

“The Passion of Jesus, the Wilderness of Faith.”

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

- Isaiah 43:19a,c

(Insert)

(your
reflection)

(here.)

2019 Lenten Devotional

By Bethlehem Folks

(with a little help from
Lutheran Hour Ministries)

40 days of Lenten reflections, based in part on the “People of the Passion” by LHM

**Devotion quotes with an asterisk* are from *Meditations of John Muir: Nature’s Temple* (2001)*

THE FIRST PEOPLE OF THE PASSION—ADAM AND EVE

Wednesday, March 6, 2019

TEXT: *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:22*

In old paintings of the crucifixion you will often see a human skull, right at the base of Jesus' cross. Ask a museum guide and they will tell you that the skull is supposed to be Adam's skull. It is a reminder of when human beings first disobeyed God and fell into evil. It is a reminder of the time when death first became a part of the human experience.

Surely Adam and Eve weren't thinking of Jesus' cross when they first reached out to pick the forbidden fruit. They were looking at a tree in paradise—one that was beautiful, green, full of fruit, lovely to the eye and tempting to the taste. They could not have imagined the very different tree they were bringing about by their rebellion against God.

That tree would stand at Calvary, not in Eden. Instead of beauty, there would be horror; instead of green leaves, dry, rough wood. It made no appeal to the eye or taste; people turned from it in fear and disgust. And what hung on its branches was the dying Son of God.

Adam and Eve didn't foresee Jesus' cross—but God did. Walking in the garden that evening, He called out to His lost children. "Adam, where are you?" He knew what had happened. Still He heard their half-hearted confession, warned them of the consequences to come, and covered their shame—all the while knowing that the cross lay in His future. God Himself would rescue His sinful children at the cost of the life of His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are also many old paintings of Jesus visiting hell, triumphant after breaking the power of the devil by His death on the cross. The artists always show Him leading humanity out of the gates of hell to freedom. If you look closely, you will see that He is shown leading Adam and Eve first of all, in memory of His first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

THE PRAYER: *Lord, thank You for saving us through Your death on the tree of the cross. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have you ever planted a tree? Tell about it.

Have you ever loved someone who made a bad choice? How did you try to help?

What does it mean to you, knowing that God foresaw the cross?

"No wonder the hills and the groves were God's first temples, and the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord."

*- John Muir**

Day 1: Reflections by Peg

1 Corinthians 15:22 *"For as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ shall we all be made alive."*

Prayer: "Lord, thank You for saving us through Your death on the tree of the cross." Amen.

We have lived in many different homes, each offering special memories. We made many changes to those homes including planting new trees but on two occasions, our parents celebrated our new homes with the gift of a new tree. When we lived in Dallas, we were gifted a beautiful magnolia tree by my husband's parents. On moving to New York, my mother bought us a flowering Bradford Pear tree. Those two trees meant so much to us that we have gone to Google maps and looked at our old homes to see how those special trees have fared over the years. They are reminders of parents no longer with us and the gift they were to our lives. In much the same way, every time we look at the "tree of the cross" we are reminded of the gift of Christ who died to save us. Truly the greatest gift of all.

-P. Pepler



Day 2: Reflections by Mary Ann

I think God is testing and challenging us every day on the strength of our faith and trust in him, just as he did with Abraham and Isaac. Even when things we are given are more than we really want to deal with, if we trust God to bring us through the rough times. That is when we feel our faith and trust growing stronger. He also gives us the quiet times to look back, and know that “God is always with us”.

Life is a Journey. Hold God’s hand. Enjoy it.

- M. Tanis



OF ONE HEART AND MIND

Thursday, March 7, 2019

TEXT: *Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” Genesis 22:8*

Imagine what it must have been like for Isaac. His father, obviously upset, organizes a three-day trip and says, “We’re going to go offer a sacrifice.” Nothing more. No information about the who, what or why of the sacrifice—and where is the lamb, anyway? When Isaac asks, he gets only the mysterious “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”

At some point Isaac must have figured it out. Was it when his father loaded him up with the wood for the sacrifice—probably more than Isaac expected for a small lamb? Or maybe it was when his father took out the rope and began to bind him. Did he panic? I would have.

But Isaac submitted. Surely he could have overpowered his dad and escaped—after all, Abraham was well over a hundred years old, and Isaac was a strong young man capable of carrying large loads of wood, even up a mountain. He could have escaped. But he chose not to. He allowed his father to bind him without putting up a fight. He even seems to have lain down on that altar himself—it’s not likely that Abraham alone could have lifted him. However strange it seems, Isaac and Abraham were of one heart when it came to this sacrifice.

Jesus, too, was of one heart and mind with His Father when it came to the sacrifice of the cross. As a human being, He knew the full effect of terror and dread. He had the option of escape, just as Isaac did—as He told Peter, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53) But Jesus refused to take it—because He loved us.

There was no last minute reprieve for Jesus. He suffered, He died, and was buried. But the hope that Abraham had—that his son would be resurrected—came true for Jesus (Hebrews 11:9). Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again. And because of Him, we too have the hope of resurrection and everlasting life.

THE PRAYER: *Lord Jesus, thank You that You were of one mind with the Father when it came to saving us. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are you most afraid of?

Have you ever done something you were afraid to do because you loved and trusted the one asking you to do it? If so, what?

Does it make a difference for you, to know that Jesus voluntarily lay down His life for you—that He was not forced? How?

“[Our task is to widen] our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature .”

- Albert Einstein*

TEXT: *knowing that you were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:18-19*

What must it have been like to be an Israelite father on that first Passover night? The Passover lamb had just been slaughtered; now each father had to complete the strange job Moses had given them. With the smell of roast lamb in the air, each man dipped a stalk of hyssop into a basin of lamb's blood and used it to smear blood on the doorframe of His house. One smear for the lintel across the top; one for each doorpost, on the left and the right. As night came on, the door was shut; no one would go out till the morning.

It was a strange thing Moses had them do. No doubt their Egyptian neighbors asked them what they were up to, smearing blood all over the place. Maybe they even made fun of them. But no man would dare disobey God's word, because Moses warned them, "The Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you" (Exodus 12:23).

The blood of the lamb was the safety for their children. Because the lamb's blood was shed, no Israelite child would lose his life in the final plague of Egypt. They would be protected, safe at home. The lamb died, and the children lived.

It's like that for us too, isn't it? Our lamb is Jesus, the Lamb of God (as John the Baptist called Him). He willingly lay down His life for us so that we would be saved from the power of death and evil. His blood marks us as God's own family. Nothing, not an angel of death, not even the devil himself, can destroy God's children. Jesus' blood marks the door to our hearts.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, thank You for saving us through Your blood. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What seemingly odd things do you do to protect yourself and your family?
- When you think of blood, what else do you think of—good or bad?
- The blood of Jesus marks the door to our hearts. Does carrying that thought impact what you let go through that door?

*"Nature – the Gentlest Mother is."
- Emily Dickenson**

Day 3: Reflections by Cathy

After reading this devotional, I was immediately taken back to my childhood as I watched the Passover scene in Charlton Heston's movie, "The Ten Commandments" (Find it on YouTube - "The Ten Commandments - Passover" 2 min/46 sec). The scene entails Moses and his people remaining calm inside with the blood of the lamb painted on the doorway, while one can hear screams of terror outside as the cloud of death creeps along the ground, killing the Egyptians. This was a bit daunting for my young mind, but never to be forgotten! The lamb died so that God's children could live! To me personally, the most beautiful gift that arises from this story is God's grace for those who believe. Sometimes things happen in our own lives that creep in like a fog and bring fear. Sometimes people around us are in turmoil and, if we listen carefully, are screaming for help. We don't necessarily look for these situations, they just seem to find us, right? God's grace says that He's carrying our load and He's staying right there with us every step of the way, through the good and the bad. But I believe there is a bit more to this story...if Jesus willingly laid down His life so that we would be protected from the power of death, our burdens have been lifted. Hopefully, this can free us to be still and pray that we will see what God is putting before us each day, that we can act upon, to bring glory to His name.

- C. Lautner



Day 4: Reflections by Renae

I very much took for granted my "religious" upbringing in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. It included attending Lutheran School through 8th grade, extensive Bible daily, confirmation, and my parents "making me go to church and Youth Group." I just did it. Deep down inside, I guess I felt it was forced on me.

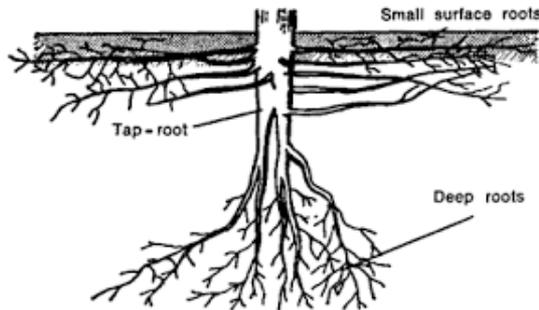
The dawning of the importance of all this came early in the morning on December 27, 1979, when at 6 am there was a pounding on my door from my sister-in-law who came to tell me that my husband had been killed in a traffic accident with his tanker transfer truck that he drove back and forth to Canada to pick up propane gas.

What? I had a 3 1/2 year old, a 17 month old, and I was 8 months pregnant with our 3rd child. I have to have been forsaken!!!! It took about 3 minutes for God to speak to me and help me cope, make decisions, and stick by me from then until now. The "religious" upbringing proved to be planted deep inside. It has sustained me, strengthened me, and supported me through raising 3 very successful children who all have beautiful families, good jobs, and good lives.

At this stage of my life, He helps me feel successful and at peace.

God does not forsake us!!!!

- R. Wells



A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

Saturday, March 9, 2019

TEXT: *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? Psalm 22:1*

I wonder what it was like for King David, writing his songs to honor the Lord, and knowing that God was speaking through him. What did he think when God inspired him to write Psalm 22? It speaks very clearly of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. David must have wondered what the Holy Spirit was referring to.

To be sure, David himself had some experience with feeling forsaken. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but I find no rest" (Psalm 22:1-2). David could have cried out those words at any time while he was hiding in the wilderness, staying away from King Saul who wanted to kill him.

Or this part: "All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; 'He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'" (Psalm 22:7-8) It's a very good description of what happened to David when his son Absalom rebelled against him and David had to leave the capital city. But it fits even better as a description of what people said when Jesus hung on the cross, mocked by the very people he came to save.

But as David continued to write, there could be no confusion about what came next. "For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Psalm 22:16-18). None of that ever happened to David—no piercing, no being stretched out on the cross as a bony skeleton of a man, no gambling for his clothes. That was clearly about Jesus, David's greater Son. Did David tremble when he wrote those words?

I don't know. It's a mystery. But it's a mystery that reveals Jesus' great and everlasting love for all of us for whom he suffered—for David, for you, and for all of us.

THE PRAYER: *When I suffer, Lord, be with me and keep hold of me. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Did you ever pass on a message you didn't understand to someone else?

How does the way you pray change when you are suffering? Give examples, if you are willing.

When have you felt forsaken by God?

**"[The Tree speaks]: Come to me, here beside the River,
Plant yourself beside the River."**

- Maya Angelou*

TEXT: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Colossians 1:15*

Have you ever tried to draw or paint another person? If you have, you know how carefully you look at him or her; you notice the texture of his skin, all the subtle colors in her hair; you gaze, you fill up your eyes with the way the person walks and moves and sits. It's rather like love. You notice and pay attention to everything.

Isaiah the prophet did this for Jesus. The Holy Spirit helped him to know, hundreds of years in advance, exactly what Jesus would be like when He came. And Isaiah painted His portrait, lovingly and exactly, in chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah.

How did he show us Jesus? He saw that Jesus would be humble, with nothing in His appearance to attract us. He would be a man well-acquainted with sorrow and grief, someone marked by loss. More than that, He would be familiar with rejection—and that by the very people He came to save. Jesus would be misunderstood and mistreated and finally killed. And He would rise again.

Isaiah had his eyes fixed on Jesus. Jesus was the heart of what he wanted to know, of what he intended to pass on to everyone who would listen. And this is true for us too, isn't it? Jesus is the one we love, the one we watch with all our hearts. And that's because He has loved us first.

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). It's easy to feel forgotten by God when bad things happen. But Isaiah shows us that never, for a single moment, has the Lord turned His attention away from us. He not only knows our griefs, He has carried them. Our suffering has become His own—because He loves us.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, Your love and mercy shine from You. Draw us closer to You every day. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When have you studied someone intensely because you loved him or her?

Which verse in Isaiah's description of Jesus (Isaiah 53) means the most to you, and why?

Since Jesus is the image of the invisible God, what does that tell you about God's personality? About His attitude toward you?

Day 5: Reflections by Paul and Jessica

In the aftermath of my dad's heart attack he was forced to retire early. At his retirement party the company did the kinds of things corporations do to honor executives. There were balloons, drinks, cards, gifts, and one very large professionally printed portrait of my dad's face. I didn't think anything of it really, the photo that is, until sometime later when I came across it again at home.

“Look at this thing!” I said to my mom. “It's huge!”

We both laughed. It really was. It was a poster size close up of his face, and like anything oversized it drew my attention. I began to stare at it and remarked to myself, “Is this what he really looks like?” I was genuinely confused. Where did the wrinkles and gray hair come from? When had I stopped really looking at my dad? At some point people in our lives become bigger than their physical appearance and we are instead left with their impression. Which brings me to Jesus (subtle transition, right?!).

From early on a picture of the classic long-haired, bearded, white robed, leather sandal wearing Jesus hung in my room. Over the years, through sermons, stories and life events this image of Jesus has changed considerably. I don't think of him so much anymore as one artist's rendition, but as a living, breathing embodiment of God. A loving, suffering, forgiving, merciful presence that communes with me, and sometimes wears sandals.

What would it look like to see the living breathing Jesus in person? How has your impression of Jesus changed over the years? What understanding of Him has developed that has surprised you? What image or impression do you experience when you meet with Him in prayer? Study your loved ones closely, really look at them. What do you notice that hadn't previously? Write a list of attributes that a loved one has impressed upon you and give it to them as “word portrait”.



Day 6: Reflections by Tina

ONLY JESUS

Monday, March 11, 2019

TEXT: *And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Matthew 17:8*

As Moses and Elijah stood on that mountaintop with Jesus, they stood for the whole Old Testament—the Law and the Prophets combined. And they were talking to Jesus about His “departure,” as Luke calls it—his death, which would shortly happen at Jerusalem. Both men had spent their lives pointing people to the one true God. Now, hundreds of years after their earthly lives, they came one last time to serve as witnesses to the Savior promised for so many years throughout the Old Testament.

We don't know how Peter, James and John recognized them for who they were. Surely they weren't wearing name tags! And yet they did recognize them—and Peter was foolish enough to propose building three shelters, one for each of them—Moses, Elijah and Jesus.

Poor silly Peter! It sounds like he thought he was honoring Jesus by placing Him on the same level with those ancient heroes of the faith, Moses and Elijah. He did not yet recognize that, great as the two visitors were, Jesus was and is someone even greater—God's own Son. God the Father corrected that mistake immediately: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” And after that, they saw Jesus only.

