicodemus.

If physical rebirth is impossible, is spiritual renewal any more feasible?

Jesus shifts the kingdom of God away from what we do to what God is doing. The wind blows wherever it pleases, you hear the sound but cannot tell where it came from, and so it is with everyone born of the Spirit. Jesus is stating that redemption, new birth, or rebirth is a work of the Spirit, not of what we do. God so loved the world that God sent his Son not to condemn, but to save.

*Our Father, may we fully embrace the love that sends the Son, that gives us rebirth of the Spirit, and overcome our fear this day and every day. Amen.*



MONDAY, MARCH 6  
GENESIS 12:1-4

GREAT AND MIGHTY THINGS

*"I will make of you a great nation,  
and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."*

Today's Scripture shows us the command given to Abram to leave his home and the promise the Lord made if he did so. The Lord promised he would make Abram into a great nation with many blessings. It is important to note that the people the Lord decided to choose for this great command and promise. We know from the previous chapter in Genesis that Abram's wife Sarai was barren, so how is it possible for the Lord to promise to turn them into a great nation if they cannot reproduce an heir? This is the power of the Lord shining through. He chose these people so that it could be undeniable that the Lord was at work in their lives by making the impossible happen.

In this time of Lent, is there anything in your life that you know the Lord is calling you to do but you are hesitant because you do not think it is possible? What is holding you back from believing that the Lord can make the impossible happen? I want to challenge you to sit with the Lord and truly take in what he is calling you to do. This calling could be as simple as going across the street to befriend your neighbor or as major as picking your family up to move to a new country in order to follow the Lord's plan for your life. Don't let this Old Testament story of Abram just be a story, let it focus your thoughts on the idea that the Lord can do great and mighty things in your life.

*Lord, help me to discern your calling for me. Reveal to me great and mighty things. Amen.*

# T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 7

## ROMANS 4:1-5

### FILLED PLANNERS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

*"But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness."*

Growing up, I was taught to believe in the value of hard work. Being an efficient and effective worker was what made me a good person in society. Although this mindset has given me some good reviews from managers and professors alike, it has also given me tremendous bouts with anxiety and certainly has affected my belief in Christ.

One of the beautiful things about Lent is that I can recognize the sacrifice of Jesus and what it truly means to me personally. The Apostle Paul, additionally, gives me comfort during this season in Romans 4. Paul talks about the Patriarch Abraham, and the faulty belief that it was his works that gave him righteousness.

Paul rebuts this belief in Romans 4:1-5, where he claims that Abraham's righteousness came from his faith, not his works. He gives a thesis statement of this passage when he quotes Genesis 15:6 in verse 3, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3b NRSV). Paul's claim is that, according to Scripture, Abraham's belief in Yahweh was the cause of his righteousness, not merely following the Law.

We can see, through Paul and Abraham, that God acknowledges faith over works. As I have grown in my religious thinking, faith was something that came a bit easier than "proper" works. For this Lenten season, I can rely on my faith in the Savior, rather than the checklist I make for myself.

While it is easy for us to value works over our trust in God, my challenge to myself as I continue looking towards Easter is that I truly treasure my faith, that I rely on it like Abraham did, like Moses did, and like Paul did. Paul's message to us in Romans reminds us that our God is one who values us as people, not as employees. Praise be to God.

*Yahweh Adonai, forgive me for my self-made label of being a workhorse. Light my path towards utter faith and trust in you, and in you alone. Amen.*

**Nathan Patzke**  
Master of Divinity Student  
Fort Worth, Texas

W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 8

# ROMANS 4:13-17

## BE THOU MY VISION

*"For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith."*

"My Lord, will you sit with me for a while? Please lend me your ear and acknowledge your servant's cry. Have you noticed that my pace has slowed? I see the wrinkles around my face and on my hands deepening. My energy level is a fraction of what it used to be. My eyes have grown weak and with them my vision. It pains me to look at Sarah. She will never admit it, but I know that her bones ache and she is tired. It pains me to look at the stars. They are a reminder of what you said but they are also a tease that taunts me with each passing day. It pains me to look forward to your promise because the wait is draining. Please know that I still believe, Lord. I have faith in every word you have spoken, but I need your help to endure."

I can imagine one of Abraham's prayers sounding a little bit like this. Even the "father of all who believe" had to have grown weary with each passing year of his unchanged circumstance. God promised to make Abraham the "father of many nations" in Genesis 12:1-3 before the Mosaic Law was established. This means that it was a covenant made based on God's grace, not on any rule that Abraham could have followed. His faith was a worship-filled response to the One who had shown himself to be faithful in their personal relationship with each other. As the celebration of Jesus' resurrection approaches, we can rest knowing that our God has not changed; his promises are still yes and amen. As we hold on to them, let us not lose sight of the Promise Keeper in the midst of our wait. Our faith rises when we are close enough to know his heart.

*Lord Jesus, today I ask that you please show me your heart as you speak to mine. Let faith and hope rise up in me as I grow closer in relationship with you.*

**Melanie Pacheco**  
Master of Divinity Student  
West Orange, New Jersey

T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 9

# PSALM 121:1-4

## ASK GOD FOR HELP

*"I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth."*

In Psalm 121, we encounter the psalmist at the base of the mountain. The mountain symbolizes a great conflict or struggle. While looking at this struggle, the psalmist considered where he might find help. However, the psalmist does not leave his readers in suspense. He quickly confesses, "my help comes from the LORD." It is only natural to wonder where our help might come when we are in great trouble. The wise person is like the psalmist, confessing they need help. Do you need help?

What would it be like to ask God for help with your struggles today? What would you say?

After stating that his help comes from the LORD, the psalmist proclaims several things about God. The psalmist offers us several promises to claim. When we are in trouble, we can feel like we are slipping. The psalmist says God will not allow our feet to be moved. When we are in trouble, we feel like we are being attacked. The psalmist says God will not stop protecting us, even while we sleep. There are times during a conflict when the situation is unsteady, but God holds us secure. Likewise, there will be times when we need rest, but God does not rest from protecting us. Lastly, the psalmist reveals that this prophecy is not only for an individual, but for the entire community of faith.

So, I ask you again, what would it be like to ask God for help with your struggles today? What would you say?

*God, we confess that you are Lord of heaven and earth, and we ask that you steady our feet during times of struggle and protect us in times of vulnerability. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Ethan Nicholson**  
Master of Divinity Student  
Paris, Texas

F R I D A Y , M A R C H 1 0  
P S A L M 1 2 1 : 5 - 8

PROTECTOR, SAVIOR, REDEEMER—NOW AND FOREVERMORE

*"The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore."*

As someone who did not grow up in the church, I never understood what the Lenten season was about. I had heard the word in movies, but I never understood its significance. As an adult, I have come to learn of its value and importance.

Reflection.

Reflection is one of the hardest skills for anyone to learn. However, this skill is one that gives us an opportunity to remember not just who we are, but where we have been, and, even more so, who our God is.

