

The Little Church on the Prairie Lakewood Grace



*Lenten Devotional
Booklet
2021*

A Look Back To See Forward

**THE LITTLE CHURCH ON THE PRAIRIE
LAKEWOODGRACE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, USA**

2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

How to Use This Booklet: Pick a quiet time each day during Lent for devotion. Start with a prayer. Then it is important to read the Bible passage before proceeding. The authors of these devotional messages assume that the Bible passages will have been read first, because the messages refer back to the Bible passage on the daily devotional page. Then reflect on what you have read and end with a prayer. It is a five-step process: Pray, read the Bible passage, read the message for that day, reflect and discuss, then close with a prayer. It is our hope that this devotional booklet will be a blessing to you each day of Lent. As you read each daily page, remember that you are connected to the author of each page through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

About This Booklet: This year we once again reached out to members and friends of The Little Church on the Prairie and Lakewoodgrace to write a page for this booklet. Our theme for this year is: **A LOOK BACK TO SEE FORWARD.** The assigned passages from the New Testament look back to quotes or allusions in the Old Testament.

It is hoped that each contributor to this booklet will gain from the experience. It is also hoped that each person who uses this booklet will be moved to a deeper relationship with Jesus, will become a better disciple, and will be motivated to bring the good news of Jesus to others, showing the love of Jesus to all. It is also hoped that you will, through these devotional pages, receive a better understanding of the meaning of Lent and Easter.

About the Lenten Season: The term “Lent” comes from an Old English word that means springtime. The Lenten season is a time for spiritual preparation for Easter by remembering the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Lent is the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter. The Lenten spiritual disciplines such as prayer, alms giving, and fasting are meant to help us realize our dependency on God for everything, and to prepare our hearts to hear what God will say to us. May our Lord bless your spiritual journey this Lenten season.

Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

WHOSE PATH ARE YOU PREPARING?

READ: Mark 1:2-8; Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 40:3

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help me spread your light so brightly such that others may learn of your grace, mercy, and love. Amen.

MEDITATION: Have you ever looked back over your life and wondered how you had arrived at where you are now in your journey with Christ? I didn't come to Jesus until I was in my early twenties. My husband, Bill, was baptized as a child. Before we married, Bill thought it was important that I be baptized. We didn't attend church until a few years later after Bill had read an article in Forbes Magazine written by Peggy Noonan.

She wrote about how we can have it all but still have an emptiness inside. This emptiness was actively living our lives. We were not active as members of a Christian community. Since that day, we have always attended church. We moved to Lakewood in 2005.

While driving around, our son, five at the time, pointed out The Little Church on the Prairie and said we needed to go there. Our children spent much of their Christ journey at Little Church. Our daughter continued her journey with a college Christian organization.

On our Christian journey, it is important to think about where we are now, who guided us toward our path, and who we are shepherding toward a closer relationship with Christ.

CLOSING THOUGHT: In this time of COVID, many people need the love and hope of Christ. Are you helping prepare the way for those around you to know Christ on a deeper level?

Carla Pelster

Thursday, February 18, 2021

PREPARE TO BE TEMPTED

READ: Matthew 4:1-7; Deuteronomy 6:16, Psalm 91:11-12

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I pray that your words are spoken, not mine. I hope that through this devotion your kingdom will grow, and others will grow in their faith. Amen.

MEDITATION: I don't know about you, but I am tempted to sin every day. I am tempted to skip reading the Bible. I am tempted to skip praying. I am tempted to tell God what I'm going to do, instead of going to him to seek his direction. Am I surprised that I am tempted? I shouldn't be. If Jesus was tempted, why am I surprised if I'm tempted?

The first thing we read is that the Holy Spirit **LED** Jesus into the wilderness. This happened right after the baptism of Jesus with the Holy Spirit coming down on him, and God saying, "This is my Son, whom I love." It wasn't by accident that Jesus was in the wilderness. He was right where God wanted him to be; to be alone, spending time with God.

Let me remember to spend time alone with God while I am in the wilderness, preparing for battle with temptation; spending time reading and studying his Word, spending time in prayer, not always asking, but conversing with God, and praising him, and reminding myself of who he is and his promises. Why? To grow in my faith. To be able to share the Gospel with others. To withstand Satan's temptations, not with my words or what I think is right and wrong, but with God's Word, the Bible. In the Armor of God, the only offensive weapon against Satan and temptation is the sword, the Word of God.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your Word, the Bible. You give us everything we need to stand up to Satan and the temptation to sin. I pray that every day I will spend quiet alone time with you, reading and studying your Word, the Bible, and using your Word as an offensive weapon to defeat temptation. I pray that I bring honor and glory to your name. Amen.