Moses and Elijah would be the first to tell us—keep your eyes on Jesus. Jesus is the one who matters—not any prophet or lawgiver; not any pastor or church leader, however great and holy they may be. What we see in such people is a shadow, a reflection—Jesus' own light shining through them. For that we honor and love our leaders. But Jesus has our hearts—because He is the Son of God, who loved us, and gave Himself for us. No one could love us more.

THE PRAYER: *Father, keep our eyes focused on Your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have you ever been tempted to honor someone more highly than you ought?

Who is a person you see Jesus' light shining through?

What are aspects of your life that you reserve for God alone?



In order to keep our eyes on Jesus, we have to put him above our spouse, our children and ourselves. This can be extremely hard to do, at times. Especially with our own flesh and blood...our children. I'll never forget when the pastor who married DJ and I said, "put God first in your marriage and your relationship with your spouse, next. You can't have one without the other". If the strength isn't with God and your spouse, how can you expect to raise children strong in faith, morals and ethics.

Temptation to honor someone higher than we ought, will always exist. In relationships that we weren't meant to have, jealousy. The devil lurks and knows exactly when to strike. When you ask Jesus to help us through that temptation, His light will shine through.

I see Jesus' light shine through my family, my pastor ☺, my friends, my church family and especially Makena and Lincoln. Becoming a mother is the most incredibly fulfilling experience that God could have given me. Jesus' light shines through them when they show love and talk about their faith. Jesus' light shines through nature in so many ways.

Aspects of my life that are reserved for God would include the spiritual, the family and the social aspects.

1 John 2 15-16: Love not the world neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of this world.

- T. Dohm

TEXT: *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip ... and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." John 12:20-21*

It seems like a strange disconnect. Some foreigners from Greece ask to meet Jesus, and Jesus immediately starts talking about dying. After several minutes of increasingly scary talk, Jesus "departed and hid Himself from them" (John 12:36). It looks like the Greeks missed their chance—Jesus didn't even answer their request!

Or did he? Something about the Greeks touched off these words: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:23-24). The Greeks were foreigners—non-Jews. They were not the first foreigners Jesus ever met, but they were apparently the first who actively sought Him out with the goal of hearing Him and possibly coming to faith in Him. They were, in fact, the first tiny trickle of the great wave of Gentile converts who would begin to come into the Christian faith, several years later.

The tide was turning. Jesus had said: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). But now other sheep were starting to come to Him, the rest of the human family. It was time for Jesus' church to take over and to "make disciples of all nations" as He would command them after His resurrection (Matthew 28:19). No wonder His thoughts turned to His death!

We don't know what happened to these Greeks after Jesus left and hid Himself. Possibly they had to make do with the disciples to answer their questions. And that's okay. Because that's exactly what God does with us today, whether Jew or Gentile. We learn about Jesus through the Holy Spirit speaking through Jesus' followers. And that continues until the day we do indeed meet Jesus Himself, face to face.

THE PRAYER: *Dear God, make me a good witness to Jesus my Savior. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are the signs you see that tell you that summer is almost over?

When you think about your own death or that of someone you love, how do you lean on God for help?

How did you come to know Jesus your Savior? Which of His followers helped you in this?

Day 7: Reflections by Carolyn and Summer

Being a life-long Lutheran, I have learned from my family, Sunday School teachers, Confirmation, sermons, Bible studies, and Christian friends. Actually, I think we learn from everyone. It is easy to see God in many situations.

This sheet asks ".....how do you lean on God for help?" My response? I lean hard ! I have had the following poem for many years and I think of it and re-read it often. It was included in a cookbook that we church gals put together in a church down-state many years ago. I have no information on the poet.

LEAN HARD, by Paul Pastnor

"Cast they burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" Ps. 55:22

"Child of My love, lean hard, And let Me feel the pressure of thy care;
I know they burden, child, I shaped it;
Poised it in Mine own hand; made no proportion
In its weight to thine unaided strength, For even as I laid it on, I said,
'I shall be near, and while she leans on Me,
This burden shall be Mine, not hers:

"So shall I keep My child within the circling arms
Of My own love.' Here lay it down, no fear To impose it on a shoulder which upholds
The government of worlds. Yet closer come;
Thou are not near enough. I would embrace thy care;
So I might feel My child reposing on My breast,
Thou lovest Me? I knew it. Doubt not then: But loving Me, lean hard."

- C. Burns

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Signs that summer is almost over...The signs that summer is almost over is in the beginning colored changes of leaves, less daylight, temperatures getting cooler and birds migrating to warmer climates....Thinking of yours or others death...I think we have to lean heavily on the words of Christ and the promises made in the Gospel. The Word tells us we will have eternal life if we believe that Jesus is our Savior. Ultimately all living things will perish, we cannot change this, but with faith, hope and trust we can rely on the promises from God to give us strength to get through personal challenges or losses.

Knowing Jesus your Savior...There is a big difference in having knowledge of Jesus or God and having a personal relationship. We are baptized at a very young age into the family of God, but life experiences eventually bring us into our own personal relationship with God. I have been blessed to have deeply religious friends and family which provided a solid foundation of faith but I feel that experiencing difficult times in life can pull you closer, bring you to your knees and direct your heart to God.

- S. Grayson Ogden

Day 8: Reflections by Carl and Tom

A PLACE FOR THOMAS

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

TEXT: [Jesus] said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." ... So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." John 11:11, 16

I love Thomas. Here's Jesus saying incomprehensible stuff about Lazarus being asleep—no, dead—wait, what exactly do You mean, Jesus? And why are You planning to go back to Judea, where everybody wants to kill You? Thomas doesn't understand it at all, and he's as gloomy as Eeyore about Jesus' decisions—but he's still loyal: "Fine, let's go with Jesus, then. If nothing else, at least we can die with Him."

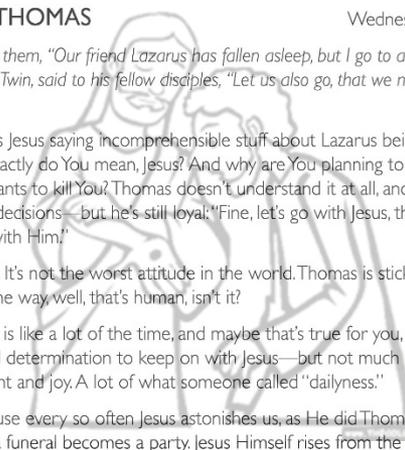
Steady, sober, faithful. It's not the worst attitude in the world. Thomas is sticking with Jesus. And if he grumps along the way, well, that's human, isn't it?

This is what my faith is like a lot of the time, and maybe that's true for you, too. Plenty of endurance, a dogged determination to keep on with Jesus—but not much imagination, really. Not much excitement and joy. A lot of what someone called "dailyness."

But that's okay. Because every so often Jesus astonishes us, as He did Thomas. Lazarus is raised from the dead, and a funeral becomes a party. Jesus Himself rises from the dead, and the first thing He says to us of little faith is "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:27).

All of us, even the gloomiest, will one day see Jesus face to face. But until we have that joy, we have His own presence with us—his Holy Spirit living in us—and our daily faith gets transformed, day after day, by His amazing love. We belong to Jesus, and there is a place for us at His side—even for earnest, unimaginative Thomas, even for you. Even for me.

THE PRAYER: Lord, keep me with You, keep me faithful, even when I can't see anything good to look forward to. Amen.



Until I read this lesson I didn't know I was so much like Thomas. Steady, sober and faithful. Those are qualities that describe the Finnish word "sisu" quite well, and they also describe me quite well. Coincidence? Probably not because of my Finnish heritage. My faith doesn't depend on spectacular happenings even though spectacular things happen all the time. I expect them so they don't astonish me. When I receive communion and my sins are forgiven that is spectacular but I am not astonished because I believe in God's grace. When a person is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit and the promise of eternal life, that too is a spectacular display of God's grace. Even the sunrise in the morning is a spectacular event. The white snow of winter is spectacular too. There is so much beauty in the world around us that imagination is not required to see God everywhere.

In spite of all the beauty in the world around us there is also evil and we must endure and display a dogged determination (sisu) to keep on with Jesus. My life with the Lord right now is not dull, exciting or painful. It is meaningful. It doesn't have to be dull, exciting or painful... And, as for a time when God was with me though I couldn't recognize it, that happens all the time. But when the day is done, I know then that he has been with me.

- C. Lehto

+ + +

I AM Thomas. Literally. Faithful, but trying to understand it all. Questioning, but trusting. And sometimes just struggling. I often say "each one of us is our own theologian". Our training is only as formal as Sunday School crafts and Bible stories at Trinity Lutheran in Moorhead, MN; Confirmation at First Lutheran in Fargo, ND; and listening to the sermons and explanations from Gloria Dei in Downers Grove, IL to St. John in Cerritos, CA to St. Andrew in Eden Prairie, MN to right here in our sanctuary at Bethlehem. I'm just about sure very few of us read and reflect on the latest reinterpretations coming from Lutheran- or any other- seminaries. While we read our favorite Psalms and search out that passage in the Gospels, we are not spending a lot of time studying the minor prophets or consulting concordances to seek out new meaning and reflection. We are rarely concerned by- or aware of- the latest resolutions of the ELCA. We have heard the Gospel and embraced it, but we all struggle with answers for many questions.

So, Thomas... sometimes known as "Doubting Thomas"... Had questions... Wondered aloud how he could possibly grasp what seemed to be happening right in front of him. He wanted more. He struggled just as we all do. Certainly there have been times when I questioned. Absolutely there are times when I ask why things are unfolding in this world the way they do. I have been down, suffered painful loss and asked why? Times I have a hard time seeing through to a positive conclusion. Tough questions- i.e. If we are going to recognize others in heaven, and if some loved ones are absent, how can there be true unbounded happiness? Ponder that one with me...

At the same time I am heartened by Thomas... Peter... Paul and others. Thomas who said "Unless I see, I will not believe". Peter who denied Christ three times in the darkness after Jesus was arrested. Paul who (as Saul) was a harsh anti-Christian as he set out on the road from Tarsus. Not much to work with there. Unbelieving. Unfaithful. Unrepentant. But wait... Thomas put his hand in Christ's wounded side...and said, "My Lord and my God." Peter was still the rock on which Christ built His church. And no one taught the Gospel across more of the known world than Paul. These imperfect building blocks... They all fell short at times. They all looked the other or the wrong way. They needed quiet time and renewal. And so we pray- Open my eyes. Open my mind. Open my heart... to trusting God. Amen

- T. Rockne

TEXT: *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39*

I love the conversation between Martha and Jesus on the day He comes to her home late after her brother has already died. It starts with what sounds like blame—"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Yet Martha can't resist adding a hint for a favor so outrageous she won't ask it directly: "Even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You."

Jesus is no fool. He knows what she's asking, and He responds directly: "Your brother will rise again." Careful, cautious Martha isn't sure what she's hearing: "I know that He will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Is that what You mean, Jesus? Are You just offering me a religious platitude about hope in the distant future, far, far away? Or are You offering me something real and firm, right now?

Martha is afraid to hope—and yet she does. She is afraid to ask for what she wants—and yet she asks, though indirectly. Martha is just like us, isn't she? We have our hopes and worries. We have our fears and doubts. And we approach God, hoping, praying—nervous, perhaps, about asking at all.

Jesus settles Martha's concern directly. It doesn't matter whether the resurrection is today or in the far distant future; Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). The resurrection from the dead is a person, who is right here walking and talking to you. It is not a distant hope. It is as close as Jesus Himself.

Those who have died in the Lord are with Christ, right now (Philippians 1:23). They are not lost or far away. They are living even now in the care of the one who rose from the dead Himself (Luke 20:38). Our shepherd Jesus knows the way through death. None of His people will be left behind in death. He has promised to share His victory and life with us all.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, help us to hope in You when we face death. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When have you asked God for a favor?

What important thing are you praying and hoping for right now?

How does it help you to know that Jesus himself is our resurrection, and will shepherd us through death?

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, flowing from [the Creator]... on either side... the tree of life."

*- John of Patmos [the Book of Revelation]**

Day 9: Reflections by Carolyn and Beejay

It is comforting to know that He walks with me now and that walk will continue in heaven. Yes, that "is better than we dare to hope." I thank Him for his love. I am humbled that he knows me.

He says, "I am with you always." I know that to be true as I feel his presence. He gives me strength and joy, I ask him to guide me and I pray that His will be done. I then ask myself to listen!

I have often said that He is my spine - I can stand erect, I can go about and do - knowing that He is with me. That gives me great peace. Hallelujah and Amen!!"

- C. Burns

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This verse Romans 8:38-39 is one of my favorites. No matter what crisis or pain we face, God's love will always be with us. We can always call on Him and know He hears us. I survived cancer twice. I claim this promise because He gave me the strength and supportive family and friends to overcome the darkest days of my life. Thank you Lord!

I plan to pay it forward the rest of my life. Give to others without expecting anything in return.

- B. Christensen

Day 10: Reflections by Lois and Jan

Friday, March 15, 2019

WHY?

TEXT: *Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." John 11:21*

I wonder what Lazarus thought of it. He was very ill—his sisters were worried, and they sent word to Jesus so He could come quickly and heal him. Then they waited. And waited.

I can just see Martha leaning out the door of her house, looking down the road. Why didn't Jesus come?

John tells us, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was" (John 11:5-6). A strange way to show love! You love someone, so you avoid helping them right away? What kind of a God is that?

And yet it's true, isn't it? We have a God like that. We see people who have been in the Christian faith for years—people whose characters have been shaped by Jesus, who are clearly walking closely with Him—and they are the ones whose prayers seem to go unanswered. They suffer. They grieve. They go through loss. Why?

We don't have the answers we want. But in the case of Lazarus, at least, we have a clue: Jesus' words, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4).

Jesus must have really trusted Lazarus and his family. What a test of faith they went through! Perhaps this is why John makes a point of saying that Jesus loved them. You don't place that kind of burden on anybody but those you know and love with all your heart. Those you are close to—they are the ones you ask the most of. You trust them. You have the hope that they will trust you.

We know the end of this story—that Jesus raised Lazarus, and many came to faith because of him. We don't often see the result of the suffering in our own lives. But like Lazarus, we trust that Jesus cares, and is going to use it for good. Somehow. Some time. Some way. Because He loves us.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, we often don't understand what You are doing or why. Help us to trust in You and to endure the hard times. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When did you do something your loved ones couldn't understand?

When have your prayers seemed to go unanswered?

When you suffer, how do you keep trusting in Jesus?

The Big Question for us is always "Why".

We know we Love our God and that our God loves us. So Why do Bad Things happen to Good People?

We don't know Why. We do know that God is with us and God cares also. He is there to comfort and not leave us alone.

In WW2 we know that Corrie Ten Boom suffered greatly in the Concentration Camp in Germany. Yet she always knew that Jesus was with her and she turned to him for strength and comfort.

- L. Gray

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You've heard of a "Bucket List"? My mother and myself always would add things to the list we wanted to ask God when we got to heaven. She is now there and the many questions (that I can't even remember) are answered.

This trust that God Is in our lives—parents and family is important. I love the words "Not to trust in what can be seen"—but to trust in what cannot be seen. We have always—The Father's Love, The Son's Merit and the Spirit's Power.

-J. Schmidt

"Our every act has a universal dimension."