In Psalm 121: 5-8 we hear the second half of a song written as a reflection of God. The author is reflecting on the ways in which we are protected and kept by God. Not only in the good times, but in the bad times as well. This psalm shows us that God is always with us through thick and thin, protecting us the way a parent protects a child. It is also through this reflection of who God is that the author shows us what it looks like to keep our gaze fixed upon the Lord.

In this day-and-age, it is easy to get swept up in the chaos of schedules, responsibilities, and obligations; but how often do we stop to reflect on who God is, what he has done for us, and the vastness of his everlasting love? Whether you are reminded of a time when the Lord allowed you to get home safely from a long trip, provided peace during a time of great turmoil, or brought reconciliation to a situation that looked impossible, God has always protected you in some way. If nothing immediately comes to mind, reflect on Jesus, the Son of God. Through his life, death, and resurrection we have been reconciled with God—our protector, savior, and redeemer, now and forevermore.

*God, thank you for being my protector and for doing the things I could not, no matter the situation. Help me to reflect on who you are daily, so I can keep my gaze upon you always. Amen.*

**Brittany Myers-LeClear**

Master of Divinity/Master of Science in Education Student  
Sacramento, California



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

# JOHN 17:1-9

## THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE

*"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

In John 2, before he turns the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Jesus tells his mother, Mary, "My hour has not yet come," whereas in John 17, Jesus at last exclaims to his Heavenly Father, "The hour has come."

Jesus goes on to give a definition of eternal life as intimate knowledge of the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom God sent. Having asked God to glorify him so that the Son might glorify the Father, he reflects on the ways he has glorified the Father on earth and made God's name known. What might we learn about prayer from the way Jesus prays in this passage? In what physical posture is Jesus praying?

In verse 5, Jesus asks the Father to glorify him in God's own presence "with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed." John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What might this reveal about the Trinity? What images come to mind when you think of the Trinity?

In this season of Lent, what do you desire from God? What might God desire from you?

*Father God, thank you for sending your son Jesus through whom you have given us eternal life: intimate knowledge of you. We eagerly await your hour to come again that we might be united in eternal glory. We love you, Lord. Amen.*

**Madeleine L. Svehla**  
Master of Divinity Student  
Morrison, Colorado

# SUNDAY, MARCH 12

## EXODUS 17:1-7

### THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE

*"I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.  
Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."*

Several years ago, I had the privilege of travelling to the Sinai desert. I can remember as we made our way through the desert in our plush van, the landscape was stunning and sparse. However, it wasn't until we stepped off the bus that the full context of today's reading came to life for me. It was a mid-May morning, but already, temperatures soared well past 120 degrees. The sun was so scorching, we were told to wear hats to protect our scalps. As I stared out at the vista that stretched endlessly before me, heat glimmered and emanated off a terrain of blood red rock and sand. Heat took the breath out of my body. Heat became a painful, inescapable, and perilous reality. "Huh," I thought to myself. "So, this is why the Israelites grumbled before the LORD."

In that moment, my understanding of the travails of forty years of wilderness wanderings was upended. Previously, I had dismissed the grumbings of God's people as moral failure. Standing where they stood on that May morning, I understood their groans as the despair that arises when true human need collides with justified fear. I could not help but wonder who I would be if I could not retreat to the security of an air-conditioned van. I could not help but wonder who I wasn't because I could.

In the inescapable terrain of wilderness wanderings, God comes to his people. In a barren landscape absent of resources, God brings forth living water. At Massah and Meribah, God's people experienced God's presence in their midst. God was not only present in memory, but revealed himself in living, flowing, abiding presence. Life from death. Hope from despair.

*God, though our lives may seem barren and absent of hope, we confess you as the source of all being, light, and life. Amen.*

**Jenny Howell, PhD**  
Director of the Program for  
Theology, Ecology, and Food Justice  
Truett Seminary

M O N D A Y , M A R C H 1 3

# JOHN 4:5-15

## JESUS: THE SOLUTION, NOT A SUBSTITUTE!

*"...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."*

One of the universal experiences of human beings is thirst. Every human shares the design, desire, and determination for hydration. Our bodies and brains send signals that warn us of our deprivation, and we in turn respond by seeking out a drink. The reality of thirst is that it is both inevitable and inconvenient. Often this causes us to seek satisfaction in whatever might be available to curb the strength of our appetite. Unfortunately, our insatiable desire can lead us to rely not on the solution but substitutes—substitutes that temporarily satisfy our feeling but leave us unfulfilled. It is not until our bodies are replenished with water, the very thing that helps to make us who we are, that our thirst is truly satisfied.

In our passage, Jesus reveals his inextricable connection to the human experience. Much like us, experiencing the weariness of life resulting in his need for rest and replenishment, he asks a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Unlike us, however, we see that Jesus' intentions transcend the temptation to meet our needs with substitutes and provides for us the solution.

Like the woman Jesus encounters, we become so reliant on substitutes that the solution may seem impractical or impossible. However, Jesus' response proves how relentless the love of God is, as he persists in pursuit of this woman's freedom from temporary relief. This season reminds us that the brokenness of this world causes us to experience the inevitable longing for a drink of something that can satisfy us, something that can save us and satiate our thirst for acceptance and absolution. Jesus, in turn, offers us himself, the living water, the very thing that makes us who we are, and he gives us connection to a loving and forgiving God.

As we turn our desires away from the substitutes and toward the solution, may our appetites be forever changed, and our request be like that of the woman Jesus encountered as she stated simply, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not be thirsty."

*Lord, thank you for providing for us the living water that we both desire and need.*

**Robert White**

Master of Divinity Student  
Fort Worth, Texas

T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 4

# JOHN 4:16-26

## TRUE WORSHIP

*"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

Sometimes our focus is shaped by our culture. Where is the correct place to worship? We can surely focus on questions like this out of sincerity, or perhaps because we want to be right. Or maybe we want to get it right.

Consider the reason Jesus asks this woman about her husband. We know that he already knew all about her life situation. How she responded would reveal who she was and her willingness to engage. In this passage, we read that this woman was truthful, and Jesus named it as so. Even when exposed by Jesus, she did not hide but took the opportunity to engage deeper. According to Jesus, true worshippers "worship in spirit and truth." This woman was focused on the place of worship instead of the how of worship. Jesus redirected her focus by describing who true worshippers are not where they are.

So, what about us? Who are we in our worship of God? Even now in the middle of this season of Lent, how are we worshipping? And who are we worshipping? Maybe it's not about these other particulars where we often focus. Are there areas of your worship in which you already know you have lost focus? Jesus invites us to consider it's about who we are and how we worship. Could we be more open and truthful about our life? Are we willing to go deeper in our worship of God? When we are confronted by the reality of our lives, do we continue to engage with the One that already knows all things?

*Lord Jesus, thank you that you continue to engage me. Help me today to recognize and be open to your promptings to inform and correct my focus of living as a true worshipper of you. Amen.*

**Sejana Yoo**

Master of Divinity Student  
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W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 5

# JOHN 4:27-38

## PERSUASIVE AMBIGUITY

*"Could this be the Messiah?"*

This Lent, you might have to answer some awkward questions. The ashen cross smeared across your forehead at the bank or your half-hearted refusal of a cup of coffee at work might mark you as distinct. These ancient Christian practices—fasting and Ash Wednesday—are marks of someone who has been with Jesus. Questions are sure to follow.