Cathy Norberg

Friday, February 19, 2021

THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE - JESUS

READ: Luke 4:17-21; Isaiah 61:1-3

OPENING PRAYER: God, thank you for your promises. Thank you for doing for us that which we could not do for ourselves. Thank you for your steadfast love which transforms sinners into sons and daughters. Amen.

MEDITATION: Our passage today comes at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and tempted by the devil in the wilderness for thirty days. Then Jesus entered his hometown of Nazareth where he taught in the synagogue.

What was the very first message Jesus proclaimed? What teaching introduced the world to the type and kind of ministry Jesus was to be about? That's our text.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that when the Messiah would come, he would come "to proclaim the good news to the poor. to proclaim freedom for the captives" and the recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

After teaching on this text, Jesus proclaimed, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus was declaring that he was the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for, that through him all that God promised is fulfilled.

What was true for the Jews is true for you and me. All that God promised for us is fulfilled in the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our hope and salvation. In him is life. Thank you, God.

CLOSING PRAYER: Father, thank you for Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of your promise of salvation. Thank you for loving us even while we were sinners. Help us to be transformed and changed by your love. Amen.

Pastor James Kim

Saturday, February 20, 2021

THE BRONZE SNAKE

READ: John 3:12-16; Numbers 21:4-9

OPENING PRAYER: Help me receive your grace, Lord! Amen.

MEDITATION: Nicodemus just didn't get it. *How can a person be born again when he is old? There has to be more to a relationship with God than being "born again" like Jesus said, thought the weathered Pharisee. Surely a lifetime of piety is enough! If I just keep doing better, stay above the riff raff and don't sin, I'll surely inherit the kingdom of God!*

But Jesus would have nothing of that "Do good and God will like me" thinking.

"Nicodemus, look." said Jesus. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again!' You're complicating the matter of grace, Nicodemus. Think of grace like this: Just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness for everyone who was dying to look at and live, in the same way, anyone who looks to me will live forever."

But that's too simple, Rabbi, thought Nicodemus. Could the enormity of God's grace really be distilled down to just... Jesus?! The people sinned and God told Moses to make a bronze snake and anyone who looked at it lived. And Jesus is saying... just... look to him?

Don't complicate the matter of grace, friends. Look to Jesus and live.

CLOSING PRAYER: Your grace is sufficient for me, Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Brad Epperson

First Sunday in Lent, February 21, 2021

CLEAN HEARTS VS. CLEAN DISHES

READ: Mark 7:3-8; Isaiah 29:13

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, we pray for your wisdom to enter into the reading of this passage so that we can understand it better and follow you more. Amen.

MEDITATION: What is the heart of God's Word to us? Ceremonies and traditions can be useful; for instance, some of the Jewish food laws brought health benefits. We are all certainly much more aware of cleanliness and health throughout the recent COVID pandemic. Cleanliness has its place for sure, but we must not lose sight of God's two greatest commandments to us.

God tells us in Matthew 22: 36-40 that we are to love God with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. He's more interested in our hearts than in our habits. A modern-day example would be letting our preferences for worship styles get in the way of true worship.

Loving our neighbor doesn't mean agreeing on everything, but it does require tolerance and respect.

CLOSING THOUGHT: How will "love your neighbor" look in your life this week?

Jane Macpherson

Monday, February 22, 2021

HOW CAN YOU RESIST TEMPTATION?

READ: Matthew 4:8-11; Deuteronomy 6:13:14

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, may we recognize that the Holy Spirit who dwells in us can help us resist temptations that turn us away from you. Amen.

MEDITATION: The third and final temptation of Jesus was to attain power and dominion over the known world if he only worshiped Satan. Jesus was able to resist because he was filled with the Holy Spirit whom he received when he was baptized just before he entered the wilderness and fasted for forty days. With authority, Jesus curtly said, "Beat it, Satan!" (*The Message*, by Eugene Peterson)

Jesus was tempted just as we are. "Temptations are not a bad thing in themselves, but it is what we do with them that can help us turn to God or away from God." (Commentary from Marquette.edu)

How can we apply this passage to our daily lives? The very fact Jesus was tempted is proof of his humanity, that he sympathizes with us and sets an example for us to follow. When we become a Christian, the Holy Spirit dwells in us and comes to our aid to help us resist giving in to the temptations that separate us from God.

CLOSING THOUGHT: There is no temptation that we cannot resist as long as we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit who is in each of us.

Becky Huber

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

WORSHIP THE LORD

READ: Luke 4:1-8; Deuteronomy 6:13

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, open our minds to honestly look at our hearts and assess how we approach worship of you each week in community. Amen.

MEDITATION: When Mike and Robin told us that they wouldn't be leading worship at Lakewood*grace* anymore, I thought, "Oh NO! I can't worship there anymore. I don't want to be sad when I experience the loss of them each week."