*- The Dalai Lama**

TEXT: *And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." Luke 19:33-34*

"The Lord has need of it." What a beautiful message Jesus sent to the donkey's owner that first Palm Sunday! No wonder the donkey's owner let the disciples take it immediately. Wouldn't you, if Jesus sent a message like that? What an honor to do anything for Him!

When I was a teenager, I was the one who wound up doing most of the dishes for our church's soup suppers during Lent. You'd find me in the kitchen, up to my armpits in suds—washing box after box of dusty glass communion cups first, and then stack upon stack of white china bowls as they came in from the tables. And the spoons! (We had a pretty high attendance.)

Doing dishes is not my favorite thing. Ask my family if you doubt it. But this time was different—because it was for the Lord. "The Lord has need of it." Well, if you put it that way, how can I refuse? Why would I want to?

Now that I'm older, I hear that voice more clearly—as I suspect you do too. Care for a sick child? Take the car in for repairs? Help somebody with their taxes? "The Lord has need of it." Yes, indeed, He does, because "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

THE PRAYER: *Lord, help me to see and recognize the opportunities You give me to serve You and Your people. Amen.*

Day 11: Reflections by Renae and Jan

God motivates each and every one of us as members of Bethlehem Lutheran Church to recognize that this wonderful institute cannot function nor be sustained without us.

My love for teenagers has gotten me involved in the Y2A Committee which supports all our programs for Youth and Young Adults, because "The Lord has need of it". There are many opportunities for each and every one of us to serve in capacities to grant Him those needs. It is the least we can do for His constant love, support, and blessings.

I encourage anyone who is reading this note to search their souls to find their own ways to participate in committees, groups, and financial support as we go forward. "The Lord has need of it".



- R. Wells

My friend Barbara Graf asked me to go with her to visit and take communion to some of our "Homebound stars." The visits are very special times to laugh, listen, and share communion and prayers with each member we visited. Since that first visit the Christian Care Giving Committee has grown to 10 volunteers that serve the Lord. The smiles, the thank you and their Joy that welcome us back are evidence "The Lord has need of it."

One of the strangest things I can recall doing for the Lord's sake is the day I was going to give some jeans and socks to Goodwill, a thought of Jim came into my mind. Jim was homeless and would stand outside the local pizza place every day. I asked if he could use the jeans and socks, he said, "Yes." I also gave him money for dinner. He said, "Thank you."

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40)

The Lord served me by giving the most wonderful husband, his leading me to the Lutheran Church, his love, kindness, thoughtfulness and his laughter is all gifts from the Lord. I feel the Lord has served me when the thoughts that comes to mind for someone needing encouragement, prayers, and visits to the lonely. The Lord has supplied me with hands to reach out to the sick and dying. No words have to be spoken, just a touch of a hand to let them know they are not alone. There are times I don't know what to say to the loved ones going through grief and sometimes no words will bring comfort, but a hug or the touch of a hand will do the Lord's work. I am thankful for all the Lord's Blessings.

- J. Stretlein

Day 12: Reflections by Jacob

Q: Why do most or some people not really listen to the words of God?

A: Because God has not put knowledge of the Word in our brain. Now I know you're going to tell me, "But I have read the Bible and know every word inside it." Here is my question to that question: "Do you know the meanings of what God said in the Old and New Testament?" It may be "yes" or "no" or "where are the meanings???"

The meanings are inside the Old and New Testament and there is A BUNCH of meanings, but they are so hidden that we can't see the meanings. Here is what I would do...ask for the Lord to give you the knowledge of the Word (and the meanings) and ask the holy spirit to help you as well. If he accepts you may fall in a trance or he will answer in heart and brain. Then once that happens, open up your Bible to the New Testament first and start reading and then you will soon find meanings to the words of God. And like the story said "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." And Jesus said, "If I tell them to stop the stones themselves will cry out." And Jesus also said, "I have



given my disciples the knowledge to understand my WORD." He didn't say meaning...he said Word so ask God for the knowledge of his Word and (the meaning) of his Word and ask the Holy Spirit for help...may God bless you all with the knowledge of his Word and his meanings.

- J. Varner

HARDER THAN A STONE

Sunday, March 17, 2019

TEXT: *And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." Luke 19:39-40*

Crowds of people had come to Jerusalem during Passover. When they heard Jesus was coming, they took palm branches and went out to meet Him. Others cut branches from the trees in the fields. They lay their cloaks in the road for Jesus' donkey to walk over. And they cried out, "Hosanna! "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" What a time to celebrate!

But not everyone was happy. There were religious leaders in the crowd who said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."

Why? Did it seem uppity to them—like Jesus was claiming too much? After all, these words were things people would say to the Messiah. Perhaps they thought Jesus should be modest and quiet, pretending to be less than He really was, refusing to accept the praise that was rightfully His.

Jesus wasn't having it. He answered, "I tell you, if they were quiet, the very stones would cry out!" Their joy needed to be expressed.

The disciples were doing what came naturally—praising God for His great works. But not the religious leaders. Their hearts were even harder than the rocks Jesus spoke of. They couldn't see or believe the wonderful thing God was doing right in front of their noses. What a shame!

But their hearts didn't have to stay this way. Long ago God promised, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). This is what God has done for all of us who believe in Jesus. He has shown us such great saving love that now even our once stony hearts cry out to Jesus, "Hosanna!"

THE PRAYER: *Lord, soften my heart and keep it responding to You with love and praise. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What do you do when you feel joyful?

Remember a time when you praised God, openly or quietly. What event caused that?

When your own heart is feeling hard, how do you seek help?

*"Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Pick up a stone, and you will find me there."
- The Gospel of Thomas**

WHAT SHE COULD

Monday, March 18, 2019

TEXT: *"She has done what she could ..."* Mark 14:8

Six days before Passover, Mary and Martha gave a dinner party in honor of Jesus at the home of Simon the leper. This wasn't long after Jesus raised their brother Lazarus from the dead, and no doubt their hearts were full of thankfulness and joy. Mary was so moved that she took the opportunity to pour extremely expensive perfumed ointment over Jesus' head and feet.

This was a customary way of honoring an important guest, but she carried it to an extreme! And several of the guests there criticized her. But Jesus defended her. He said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to Me. ... She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for burial" (Mark 14:6, 8).

That was a strange and jarring thing to say! I doubt Mary was consciously thinking of Jesus' burial at the moment when she poured the ointment on Him. And yet Jesus took her action that way. He knew, if nobody else did, that within the week He would be dead—and His burial would be a hasty one, with no time for much preparation. "She has done what she could"—and Christians around the world still honor her for doing what we could not, and showing that love to Jesus.

But it didn't end there. After Mary did what she could, Jesus did what HE could—which was to willingly be arrested, suffer, and die, all to save us from everlasting death and damnation. He did what He could for the same reason as Mary—overwhelming love. And what He did was effective! For now that He has risen from the dead, He gives everyone who believes in Him everlasting life and joy. He did what He could—and that is enough for us forever.

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Lord, for doing what You alone could do to save us and make us Your own. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What particular gifts, skills, or advantages do you have that you use to serve the Lord?

Think of someone you know who did what they could for the love of Jesus. What is that person's story?

What one small thing will you do today for love of God?



Day 13: Reflections by Barb

I've always liked to read. So when asked to be a lector, even though I'm a nervous public speaker, I felt the call to participate in this way. I would shake at first, but a friend reminded me that the Holy Spirit will calm and guide me and to place my fingers just so in the palm of my hand to feel his presence. To my amazement the next time I tried it and it worked! So then when asked to be a worship assistant, I thought, well, maybe I could do that, too. I try to read with heart, reverence and compassion, and do what I can to serve the Lord and help make the service and fellowship meaningful for all. It is my small way of participating in our BLC community, and in this way I show my love of Jesus as my heart is so full of thankfulness for all the blessings I have because of Him.

I have a friend who has an autistic son. Not only that - he is deaf as well. Her husband passed away several years ago and her sons welfare has been in her hands. At 23, he will never be self sufficient, but Kathy nurtures and guides him. She is a woman of faith, who reads and practices the Bible daily. She selflessly takes care of him—even moving from Michigan (her preference) to a busy area of southern CA where her daughter lives as there her son has a connection and limited work. She does what she can so that one day when she is not around to care for him, he will have a safe place in this world. She feels so blessed to have her son and I feel so blessed to have her as a friend.

-B. Wright

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"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us."

- 2 Corinthians 4:7

Day 14: Reflections by Carolyn

This segment of Paul's letter is usually linked with verse 17 (money changers in the temple).

I am focusing on verse 16, the fact that WE are God's temple and the Spirit dwells within each of us! We are the church.

The passion of Christ emphasizes the suffering and death of my Lord and Savior. That event - along with Christ's resurrection - amplifies the fact that the collected group of believers known as the church are ALL part of God's temple. It is a vision of Christian community.

In the wilderness of my faith, at this point in my life, I am especially aware that strength solidly comes to me in the form of the Holy Spirit. I am sustained by that presence and full of gratitude to God for God's grace and compassion. I am also grateful to the church for its encouragement.

- C. Mann



BUSINESS AS USUAL

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

TEXT: *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16*

What happens when "business as usual" is sin? Think of the merchants and the money changers, sitting there comfortably in the large temple court, doing business just as they had done every day for years. Listen to the lambs bleating and the pigeons calling from their cages. Don't breathe too deeply—the smell is pretty bad. Over in the corner, men are arguing over the exchange of ordinary money for the kind used in the temple. Who is cheating whom?

It was business as usual—a strange business, we might think, to be going on in the very temple of God. Oh, it was convenient, all right—for the pilgrims who needed to buy sacrifices to offer; and even more so for the temple authorities who made money from the market. Very convenient indeed—except for the worshippers who were supposed to be there. For this marketplace was the Court of the Gentiles, and the only place where anyone, even a non-Jewish foreigner, was welcome to come and pray to the God of Israel. If they could concentrate, of course!

Into this unholy mess comes Jesus, eyes flashing, hands busy braiding a whip. "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). Bang! and He tips over the tables, and all that money falls into the dirt. Crash! and the chairs of the bird-sellers go flying. "Get these things out of here!" He says.

Very shortly a different kind of business was going on. Worshippers were using the place for prayer. Blind and lame people came to Jesus in the temple, and He healed them. Jesus taught anyone who would listen about the kingdom of God. And the little children were singing, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matthew 21:15)

What is "business as usual" in your own heart? It is the temple of God—has anything crept in that should not be there, like concerns for money or power? If so, ask Jesus to clear it out and replace it with what should be usual there—worship, prayer, learning, service. He will gladly do it. Your heart is His home.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, make my heart a fitting home for You. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When have you seen improper business going on in a holy place?

What improper business is going on in your heart that you would like to see evicted? Only answer if you wish.

What specific "proper business" would you like to see the Holy Spirit establish in your heart?

"[And after the wind, the avalanche, the earthquake, the fire] a sound of sheer silence.

*- Elijah**

DOING HIS JOB

Wednesday, March 20, 2019

TEXT: *His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:21*

It was an odd thing for Jesus to say: "Look for a man carrying a jar of water." This was Judea; men didn't normally carry water; that was a woman's job. The disciples must have wondered. Still, they were used to Jesus by then; they did it without arguing.

I also wonder about the man carrying the water. How did he end up there doing such an odd job? Perhaps his master had made an arrangement ahead of time with Jesus to get the disciples safely and secretly to his house: "Look for one of my man-servants carrying a water jar and follow him home," he might have said.

Or maybe there was no arrangement at all, and Jesus simply knew the future and used it. "Go," He says, and it happens that day that a brother helps out his sisters who are busy cooking, or a strong son decides to tote water for his elderly mother. However it happened, it was effective. The man fetched the water; the disciples spotted him, and they got to the right house to prepare the Passover feast.

One thing is clear, though. The man with the water jar was doing his job, however odd or embarrassing it might have been to him. And because he was doing his job faithfully, Jesus' plan worked out perfectly. The disciples made it to the safe house, got things ready, and Jesus and His followers had one last dinner in peace before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion.

We have the chance to be faithful in the little things of our life, too. Taking out the trash, getting gas for the car, replacing the toilet paper when it runs out—these are such tiny acts of service, we don't usually think about them (unless they go undone, of course!). Yet they can make a huge difference when Jesus uses them in His service. This is the way He honors us, giving us a part to play in His plans—a role that involves faithful service, even when it seems tedious or embarrassing. He who served us at the cost of His own life now allows us to serve others—and Him.

THE PRAYER: *Dear Father, thank You for the many people who serve You faithfully and are a blessing in my life. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When have you done something that was unexpected for your age, gender, or other social classification?

Think of someone you know. What small acts of faithfulness do they do that you notice?

What is an area of your life where you want to ask God to help you serve faithfully?



Day 15: Reflections by Pastor Paul

When I first started typing this devotion, I wanted to answer this simple question: "When have I done something unexpected, or simple/small but faithful?" I was proud to have my answer all ready-to-go: "On a fairly regular basis," I remember thinking: that is, I try to keep things tidy in the places where I work and reside. I try to live with integrity and generosity. I try to pay attention to detail. I try to go above and beyond, when I can...and so on...

But then I decided I was going to take a closer look at Matthew 25:21 and see how it fit into context. Like the writer of "Doing His Job" says in their devotion, it was unusual for a man in those days to carry water. His efforts may have been part of a larger plan, or just haphazard in nature. But one thing is clear, for him and us: small acts of kindness can be very important and don't go without notice by God. How do we know that? I suppose all we have to do is read a little further in Matthew chapter 25: "'Truly I tell you, just as you did [an act of service and kindness] to one of the least [fortunate] of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" (verse 40)

Jesus is trying to tell us that when it comes to acts of kindness and goodwill, there really might be no such thing as an act "too small" for significance. Whether it is giving a visitor a smile (when no one else may think or want to) or helping someone find their way, or literally stopping to help a broken down car on the side of the road... all help keep neighbor, goodwill and gospel alike – alive.

If I had more space in this devotion I'd talk about how God's Creation also proves this theory: how many seemingly insignificant details of the "wilderness" around us (from a single pollinated plant to a random rainfall) are often unnoticed by a passer by, all the while serving a very real and necessary purpose. Life. Yet God's grace and our blessings continue... with the eternal and everlasting mercy of God.

- P. Busekist

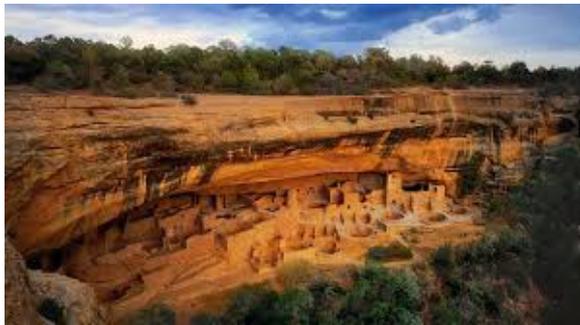
Day 16: Reflections by Jim

Making Pretty for Jesus. The discussion of today's text brings to my mind a letter I read years ago in *The Lutheran*. The writer described her experience of walking into a dirty public restroom and being struck by three thoughts. Thought One: "Why doesn't someone do something about this?" Thought Two: "What if Jesus were the next person to walk in here?" Thought Three: "I guess it's up to me to clean it up."