In John 4, we are beholden to a woman marked by her encounter with Jesus, and she was remarkable in this: the first evangelist was both ambiguous and persuasive.

*"Then, ...the woman went back to the town and said, 'Come, [and] see... Could this be the Messiah?' So, they came out of the town and made their way toward him."*

I have been wonderfully winsome, at times, in response to questions about my association with Jesus. More often, I have been unbearably awkward.

In beholding the first evangelist, I'm struck by this: it was neither her certainty nor precision that made the difference. Still, many of us often feel paralyzed by our lack of ability to provide the exact-right words. Often, we avoid the possibility altogether.

Jesus, knowing our frame, (in a masterclass on teaching distracted pupils) immediately riffs off the disciple's absentminded attentiveness to food (31-38). Bringing them back to the lesson to be learned from the woman at the well, he assures them that the harvest is plentiful.

*"My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."*

It's *his* work. The saying, "One reaps and another sows" is a true spiritual sentiment according to Jesus. He said, "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for."

Jesus lets us in on a liberating secret: the hard work is done. Grab a sickle, friend. All that is needed is enthusiastic wonder at his presence, to marvel, to speak, even if we can't fully articulate.

*Dear Lord, I long to encounter you; grant me that joyful wonder at your presence and the courage to point others to the same.*

### **Michael Distefano**

MDiv Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary ('17)  
Master of Arts in Contextual Witness and Innovation  
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Houston, Texas



T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 1 6

# JOHN 4:39-42

## KNOWN BY JESUS

*"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."*

Traditionally, the story of the Samaritan woman has painted her as a sinner and has understood that when Jesus told her everything she had ever done, it referred to her sins. Yet nowhere in this chapter does it say that. The first time this traditional understanding was challenged for me was in a sermon by my pastor, Rev. Dr. Malcolm Foley. In his sermon, Dr. Foley suggested that when Jesus spoke of her many husbands, he spoke not of her adultery but of her abandonment by each of these men. Jesus knew the story of this woman's life.

He knew her loneliness and the tears she had cried. He knew her longing to belong and the many times she found disappointment instead. He knew of the kindness she had shown to others, the sacrifices she had made. He knew of her conversations, what she said and what was said to her. And yes, he knew of her sins. This woman, who for us is unnamed, was known by Jesus. This knowing caused her to believe in him.

Like the other Samaritans from that city, we hear her story. And like them, we hear his word for ourselves. Jesus speaks into our stories. He knows us and everything we have ever done. Their words echo across the centuries as we too exclaim that Jesus is the Savior of the world, of our world, and of each of our stories.

*Jesus, you know me, and you love me. Let this be my testimony. Let this be the reason not to hide from who I am or what I have done or has been done to me. I rest in your unfailing love. Amen.*

**Mollie Callahan**

Master of Arts in Christian Ministry Student  
Woodway, Texas

F R I D A Y , M A R C H 1 7  
P S A L M 9 5

LET US WORSHIP!

*"O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!"*

Our God is the same in all times and places. God is not some regional deity sequestered to specific people in an isolated time and place. God is eternal, set apart, and yet near. Who is this God that we might be invited to become his people? Who are we to step into his presence? We are his creation, lovingly formed by the hands that painted the stars, given breath by the breath that spoke all things into existence. When presented with the majesty of this God there is but one option, as the psalmist says: to fall to our knees in worship.

And yet there are times when we have neglected this option, times when each one of us have hardened our hearts to God and failed to elevate him to the rightful place in worship. And still, God came, lowering himself to be human. Not to subjugate, though we are his subjects. Not to bring wrath, though he is our judge. Not to leave us in our sin, but to show us mercy. Christ came to be our salvation, that we might not be left in the wilderness, but be invited into his rest, that we might be a generation that listens to his loving voice and responds with adoration and worship.

In this time of Lent, hanging between the acknowledgment of mortality on Ash Wednesday and the celebration of eternal victory on Easter, we are presented again with an option: to turn our hearts from our Creator, or to worship our Savior.

*Father, Son, Holy Spirit, help me today to joyfully worship you as you deserve, as the object of my every affection. Be exalted in my life.*

S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 1 8

# ROMANS 5:1-11

## PRAISING GOD THROUGH THE TRIALS

*"And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope..."*

Living the Christian life is definitely not easy at times. It certainly was not easy for me on my high school mission trip when I tried to invite someone to church only to have that person's door slammed right in front of me. It is also certainly not easy when there are a million things on my to-do list while only having one task checked off.

Despite the challenges we face on a regular basis, Romans 5 is an important reminder of who we are in Christ and how we can continue to grow in the midst of our daily trials. Paul shows us that when we are grounded in faith, we have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). While we may suffer through the challenges of this earthly life, God remains faithful even through our trials and tribulations, and we can always find peace in Jesus Christ.

Paul explains in verses 3-5 that this earthly "suffering" will ultimately grow our endurance, character, and hope. Trials can be exceedingly painful, and sometimes life can seem hopeless in the moment, but Paul shows us that we should praise God through these challenges because we have an eternal hope through our salvation.

Christ followers have this eternal hope, because God loves us so much that he was willing to send his son, Jesus to die on a cross for our sins. When we put our faith in Christ, he gives us a hope that will never be shaken. There is something so much greater on the other side of our sufferings, and for that, God is worthy of our praise. May we give him praise as we face the challenges in front of us today!

*Father, thank you for the hope and peace that you give through your son, Jesus. Give me a desire to put my faith in you today. Amen.*

**Trevor Hart**

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SUNDAY, MARCH 19  
EPHESIANS 5:8-14

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

*"Walk as children of light..."*

From asleep to awake. From darkness to light. From death to life.

These are central metaphors to describe the beauty and mystery of the Christian life, and they stand front and center in this passage.

As a historian, I'm particularly struck by the different senses of time conveyed throughout these verses. There is a sense of the past ("you were once darkness") and of the present ("now you are light") and the future—a call to "live as children of light," a promise that "Christ will shine on you."

We know our selves, it seems, through the contrast between past and present, between who we once were and who we now are. And yet, knowing who we are is not so much a final destination we've already fully arrived at, but instead a gift bestowed on us that we live into. It is a future orientation that breaks into our present. Live as children of light, the Scripture commands.

Theologian Howard Thurman liked to use another metaphor to make this point. Christians have been given "a crown over their heads that they are always trying to grow tall enough to wear."

Importantly, the resurrection self that we become in Christ does not eliminate our histories or past selves. Instead, it redeems and transforms them. "It's the body with scars that is resurrected," James K.A. Smith writes in *How to Inhabit Time*. "It's the me with a history that is redeemed, forgiven, graced, liberated."