Before that, I had been pondering if God was using this COVID-19 pandemic to revitalize the way Christians worship together, but I didn't expect to be grouped with the masses that I felt had missed the heart of what worship was! God has an awesome sense of humor – guess I was called to look inwardly and apply my own questions.

How are we doing in our hearts when it comes to worship? Are we distracted by the quality of the music, the song choices, the AV glitches, the mistakes by the folks standing in front, or by what we think of the words spoken by the pastor during the sermon? All of these distractions point to a heart focused on self and what I can get from the worship experience. It is almost as if we believe that worship is about us and our needs instead of expressing our worship to God.

Are our hearts focused on praise and adoration? Sunday gatherings give us the opportunity to share together in our worship of God, not to meet our own needs, which can be a consequence when we genuinely worship, but not the goal or purpose.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, renew our hearts by putting you only as our focus for worship. Renew in us clean hearts, Lord. Amen.

Karen George

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

DEMAND FOR A SIGN

READ: John 6:30-34; Exodus 16:4, Nehemiah 9:15, Psalm 24-25

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, open my heart to receive the message that Jesus was trying to impress on his disciples 2000 years ago. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus is talking with his disciples shortly after the feeding of the five thousand. In the verse just before our reading, Jesus has just made a great claim. The true work of God was to believe in him! The disciples were challenging Jesus to produce bread from God as a sign to substantiate his claim. They did not regard the bread which had fed the five thousand as bread from God: it was earthly bread. Manna was a different thing.

Jesus told them that the manna was not the true bread of God. The true bread of God was he who came down from heaven not to give physical relief from hunger, but to give life – eternal life. Jesus claimed that the only real satisfaction was in him. Jesus wanted his disciples to change their reference point.

Can we believe without seeing a sign? Believing without seeing is faith. Faith is more important than physical objects. Our faith is what sustains us, particularly during the difficult times in our lives. If we keep waiting for signs, we will miss out in life. There will always be longings. We will never attain real satisfaction. We, too, need to change our reference point. We don't need signs. We need Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Father, for giving us Jesus, the true bread of life. Our faith in him is the key to salvation. Amen.

Alice Amblad

Thursday, February 25, 2021

MADE HOLY THROUGH THE BODY OF JESUS

READ: Hebrews 10:5-10; Psalm 40:6-8

OPENING PRAYER: As we enter this Lenten season, Lord, help us to be open to your Spirit so that we see afresh your gift of the new Covenant. Amen.

MEDITATION: For the Israelites, animal sacrifice was a major cultural/religious practice. I've always thought it was weird and have trouble relating to the concept of animal sacrifice which is now so far removed from the world's experience. And yet by faith, I believe that God honored this practice in sending Jesus to earth because it was the most relevant way at that time to help people to understand his mission and great love. At the moment of his death the big heavy curtain in the Jewish temple separating the people from the presence of God was torn in two from top to bottom. We now have access to God directly through his Son, Jesus.

The new Covenant is established and no more sacrifice is needed. But we have a tendency to burden ourselves with the equivalent of sacrifices instead of believing God's word that "By his will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, please help us to remember that your Son has already paid our price and to live into his forgiveness. Amen.

Mary La Tourelle

Friday, February 26, 2021

BE HOLY

READ: 1 Peter 1:13-16; Leviticus 1:44-45, 19:2, 20:7

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help me to keep my eyes fixed on you as I go step by step through each day so that I may be strong to walk in your ways. Amen.

MEDITATION: “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18) is a quote from Paul. I am reading this as I open my *Daily Word*, a daily devotional I have read for 30 years. It has never been more relevant than this last year, as COVID-19 has changed our daily lives, how we view ourselves, our neighbors, and the world.

It is easy to get lost in the circumstances that surround and affect us when we are not able to do the things that, not that long ago, we took for granted – go out for lunch or dinner with a group of friends, go to a movie or the theatre, attend church with all its activities, take that trip you booked, and exchange hugs with family and friends. It’s a lot easier to give thanks when everything is going well.

But God calls on us to be obedient in tough times as well as good times. He is calling on us today to stay in his Word, be obedient, be Holy, and take action. By listening to him and setting our hope on him, he will lead us to be Holy in our actions. We can be Holy as he is Holy in all that we do, by being both merciful to others and by looking outward. We will be doing his work. By being Holy and doing his work, we will also heal ourselves.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, please give me the self-control, obedience, and faith of a child to be Holy in all that I do because you are holy. Amen.

Judy Eng

Saturday, February 27, 2021

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH

READ: Romans 1:16-17; Habakkuk 2:4

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us live a life by faith by allowing us to look forward with hope and the assurance that you will free us from our sins. Amen.

MEDITATION: Paul longs to share his faith with the Romans – to share the gospel and to proclaim that we are righteous in our faith and that we are not saved by our works – that only the grace and mercy of God can save us.