Thoughts one and three have influenced my behavior over five decades. When I see something that makes me think, "Why doesn't someone do something about this?" I'm motivated to try to clean it up. But her "Thought Two" is a puzzle that I've continued to ponder these fifty plus years. Now, I'm led to reframe the question this way: Exactly how and where do we encounter Jesus in our daily lives? My answer is this: Jesus (or God, or the Holy Spirit, or all three) is part of my body, a component of my being. Moreover this condition is the same for every human individual in existence. This condition is not a result of my baptism; my baptism is my acknowledgement of my internal Jesus and my attempt to connect with the Jesus of my being. Jesus (or, more universally, God) is present in all humans, whether they acknowledge it or not, and whether they are saint or whether they are the most despicable sinner.

Therefore, to return to "Thought Two" of *The Lutheran* letter writer. In my view, the question, *what if Jesus were the next person to walk in here?* should be replaced by the resounding statement, *Jesus will be the next person to walk in here!* Now, I invite you to entertain these questions: What am I going to do about this? How will I make pretty for Jesus?

- J. Hutchison



JESUS FOR DINNER

Thursday, March 21, 2019

TEXT: "Tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" Luke 22:11

Have you ever thought what it would be like to have Jesus over for dinner? Just imagine the storm of cooking and cleaning that would go on! You'd want to have everything perfect—a table beautifully set up, dishes and utensils and napkins and serving dishes... It would be a lot of work. But it would be worth it, wouldn't it?

One family in Jerusalem had this experience at Passover time. Jesus was planning to eat His last supper with His disciples, and they needed a family in Jerusalem that would be willing to take them in. It must have been a family with a large home; Jesus and His disciples meant thirteen people for dinner, even if none of His other followers came. Where would they put them all?

It was common in that country to build extra rooms on the flat roofs of the first floor. That's apparently what this family had done, and they furnished it with a table and dining couches or cushions enough for all the men to be comfortable. They probably supplied other things, like the basin and towel Jesus used to wash His disciples' feet; it's likely that they shared their cooking—special family dishes served at holiday time. And of course, there was clean-up. Someone had to do the dishes!

This kind of hospitality is something we're never going to be able to give to Jesus—or is it? After all, He did say "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). You yourself probably enjoy showing hospitality to others, whether at home or as part of a joint effort at church. Perhaps you invite people who are lonely, or people who are hungry or homeless or far away from home. Perhaps you are reaching out to refugees or to international students. Perhaps you take a casserole to a family with a new baby, or buy toothpaste and toilet paper for the local homeless shelter. If so, you are showing hospitality to Jesus. What an honor to be able to do so!

THE PRAYER: *Dear Lord, help me to show care to others for Your sake and in Your name. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Is there a special time when you celebrated with family or friends that shines in your memory? Tell about it.

Are you involved in showing hospitality, or have you done so in the past? How?

How can you make your heart a place of hospitality for Jesus and His people?

*"The books the Holy Spirit is writing are living."
- Father Jean-Pierre DeCaussade**

TEXT: *They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself!" Matthew 27:4*

What kind of men are these? Though they are priests—chief priests!—they seem to feel no shame at all about offering silver to Judas to betray his master. I hope they at least had the decency not to use money that came out of the temple offerings!

And when Judas shows up later, full of remorse, and tries to undo the betrayal, they answer him with one of the most cold-blooded replies on record: "What is that to us? See to it yourself." They offered no hope, no mercy, nothing to hang on to—and Judas went and hanged himself. Did they know? Did they care?

The priests are scary. Not because they are villains, but because they manage to be what they are while spending all their lives around holy things, serving in the very temple of the Lord. My mind can't process that. How is it possible for a man to walk from "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" just a few dozen steps to a meeting that ends up with "What is that to us? See to it yourself!"?

It scares me the more because as a Christian, I too spend my life among holy things. I read the Bible. I go to church. I take communion. And I don't want to end up like these men, arguing over blood money in the midst of holiness.

But only one thing can prevent that—and that's if Jesus is actually living in me, holy in the midst of my unholiness. Nothing short of that can protect me. Nothing short of that can protect you.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). This is our protection. Because we are His temple, God guards us jealously from the attacks of the devil. Jesus lay down His life to make us God's holy and everlasting possession. The one who died and rose for us will keep us safe—and holy—in His hands.

THE PRAYER: *Dear Father, keep me holy and safe from evil in Your hands. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What "holy things" do you live among on a daily or weekly basis?

When have you been surprised by evil in a holy place or situation?

How do you guard against having a hardened heart like those of the chief priests?

*"Love is the strongest force the world possesses."
- Mahatma Gandhi**

Day 17: Reflections by Alexis

I think when we see the word 'holy', we have the tendency to envision something so lofty and high above us that is it unattainable; something that we have to work for; something that we are unworthy of. However, I find that the most 'holy' experiences of my life have been in the mundane every-day.

Holiness can be found in love; in compassion for the stranger. I experience it when wisdom from a friend or older family member is shared; when I see the change in a young person's heart as they discover Jesus; when forgiveness overcomes anger and hate. It's in the **love** that we share and experience every day.

It's always upsetting to hear when the opposite is happening; school shootings, random acts of violence... and even more so when it's a church- because it is a place where we believe that the Spirit resides. We don't want to put evil and God in the same space, when it feels like evil is prevailing.

It doesn't even have to be violence... absence of love happens when people are un-welcome in a church or discriminated against for their sexuality, skin color, or anything else by God's people. We are going against Jesus' very words, and that is the most unholy act, especially when we should know better.

- A. Steig



Day 18: Reflections by LoAnn and Tom

Saturday, March 23, 2019

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

TEXT: *The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" John 7:46*

The crowd of soldiers and officers who came to arrest Jesus must have been disconcerted. Jesus wasn't behaving like anyone they'd captured before. To begin with, He stepped forward to meet them, instead of hiding in the darkness. "Who are you looking for?" He asked. When they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth," He calmly identified Himself: "I am He."

The Gospel writer John says that when Jesus said that, "they drew back and fell to the ground." There was power in Jesus' words, and they couldn't help responding! What power? When Jesus said, "I am he," He was basically saying the very name of God, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). It was as if He had said, "I am YHWH, your God." No wonder they fell to the ground!

But rattled as they were, they pulled themselves back together—only to start taking orders from the very man they came to arrest. Jesus said, "So, if you seek me, let these men go." And that's what happened.

But that wasn't the end of it. Jesus' disciple Peter pulled a sword and hurt a man—only to be stopped by Jesus, who rebuked him and healed the man's ear. And as far as we can tell, the soldiers simply let it happen. Jesus was in charge.

But Jesus had one more thing to do before submitting to arrest. He made it absolutely clear to everyone what was happening in the garden that night—and that it was foolish and evil: "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:52-53). And having said this, He submitted—and the soldiers finally took Him away.

Did the soldiers wonder about Jesus in years to come? Surely a man of such power could have avoided the cross. But that wasn't what Jesus was doing with His authority. He was in charge, that night because He was about the business of saving us. And now that He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, we know that He is in charge of everything in heaven and earth—and we are safely His forever.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, I'm glad You're in charge. Help me to trust You. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Are you comfortable being in charge of events at work, at home, or at church? If yes, in what situations?

When do you feel like events are spinning out of control? What do you do to feel better?

Have you ever had an experience when you sensed the power in God's word? Tell about it if you like.

Jesus, in charge even when faced with extremely daunting circumstances – who is this man? How do we interpret and use this story to prepare our hearts during the Lenten season? What is the lesson going forward?

In reflecting on this part of the Lenten story, I am struck by what I see as God's perfect plan – using the situation to emphasize his glory through Jesus. God had to have provided an awareness to the soldiers, of who this was that they were dealing with. For them to fall to the ground, obey Jesus' commanding that the disciples be let go, to not kill Peter when he drew his sword, feels like it had to be a pre-ordained scenario. Jesus, making the point that they are following a foolish and evil path, and then healing the soldier's ear – you can bet they talked about that for quite some time!

As we prepare for the crucifixion, this is a story that helps us to understand the mighty God who we are blessed to call Father. Our God, who, if we choose to pay attention, gives us opportunities to do what Jesus did. To show His glory and power through situations in our own lives.

The lesson going forward... Jesus, God incarnate – on earth, as man – was put among us to lead. Great leaders of our time tell us that it is important to know they way, go the way, and show the way – Jesus was The Way. To know Jesus, follow Jesus' teaching, and share it embodies what we are all called to do on a daily basis. God gives us free will, allowing us to choose to do this, or not... but if we do, we're in charge – as we know, go and show – are helping to multiply the numbers of believers/followers of Christ here on this earth!

– L. VandeLeest



For Personal Health Care Issues which are lacking in Control +/- Relief.

- YOU are GOD , so I hand my pain to YOU, for I can do nothing else!
- (Mark 9:24) "I (father of epileptic boy) believe; (But) help my unbelief."
- (John 10:10) "I (Jesus) came that they (we) may have life, and have it abundantly"
- (Ps 131) "But I (song of quiet trust) have calmed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother"
- (Isaiah 40:31) "(but) those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint"

- T. Woodworth

HEALING HIS ENEMIES

Sunday, March 24, 2019

TEXT: *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ..."* Luke 6:27

Just a man, rubbing his ear now and then. I suspect that's what we would have seen if we could have visited the high priest's house during the weeks after Easter. The man was a servant, and his action would probably go unnoticed. What could be less important? But to the man, it was probably the most important thing in his life.

Malchus worked for the high priest, and somehow he ended up in the crowd of people sent to arrest Jesus. It must have been a motley crew, with torches and swords and clubs. Some were soldiers, but not all. And in the middle of them, Malchus.

Opposite them in the garden, what? A group of scared men who had just woken up. A rabbi with a reputation as a healer. And one frightened fisherman with a sword, swinging wildly, trying to protect his master from the enemies who had come to arrest Him.

Searing pain. An ear lying on the ground. And then Jesus, stooping forward to heal one last person before His death less than twenty-four hours later. Healing His enemy.

Because that's what Jesus does, isn't it? He heals His enemies. He makes us whole again. He reaches out in compassion and deals with our wounds, making us the way God intended us to be. And He changes us from enemies to beloved children.

Did Malchus end up in the Christian faith? It seems likely. The apostle John knew his name, after all. But what's certain is that you and I have been called to Jesus. He knows our names, and He heals our wounds. Let us stay with Him forever.

THE PRAYER: *Dear Lord, thank You for healing me and making me Your own, though I was once Your enemy. Keep me close to You. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Did you ever get caught up in a bad situation? When?

How do you deal with your enemies?

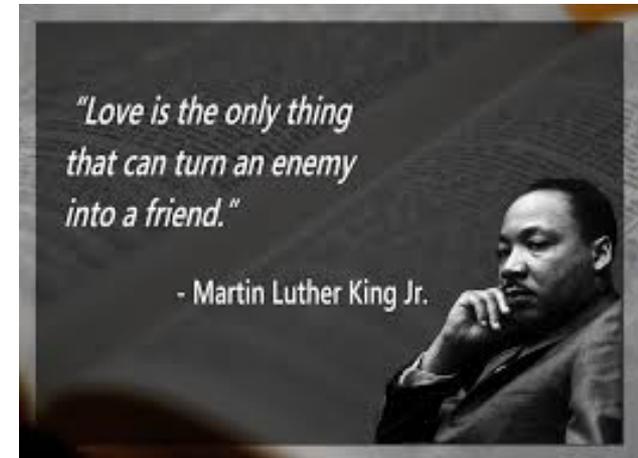
When has God done something good for you that you did not expect?

Day 19: Reflections by David

This text tells us how Jesus healed his enemies just 24 hours before his death. What a powerful lesson. How can we apply this lesson today? Do we really have enemies in our daily life? Most of us likely don't think we do. However when we turn on the news or TV we are barraged with hateful words exchanged between people, violence and killings. It seems much of what we see and hear tells us enemies are around us every day. One wonders what Jesus would say about this.

Take a minute, close your eyes, no distractions and imagine Jesus showed up today. This very minute. He turns off the TV and shakes his head and asks is this really the message being spread today? I find it better to tune out the hateful messages, tune out those who preach negativity and tune out those who would make enemies of ourselves. This brings me back to the text from Luke 6:27. We can all take a step in the direction of doing good to those who disagree with us. You will feel better, have a more positive outlook and advance along your spiritual journey by following this text.

- D. Pepler



Day 20: Reflections by Suzanne

Monday, March 25, 2019

GLORY AND SHAME

TEXT: *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Galatians 3:27*

What an embarrassing story! A young man tried to follow Jesus when He was arrested in Gethsemane, but the crowd seized on him, and grabbed his clothing. He escaped by running away completely naked.

Who was this young man? What do we know about him? Not a whole lot, though we can guess at a few particulars. Some think this was Mark the Gospel writer himself, telling what happened to him the night Jesus was arrested. Since Mark is the only one who writes down this event, it makes sense that it might be his personal story.

Clearly the young man was a follower of Jesus, though he wasn't one of the twelve disciples. He was out in the garden of Gethsemane, which suggests he tagged along with the disciples when they left the house where they celebrated Passover. Perhaps he was a son of that family. He clearly had some courage, to try to follow the arrest squad—though when they grabbed him, he lost his nerve and fled.

But in the end, what do we truly know of him but his most glorious—and inglorious—moment? Glorious because he loved Jesus and attempted to follow Him even when his own life was at risk; inglorious because he lost his nerve and fled naked. That one moment sums up all we really know about him—his love, his glory and his shame, all rolled into one.

But it's like that for us, too, isn't it? We love Jesus; we attempt to follow Him; and all too often, what we're trying to do ends up as a total fiasco. Our good intentions don't survive the actual doing of them. We may even find ourselves running away embarrassed, covered in shame.

Fortunately for us, we have a Savior who won't leave us covered in shame. He comes to us and clothes us in His own righteousness. We don't have to be embarrassed about our failures. They are taken away, covered by His own holiness. We are forgiven, healed, washed, clothed. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). He covers us in Himself. Thanks be to God.

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Father, that You take all of me, glorious and shameful together. Cover me in the grace of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do you have a funny embarrassing story about yourself you're willing to tell?

If you are willing, tell about a time when you tried to do good and it backfired.

When have you seen God bring a blessing out of an inglorious moment?

"The one who meditates on the Divine is like a tree planted by streams of water."

*- Psalm 1**

As an Assisting Minister, I want to follow the order of worship that is set for us. It is a blessing to help lead the congregation during worship. Maundy Thursday is an especially somber service and we end the service quietly, stripping the altar and chancel area of all adornments. The "Go in peace, serve the Lord" is omitted. I was caught up in the atmosphere of the night one year, but I was still a creature of habit and said, "Go in peace (then I caught myself) "No, don't go in peace!" Everyone started to laugh. Needless to say, I was quite embarrassed and the beautiful seriousness of the worship was lost.

This incident has become a funny anecdote since then, and I have made many mistakes while leading worship as an Assisting Minister. I have found that worship goes on and people are blessed by the whole of their experience with fellow worshipers, keeping their focus on why we are there - to worship our Lord and give praise to our God.

- S. Lehto



TEXT: *The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" John 18:17*

She was a servant girl minding the front door. It was a busy night—the whole Sanhedrin assembled, and the preacher Jesus of Nazareth on trial before them! She did her job, letting everybody in and shutting the door—and then one of the men came back to ask a favor: "Would you let my friend in too?" he must have said. "This man, here"—and John would have pointed out Peter.