We might not always see this clearly. Sometimes we forget. Sometimes we are blinded to this reality. But when our eyes are opened, the light that is Christ in us becomes clear once again.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for bringing me from darkness to light; help me to live today as a child of light. Amen.*

**Paul Emory Putz, PhD**

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Truett Seminary

M O N D A Y , M A R C H 2 0

# JOHN 9:1-12

## THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

*"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

In the ancient world, there was a deeply imbedded cultural belief that suffering was the direct result of sin. While it is certainly true that our transgressions can result in dire consequences, this generalized assumption is not always accurate. We need look no further than the crucifixion of Christ to see that this belief does not always hold its ground. The disciples' question about the blind man is innocent enough, but Jesus desired to show them something greater.

Jesus' response must have come as a surprise to his disciples. Their cultural assumption had been turned on its head. This man's blindness was not the result of sin but was an opportunity for God's power to be displayed. Jesus' proclamation that he is the light of the world has many layers. He advises his disciples that it is in the daytime, in the light, that they are to do the work of the Father. In one sense Jesus' words are an affirmation that our good deeds are only done in and through him. However, it is interesting that he makes this statement in regard to this man's healing. It is as if Jesus is saying that in order for this man to see, he needs the light. This is more than a physical healing; it is a spiritual awakening.

There is no sight without light, and there is no spiritual regeneration without the light of the world. John writes in his opening chapter that it is by this light, Jesus, that humankind finds God's invitation to become his children. Lastly, there is the matter of the mud. Certainly, Jesus could have spoken a simple word and the man would have been healed, but instead he touches him. Jesus' miraculous ministry is never without personal intimacy. As we reflect on this story, may we never forget this truth.

*Lord Jesus, help us see those who you would have us serve, let us be lights in this world as you are the light of the world. Amen.*

**Jared McGuire**  
Master of Divinity Student  
Deer Park, Texas

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

# JOHN 9:13-23

## LOOK FOR THE LORD

*"Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.'"*

After being healed and having his life changed, the man born blind was surrounded with everyone's questions. Was he who he said he was? How did this happen? Why did it happen? After answering with simple truth and sincerity, the man born blind was brought before the Pharisees. His answers remained simple, but the Pharisees were distracted by extraneous details of the situation.

The attitude of the Pharisees, alongside the clear and simple answers of the man born blind, catches our attention. The Pharisees refused to believe that the true Savior would heal on the Sabbath. Therefore, they chose to believe the man born blind had never been blind, resorting instead to questioning his parents, who were not even present for the miracle. Instead of leading with hearts of joy, the Pharisees brought doubts and fear into the story of a miracle.

When do we find ourselves behaving like the Pharisees? When do we miss the work of the Lord in others' lives, and even in our own, because of what we think we know?

Our attitude should not be one of skepticism. Look for the Lord in all things. When we do find the Lord in our lives and in the lives of others, rejoicing and praise should follow, not the skepticism and legalism of the Pharisees. Let us simply say what the Lord has done in our lives, reflecting the simple answers given by the man born blind to the Pharisees.

*Lord, let us see where you are at work in our lives in the lives of others. Make our hearts soft to your amazing plans. We wish to see what you do! Amen.*

**Liz Sutton**

Master of Arts in Christian Ministry Student  
Georgetown, Texas



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

# JOHN 9:24-34

## BE OPEN TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

*"The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing!  
You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.'"*

Highlighted in the religiosity and critical questions of the Pharisees, our desires for God can grow into a persistent system of pattern and pragmatics. This habit often leaves us struggling when God engages with his people in new ways. As the Pharisees question the blind man, they are not inquiring about the expansiveness of God. Their questions do not seek the depth of miracles but instead the limits of faith. Uninterested in who God is, they only care for who God isn't. Ironically, the Pharisees' persistent pursuit of God leaves them spiritually blind to the Son.

Opting for the tradition of Moses, the Pharisees miss the originality of Jesus altogether. In seeking who they know God to be, they forgo a chance at learning what else a relationship with God can offer. While God's character remains constant, such consistency impacts divine creativity and passion in a way that fosters an unyielding and innovative pursuit of the human heart. God's willingness to dwell among flesh is perhaps the most creative of these endeavors. Through Jesus, God fully rectifies his relationship with creation, a feat Moses' teachings only partially fulfilled. Sometimes God's blessings look different because they are leading us into a deeper system of faith.

The man born blind points towards the kind of discipleship that comes with letting Jesus do more than what we expect. Touched by divine change, he does not question Jesus' authority but instead leans into the miracle. But how often do we overlook the miraculousness of today because it doesn't align with yesterday? Often, we put God on trial for not showing up the same as he has in the past. So, do we rejoice in God's creativity when He does the unexpected? Or do we allow our comfortable patterns to blind us from spiritual growth?

*Lord, thank you for pursuing us, your children, with unyielding love. Thank you for your son, Jesus, and the creativity of the Incarnation and Crucifixion. Help us as we live out this kind of love. Refresh our hearts and minds. Wash over us the kind of love that remains uncritical of your guidance. Guide us into your plan for our lives and lend us your creative love as we continue to seek those that do not yet know you. And in all these actions, may glory be to your son, Jesus. Amen.*

**Jack Mobley**  
Master of Divinity Student  
San Antonio, Texas

T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 2 3

# JOHN 9:35-41

## THE TRUE SIGHT OF CHRIST

*"Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.'"*

When you truly set your heart on believing in the Son of Man, then he will reveal himself to you. When Jesus reveals himself to you then you will be transformed in a way that those around you will desire for themselves.

Oftentimes, we go through life like the Pharisees who witnessed Jesus through the blind man. The Pharisees who claimed to be believers in Christ watched as he healed the blind man. They watched the blind man praise Jesus for the miracle that blessed him with sight. However, there was a disconnect. The blind man became transformed, which led to the true sight of Christ. As believers, our goal should be to see Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, in his truth.

"We do not want to follow the example of the Pharisees, blinding ourselves to the truth concerning Jesus Christ. Instead, when we see Jesus at work, we are invited to open our eyes and see who he is—the Messiah." Further, in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Jesus is the way, and he reveals this truth to the blind man in this story.

It is our goal as believers to let Jesus meet us where we are in humility and not be prideful when we claim to recognize him but do not recognize him through his works.

*God, allow us to recognize the works of your Son, Christ Jesus. Help us to not go through life with a prideful lens. Please open our eyes if we are blind. Reveal yourself to us and let others who may reject your Son witness his truth as well.*

**Madison Patton**  
Master of Divinity Student  
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F R I D A Y , M A R C H 2 4

# PSALM 23

## WITH US EVERY STEP

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."*

What a comforting thought!

For this reason, Psalm 23 has often been used and reflected on by many in challenging times. The passage reminds us that even when we are in the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord is with us, leading, protecting, and providing for us. Often, we would rather focus on the second part of the chapter, which showcases the blessings of peace in the midst of our enemies, an overflowing cup, goodness and mercy accompanying us throughout our life, and being able to dwell in the presence of God forever.