Thus, faith will guide us in our daily lives through troublesome times. Our burdens are our sins. Our troubles are those of the world and those of modern times. How we live our lives can lift the burdens and ease those troubles.

Are we living in a manner that glorifies God? Are we a reflection of God's goodness and power? By endeavoring to be non-judgmental, offering humble service to God, loving others, and living our lives as a living sacrifice to him, we are able to leave behind our sins and look forward to eternity with God.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, in my faith I have total trust in you. I ask that you deepen my faith and guide me to live a life that reflects my belief in you. Help me to remember that I live by faith not only in what Jesus did on the cross, but also in his work today and tomorrow. In Jesus' name, amen.

Phil Eng

Second Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2021

NOT EVEN ONE

READ: Romans 3:1-12; Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 53:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to take comfort in your message and know you better through your words. Amen.

MEDITATION: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Our text sounds a little harsh. How could there not even be one who does good? How about Mother Teresa? No one is righteous? How about Job? When we define righteous and good by our human standards, it may be difficult to understand the concept of “not even one”. The standard for righteousness is God’s perfect love demonstrated through his Son. The true standard is God’s perfection.

Not even one.... We may do some good deeds, but when we are measured by God’s standard of good and righteous, no one, not even one is good and righteous. We could try our best with good deeds and living as best as we can, but our actions will always fall short because we are all sinners. So then, where does our hope come from? Our hope comes from our Lord who offers his gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ. Christ is our hope, our only hope.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for being our good and righteous God. Help us to follow your ways and put our hope in you today and every day. Amen.

Helen Kim

Monday, March 1, 2021

GOD'S GIFT GIVEN FREELY

READ: Romans 3:21-26; Leviticus 16:15-16

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for your grace, given freely to us. Help us to remain grateful each day, in these uncertain times, that we as believers can hold tight to the truth that you have justified us, even though we fall short. Thank you for loving us beyond our understanding. Amen.

MEDITATION: This is a wild world that we live in, where unrealistic expectations of perfection are often imposed upon us. It can be easy to seek our worth and identity in many things: our career, our financial status, our successes and accomplishments, our belongings, what others think of us, and so on. It is easy to forget this most important truth that defines our worth in a way we could never have achieved on our own. And this truth is all the more amazing and overwhelming because as Paul reminds us, we all fall short of the glory of God.

The justification we were given through Jesus Christ not only wiped the slate clean, it came with the inheritance of salvation! We sometimes struggle to grasp this, as it is given to us freely, not earned. When we can let go of trying to completely comprehend God's gift of grace and justification, we can receive it and be freed from the weight of trying to be "good enough" yet we never can be.

Praise God we weren't left to work out salvation on our own! We are made new when we accept God's gift and find our hope and identity in him.

CLOSING PRAYER: God, thank you for sending Jesus as a means of justification for our sins. Help us to cling to this gift from you, and to remember that it is you who defines our worth. Thank you for being our strength in difficult times, a constant in changing circumstances. Amen.

Heather Epperson

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

LOOKING BACK TO SEE FORWARD

READ: John 6:44-51; Isaiah 54:13

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, enter my mind and heart as I try to understand your words. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus is explaining that only by first being drawn in by God can your path lead to Jesus. Learning the teachings of God, as explained in our Bible, is necessary for us to come to Jesus. By believing in Jesus, we have eternal life. We need to learn the way of a Christian Life as taught by God (Isaiah 54:13). By our regular reading of the Bible, we will learn the Christian Principles. Our charge is to live a life that will reflect these principles.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, may we feel your presence as we try to live the teachings in the Bible. Amen.

Darrel Stutesman

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

JESUS IS GOD

READ: Hebrews 1:5-9; Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14, 1 Chronicles 17:13

OPENING PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, be with us as we read and think on these verses. Help us to understand your word. Amen.

MEDITATION: Paul says that God the Father called Jesus his Son and that he will reign over us and the angels forever. God said for all the angels to worship him. Can we do anything less? His kingdom is uprightness and has no end.

Colossians 1:16 says that Jesus created all things and that he is God. There is nothing created that he did not make! Some religious groups claim angels are not created beings, but the Bible says that the Son, as the image of God created the angels. So that even Satan as a fallen angel was created by him.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, please be with us in our worship of you. Amen.

John Wickliffe

Thursday, March 4, 2021

PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

READ: Mark 9:11-13; Malachi 4:5

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, let us learn from the past and look forward to the present as Christians. Amen.

MEDITATION: In these verses, Jesus is talking to Peter, James, and John after their return from the Transfiguration. In the book of Malachi, it was recorded that Elijah does come first and was sent to restore the people of Israel back to God by changing their ways and by having them repent. He was rejected and suffered. This was a view of what was to come for Jesus.