It was no skin off her nose. John was known to the high priest's household, and she didn't mind letting his friend Peter in, too. But she was curious. Apparently she knew that John was a follower of Jesus. So as Peter entered, she asked him, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?"

That question gets asked more often than we think. At work, at school, in the neighborhood—people look at us, just as the girl looked at Peter; and wonder: "You aren't one of these Christians, are you?" They may ask us to our faces, or they may ask other people behind our backs. But they are curious.

It's a good curiosity to have. It can give Christians the opportunity to tell our friends about Jesus their Savior. True, Peter blew his chance when he denied Jesus. And sometimes we blow our chances, too, when we talk or behave in ways that bring shame to the name of Christ.

But that isn't usually what happens. If non-Christians are asking, it's usually because they see something in our lives that is good—something they want for themselves. They may not know exactly what it is, but they want to. They are curious. And that's our chance to tell them about Jesus—who loves them, and us, enough to lay down His own life to rescue us.

Pray for your friends. Ask God to make them curious about Jesus—and to give you the right words to say at the right time.

THE PRAYER: *Father, use me to draw others to Your Son Jesus. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What kinds of topics make you curious, and why?

Has anyone ever asked you if you were a Christian? What happened?

Think of the Christians you know. What in their lives would make a non-Christian curious to know more about Jesus?

Day 21: Reflections by Jana

What makes me curious? Obviously, lots of things make me curious. But nothing so strongly as relationships and family dynamics. The servant girl in this text was just doing her job. Not a particularly important job and really kind of insignificant in the realm of the religious maneuvering of her day. Yet, she had a family somewhere and she probably talked about what happened at work that day. Was her family fascinated by her door-opening experiences? Doubtful.

My family usually asks about my day and I usually respond in generalities. The reality is, though, that I spend my entire work day engaging in relationships that are amazing and painful and hard and powerful and frustrating and enlightening. Relationships are the very foundation of my approach to therapy. I believe healing occurs only through relationships - with others and with ourselves.

My curiosity about my relationship with Jesus is endless. If he were in my office (I seriously hope that isn't sacrilege to even say that) how would I relate to him? How would he relate to me? Could I be of service to him? I know he has certainly been of service to me!! Most importantly, how do I internalize this amazing relationship I have with him and let it mold me into a stronger Christian and a stronger healer? That really makes me curious.....

- J. Rockne



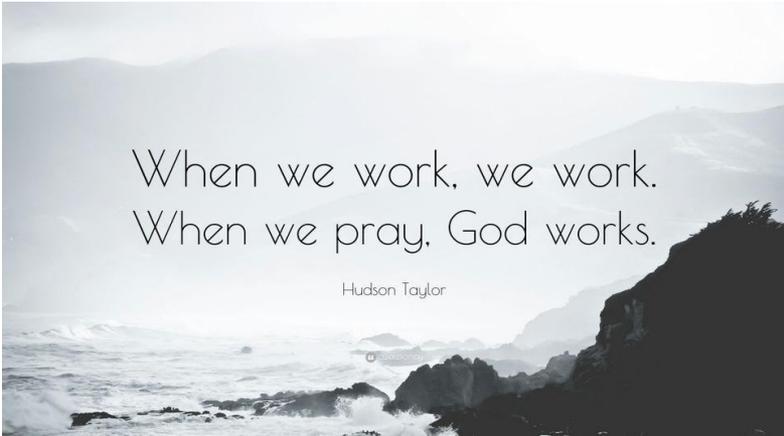
Day 22: Reflections by Nancy

'Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered', Jesus is there: at Bible studies, in committee meetings, during worship, during fellowship, everywhere. When we sit down together, Jesus is kindling the fire which may have only begun as a small spark. It is then our 'duty' - our mission - to see that this spark keeps going and growing for Him - to see that everyone has what they need to grow their faith. I'm not sure I like the word 'duty'. It sounds to me like I 'have' to do something. I'd rather 'want' to do something - for Christ. I love to work with children. They are so willing to learn - to do it right the first time. We adults should be more like them.

Martin Luther said that whenever he looked into the face of a child (or fed, clothed, heard them), he was looking into the face of Christ. Jesus delights in His children - in us. Sometimes I wonder why He delights in me - a sinner. I do not deserve it - ever. But He loves me - and you - no matter what. So I accept His love and try to spread that love to others.

That's my wilderness of faith - spreading the Word, not knowing the results - and letting the almighty power of God do His work.

- N. Ammann



When we work, we work.
When we pray, God works.

Hudson Taylor

MORE THAN DUTY

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

TEXT: "And they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together . . ." Luke 22:55

When the guards got back to the high priest's house, they went into the courtyard and made a fire. It was cold, and they'd be waiting a long, long time. There was no prospect of bed any time soon! The priests and leaders would be meeting for hours, they knew that. So they gathered in a group around the charcoal fire, warming themselves and watching the flames. Waiting was their duty.

The servants of the household were on duty, too. The girl in charge of the door was checking people who arrived for the meeting to make sure that no one improper got in. Other servants passed through the courtyard, making sure that the men in the meeting had whatever they needed. That was their duty—to fetch and carry whatever was needed—chairs, refreshments, messages. They, too, would have a long night.

Though they could not have known it, there was one more person on duty that night—our Lord Jesus, on trial for His life in that council room. Of everyone there He had the hardest work, for He was in the process of rescuing the entire human race. By now He was well launched into His Passion—arrested, beaten, slapped, forced to listen while people lied about Him and His ministry. It would be a very long night for Jesus, with no rest and no sleep ever again—not until His body slept in death the next evening in a borrowed tomb.

But it was more than duty that motivated Jesus. He wasn't just doing it because He "had to"—he was doing it because He loved us. Looking ahead, He knew that everything He suffered would bring us out of spiritual death into eternal life and joy forever. As Isaiah put it, "He shall see His offspring . . . Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11). Because of what Jesus did, we are God's children, and Jesus is satisfied—joyful!—because we belong to Him.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, thank You so much that we are more than just another duty You have. Thank You for taking delight in us. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What duties do you have in your life?

What kinds of things do you do for love—not simply because you have to do them?

What does it mean to you, that Jesus delights in you?

“NOBODY HURTS MY FAMILY”

Thursday, March 28, 2019

TEXT: *One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” John 18:26*

“Didn’t I see you in the garden with Jesus?” Such a simple, innocent question—on the surface. But Peter knew what it meant: “You look familiar. Hey, I think I’ve seen your face before. Aren’t you the one who stepped into the torchlight just when we went to arrest Jesus? Aren’t you the one who cut my relative’s ear off!?”

No wonder Peter was terrified. Peter had indeed cut someone’s ear off in the garden, the result of terror and a wild swing with a sword—the ear of a man named Malchus, who was with the group arresting Jesus. And now here was Malchus’ relative, demanding an answer. We can feel the tension in the air; the not-yet-spoken threats: “Nobody hurts my family and gets away with it.”

Peter bursts into denials. “Not me, I swear it, I don’t even know this man Jesus you’re talking about ...” and the rooster crows. Peter has denied Jesus for the last time.

Was Malchus’ relative satisfied? Did he believe Peter? Or did he look at Peter’s tears and decide he wasn’t worth pursuing any further, and let him go?

“Nobody hurts my family and gets away with it.” Malchus’ relative wasn’t the only one in the high priest’s house that night who had that attitude. Jesus Himself was taking His next steps toward the cross, willingly and deliberately, for just that reason.

For Jesus Himself had had family injured long ago in a garden—in the garden of Eden, in fact. Back at the beginning the devil came into the garden to tempt and destroy Adam and Eve, and with them the whole human race. God took this very personally. “Nobody hurts My family and gets away with it.” And so God was born as the man Christ Jesus into the family of humanity, to destroy the power of the devil and to restore us all to life and health.

You, you yourself, are the relative Jesus came to rescue and avenge. You are the one He protected even at the cost of death. And you are the one with whom He shares His resurrected, eternal life—because He loves you as family.

THE PRAYER: *Thank You for protecting me as Your own family, Lord. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have you ever had to protect a family member; either with words or with actions?

Has anyone ever protected you because you are family? Tell the story.

What does it mean to you, that Jesus sees you as family?

Day 23: Reflections by Anne

It seems natural to protect and defend your own family. As Malchus asks Peter if he cut off his relative’s ear, Malchus supports and defends his injured relative. Peter is afraid and threatened by the accusations, as seems human nature, he is scared of the repercussions of an admission of guilt if he admits to cutting off the ear; so he denies it and knowledge of Jesus.

As an older sister in a family of 3 girls, I often found myself defending and protecting my sisters, as we grew up. I also recall times they stood up for me.

Whoever does what God the Father wants, is my brother, sister, my Mother...my Family explaining the love and closeness one feels with family, extended family and friends becoming like "family." I find myself feeling that same type of closeness to my students and their families. In teaching, I try to reinforce the lesson of kindness and friendship. I try to instill in all classes (all ages 18 months through 5years) that we are all friends - that we all help each other out, we help not hurt our school family. We are : kind and gentle, using manners and not angry words. Our class is like a group of friends, like a family when we work together. (if we divide into separate groups we lose that feeling of togetherness and family and then fight each other, then the family falls apart.)

Wilderness of Faith: In bad times, you feel lost and disillusioned with your faith. Emotions and stress can play a big part when you feel stretched to the limit and don't make time for your spiritual life. Rather than stating “I’m too busy for church,” stop and realize what you have to be thankful and grateful for in your life.

- A. Franko



Day 24: Reflections by Tim

The above title "Power Games" says a lot to me. When I think of Power, not counting our Lord's Power, I think of it in a negative manner. One definition of Power is, "The ability or right to control people or things." I despise the word Power, because most of the time I have seen it used in a selfish form. The word, "Games", as a verb can mean, "manipulate (a situation), typically in a way that is unfair or unscrupulous." Too many games are always going on, and we have to recognize them as "games." These Power Games don't have to be something globally, they can be right in your neighborhood bridge club. The second to last paragraph says the following: "These Power Games look familiar, don't they? The world we live in is full of Power, much of it used wrongly and illegitimately. It's a scary time to be alive for many of us." The author of the devotion should realize that living in our earthly world has been scary for decades, not just now. In the closing comment the author say, "for many of us", the author should say, "for all people", for too many reasons to mention in my comments.

Regarding the questions from the devotional: 1) Have you ever been treated wrongly by those in Power? I will answer that with a question, "who hasn't?" The second part asks, How did it make you feel? For me, disappointed in that person, persons or group. And, also extremely disrespected and unappreciated. But I did realize, as the saying goes, "Consider the source." 2) Non-violent resistance, is another term for Jesus' behavior before Annas. Have you ever done this, the question asks? I have tried addressing my concerns with those in Power expressing what I am seeing and feeling but that person or group will look at you and their ears don't appear to be clogged, but they are not listening. It is usually a case of selfish ways versus being selfless. In my view a better term for a person, persons or group, should be leader or leaders, those of whom are working truly for the benefit of all, respecting all and being selfless. 3) How has God protected you when you were in danger from corrupt authorities (of any kind)? Corrupt may be too strong of a word, because the authorities don't have to be corrupt to abuse power. I have found that God is always there to speak with and being able to speak with our dear Lord makes dealing with the selfish power person, persons or groups much easier to deal with as we live our earthly lives.

- T. Fox

POWER GAMES

Friday, March 29, 2019

TEXT: *First they led Him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. John 18:13*

Annas was the power behind the throne. He had been high priest himself, and after the Romans removed him from office, each of his five sons took a turn as high priest. So did one son-in-law—Caiaphas. Annas might have been out of power officially, but everyone knew who was pulling strings behind the scenes.

Small wonder they brought Jesus to Annas first. And Annas started meddling instead of leaving Jesus for Caiaphas to deal with. What's worse, he chose to question Jesus rather than handling things in the proper legal way—producing witnesses who could testify to a crime. Annas was hoping Jesus would incriminate Himself.

Jesus pointed out the illegality. "I have spoken openly to the world ... I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them; they know what I said" (John 18:20-21). A nearby officer hit Jesus, saying, "Is that how You answer the high priest?"

Power versus powerlessness. But who was the powerful one? On the surface, it appears to be Annas. He has the office and authority (well, sort of). He is running the interrogation. He is the one who has guards to enforce his will.

And yet Annas can do nothing with all his power: Jesus refuses to cooperate. He is not afraid to point out the wrong Annas is committing. Even a blow doesn't change Jesus' mind. It merely gives Him another illegality to point out. Annas gives up and sends Jesus to Caiaphas.

These power games look familiar; don't they? The world we live in is full of power; much of it used wrongly and illegitimately. It's a scary time to be alive for many of us.

And yet, we don't need to be afraid. Our true high priest, Jesus, is with us now, whenever we are in danger or need. Jesus watches over us with God's own authority and power; and nothing escapes His notice. No evil will be able to destroy us. Jesus will keep us in His care forever.

THE PRAYER: *Father, thank You for protecting us from all the powers of evil in our world. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have you ever been treated wrongly by those in power? How did it make you feel?

"Non-violent resistance" is another term for Jesus' behavior before Annas. Have you ever done this? If so, when?

How has God protected you when you were in danger from corrupt authorities (of any kind)?

TEXT: *Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Matthew 10:16*

What a cold-blooded snake. Caiaphas sees Jesus as a risk, someone who could bring the whole religious hierarchy crashing down. Caiaphas isn't about to lose his job as high priest, even if Jesus is the actual Messiah. Better to get rid of Him at once. And so Caiaphas says to his fellow plotters: "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man [Jesus] should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish" (John 11:49-50).

Time to bite the bullet. Make the hard decision. Get rid of one man and save the whole nation. After all, we're living in the real world, aren't we? Not the pretty baby world of morality and fairy tales. We're grown-ups here.

And so Caiaphas sets in motion the events of Jesus' suffering and death.

We hear this reasoning so often—from politicians, from businesses, and even sometimes from our own coworkers, friends, or family. And we are tempted. We know what they're proposing is wrong. But it looks like such an easy solution... And we're scared. If we don't go along with it, will our own worlds come crashing down? Should we join the crucifiers with Caiaphas, or should we risk ending up on a cross next to Jesus?

But even here the Holy Spirit is at work. He takes those terribly evil words and turns them into a prophecy: Caiaphas "did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:51-52).

It is for us Jesus died—for all of us who are scared, who are tempted, who worry about what the future will bring. It is even for us who have fallen, who took the easy way out when we knew it was wrong. For us Jesus died, to bring us together again as the children of God, forgiven and made new. For us Jesus rose, that we might be set free from fear and trust in the safety of God's love for us.

THE PRAYER: *Lord, give us wisdom and strength to withstand our own fears and the tempting wrong suggestions of those around us. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Who in your world do you hear saying things like Caiaphas? How do you deal with their pressure on you?

What do you do when you're afraid? Does it help?

If you are willing, tell about a time when you were tempted to take the easy way out. How did God help you?

Day 25: Reflections by Phil

Jesus was aware of the dangers and hardships His apostles, and later His disciples, would face as they lived by faith in a fallen world. He did not hide it from them. He wanted them and us to know what we were getting ourselves into. He wanted us to know of the blessings and riches that would become ours in the kingdom, but also He wanted us to know the obstacles we would face on our way.