It is easy to crave these blessings, desiring a life of ease and, at times, trying to control the various aspects of our life so that we can avoid suffering. But blessings are not the focus of the psalmist's message. We see earlier in the passage (v. 4 -5) that the psalmist anticipates and has likely already walked through the valley of the shadow of death and engaged with his enemies. There is no guarantee of a free pass from suffering, but in the midst of it we can follow the lead of the psalmist and reflect and see the Lord himself leading us through it. He provides still waters, green pastures, and restoration. He walks with us through it all (v. 4).

Take a moment to reflect on how the Lord has led you to this place and how he has been at work through the hills and valleys of your life. How do you see the grace, presence, and forgiveness of God brought about by Christ's death actively working within your life today?

Knowing that the Lord is present and in control of the good and bad that we face, both in our past and in our future, we can surrender control of our lives to him with full assurance that he will walk with us through it all. As we approach Easter, let us look to Christ's example, in which he surrendered to the Father's direction and provision in his ministry and life.

*Father God, as I obediently step into today, help me to surrender control to you, remembering to trust your provision and that you will walk alongside me in both the green pastures and the valleys. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Makayla Dunkin**  
Master of Divinity Student  
Blaine, Washington

S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 2 5  
1 S A M U E L 1 6 : 1 - 1 3

CHOSEN, CALLED, AND EQUIPPED

*"The LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him, for this is the one.'"*

It is said that God does not call the qualified, but he qualifies the called. How many preparing for ministry can say, "Amen" to that statement? In ministry we are often asked to tell our call story. Call stories have many different beginnings. God calls his children from different times and places in life in service to him. Some may say "Why me?" or, "Why now?" Others will feel their calling and follow it and there are those that may fight the call along the way. When it is God who is making the call, you can follow him now, or follow him later. He knows the plan he has for those that are his chosen.

In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel is told by the Lord to go to Jesse of Bethlehem to anoint one of his sons as the king. After Jesse presents the sons that are his choice, Samuel finally meets David, the one that is God's choice. David is the youngest, the least likely to be chosen, but to God, he is the perfect choice. The Lord said, "Anoint him, for he is the one." God chose David for his heart and then equips him to be the chosen king of Israel.

As God equips us to serve him and to lead his flock, do we have the heart of David to be chosen and to accept God's call, following his lead for our lives? Are we prepared to shepherd his flock to be followers of the Savior? Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn 10:11). Jesus did this for all humankind. During this season of Lent, let everyone remember this as God equips us, those called to follow him.

*Lord God, Holy Spirit, prepare our hearts to follow Jesus Christ, and equip us to be followers and makers of disciples of him. Amen.*

# SUNDAY, MARCH 26

## EZEKIEL 37:1-14

### GRAVES WIDE OPEN

*"And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves  
and bring you up from your graves, O my people."*

Students sometimes wait until the week a ten-page paper is due before they begin writing, but their brain cannot get past the first two paragraphs. For others, from locking keys in the car, to an unexpected diagnosis, to the deep pit of suicidal ideation, I'm afraid there is a societal sense of entrapment, conforming us to anxiety and setting up for complacent lives.

There are graves of captivity all around us where every person, at some point, feels stuck either physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

"Life," as this world knows it, can sometimes take the life out of us. The Lord asks Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" The bones in the valley were so dry they were lifeless. But they were not hopeless. God was ready to breathe his miraculous power into them. Ezekiel answered and said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know." This is a common answer to so many of our questions: "Only God knows."

My favorite part of this Scripture passage is when the Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy and say, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" The dry bones represented Israel's spiritually dead condition. We can relate to this today in a personal way. Can dry bones hear? It sounds impossible. But isn't this the point where God comes in? Romans 10:17 says, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." The same Spirit that God breathed into Adam and Eve's nostrils, that descended the valley into these dead bones, and raised Jesus from his dusty grave is the same wind that can fling our graves wide open.

Rather than giving up when stuck in life, let us pray aloud and exclaim from our souls, "Life is found in you alone, 'O God...renew a steadfast spirit within me.' and I will live!" (Psalm 51:10)

*Dear Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Help us hear your voice amongst our anxious imaginations. We draw near today and wait for your Spirit to breathe new life into each area of our lives. Amen.*

MONDAY, MARCH 27  
ROMANS 8:6-11

RESURRECTION POWER

*"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you."*

Continuing a thought introduced in yesterday's devotional, imagine for a moment that you were the one standing at the center of the valley filled with dried bones as far as the eye could see. Now imagine what it must have felt like to witness those dried bones rise up, receive the breath of the Lord into their bodies, and be given a new hope and purpose. The majesty, the resurrection power, the faithful promise bestowed –how overwhelming would it be to witness such a thing? Paul in today's passage, Romans 8:6-11, calls us out of the valley into the present moment and tells us that we too get to participate in that same resurrection power.

Apart from Christ, our bodies are slaves to sin, bound by brokenness, and thus, hostile to God and destined for death. But in Christ, we have been called out of the grave and given a hope for the future.

How could it be that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead has made a home, a dwelling place, within our broken and mortal bodies? What does it look like for that same body to be redeemed and made new, used as a living sacrifice for the glory of God and the coming of his kingdom?

It means that by grace we get to call upon the name of Jesus and claim victory over the works of our flesh every day. It looks like living in the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and allowing that grace to overflow and impact every room we walk into and every person we meet.

*Spirit of the Living God, I declare the victory of Jesus Christ over my sinful mind and broken body. I ask that you give breath to these dry bones and raise me to life so that I may walk in the fullness of your glory and testify of your resurrection power. Amen.*



T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 2 8

# JOHN 11:1-16

## SEEK THE LORD FIRST

*"But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'"*

Two days. Two days is a weekend, 48 hours, or close to 3000 minutes. In that time, I could drive to my hometown to see my family, I could spend so much time at the lake that I would look like toast, or I could read a book on my never-ending list of suggested reading. In two days, I could travel to nearly any destination, given the right transportation—especially to see a dying friend. In fact, I would be willing to sacrifice many of the things I treasure—like rest, reading, sleep, or being outside—to have just a few more minutes with a person I love.

Jesus knew. Jesus knew what was quickly happening to Lazarus and he did not leave where he was. He didn't even weep, as far as we are told.

Jesus also didn't scold the disciples for not listening to him two days later when he said where they were going, nor was he frustrated when the disciples did not understand what Jesus meant by Lazarus falling asleep. He didn't even chide Thomas for his ironic, begrudging response to following him back to Judea. Instead, Jesus was patient. He heard from his Father and listened. He walked in the light and did not stumble, even in the face of a dying friend, a dangerous city, and friends who would not believe in him. His act of obedience was a testament to the disciples.

The confidence Jesus had in his Father in heaven came before the disciples could realize what was happening or the foreshadowing of what was to come. Jesus' faithfulness to his Father was far more valuable to him than any approval or understanding in this world. As we continue our week, let us seek the Lord first and may our priority be to obey him and honor him to the best of our ability.