Most thought of Jesus as a prophet, or teacher, or even a miracle worker, but not the Messiah they were waiting for. John the Baptist was in respects like Elijah due to the fact he came to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.

Once Elijah's mission was completed on earth, he did not die but was swept directly to heaven.

CLOSING THOUGHT: During this Lenten season, we are reminded of the death of Jesus, who was buried, and rose from the dead. With his resurrection and thus victory over death we have the true meaning as Christians to celebrate Easter.

Doug Berglund

Friday, March 5, 2021

WAS JESUS NEEDY?

READ: Matthew 25:31-46; Isaiah 58:6-9

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, open my eyes and ears to all who need help. Amen.

MEDITATION: In this passage Jesus tells us to help the needy. Who are the needy? The person on the street corner? The person living on the street? These are just a small portion of the needy. Everyone we meet should be seen as needy. Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me". We should see Jesus in everyone. We should help not only the people we see as "needy" but even the ones we don't see that way: the new kid in school, the not so popular one. How about the new person at work? Someone who can't reach the top shelf at the supermarket?

When Jesus came into this world, he had no place to lay his head. During his ministry he had no place to stay. Was Jesus needy?

If you are a follower of Christ you will treat others with kindness. If you do this, you will serve them as if you were serving Christ himself.

The good works in the parable are not the cause of salvation but the effect of salvation. We will be known by our good works and acts of kindness, not by our words.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for being so understanding. We are all sinners and in need of help. Amen.

Don Becker

Saturday, March 6, 2021

IN OUR DARKNESS, HOPE

READ: Hebrews 4:12-16; 2 Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 41:13

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, may you give me eyes to see me as you see me. Amen.

MEDITATION: When John opens his Gospel with a series of metaphors – God as the Word, God as light, God as life – he eventually arrives at a line that summarizes the Gospel story: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5 NIV). This introduction tells us all we need to know: This is a story of hope. Jesus’ very human and grace-giving death is not the end.

We can see this same language repeated in Hebrews, but whereas John and the Gospels are accounts of Jesus’ life, Hebrews is an argument for the necessity of belief.

Every basic argument structure can be broken into two steps: First, you must prove the problem, then you must provide the solution. In the passage above, the author of Hebrews begins with the problem (verses 12-13): our dark sin doesn’t stand a chance beneath God’s penetrating light.

The solution (verses 14-16), is a God who is capable of empathy because he was also human, yet blameless. In these two paragraphs, we are presented with a neat argument for belief; a reminder of the need for the resurrection but beneath the blinding light of God we have hope of salvation.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, may I have confidence in your grace and mercy, so that I may believe that all you see in me has been forgiven. Amen.

Adie Kleckner

Third Sunday in Lent, March 7, 2021

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT?

READ: Matthew 22:34-40; Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:8

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, open our understanding of your word today. Amen.

MEDITATION: Religious leaders who had been following Jesus began to see that many of his teachings were quite different from theirs. One of them, a lawyer/expert in religious law, posed this somewhat tricky question: "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" He wanted Jesus to pick one commandment as the most important, the greatest.

Many of us are familiar with Jesus' answer: Love God and love your neighbor. The whole Law of God hangs on these two. Nothing is greater. First: Love God. Second is like it: Love your neighbor.

Ask yourself: Do I really love God? An easy answer isn't there, is it?

Do I really love my neighbor? Or am I satisfied enough to just be nice to my neighbor? How do I love my neighbor? Do you answer, "Not very well"?

As Pastor James has said: "When you love God, you love what God loves. When you love God, you love the people for whom Christ died."

Do you love what God loves? God the Father loves the Son (John 5:20) and because the Son fulfilled all the commandments, we are free to love him and our neighbor through Christ in us.

CLOSING PRAYER: Change my heart, O God, and teach me how to love you and my neighbor well. Amen.

Ray Larsen

Monday, March 8, 2021

THE PROMISE COMES BY FAITH

READ: Romans 4:13-17; Genesis 17:5

OPENING PRAYER: Father, help us to believe what you say. Jesus, please author in us a deeper faith. (Hebrews 12:2) Amen.

MEDITATION: In Genesis 12 God said to Abram, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This statement follows God’s telling Abram to leave his country and relatives and go to a land he would show him. Why did Abram do what God asked? In Genesis 15 the answer is in verse 6, “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Two things happened. Abram believed and God counted his belief. This statement is followed by a description of the enactment of a formal covenant between God and Abram.

That brings us to Romans 4. The history with Abraham is, he believed (faith) before he was circumcised, before Isaac was born signifying physical heirs, and way before the law was given (no works). God promised him heirs like the dust of the ground. The mystery is revealed in those verses at the beginning of Genesis 12. The promise of Abraham’s being a blessing and his descendants’ being a blessing refers to two things. The physical offspring were to be holy and through them God incarnate would enter the world and ultimately go to the cross. And all who believe in Jesus are heirs of Abraham’s faith.