This is our "walk in the wilderness"; the wilderness of a broken and fallen world. However we have a perfect compass and map to lead us. That is The Bible and The assurance of Jesus within us and us in Him. So, we ought not be surprised if the world reacts much in the same way as it reacted then. Jesus told them what they needed to be because their message would not always be welcomed and sometimes they would be severely tested. It would be easy to give up or shrink back from their responsibility. So, facing this, Jesus tells them what they need to be; and this is a rather difficult balance to strike: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16).

We have the same challenges in this time. There is no conflict between speaking truth and loving others unless we put it there. One can love those who do evil while abhorring the evil that they do. After-all they too are God's children whom he loves. If, for the sake of protecting feelings, the truth is compromised, then we have failed to keep a proper balance. If for the sake of speaking truth, one becomes harsh and insensitive, again, we have failed to keep a proper balance. There is a danger that the hurt inflicted will close the heart of the hearer to the truth of the message. Today, many apparently think that they can be pleasing to God apart from steadfastness to His word. His word is not always viewed as politically correct today, and often mocked, ridiculed and compromised. One cannot be as "wise as a serpent" while compromising the source of wisdom - God's word.

My Reflection Answers (to questions in box above):

First, pray for those you disagree with. With Christian love, try to correct those who need help. Everyone has a cross to bear so speak in a loving manner.

When afraid, I pray for guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Our understanding is so finite and God's is infinite. Give it to God and ask for guidance and peace, a peace that only He can give. We are all human and sometimes look for the easy way out of a situation. Again, prayer is a perfect opportunity to strengthen your relationship with God. He knows our every thought and all of our weaknesses...

Instead of hiding our weaknesses, pour out your heart to God in prayer and wait quietly and patiently for His answer.

- P. Anderson

Day 26: Reflections by Laura and Pete

Sunday, March 31, 2019

FALSE WITNESSES

TEXT: *Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put Him to death. Matthew 26:59*

Caiaphas was in a bind. He needed testimony—any testimony, true or false!—against Jesus, but it had to match up. There had to be at least two witnesses according to the Law of Moses, and both witnesses had to testify to exactly the same crime. If they disagreed, their testimony was not valid.

Matthew tells us that “many false witnesses came forward” (Matthew 26:60). This staggers me. Why? Were they looking for money? Probably—we know that Judas had already been paid off for his role in Jesus’ betrayal. But there could be other reasons. Were they simply haters, people who had it in for Jesus? Were they the kind of people who liked to stir up excitement, and didn’t care what it did to other people’s lives?

This just makes me angry. I can sort of see why Caiaphas did what he did—his whole life and position as high priest was on the line, after all. But who were these false witnesses, who would throw away a man’s life for so little?

It may be that you, too, have suffered at the hands of false witnesses. It is a strange, unique pain—to know yourself true but be treated as a liar, to be innocent and yet accused. If this is your case, Jesus knows your pain. He experienced it. He who is the Truth incarnate had lies thrown at Him by people off the street, men of no account. And He stood silent.

Why? For you. Because He loves you. Because He knows all of you, both the good and the bad, the true and the false bits alike, and still wants you. Because He came to redeem you, to make you a son or daughter of the Truth, someone who will one day walk in the clear light of God’s presence and rejoice. That is the truth of why He suffered, died, and rose from the dead—for love of you.

THE PRAYER: *Father, keep us in the truth for the sake of Your Son Jesus. Amen.*

As a young child around 5 or 6 years-old, I was trying to make a joke to my little sister, but what I said was absolutely awful and made her cry. When I was confronted about what I’d said to upset her, I lied about it to try and keep from getting in trouble. I don’t remember now what my punishment was, but I’ve never forgotten how upset my sister was. She was absolutely terrified and nearly inconsolable. I’ve also never forgotten the lie that I told so many years ago, but unlike Jesus, *I deliberately chose to tell that lie to try and save my own skin*. Rather than choosing to take action to save His own skin when others were telling lies about Him and conspiring against Him, *Jesus deliberately chose to take the punishment*, not only for that lie I told, but for all the other sins I’ve committed over my lifetime as well as all the sins the entire world has committed over their lifetimes.

Although I am still not likely to deliberately choose to take punishment, I have also experienced situations similar to Jesus when ill-intentioned people have said untrue things about me. I once had a supervisor that was not very good at the work that she did, and rather than admit her faults, she tried placing the blame on me whenever something went wrong. This was one of the hardest and darkest parts of my working life, and it truly felt like I was wandering all alone; just like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, I wondered whether God heard my prayers to take away these awful circumstances. I knew that if I were ever going to get out of this bad situation that I would need to be patient and, like Jesus, keep silent until the lies worked themselves out. Eventually an opportunity presented itself for me to give a truthful account about our work to our manager, and I was offered a new and better opportunity after telling my side of the story. My triumph over that bad situation at work is certainly no comparison to the triumph that Jesus experienced on Easter, but it did make me feel like I had come through a very bleak wilderness and risen to the mountaintop.

Thanks be to God this Lenten season for His *deliberate* grace and compassion, reminding us that He is the only source of truth that will ever be able to set us free from the lies of sin, death, and the devil by leading us through the wilderness to the path of victory!

- L. Acker

Reflection Questions (responses by Pete):

- 1. Did you ever get in trouble as a child for lying? Yes, and I was told to tell the priest at confession.**
- 2. Have you suffered at the hands of false witnesses? How did God help you through it? Yes. God made me believe to know myself to be true, and not a liar.**
- 3. Jesus calls Himself the Way and the Truth and the Life. What do you think He meant by calling Himself the Truth? He is the Truth incarnate and had lies thrown at Him by people off the street.**

- P. Hoopfer

WHAT SHALL I DO?

Monday, April 1, 2019

TEXT: *Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" Matthew 27:22*

"What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" That was the problem facing Pilate that whole Good Friday. Shall I set Him free, seeing He is an innocent man? Shall I send Him off to Herod, and get Him out of my jurisdiction so I don't have to deal with His case? Shall I hand Him over to the doubtful mercies of the crowd, in the hope that His old popularity will save Him? Shall I scourge Him to work up the sympathy vote? What shall I do with Jesus?

Pilate knew a political hot potato when he saw one. His career was already in trouble before Jesus arrived on his doorstep—Pilate's old mentor Sejanus had fallen from power, and anyone associated with him was at risk. The last thing Pilate needed was for the Jewish leaders to send bad reports of him to Rome.

But Pilate wasn't comfortable just condemning the innocent Jesus either. Some of the reason might have been a drive for justice. Some of it might have been an understandable desire to annoy the Jewish religious leaders, who had been a longstanding thorn in Pilate's side. But much of it seemed to be due to how Jesus handled Himself, how He spoke and what He said. It bothered Pilate. When the leaders said, "He claims to be the Son of God," Pilate was half-inclined to believe it. There was something spooky about Jesus!

We all know what Pilate decided in the end. But what about us? What will we do with Jesus, this man who claims to be the Son of God? We face this question every day as we live our lives in a world hostile to Jesus, making choices in what we say and think and do.

May the Holy Spirit strengthen our faith in Him who laid down His life for our sake. May He give us the joy of following Jesus faithfully and sharing His story with others.

THE PRAYER: *Father, strengthen our faith and trust in Jesus our Savior, and let all our decisions be made according to Your will. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What do you do when you're trying to avoid making a decision?

What other "options" besides trusting in Jesus have you had in your life? These might be other faiths, or just other ways of trying to cope with the world.

If you're willing, share about the last time you had to choose between Jesus and an easier way out of a hard situation.



Day 27: Reflections by Marilyn

What shall I do? That's a question I found myself asking when choosing to change majors and when making career changes. Often I would get caught in the current of trying to be what I thought I should be rather than letting God lead me. I have learned especially in the last two years and since being recently married that truly listening to God is letting God take the lead and following with faith. He'll lead you in the direction you least expect. It will fall into place.

- M. Johns

"It seems strange that visitors to Yosemite should be so little influenced by its novel grandeur, as if their eyes were bandaged and their ears stopped. Most of those I saw yesterday were looking down as if wholly unconscious of anything going on about them, while the sublime rocks were trembling with the tones of the mighty chanting congregation of waters gathered from all the mountains round about, making music that might draw angels out of heaven. Yet respectable-looking, even wise-looking people were fixing bits of worms on bent pieces of wire to catch trout. Sport they called it. Should church-goers try to pass the time fishing in baptismal fonts while dull sermons were being preached, the so-called sport might not be so bad; but to play in the Yosemite temple, seeking pleasure in the pain of fishes struggling for their lives, while God is preaching the sublimest water and stone sermons!"

- John Muir, "Eyes to See, Ears to Hear"

TEXT: *While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of Him today in a dream." Matthew 27:19*

Pilate's wife is one of the more interesting minor characters in the Passion story. All we know about her is that she had a dream about Jesus, and it concerned her so much that she tried to get her husband to set Him free as a righteous man. Where did the dream come from? Coincidence? God? We don't know. But wherever it came from, she was right. And she did everything in her power to rescue the innocent Jesus from His fate.

Pilate was apparently worried by his wife's dream—no surprise, since the Romans put a lot of stock in omens, portents and dreams. At the very least he would have been deeply uneasy at his wife's report. He was already aware that the case against Jesus was based purely on jealousy—that the religious leaders hated Him for His popularity, and not for any real wrongdoing. So Pilate tried to get Jesus released through a trick—offering the crowd a choice between the popular Jesus and a known murderer, Barabbas. Unfortunately, it backfired. The crowd chose the wrong man. And Pilate didn't have the guts to set the innocent Jesus free anyway.

It must have been heartbreaking for Pilate's wife. She tried so hard to save Jesus, and all for nothing. He died anyway, like a common criminal, hanged on a cross.

Or was it for nothing? Jesus wouldn't say so. He knew exactly why He had come to that day, and it wasn't to be miraculously saved by a Roman lady, however kindhearted. He came instead to save her—yes, and Pilate too, and everybody else, all who would have their sins taken away by His death on the cross. And by rising again, He gave all of us who trust in Him everlasting life. Jesus is our true and everlasting Savior.

THE PRAYER: *Lord Jesus, thank You that You chose to save us rather than being saved Yourself. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have you ever had a particularly disturbing dream?

When have you tried to help someone and had it all go terribly wrong?

When has God overruled your plans, only to do something that was ultimately much better?



Day 29: Reflections by Paul and Jessica

My wife and I met and were married within 6 months. Unbeknownst to me, she had the word *kismet* engraved on the inside of my ring. The word's meaning, fate can be more spiritually translated, as the divine will of God. Fodder for the feeling that our meeting and marriage was indeed kismet, was the fact that I had loved this uncommon word and had not once mentioned this to my then fiancé. It was a complete surprise engraved on my ring and at the time I interpreted this coincidence as further proof we were meant to be together....

A cute story, but I am finding that kismet, or God's will is much more difficult to parse. It finds home in our common parlance through phrases aimed to sooth or comfort the afflicted or even praise God for our prosperity. We say things like, "I am sure God has a plan..." and, "When God closes one door, He opens another." But what does this really mean? I may have believed that kismet brought my wife and I together, but I've struggled with the concept of God's divine will since the birth of our daughter and her congenital birth defects.

We cannot understand the complexities of God's will. We can only work to act in accordance with that which is pleasing to Him, as perhaps Pilot's wife did in Matthew 27:19. She saw Jesus was righteous and spoke to save him. Despite her petition, He was crucified. Yet it was the will of God that it was so. How is one to understand that except to say we can't? What could you have done in that situation to change the fate of Jesus? What can we do to change the fate of anything if it is the will of God? Probably nothing, but I sense that Pilot's wife's efforts mattered, even if they didn't change the outcome. I believe it pleases God for us to act in accordance with his teachings, even in light of impossible circumstances, and knowing that God is pleased with our effort is at times explanation enough.

- P. and J. Wiemerslage

Day 30: Reflections by Peg

I will be the first to admit I am good at recognizing faces but horrible at remembering names. In those cases I just apologize and ask them to remind me of their name and the awkward moment is gone. However, there have been a few occasions where a person has come up to me and started talking like we knew each other and I drew a complete blank, not recognizing the face or bringing a name to mind and just hoping they say SOMETHING to trigger my memory. I suspect my awkwardness sends the wrong message that I did not want to talk to them. Those moments are the worst because it tells that person that somehow they were not important enough for me to remember.

In this passage from Matthew, the Romans while tormenting Jesus failed to recognize him and that he was in fact the true Son of God. I wonder if any of those Roman soldiers also walked away wondering if they had made a terrible mistake in failing to recognize they had just seen the true Messiah and sentenced him to death. The question comes to mind, would **we** recognize Jesus were he standing in front of us? It is said we create God in our own image. One need only look at the huge variety of art portraying Jesus to recognize this fact; Anglo, Middle Eastern, African to name a few. Were I to be blessed to meet the Lord face to face, I may not immediately recognize his face, but I promise, I will definitely know his name!

- P. Pepler



RECOGNITION

Thursday, April 4, 2019

TEXT: *And kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Matthew 27:29*

It must have been terrifying. There were hundreds of men in a Roman battalion, and they gathered in the governor's headquarters for a sadistic game of "king" with Jesus. They stripped Him and put a reddish-purple robe on Him. They crowned Him with thorns and gave Him a reed to be His scepter:

And then they began to brutalize Him. They hit Him and spit on Him. They knelt before Him and cried "Hail, King of the Jews!" They took the reed scepter away and beat Him on the head with it. They abused their prisoner gleefully, never suspecting for a minute that this bruised, bleeding man was God who had come to save them.

This was God in disguise—the true King mocked as a false king, the one who came to help us all treated as helpless and without power. They didn't recognize Him. But He recognized them. Nothing that they did that day was unexpected. He knows what lives in human hearts. He was not surprised.

He knows what lives in our hearts, too. That is enough to make us hide our faces in shame, except that we know what those soldiers did not—that "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Our sin is not enough to make Jesus turn His face from us. He knows us through and through—and He loves us anyway. He died for us. He rose from the dead for us. And He continues to recognize us as God's own children and care for us today. As Paul says, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

Jesus recognizes us as His own. Thanks be to God.

THE PRAYER: *Lord Jesus, thank You for seeking us out and calling us Your own. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When have you failed to recognize someone—and what happened next?

Do you think you would recognize Jesus if you met Him on the street? Why or why not?

When you finally meet Jesus face to face, visibly, what do you think He will say?

"Thus the Unspeakable [God] used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend."

- The Torah*

TEXT: ... and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head and put a reed in His right hand. Matthew 27:29

Has it ever occurred to you that someone must have made that crown of thorns for Jesus? Someone came up with the idea. Someone left the barracks to go looking in a field or on the side of the road. Someone (probably wearing gloves) picked those thorny branches and twisted them into the shape of a crown. Somebody took that crown and pushed it down on Jesus' head—a nice little piece of human handiwork to honor the King of the Jews.

We don't know that person's name. We don't know if he was young or old, Roman or provincial. Maybe he was habitually cruel—a man who went home at night and hit his wife and kicked the dog because it was underfoot. Or maybe he was the kind of person who just goes along with the crowd.

It doesn't really matter. Because, in the end, the one who twisted that crown for Jesus was me. It was you. It was every human being has ever done evil, however slight, knowing it was wrong but thinking, "It's such a small thing, it doesn't really matter." It was every one of us who has hardened our hearts against the needs of the poor, the sick, the unwanted, the very old and very young. A crown of thorns doesn't cost much to make. The effort is next to nothing.