*Lord, I am turning away from my desire for control and my desire to know more than I need to know. I thank you for your overflowing cup of forgiveness. Show me where I need to listen more carefully to you. Give me strength to be more like your Son, standing with you despite my circumstance. I am confident you will guide me where I need to go and teach me what I need to know to serve you well. Amen.*

**Kayelee Arensman**

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W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 2 9

# JOHN 11:17-37

## OUR COMFORT

*"When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping,  
he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved."*

How do we respond when it appears our LORD did not deliver? As we journey through this Lenten season, let us take a few moments to reflect on the story found in John 11. Lazarus has died. Our LORD has arrived four days too late, and Mary and Martha are deep in their grief when Jesus appears. Martha goes first to him and laments before him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

This accusation rings bitter with her pain. Not long after, Mary, informed by Martha that Jesus has arrived, comes to him and the same hurt-filled accusation spills from her lips, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." And Jesus stands there, comfortingly.

Both sisters, devout followers of their LORD, are hurting. Their grief spills out as doubt and accusation. How often do we do the same? When things look dire, I often forget all the goodness my LORD has graced me with and begin to fear, doubt, and question. I rage and wail and accuse him of not having my best interests at heart. I turn away from him and seek my own interests.

But Jesus looks at all of it and sees its raw tenderness. The passage says that when he heard Mary he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. Two verses later, Jesus weeps. Our LORD is not blind to our pain, nor absent in our agonies. He sees them. He is deeply moved by them. He is not cruel, nor does he seek to cause us pain, but to comfort us in it. Let us meditate on this today, recognizing our pain, and letting him be our comfort in our times of doubt.

*Oh LORD God, help me feel your comfort today, trusting in your words and hands to guide me through my fear.*

**Chris Meyers**  
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T H U R S D A Y , M A R C H 3 0

# JOHN 11:38-45

## LOCK EYES WITH THE LORD

*"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

The stone was commanded to be rolled away. An individual, proclaimed dead for numerous days, was now alive. Women were there to witness. Linen was left behind. Faith was inspired by the miracle. Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead was the ultimate foreshadowing of his own resurrection to come. However, looking too far ahead might keep our eyes from seeing what God has for the present.

Martha, at another point in the Gospel, co-hosted a group in the household of her and her sister, Mary. Martha is typically regarded as the mis-prioritized sister, because she was busy-bodied and concerned about her sister's role. Jesus encouraged Martha to lay the burden of worry and distraction down and, instead, choose what was most important (Luke 10:38-42).

Yesterday's devotional shared the passage where Jesus interacted with Martha at another point. In the midst of her brother's death, Martha addressed Jesus about the chaos. Jesus chose this moment to share one of the "I am" statements. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25).

Today's passage not only shares the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, but the story of a woman who was alongside Jesus. A woman who fluctuated with busyness and stillness and with faith and doubt. The scene outside of Lazarus' tomb is a prime example of Jesus' gentle reminder to strip off worry and fix our eyes on who he is. Despite her imperfection, Jesus chose Martha to hear that he is the resurrection and to see the glory of God displayed with resurrection power.

There is an invitation to lock eyes with the Lord exactly where you are. Remember how he has resurrected you, what part of himself he has revealed to you, and what he is showing you in the present. May you see the glory of God as you believe in him.

*Lord, help me to fix my eyes on you, and may I see your glory. Amen.*

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F R I D A Y , M A R C H 3 1

# PSALM 130

## PATIENT WAITING

*"I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord..."*

In a few days' time we will celebrate Jesus' Triumphal Entry into the Jerusalem, marking the beginning of Holy Week. Lent is a time to prepare our hearts for what is to come and to repent. Whether that's true for you of the past month or not, God is ready to forgive fully. It's not too late to recenter your heart and intention on the Lord. Just as the psalmist says, "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord," so too the Lord is waiting and ready for us to cry out and repent so that we can experience his unfailing love and full redemption.

The psalmist says that with the Lord "there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve" him. What is keeping us from waiting on him? Say it out loud, release it, be redeemed fully, experiencing his love that doesn't hold back, harbor resentment, or hold grudges.

Romans 8:24-25 says, "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." This is how we wait on the Lord. We put our hope in him by meditating on his word. This time of waiting is patient, but not passive. It fills us with the Spirit that makes it possible to persevere in God's strength, filled with joy. This is how we can rejoice this Palm Sunday, even while knowing what is to come the next week.

*Lord, may we be fully transparent with you so that we may be fully redeemed by your love and forgiveness, enabled to serve you with joy, filled with the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Laura Podschun**  
Master of Divinity Student  
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S A T U R D A Y , A P R I L 1  
P S A L M 118:1-2; 19-29

THANKFUL HEARTS

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever."*

Psalm 118 is traditionally read in Jewish customs both at Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. Historically, Psalm 118 testifies to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles after the completion of the second Temple, according to Nehemiah 8:13-18. The psalm begins with great celebration, reflects on hardships and discouragements, and returns, in the end, to praising God for what he has done. The psalm speaks of the miraculous deliverance of the people of Israel and points towards a Messiah who would rescue them and establish the Kingdom of God in their midst.

We too await the return of Christ. We too are in need of great deliverance. Although we have the promise sealed by the sending of the Holy Spirit, we live in expectation of the full reign of the Kingdom of God. In this time of waiting, the invitation to "give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" repeats in our hearts, especially throughout the Lenten season, encouraging us to give thanks because God is good. As we experience God's goodness, we again give thanks.

The act of thanksgiving has a way of centering our hearts and minds, shifting our tendencies of entitlement and pride to thankfulness and praise, reminding us of who God is as our provider and that it is Christ that holds all things together, not ourselves. We recognize, as the psalmist says in this passage, that it is the Lord who has done these things. God has created us, continues to sustain us, and gives us good things from his own hand.

During this Lenten season, the invitation stands for us to turn our eyes again to Christ with thankful hearts, remembering all he has done for us, praising God for the true gift, Jesus, coming to us from the Father, who sent his only Son for our salvation. May our hearts be attuned to this—and may we respond with thankfulness as we remember.

*Lord, bring to mind today the great works you have done in our lives. Cause us to remember your good deeds and praise you, for you are good. Your love endures forever.*

**Amy Toney**

Master of Arts in Theology, Ecology, and Food  
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# SUNDAY, APRIL 2

## JOHN 12:20-36

### IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

*"So Jesus said to them, 'While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons [and daughters] of light (John 12:36, Lexham English Bible)."*

Today is Palm Sunday and Palm Sunday is all about Jesus. I realize I'm stating the obvious, but you may agree that the hustle and bustle of this week (including the crusting of your Easter ham or the flavoring of your favorite fixings) often prevents intentional time and reflection on this foundational truth. This season is all about Jesus.

In John 12:19, the Pharisees were perturbed (to say the least) that Jesus' earthly ministry and influence were going viral. Their futile attempt to halt Jesus' mission was "accomplishing nothing!" The Pharisees sought to wreck Jesus' influence every opportunity they met. In contrast, the Greeks wanted to make his acquaintance not to mar his reputation but to learn about him and from him. They asked Philip, "Sir, we want to see Jesus (12:21)." These Greeks got the memo. They understood that time spent with Jesus was indispensable. Rather than exhibiting some social grace and shaking some hands, however, Jesus offers up a seemingly gratuitous lesson on agriculture about a grain of wheat (12:23). For introverts (like myself), we may chuckle at Jesus' reaction: "See, I knew Jesus was introverted."