CLOSING THOUGHT: Friends, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was promised to Abraham and Abraham believed God. making him the father of all who believe. God attributes Christ’s righteousness to us outside the works of the law. (Grace!)

Shirley Larsen

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

BEAR WITNESS

READ: John 8:13-18; Deuteronomy 19:15

OPENING PRAYER: Father God, please allow my heart and mind to bring forth the understanding of your words into our lives, hearts, and souls. Amen.

MEDITATION: The Old Testament, written by Moses and others, was to remind people of what God had done for them, and to redirect their lives. People were instructed not to bear false witness; that there must be two to three witnesses against anyone accused of a crime. In the Gospel of John, the Pharisees challenge Jesus in his bearing witness to himself. They tell him his testimony is not valid, as he only has one witness. Jesus tells them he knows who he is, where he came from, and where he is going, and the Father is his witness.

Jesus says he doesn't pass judgment on anyone, BUT if he does, it is true. Although the Pharisees refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, we who follow and believe in Jesus know that he was and is the Messiah, our Lord and Savior, and that he is the only true judge, and that God is his witness. As followers of Christ, we should not judge others, bear false witness, or bring harm. We should follow the laws of heaven. Do not close any door in our path to follow Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, as you guide me down my daily path to bear witness to your Son Jesus Christ, and to others I meet on this journey, help me to show love, kindness, understanding, and to do no harm I pray. Amen.

Tim Gary

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

OUR PRIEST AND KING FOREVER

READ: Hebrews 5:1-10; Psalm 2, Psalm 110:4

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, we sing your praise as the King of Peace and High Priest. May you govern our lives and help us to know your truth and your way. Amen.

MEDITATION: The Hebrews letter is addressed to Jewish converts to Christianity who were tempted to revert back to Judaism. They were familiar with the Old Testament and able to understand references to it. These references portray Jesus as our High Priest and King. The reference to Melchizedek intrigues me. He was a priest named in Genesis (the book of genealogies) without any mention of his birth, or death, or genealogy. Unlike other priests he was the last of his lineage. Melchizedek was called by God as the High Priest AND the King of Righteousness in Jerusalem during the days of Abraham. Although obscure, Melchizedek had the dual honor of being High Priest and King. That is the dual role of the Messiah, our Christ is both High Priest and King forever.

The imperfect high priests of the old covenant offered symbolic sacrifices for atonement that satisfied God's justice and demonstrated his mercy. God accepted the offerings from these imperfect men because he knew Christ's own perfect sacrifice would cover their sins.

CLOSING PRAYER: As the Hebrews, we too have doubting hearts. The Bible reminds us of God's greatest gift. Thank you, God, for such an amazing grace that was extended to those who lived before and after Christ's perfect sacrifice. Amen.

Sharon Scott

Thursday, March 11, 2021

FREE FROM SIN

READ: Romans 6:19-23; Psalm 22:16-21

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask that the words of my heart and my mouth are the words that you have given me to share. Amen.

MEDITATION: In Romans 6, we read that we are slaves to sin because of our human limitations, but in our finding and accepting of Jesus Christ, we become slaves of God. The things of our past that we are ashamed of only lead to death. Our righteousness in Christ leads now to eternal life. In my home I have a saying posted nearly everywhere and it states: You already have what it takes...so...let go of the shame...and take hold of the grace.

In Psalm 22 David writes from great suffering to great joy, as he comes to believe that his God would rule over the entire earth. He writes of being surrounded by dogs, pierced in his hands and feet, gloated over, and robbed of his clothes, which was the greatest indignity, to see a man naked. This Psalm foretells of Christ's suffering but his saving of all who would believe. Just like in the Psalm, Christ asks his Father to take this cup from him, and yet but he does his Father's will. His righteousness leads to our eternal life if only we believe.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, I pray that you will help us to remember every day to put away our past and walk into your Holy grace. Amen.

Barbara Nichols

Friday, March 12, 2021

REJOICING IN OUR SUFFERINGS

READ: Romans 5:1-8; Isaiah 53:4-7

OPENING PRAYER: Father God, thank you for this day. Thank you for the ways you love us and take care of us. Thank you for dying for us, while we were still sinners. You chose us and love us. Use our sufferings, and help us to see how you are using our sufferings. Amen.

MEDITATION: I don't know about you, but when I first read this passage, I thought "rejoice in our sufferings?" But God, don't you know what we've been through? Don't you know about the global pandemic? Don't you know about the civil unrest? Don't you know about our black brothers and sisters who have been unjustly murdered? Don't you know about the friends and family we have lost?