But Jesus has made us a crown also, and this one cost Him everything. It's the crown He won for us when He laid down His life for us willingly, dying and rising for us in order to bring us back as God's people. The crown He offers us is His gift to everyone who repents and trusts in Him for forgiveness. James calls it "the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

Now, because of what Jesus has done, we can put away those thorns forever. Jesus has given us the crown of life—and on His own head, what do we see? A very different crown—we see Jesus "now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9).

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank You for the crown You have given us—and thank You that You Yourself are our true, beloved King. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have you ever grown a thorny plant—a rose, a cactus, or something similar? How did you handle it?

What good thing would you like to make for Jesus with your life?

How do you glorify and honor Jesus in your daily life?

Day 31: Reflections by Summer

Thorny plants...

With thorny roses and cactus plants, I have handled them with great care and caution, careful to be very aware of where the thorns are and to avoid them if at all possible.

Good thing to make for Jesus with your life...

I want to make Jesus my top priority, above everything, free up time to help others and truly put Him at the center. Also placing more emphasis on eternal life and rewards in heavens than unimportant things here and now.

Glorify and honor Jesus in daily life...

I honor Jesus by helping others, smiling and greeting people, looking for opportunities to listen or assist and acting on those moments. I pray, give thanks, humble myself, and ask for forgiveness and guidance daily.

Text reflection questions...

1. This text speaks to the great sacrifice Jesus made, how much He loved us and endured to give us eternal life. His love and commitment to each and every one of us is absolutely amazing!
2. The wilderness of faith sounds lonely and rugged, feels like you're all alone during difficult times, with no one to rely upon. But Jesus is there with us in the wilderness, to give us strength, hope and love to make it through the most difficult times since we are never truly alone with Him by our side.

- S. G. Ogden



Day 32: Reflections by Sharon and Betty

A CURSE OR A BLESSING?

Saturday, April 6, 2019

TEXT: *Pilate ... took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Matthew 27:24-25*

The roar of a crowd in a blood frenzy is a terrible thing. Pilate was hearing it that Friday morning as he tried to find some way, any way, out of his dilemma. He was more and more convinced that Jesus was an innocent man. And though Pilate was a seasoned and brutal Roman governor, even he was not willing to execute an innocent man—particularly one who spoke and acted as Jesus did.

He tried everything. A referral to another jurisdiction—to King Herod. But Herod sent Him back. An offer to release one prisoner in honor of Passover—with the only other choice a murderer. The crowd still chose the wrong man. In desperation, he had Jesus scourged and publicly displayed. Surely that would satisfy the crowd's thirst for blood. To no avail. "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

Finally he took water and washed his hands publicly in front of the crowd, saying: "I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!" to which the crowd replied, "His blood be on us—and on our children!" Pilate was defeated. He handed Jesus over to their will.

The crowd could not be placated. They would even wish a curse on themselves—and on their children. Pilate couldn't do anything against such resolute, determined evil. He could find no way to change them.

Pilate couldn't—but Jesus did. Because that crowd of people screaming "Crucify! Crucify!" were among the people He had come to earth to save. They, with us, were the reason He chose to suffer. They hated Him. No matter. He still loved them.

And so the curse turned into a blessing—Jesus' blood became the bringer of salvation to everyone who came to trust in Him, even those who once screamed for His death. His blood made them clean—new creations, new children of God. His life-giving blood does the same for us who trust Him today. And so we can say with thankful, loving hearts: "May His blood be on us—and on our children."

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving us life through Your blood. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What do you think of when you see blood?

What is the connection between ordinary blood and life?

How does Jesus' blood give us new life?

1. What do you think of when you see blood?

- Injury. We only bleed when our skin is broken open.

2. What is the connection between ordinary blood and life?

- Ordinary blood IS life! Without it, our cells don't receive oxygen and impurities (waste products) are not removed from our bodies. Without ordinary blood, we die.

3. How does Jesus' blood give us new life?

- Jesus' blood sanctified us and not only renewed us, but gave us eternal life. Jesus' blood washed away our sins. It took the waste material of our sinful nature and removed it from our bodies which made us clean and whole.

My favorite part of this devotion is the part where it says "They hated Him. No matter. He still loved them." Jesus' sacrificial love is astounding to me. I can't imagine the physical pain he endured. It was so cruel. Barbaric. And yet He didn't do anything to save Himself just so that I can enjoy the security of knowing that I will live forever with Him in paradise! No Greater Love!!

- S. Weller

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I doubt my deserving having His blood on me (His love), but I do not doubt receiving it. No one is excluded. This gives me a confidence in life, a happiness and the ability to feel and give love.

- B. Rutila



*"Whoever knows me can never fall – For I am love,
which the vast expanse of evil can never still."
- Hildegard of Bingen**

THE OTHER “SON OF THE FATHER”

Sunday, April 7, 2019

TEXT: *So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Mark 15:15*

Barabbas must have been shocked when they opened his cell door and called him out. He was a murderer and a rebel; he knew that death was in store for him. But freedom?

How he must have questioned the guards as he stumbled through the hallways leading out of the prison. The crowds chose me? he must have asked. And who was the other guy? Jesus of Nazareth?

We don't know if Barabbas knew who Jesus was. Perhaps he had heard about His preaching, His teaching—perhaps he knew about His miracles. Maybe Barabbas had even been among Jesus' crowds listening for a while. It hadn't stopped him ending up in Pilate's prison. And yet now, here was Jesus—switching places with him, doomed to end up on Barabbas' cross.

Barabbas' name means “Son of the Father.” I hope at some point in his new, free, second life, he took the time to learn about the true Son of the Father, Jesus our Savior, who suffered, died, and rose for him. For us. For all of us, who can now become sons and daughters of the heavenly Father through Jesus' mercy.

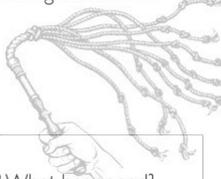
THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Lord, for taking our place. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Can you remember a time when you switched places with someone else? What happened?

Has anyone ever taken your punishment—or consequences—in your place? If you are willing, tell the story.

What does it mean to you now, that you are a son or daughter of the Father?



Day 33: Reflections by Phil

We know little about Barabbas, other than he was a “notorious prisoner.” See Mathew 27:16. He is referred to similarly in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. His name does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. He was given his freedom in exchange for the life of Jesus. Looking at this event in the broadest perspective of the entire New Testament, we could look upon the assembled crowd as reflecting all of humanity and Jesus' blood as necessary in the reconciliation between humanity and God, not as crying out for retribution. Christ died to redeem and reconcile us to God our heavenly Father. Barabbas becomes a mere footnote in the Biblical grand story of salvation.

Jesus spent 40 days alone in the wilderness. Sometimes our lives can feel as though we are walking the wilderness. Those are the times when we should come to God in prayer with all of our weaknesses: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Remember, nothing is impossible for God, He is the Good Shepherd and will lead you to green pastures and beside still waters. Do not be afraid. Remember that He is holding you by your right hand and that nothing can separate you from His Presence and Love. Sit quietly and let His peace settle over you. Jesus died a criminal's death to give you peace and salvation. Think about

the fact that Jesus took our place and died for our sins to give us peace and eternal life in Heaven.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” – John 14:27

Answers to the Reflection Questions:

“I didn't do it, David did it!” At some point, we all try to duck our guilt and try to blame an innocent. I tried many times to shift the blame for something that went dreadfully wrong onto my younger brother. He was “the favorite” so the punishment would seem minor to me. I carried that guilt for many years before confessing to my folks what I had done. My brother long ago forgave me and my folks did the same. In their wisdom, they figured out early on that somehow I was the guilty party.

I am a child of God and precious in His sight. By the same token, we are *all* His children and He loves each one of us. I am His servant and He is my God.

- P. Anderson

Day 34: Reflections by Jana and Jalen

"They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus." – Mk 15:21

As I visualize Simon of Cyrene being "asked" by the Roman soldiers to carry the cross of Christ, I cringe. What a no-win situation!! Talk about being in the wrong place at the wrong time!! And then I pause. Maybe that's what faith is all about. It's certainly easier and more joyful to be a Christian on Easter morning, when the rock has been rolled away and Christ has risen (He is risen indeed!), than in the days leading to his death and resurrection. I have carried my own cross, in my faith journey and in my life journey.

As in the days of Jesus' death, the cross was not smooth and varnished, polished to a shine and sanded to perfection. No, its been splintered and cumbersome and heavy and hard to handle and easy to drop. In fact, hanging on to the cross has been a challenge at times. But in tending to my personal experience with the cross of faith, I have felt my spiritual muscles grow bit by bit, ever so gradually. I grumble and groan, and then am reminded that this is my invitation to be a bearer of eternal blessings. I don't compare my sufferings to Jesus. I can't. I can only be grateful for his abounding love. And I am. - J. Rockne

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- **When have you had to do a job that you really didn't want to do?** Personally, some of the jobs that I really did not want to do at the time are the ones that require the most physical exertion. Tasks such as moving a lot of cut wood, loading and hauling soaking wet leaves, and carrying heavy objects are generally less enjoyable for me. As much as I dislike these things, I also realize that it is better for myself to do it than others who may not be as strong as myself or for those I care for. Jobs that we don't seem to want to do generally are given to us from others or for the sake of others while being difficult for ourselves.
- **Who (besides Jesus!) has helped you by "carrying your cross" in some way?** Those closest have helped by carrying the cross for me from time to time. My Wife and my Mother have helped me with difficult decisions I needed to make, providing advice or even just listening. When there is something that must be done, no matter the hardships that it would take, I know I can count on those I love to help carry that cross when needed.
- **Does it make it easier to suffer, knowing that Jesus has suffered for and with you? Why or why not?** Knowing that Jesus suffered for and with us all certainly makes any suffering that we face easier. I feel that this understanding of Jesus' suffering goes beyond the famous John 3:16, as we know that Jesus lived in this world and experienced the same fears and challenges that we do. He saw good and evil throughout the land and even the doubts and struggles of those around him. Through all this and more, he still died for us. The differing struggles we all experience in our lives are no mystery to Jesus as he suffered dearly for us and consoled those who also suffered in his time here in the physical form. Jesus experienced so much during this time, from the grief over Lazarus, his own persecution, and mending those lives that were already broken through illness, that it is clear to me that suffering is a part of what God has for us at times. Suffering is not the absence of God in our lives, but the reminder that he is in control far more than we are, and that Jesus (and by extension through the holy trinity, a part of God) also suffered.
- **Special Questions: How has Christ's prophetic passion shown forth in your life? How does the above text speak to that passion?** Christ's prophetic passion shows forth in my life by my dedication to helping others through challenges and encouraging others where they may be struggling. Christ always urged others to better themselves, to be satisfied with what life has in store for them now and in the future, and to make the time we have here on earth beneficial to others and to God. We too should let others fulfill their greatness and their potential that God has bestowed on them by helping them get to that point - even if it means their cross has been thrust upon us unexpectedly.
- **What does it mean for YOU to be in the wilderness of faith - in the good times and in the bad?** For me, to be in the wilderness of faith involves patience and perseverance. One must be patient in the wilderness of faith, as God has much in store for us, spread throughout our lives. That faith means that we do not know when things may happen to us from God, good or challenging, but we must rely on God to deliver to us what we need. Perseverance is also needed. While we should, of course, await what God has for us, we also must keep "moving" whether that be by growing in faith, continuing to tackle a problem at hand, or staying devoted to the hard work that we are doing. When we are helping by carrying someone's cross for them, we are acting as a guide (or at the very least, a partner) in traversing the wilderness of faith. We might not know exactly where we're going or when we'll be there, but we know Jesus is with us.

- J. Provo

SAFETY

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

TEXT: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."
Luke 23:28

As Jesus walks to the place where He will be crucified, a large crowd is following Him. Some of them are women who are grieving and weeping for Him. Jesus turns to speak to them.

That in itself is surprising. Jesus has already been scourged, and He is now so weak that the soldiers have had to draft another man to carry His cross for Him. In a few minutes Jesus will be nailed to the cross. If there is ever a time for Jesus to think of Himself, surely it is now.

And yet He doesn't. He is thinking of the women who are weeping. And He says to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." He warns them that terrible days are coming. In just a few years, the Roman army will come and destroy Jerusalem, and her people will starve and be slaughtered. "For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" In other words, if human beings are willing to murder the incarnate Son of God while He is living on earth, what worse things will they do in the future when He has returned to heaven?

I wonder how many of the women recalled His words when the siege of Jerusalem started. I hope some took warning and left the city while they still could. There is a tradition that says that before the end, the Christians of Jerusalem left the city to find safety elsewhere. Perhaps some of these women were among them.

Jesus gave them a chance of safety, for themselves and their children. And yet He did far more than that, just hours after this conversation. For when He died on that cross, Jesus made Himself our place of safety—the one who protects us from the power of death, the devil, and all evil. He made Himself our fortress, our protection. When we are in trouble, we can flee to Him for help. He will never fail us or leave us alone.

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Lord, for becoming our place of safety. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Where is the place you feel the safest?

What person in your life makes you feel the safest (besides Jesus)?

How can you help someone else find safety through what you do or say in the Name of Jesus?

Day 35: Reflections by LoAnn

Jesus, scourged and weak - telling the women of Jerusalem NOT to cry for him - but for themselves and their children...so very ominous! How do we interpret and use this story to prepare our hearts during the Lenten season? What is the lesson going forward?

Think about the fact that Jesus, through his crucifixion, becomes our place of safety - protecting us from evil and death, through his own death. Us, mere humans, far from perfect, far from deserving, but still deemed worthy by the Father. In reflecting on this text from Luke, I think of all of the times in my life, from little on, when I was protected from danger by another. I think of how I reacted, and how I learned from each experience - hoping to never have to learn the lesson again - but, at times, forgetting - and having to relearn.

That's what we have here. Jesus, encouraging us on his way to the cross. Encouraging us to keep our relationship with him strong, as he continues to protect us. Encouraging us to be watchful and aware, to turn to him when we feel safe, living in his word, as well as when we're faced with fears and danger. And, as mere humans, we learn this lesson through the Lenten season - but then what?

That's the lesson going forward. As we prepare our hearts through Lent, walking to the cross with our Lord who tells us to cry for ourselves and our children, he's encouraging us! Encouraging us to keep our relationship with him strong. To spend time in his word EVERY day - perhaps using this Lenten study as a springboard to form that habit. It's through that strong vertical (up to the Lord and back to us) relationship that we guard ourselves against evil, that we ward off the enemy, that is trying so very hard to ruin that relationship, and supplant it with doubt, apathy and mistrust. Develop the habit, stay in the Word, strengthen the relationship. Thank you Jesus!

- L. Van deLeest

"... This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' "

- John 18:9 NRSV

Day 36: Reflections by Pr. Paul & 'Team Bauer'

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

STANDING BY

TEXT: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?" Matthew 26:53

When we think about the people involved in Jesus' arrest, suffering, and death, we often forget the invisible ones—the ones behind the scenes watching. But Jesus reminds us when He says to Peter at His arrest, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:53-54)

Think of it. Twelve legions of angels, ready to be unleashed instantly at a single word from the Father. Roughly sixty thousand angels or more, every one of them eager, wishing, hoping to be allowed to intervene ... grieving, indignant as they saw what was being done to Jesus ... but all fully obedient to God's will, as difficult as it must have been to stand by.