Yet, in verses 27-36, we come to a greater appreciation of Jesus' humanity in concert with his divinity. Jesus was troubled in his soul because he would soon offer his life on the cross of Calvary. Just as Jesus emptied himself, his agrarian tutorial on wheat instructs us to die to ourselves if we truly want to be his disciples.

As we empty ourselves in this Lenten season, share Jesus (the light of God) with those in darkness. Encourage them to "believe in the light" while he is still available to them. Remember, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Resurrection Sunday are all about Jesus and making Jesus known.

*"Jesus, may we bring you and God the Father glory as we remember your suffering and share the gospel with this dark and broken world. Amen."*

**Matthew D. Kim, PhD**

Professor of Practical Theology;  
Holder of the Hubert H. and Gladys S. Raborn  
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MONDAY, APRIL 3  
1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

BOAST IN CHRIST CRUCIFIED

*"In contrast, God is why you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption..."*

The proclamation of the world centers on the wisdom of competency, which is an expectation inherent to every level of society. Yet, in these verses, Paul essentially declares humanity to be wholly incompetent, so much so that he contends that humanity is incapable of distinguishing between what is truly wisdom and that which is utter folly. This assertion is easy to defend oneself against until Paul reasserts God's order of wisdom—for the proclamation of God centers on the wisdom of Christ crucified.

The crux of this wisdom is so far from the common championing of competency that it seems like pure foolishness to humanity. A crucified Christ is the ultimate contradiction because, as Gordon Fee writes, human wisdom dictates that "One may have a Messiah, or one may have a crucifixion; but one may not have both."

And yet, in keeping with Paul's proclamation that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom" (v. 25), Scripture uniformly declares that God has chosen to proclaim Christ crucified as God's wisdom and power for salvation. Moreover, precisely because this proclamation stands in such stark contrast to human wisdom, Paul declares that it is only for "those who believe," for those who will wholly trust and only boast in the God of the cross (v. 21).

Thus, God's propensity for the cross leaves humanity with a dire decision: "to trust God and be saved by his wise folly or keep up our pretensions and perish" (Fee, 77). While the latter may bring temporary gains, only the former accomplishes that which all of humanity is incompetent to do, that is, to bring oneself into eternal fellowship with Christ the Lord. Therefore, whereas boasting connotes, "to put one's full confidence in," "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (v. 31).

*Lord Jesus, help me today to wholly trust and only boast in your wisdom, which is the power of Christ crucified. Amen.*

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

# PSALM 70

## HELP ME KNOW MY HEART

*"But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God!  
You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!"*

Back in high school I was an enthusiastic, albeit untalented, member of the football team. During practices and workouts, we were often encouraged to move with "a sense of urgency." Lots of hard work needed to be done in a very short period of time. This was no time to be idle.

In today's psalm, David asks God to work with a similar sense of urgency, given his afflicted state. David instructs God to quickly come to his aid, destroying his enemies and giving victory to his allies in the process.

Upon reading this psalm, I was unsettled. Who are we to tell God what he ought to do? Aren't we supposed to love our enemies, not pray for their downfall? This psalm sounds triumphalist: "God quickly destroy everyone who is against you and save everyone who is for you!" Imagine the reaction if someone prayed this during Truett's chapel hour!

I don't know how to handle this prayer of David's. I could be cliché, saying this psalm reminds us to "sit and wait on the Lord" and "to trust his goodness in times of trouble." But I despise sentimentality, and what is in the text doesn't call for empty platitudes.

Instead, I go back to those "urgent" football practices from high school. Truth be told, I was not a very good player, and we were not a very good team. We went 2-8 in my senior season. Every day, as I stood ready to take my beating in practice, I'd pray "Father, show me where my heart is today."

Prayer does that for us, it reveals things about ourselves we didn't know before we prayed, even if what is being revealed is deep spiritual dysfunction. I don't think Christ would pray such a prayer, but I do know that Christ is willing to listen to all such prayers. The psalms don't necessarily give us a prescription as to how we should pray, rather they give us a description of how we can pray. God listens. God cares. God stands ready to come quickly to be our help and deliver in all circumstances.

*Father, help me to pray in such a way that the depths of my heart are revealed in plain sight. May I be honest before you, so that you might set me free. Amen.*

**Matt Mooneyham**  
Master of Divinity Student  
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# W E D N E S D A Y , A P R I L 5

## HEBREWS 12:1-3

### TRUE PERSEVERANCE

*"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."*

At first glance, this call to perseverance feels to me more like discipline than encouragement. It reminds me that I have repeatedly failed at throwing off sin and everything else that hinders me. But a closer look at what comes just before and after that command reveals that this passage is not about trying harder to live a good life on your own strength. Instead, this passage defines perseverance as living with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Just before these verses, in chapter 11 the author of Hebrews led us on a walk down the Hall of Faith. The author pointed out multiple people who are remembered forever in Scripture, not because of what they did, but because of what God did. The faithful who have gone before us stand as witnesses to the fact that God does not expect us to be good enough to be used by him. In fact, working through sinners who trust in him is one of God's favorite things to do.

Immediately after the command to run with perseverance, the author of Hebrews gives us a picture of what perseverance looks like: continually looking at Jesus. Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He is God among us who demonstrated and made possible human life reconciled with God. Through repeatedly coming to Jesus, despite how we feel or how much we have strayed away, he will transform us into people who are less and less entangled by sin.

Persevering is not having a perfect record to bring before Jesus. The perseverance we are called to is living with our eyes fixed on Jesus, so that he can guide us through any hurdles we encounter.

*Lord, thank you that I do not need to be perfect to come before you. Help me to continuously fix my eyes on you, so that you would lead me deeper in my faith. Amen.*

**Katherine Franker**  
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# THURSDAY, APRIL 6

## JOHN 13:1-17; 31-35

### THE WAY OF SELF-LESS LOVE

*"For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

At the Last Supper and just days before Jesus was crucified, he washed his disciples' feet. Foot washing was a common act performed by a servant when a guest entered a home from the dusty roads. Jesus explained his unconventional actions by saying, "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). Using foot washing as a symbol of hospitality (Genesis 18:4; I Timothy 5:10), humility (John 13:1-5), and spiritual cleansing (Titus 3:5), Jesus modeled the way of self-less love.

Today some churches continue to observe the practice of foot washing. The call of Jesus in this ritual of foot washing is to display a lifestyle of humble service and love. He moves us away from our casual understanding of love and service. In John 13, Jesus loves and washes Judas' feet even though he knew he would go on to betray Him. Here, Jesus demonstrates a standard of love much higher than our standard. His command is for us to serve and love as he has loved.

Jesus left his Father and gave his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Though equal with God, Jesus left his Father's side to wash us from our sins (Revelations 1:5). As we look toward Resurrection Sunday, how can we stand in the power and love of Christ (Psalm 40:1; Ephesians 3:17)? Imagine Christ's love on display in our families, communities, our nation, and the world, if each of us practice this kind of service and love.