But of course, he knows. Our crucified God certainly knows what it is like to suffer. Because as verse six says, Christ died for the ungodly. He didn't die for the people who have it all together. He demonstrated his love by dying for us, while we were still sinners.

When we are suffering, we can rejoice because we have a God who understands. Our "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." So, what are you finding hope in today? How is God using your suffering to produce perseverance? How is he using that perseverance to produce character? And how is he using character to produce hope?

CLOSING PRAYER: Crucified God, help us to see how you are using our present suffering to produce in us perseverance, character, and hope. Help us to see that we can rejoice in our suffering, even when it is hard, because it is drawing us closer to you. Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, that we are never alone, even when we are suffering to the point of breaking. In Jesus' name, amen.

Katie Davis

Saturday, March 13, 2021

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

READ: John 15:23-27; Psalms 35:19, 69:4

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for being the one constant in our lives during the very uncertain times. Even when I did not know what the world would bring me and my family next, I knew that you would remain constant, for you have been there from the beginning. Amen.

MEDITATION: In today's society, it is so much easier to do what others find socially acceptable to get accolades on social media. Being a follower of Christ can be, even in today's day and age, a scary thing for many people.

So many people find it difficult to believe in a God that they can't physically see, touch, talk to, or hear.

Because of our belief in God, we can be persecuted. We can experience hatred from others. Non-believers can be very hostile to those who are very passionate and authentic about their love of God.

But don't worry about that hatred! God reminds us daily that this hatred is because of the sin and the rejection that the unbelievers feel.

Christians are never too good to serve others. We are also never too good to suffer like Christ did for us. So, by enduring the hatred that others may feel toward us for being believers, we see it as a way for us to strengthen our faith.

Today, I pray God's love will shine through me to those whom I meet.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, God, for being a constant in my life when the world around me has been so uncertain at times. I pray that those who have yet to know you will soon know you and your love. Amen.

Katie Aguilar

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 14, 2021

YOU'RE ON GOD'S TEAM

READ: Romans 8:31-39; Psalm 44:22-26

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus, for his everlasting love, and for his sacrifice that secured a place in heaven for us. As we reflect on your word, help us to open our hearts and minds to the reality of your love for us – a love that is unconditional, pure, and everlasting. Amen.

MEDITATION: We all remember our days on the playground, and whether we were playing a game of red rover, kickball, or tag we can all empathize with the precarious nature of picking teams. Now, if you were like me, you were picked toward the end. And it was always a little awkward. I didn't necessarily think my friends were against me.

This analogy holds true in adulthood. Maybe you are struggling with a project at work and your team seems frustrated. Or maybe marriage or parenting isn't working out the way you thought it would. We all face challenges that can easily set us back and get us down.

But this passage reminds us that because of Jesus and his sacrifice, we are all members of the greatest team there is – God's team. There is no set back, mistake, or disappointment that makes it impossible for us to be loved and accepted by Jesus. Never forget he picked you first, and you are exactly the person he needs on his team. He needs the believer, but he needs the skeptic too. He needs the parents who are struggling, and the ones who have it all together (if that even exists). He needs you and is for you – always.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for the truly unconditional love you have for us. No matter our missteps or mistakes, you are for us. And because you are for us, no one can be against us. Help us to keep this truth at the forefront of our thoughts as we work to strengthen our faith and lead others to your kingdom. Amen.

Nichole Zuger-Cheney

Monday, March 15, 2021

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES BY FAITH

READ: Romans 10:5-13; Leviticus 18:5; Isaiah 28:16, Joel 2:32

OPENING PRAYER: Thank you, Father, that the Righteousness by which I stand before you is all of Jesus' doing and none of mine, for I would be in a sorry state if it depended on me. Amen.

MEDITATION: The daughter of a dear friend was, already at age two, a very independent AND self-reliant young lady. When facing such tasks as tying her shoes, if her Mom asked if she needed help, she would reply, "my do it myself!" While I applaud her determination, AND I share in her desire for self-actualization, there are some things that we cannot do for ourselves. We can't save ourselves – only Jesus can do that.

When we strive to commend ourselves to God, we place ourselves firmly under the grip of God's Law of Perfect Love, a law we are powerless to keep. When we rely on the righteousness of Christ, we place ourselves firmly in the grip of the Perfect Lover of the Law – the only One who can keep it.

The Gospel is Good News because it frees us from relying on ourselves for that which we could never do: "God made him who knew no sin to become sin for our sake, so that, in him, we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus IS the Living Word – God's Perfect Law of Love. Let the Word of Christ dwell richly within you!

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Jesus, that I can stand in the Righteousness that is yours alone. For this do I kneel before you as Savior and Lord. Amen.

Bill Ward

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

THE BEATITUDES

READ: Matthew 5:38-48; Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 19:18

OPENING PRAYER: Jesus, my Lord and Savior. Thank you for this wonderful day. Forgive me for my sins. You have blessed me always. Please bless those less fortunate. In your name I pray. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus is speaking to those who have never heard his words. Many of these teachings are simply telling us the difference between right and wrong.