It must be hard to be an angel. To know that you have the power to help, and yet have to stand by because God's will is being carried out in a slower, more terrible, and more glorious way than you could ever have imagined. To refrain from meddling, from taking over the life of someone else, even to make it better. To respect God-given free will, just as the Lord who made it does.

You may know this conflict if you are a parent, a teacher, a pastor or educator of any kind. Even for those of us who are not, there can be a terrible urge to rearrange our friends' lives for them—to "fix things for them"—because we "know better." And yet, without an invitation from the people themselves, or a command from God, we cannot. We end up making things worse for the very people we love. How difficult it is!

Thank God that He is not under the same constraints. When He reaches into our lives to help and heal us, He does it right. He doesn't make things worse with His meddling. He knows when to respect the free will He created, and He knows when to respond to our cries for mercy. As He did in His best blessing to us—Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection.

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Father, for caring for us in Your wisdom and mercy. Please keep us when we go through difficult times. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

When has it been difficult for you to stand by and watch something happen without helping?

Have you ever been glad later that you didn't intervene—and if so, in what situation and why?

Has there been a time in your own life when you wanted God to intervene—and were later glad He didn't do what you wanted?



+ + +

This text immediately brings to mind the journey parents take with their adult children. Watching your children deal with challenges and issues that confront them in this world today is hard, yet you know they must work through them as you did at their age. Our children recently sold their home and bought another one. We may have wondered if their choice was wise due to the purchase price and

potential repairs that needed to be done, however, you want to give only so much input without being overbearing while at the same time worry

about them getting financially in over their heads. Advice from our children is not always sought after or the best answer to problems that arise in our kids' lives. Yet, we want to guide our children based on the mistakes we've made in our own lives. Do we ask God's help in dealing with the problems, or do we expect God will take the problem away? A huge lesson learned is the the Lord doesn't always work through instant gratification, instead He teaches us to accept what is and have faith in what is to be. Yet, even knowing all of the above, I sometimes feel like I'm in the wilderness of faith. It can be so easy to loose one's self within the forest, or in this case, obstacles and conflicts in life. However, if I look to the lesson the Lord is trying to teach us, I will find my way out of the wilderness using the tools I have collected in life's lessons and my faith in the Lord.

- Maureen and Craig Bauer

Proverbs 3:5-6 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

TEXT: *They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. John 19:24*

It's a grim picture—Jesus hanging on the cross, while beneath Him, several Roman soldiers gamble for His clothing. It's tempting to condemn the soldiers for what they were doing. It's offensive. They shouldn't be doing that!

But from their point of view, they were only doing their jobs. They had taken three condemned men to Calvary, offered them a basic painkiller (wine mixed with myrrh), nailed them up, and now there was nothing to do but watch them. The soldiers couldn't leave till the men were dead, and that would take hours, if not days.

So they decided to divvy up Jesus' clothes, which were their traditional right as His executioners. And when one piece was too nice to be divided by tearing, they decided to gamble for it. Hey, there was nothing else to do. Dice or cards have helped pass the time for many soldiers down through history. And there was nothing more interesting going on!

But that's just where they were wrong. The central event of human history was taking place, right over their heads. Jesus Christ was dying for the whole human race. God was being executed—paying the price for all sin and wickedness. If the soldiers had only known!

If we had only known, we might say. Not about Jesus' death—most of us have known that story since childhood. But God continues to do things right in front of our eyes—things in which we ought to be involved. We have neighbors in need—live near children in danger—have family who are hurting or lonely or struggling. If only we had known! we say, when some hidden disaster comes to light, too late for us to help.

But we can know—if we are willing to know. We can lift up our eyes and look around us for the signs of need. We can pray and ask God to direct us to the people He loves who need help. The main thing we need is a willing heart. God will provide the rest. Do you want to know?

THE PRAYER: *Dear Father, show me what You want me to know so I can serve the people You love. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What do you do when you are bored?

When was there something happening "right under your eyes" that you didn't notice or recognize?

Tell the story of a time when God opened your eyes to a need and you were able to 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."*

- Psalm 121

Day 37: Reflections by Pastor Paul

I am struck by the way the original devotion writer interpreted this event from Christ's crucifixion: "from [the soldier's] point of view, they were only doing their jobs." They couldn't leave the crucified 'criminals' until they were pronounced dead, so the soldiers were merely passing the time by rolling the dice - "and that [waiting process] would take hours, if not days." While that all may indeed be correct, I would liken the soldiers' "missed opportunity" to witness God's sacrifice, mercy and grace akin to all the times I have missed God's grace in the wilderness of my faith.

An example: Wilderness is part of our Lenten theme, so I can tell you that I have hiked, camped and journeyed MANY times focusing SO much on *getting there*, or making sure I was exactly where I was "supposed to be" (on the map, on my list of "must-see places," etc) that I oftentimes missed the "God moments" in the mundane spots. In other words, I often overlooked the views and experiences that weren't known for their majesty, but were beautiful and restorative nonetheless.

God restores us here, and there. And we might just be sitting at the feet of Christ without knowing it no matter where our setting, or our place, in this wonderfully confusing thing we call...Grace.



At the foot of...

Day 38: Reflections by Alexis

I was recently playing this video game... It's a 'choose your own adventure' type game, and you have to make a series of decisions that will ultimately change the outcome of the game.

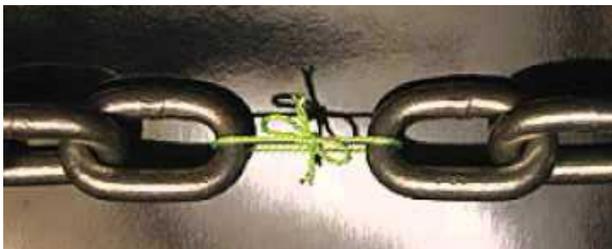
The biggest decision that you have to make (as the leader of a revolution) is whether you will take a peaceful or violent approach. I made the choice from the start to be peaceful, and got the best possible outcome at the end.

I think that speaks to my response- that the most impressive kind of power is the kind that speaks without force, the kind that inspires people rather than oppresses them; the kind that frees instead of enslaving. (A major theme in this game).

I also believe that true strength is found in vulnerability, which many perceive as weakness. It means making it a practice to be open, honest, and emotionally available to others. Every person I've met who has this quality is incredibly successful/healthy in almost all facets of life, and I think that speaks for itself.

Jesus being both Son of God (powerful) and Son of Man (weak, in comparison) shows both the contrast and beauty of who he is, but also how we (as people) have been designed. There is strength in our weakness, and it is something that we should embrace, because it's a part of who we are.

- A. Steig



THE SON OF GOD?

Friday, April 12, 2019

TEXT: *When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:54*

The centurion and his soldiers were keeping watch over the dying Jesus. As the hours wore on, they heard those words mentioned again and again: "The Son of God ... the Son of God ..."

They heard it from the endless stream of people passing by, going in and out of Jerusalem: "Save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." They heard it from the religious leaders who came out to gloat over Jesus' suffering: "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:40-43).

The centurion might have wondered: What did they mean, "Son of God"? That was a title of the Roman emperor: Was Jesus a rebel? But then, there were also the old stories of Roman gods who had children with human women. Their sons became heroes like Hercules or Perseus. Jesus didn't look like a hero. After all, you could hardly find a weaker man than someone dying on a cross.

And then Jesus cried out with a loud voice and died—and there was a great earthquake. The rocks split and tombs were shattered. The centurion was deeply impressed by the power he witnessed. And he gave his verdict: "Surely this was the Son of God!"

The centurion was right to be impressed by God's power. And we are right to thank God for the even greater power we know He unleashed at that time—the hour Jesus destroyed death, the day He broke open the gates of hell, so that no human being ever needs to be imprisoned there forever. Now the gates of paradise are open to us. If only we trust in Jesus, the Son of God, we are set free and brought into the kingdom of God our Father.

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Lord, for rescuing us from the power of evil. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What kinds of power do you find most impressive?

When have you seen a case of weakness that turned out to be true strength?

If "Son of God" means power to many people, what meanings do you think Jesus' title "Son of Man" means?

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

- John 14:27a

A DEATH THAT GAVE LIFE

Saturday, April 13, 2019

TEXT: *The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Matthew 27:52-53*

What a shock it must have been. Imagine a family in Jerusalem, busy at home a couple of days after Jesus' death, when a knock comes at the door. They open it, only to find—"Grandpa Samuel! What are you doing here?" There he is, alive, well and smiling—but everyone knows he died five years ago.

Similar things were happening across the city as people got unexpected visits from Aunt Hannah, Cousin Dan, and others—all of them people who should have been dead, who had been dead, but not anymore. It must have been scary and incredibly joyful, all at once.

Why were they there? Eventually someone figured it out. At the moment of Jesus' death, a great earthquake hit, and many tombs were opened. At that time many people who had died trusting in the Lord came back to life again, and they eventually made their way into the city—where they no doubt surprised a great many people, and caused a joyful rearrangement of their lives and homes.

What a gift the Lord gave them, through His suffering and death. What a gift the Lord has given us! We know absolutely that when Jesus died on the cross, He broke the power of death over us and all people; and when He rose from the dead, He made His own everlasting life available to all of us, to anyone who trusts in Him, our life-giving Savior.

No wonder God the Father marked Jesus' death with such a gift of life!

THE PRAYER: *Thank You, Father, for giving life to all of us who trust in Your Son Jesus. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What would you do if you saw a deceased relative alive at your front door? How would it change your life?

We are told that they didn't come into the city until after Jesus' resurrection. Why do you think they waited so long?

How do you think experiencing an event like this would change your attitude toward death—or would it?



Day 39: Reflections by Tracey

Matthew 27:52-53 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

About a month before my husband died we were talking about life in heaven and how beautiful it would be. He knew that his body would be made whole and perfect but that he would give that up to come back here to marry me again. He even created a secret password he would say to me when he walked back into my life (he also knew that he would look different because of being healed). I told him he was crazy because why would anyone give up life in heaven to come back here and do it again? Russ knew about Christ and His resurrection and life after death given to ALL who believed in Him.

The saints we learned about in this passage did not have that knowledge but they did have **PS116:15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.** God promised us that All of his saints were precious to him. This was all these saints knew, not what we know about the resurrection and they still believed, still had faith in God. The gift of their faith was their own resurrection at Christ's death. They were able to walk back into their families lives and share God's gift. Boy would I like that too so that Russ could see how grown up and special our daughter is and share in that. My faith knows that he is whole and healthy waiting for us to join him when it is our turn. Life in heaven has no measure and life on earth is so short I know we will meet again soon.

Faith is not a wilderness wild and unknowing, but Faith is strong a steady. The wilderness is a place we can enter and reflect without interruptions found in our daily lives.

- T. Moyer

Day 40: Reflections by Barb

The most recent major reason for praising God was my recent health issue. I could feel God's presence even when I was hospitalized. Since then I praise God every day that he sent his angels to get me to the hospital before it was too late.

I continually praise God when I observe all that He has given us. Ever since I was a child I have loved looking at all the different kinds of clouds. When I see the sun coming through, I feel God looking upon us. It is easy for me to praise God when I see such a beautiful sight.

Children can praise God just by being excited about being in church. We can see it on their faces every week when they come up for Pastor Paul's Children Message.

I do have a story of a young child and his way of praising God. In my former LCMS church, I was a member of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. We were given small boxes to collect change for missions. They were called "mites" like the story of the widow's mites. Once a month we brought in our mite boxes to be put in a larger Mite Box. Sometimes one of us stood at the door to collect the mites. Once when it was my turn, I saw a young boy who was about 8 or 9 years old. I did not know this boy. He looked at the Mite Box and thought very seriously. He then dug deep into his pants pocket and pulled out some change and put the coins in the box. I did not see an adult tell him to do that. He was praising God in his own way.

In closing, this is one of my favorite hymns (ELW # 884/885)

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures here below;
praise God above, ye heav'nly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

- B. Oster



HOSANNA

Sunday, April 14, 2019

TEXT: *Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise. Matthew 21:16*

After Jesus cleared the temple of the people who were selling animals, people who were blind or lame started coming to Him there to be healed. There were little children in the temple that day, too, probably there with their parents to worship. The little ones began shouting praise to Jesus: "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

This got the religious leaders upset. "Do You hear what they're saying?" they asked Jesus. Apparently they wanted Him to stop the children. But Jesus quoted from the book of Psalms, asking, "Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise?'"

The second "You" Jesus mentioned is God Himself, who has called even babies and children to praise Him. It seems strange that God would want praise from the weakest and lowliest of people—from children. But He does. He treasures it. In God's eyes, "the last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16).

This is good news for us, too, because if we admit the truth about ourselves, we are just as weak and lowly as little children are. More, perhaps, because we are more experienced in wickedness. We may have more years than they do, but we have not used those years wisely. We desperately need a Savior.

And so with the little children we cry out "Hosanna!" The word "hosanna" has become an expression of praise, but in Hebrew it literally means, "Please save us." Jesus hears our cry. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection, He has become our Savior. And now we cry out in glad joy, praising Him along with the children—and with all creation.

THE PRAYER: *Lord God, we praise You for being our Savior. Amen.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What is the most recent thing you recall praising God for?

Can you recall a time when you were deeply impressed by a child's praise or words about God? If so, tell the story.

Why do you think praise is part of what Christians do?

"God is good..."

"All the time..."

"...all the time."

"... God is good."

Amen.

Ash Wednesday is the day we begin our Lenten journey in penitence and reflection. What better time to begin a new set of devotions for our 40-walk, co-authored by YOU?

In addition, each Sunday morning (and Wednesday evening) in Lent, starting on March 10th we will engage in a new perspective for our 2019 Lenten theme “**The Passion of Jesus, the Wilderness of Faith**” as follows:

1. **Sun 3/10 & Wed 3/13:** “Creation Wild: God Meets Us in The Scripture of Nature”
2. **Sun 3/17 and Wed 3/20:** “Re-Created: A New Heaven and Earth”
3. **Sun 3/24 and Wed 3/27:** “Wilderness Prophets, Part 1”
4. ***Sun 3/31 (Jubilee – no class) but Wed 4/3** “Wilderness Prophets, Part 2”
5. **Sun 4/7 and Wed 4/10:** “The Passion of Jesus Transforms”

We will draw heavily on modern works of wilderness spirituality, along with scripture and Lenten reflections. Hope to see you there!

Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, ¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: ¹⁸ Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. ¹⁹ **I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.**

²⁰ The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹ the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

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Lenten Activities 2019

Wednesdays: Dinner, 5:30, Worship & activities for the kids every session!

March 13 & April 10 – Holden Evening Prayer

March 20 & April 3 – An Evening with Zeke & the Celebrate! Band

March 27 – Taize Prayer

Palm Sunday: Saturday, April 13, 5 pm and Sunday, April 14, 8:30am & 11 am

Maudy Thursday: Thursday, April 18, 5:30 Seder followed by worship

Good Friday: Friday, April 19, 7 pm – Tenebrae Service

Easter Vigil: Saturday, April 20, **7 pm!**

Easter Day: Sunday, April 21, 8:30 am & 11am