*Lord and teacher, on this Maundy Thursday, thank you for guiding my feet in peaceful ways and setting me on a path of service and love. May I learn from your self-less example of foot washing to live out your new commandment to love.*

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# FRIDAY, APRIL 7

# JOHN 18:1-19:42

## THE MYSTERY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

*"There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them."*

To read of the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus in John's Gospel is to be confronted with a dark picture of human frailty and corruption. The swirl of events surrounding Jesus, his betrayal by Judas, his denial by Peter, his general abandonment by the disciples, his accusation by religious teachers, his interrogation by a Roman ruler, his rejection by the crowds, and his mockery and torture by the soldiers. All of these events appear to be the convergence of unrelated acts of human weakness, fickleness, wickedness, and failure. Yet at the center of the storm of tragedy stands Jesus—portrayed as a serene and transcendent witness to truth even in the face of his immanent death, guiltless yet condemned to die.

The great mystery of these events is not that human persons fail, whether well-intentioned like the disciples, or those more indifferent or even malicious like the religious and political leaders. Not only personal experience but even a slight knowledge of human history should keep us from any naïve view of human virtue. Even more naïve would be to think that we would find ourselves on the right side of history had we been among the disciples or the crowds or had we the political power we crave to make a difference.

The great mystery is therefore not why all persons surrounding Jesus in John's narrative seem to have failed in every respect. The great mystery is, rather, how out of these seemingly confused and even malicious events God brought forth the salvation of the world, bringing ultimate reconciliation out of what could only have appeared to be a pointless death and the final dissolution of Jesus' life and purpose.

The most shocking thing that John records is not that Jesus was handed over to death, but that underneath what could only appear to be meaningless events, something deeper was at work. On the cross Jesus knew—not in spite of, but because, things had so transpired—that "all things had already been accomplished in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (19:28). His final words point to a mystery far deeper than the end of personal suffering in death. They point, rather, to a purpose of divine justification beyond human injustice and death itself. The weakness, fickleness, wickedness, and failure that all of us have displayed and done in our lives. All these things are revealed to be what they are in the crucifixion of Jesus. This revelation should assure our final judgment and condemnation. Yet in some way both profound and marvelous, the death of Christ is not our ultimate condemnation but our salvation (3:16-17), our guilt undone as Jesus cried, "It is finished." Our love of darkness (1:5) has been overcome by a light and love greater still, for "God so loved the world..." (3:16).

*Dear Father, thank you for the salvation you have brought through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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S A T U R D A Y , A P R I L 8  
L A M E N T A T I O N S 3 : 1 - 9 ; 1 9 - 2 4

NEW TOMORROW MORNING

*"... great is your faithfulness."*

Last year my son Josiah took it upon himself to grow an avocado plant. He used toothpicks to suspend the pit of an avocado in a glass of water, like you would for a third-grade science project. Week after week, the avocado pit sat there in silence. After a couple of months of neglect, it rejected the hopeful culinary aspirations of guacamole and cracked down the middle. No sprouting of green growth. No tendrils of roots seeking sustenance. Just a dried and cracked avocado pit sitting in an increasingly dirty glass of water.

Our passage today comes to us in the silence of Holy Saturday, giving voice to dashed hopes and cracked dreams. The dank smell of tragedy and wastefulness hangs over this pallid day and drives all thoughts of blossoming flowers and new life out of our minds. In our passage, the poet of Lamentations shifts voices, and on Holy Saturday it is as if Jesus himself is speaking these words from the silence of the tomb. They are the pained words of a broken man, coming up from the pit of death and despair.

I gave up on that avocado pit a long time ago. I saw a failed experiment that needed to be tossed out, but Josiah had hope for what still might come. After many months of nothing, the appearance of roots brought a glimmer of hope. But then it appeared that roots were all that would come.

However, the pit that seemed to be a failure was not done. Six months after it was suspended in a glass, a tiny shoot began to thrust its way from the cracked pit. Life now springs from what appeared to be failure. On Holy Saturday, we know that in the wake of Good Friday, we can read Lamentations 3 as "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new tomorrow morning."

*Father, when I am cracked and seem to be beyond hope, please help me remember that your love never ceases.*

**J. David Tate, DMin**  
Director, Online Certificate Program  
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# SUNDAY, APRIL 9

## JOHN 20:1-18

### THE APOSTLE TO THE APOSTLES

*"Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and to your Father and to my God and your God.'"*

Although all four Evangelists report that Mary Magdalene was present at the cross and at the tomb of Jesus and Luke notes that Mary, called Magdalene (because she was from Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee), had been exorcised of seven demons and was among the women who accompanied Jesus and the Twelve and supported them out of their means (see Luke 8:2-3), it is only the Fourth Gospel that tells the riveting story of Mary Magdalene as the "apostle to the apostles." Over the sweep of Christian history, Mary has been referred to as such because Jesus commissioned her to tell his other disciples of his resurrection and pending ascension.

John 20 commences by indicating that once Mary Magdalene, who journeyed to Jesus' tomb on the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday) under the cloak of night, discovered that the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb's entrance had been removed that she made a bee-line to Simon Peter and the "other disciple" (traditionally identified as John, the son of Zebedee) to tell them that the Lord had been taken out of the tomb and that his whereabouts were now unknown (John 20:1-2). Her report to Peter and the "other disciple" prompts them in turn to hightail it to Jesus' tomb, where they discover Jesus' graveclothes but do not see the Lord (20:3-10).

While Peter and the "other disciple" take leave, Mary lingers at the tomb weeping. Stooping down and peering into the tomb, she discovers two angels who ask her why she is crying. She responds that "they," whoever "they" might be, have removed her Lord from the tomb and that she has not the foggiest notion of where "they" have put him. Straightening up and turning around from the tomb, Mary sees a man, who she thinks is a gardener. This man, like the angels, asks her why she is crying. He also asks Mary for whom she is looking (20:11-15a).

The suspense as well as the irony increase further when Mary requests of the "gardener" that in the event he has removed "him" (i.e., Jesus) to tell her where so that she might get him. John then springs the proverbial trap when the "gardener" reveals that he knows who she is in calling her by name. This enables Mary to see who he is. Calling him "Rabboni" (or Teacher), she begins to cling to him. Instructing her that he is yet to ascend, Jesus sends Mary to go and to tell his "brothers" (namely, his other disciples) that he is alive and will be ascending to his and their God and Father. Thankfully, Mary does as she is instructed, declaring to them, "I have seen the Lord!" (20:15b-18).

Mary, who knew the voice of the "good shepherd" (note John 10:3, 11, 14), used her voice to declare to the disciples and others that the now risen and soon-to-be exalted Lord, would continue to lead and to feed them.

*On this Easter morn, may we pray, "Our Loving Lord, who became a Lamb, would you lead us like a shepherd so that we might continue to experience your presence and bear witness to your resurrected life by living cruciformed lives?"*

**Todd D. Still, PhD**  
Dean  
Truett Seminary