The following passage, Matthew 5:46-47, is very meaningful to me, because it tells me that I can be loving and still miss the mark: "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

CLOSING PRAYER: Jesus, you are the living Word, always just, righteous, loving, and, forgiving forever. May I always be mindful and loving to all. Amen.

David Byrd

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

GOD's TOUGH LOVE

READ: Romans 11:22-27; Isaiah 59:20-21, Jeremiah 31:31-34

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, may we not take for granted your blessing of salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Keep us strong in our faith and help us to live in such a way that others will be drawn to you, knowing your mercy, goodness, and grace. Amen!

MEDITATION: Paul is warning the gentiles against PRIDE. He is reminding them that their present place of privilege was due to God's GOODNESS, while Israel's being "broken off" was a manifestation of his uncompromising SEVERITY. But if they failed to appreciate God's goodness toward them (by rejecting his Word as Israel had done), they too would be cut off!

Just as parents' love for their children is unconditional, sometimes "tough love" is needed to bring about changes in behavior. It doesn't mean that we don't love them anymore or that they will never again be in our favor. Unless you have an only child, siblings are watching and (hopefully) learning from the experience and have been put "on notice" that they are not immune to the same actions. Once behaviors are corrected, peace, acceptance, and unity resume...until the next time.

In the same way, God has demonstrated that with the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Savior, he is more than willing to "graft in" that which has been "cut out", thus making the olive tree (or family) whole once again!

CLOSING THOUGHT: In the end, God will show mercy to all Jews and gentiles who come to him through faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

Lisa Semon

Thursday, March 18, 2021

JESUS AND THE NEW COVENANT

READ: Hebrews 8:1-13; Exodus 25:40, Jeremiah 31:31-34

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, please forgive me for my sin and lead me to do your will in thought, word, and deed. Amen.

MEDITATION: In Exodus 24 and 25, Moses told the people the Lord's words and laws. They responded, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." The Lord gave detailed instructions for building the Tabernacle and furnishings and said, "See that you make them according to the pattern." The Tabernacle was a shadow version of heaven, where the Lord was to dwell among the people.

In Hebrews the people broke the old covenant, so the Lord promised a new covenant of grace. Burnt offerings, circumcision, and the sacrifice of animals were no longer required after 70 A.D. In the new covenant, Christ suffered and gave the ultimate sacrifice of his blood on the cross to completely pay the debt of our sin. We ask for forgiveness of our sin and our sin will be remembered no more. Jesus has done all that can be done to accomplish our redemption. He is the high priest who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. We give thanks with the ritual of communion.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for sending your only Son, Jesus Christ, to show us how to live life with abundance, and to die on the cross so that we may be forgiven for our sins. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Gayle West

Friday, March 19, 2021

ZEAL FOR GOD ALONE

READ: John 2:13-19; Psalm 69:9

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, in these times of massive trials please give me the ability to be quiet with you and respond to your spirit. Amen.

MEDITATION: In normal times we are met daily with new obstacles to take our eyes off of God. This year has brought unprecedented challenges. Our church should be a place of comfort and faith, not a place to be bombarded by people selling CD's, books and trinkets taking away from God's quiet presence. There are some churches still today that are famous for that. Not The Little Church on the Prairie.

Even though we have been unable to worship physically, the spirit lives in the messages we receive via the Internet and the many calls, cards, e-mails, and Facebook posts we receive daily. God works in mysterious ways and in some respects, I have more contact with more content than I did before. Still, we miss our precious church and church family. We are there in our hearts and look forward to worshiping in person again. Thank God for the ability to see and hear our pastors share God's word via the Internet.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord open our hearts and minds to be able to discern those things that cause us to take our eyes off of you. You alone are the earthly focus of our faith and lives and the hope of our eternal life. Amen.

Bridget Upton

Saturday, March 20, 2021

GOD's SACRED TEMPLE

READ: Luke 19:41-46; Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, please help me to recognize where I may be hiding my sins of commission and omission behind church attendance or ritual so that I may confess them and your light may shine through me ever brighter. Amen.

MEDITATION: In Luke we read of Jesus' sadness over God's people once again letting their love for God grow cold, letting his house harbor unfair business practices and cold, unfeeling hearts. Jesus knew while their attention was toward worldly pursuits and personal success, the future destruction of the temple and persecution would catch them by surprise. Jesus was fully aware this was not the first time this had happened.

In Isaiah, we read of the wonderful plan God had for his new temple to be a place of worship for all people, including gentiles and socially marginalized "eunuchs". During this same time, God had given his people great victories in war. Later, Jeremiah wrote that the people came to misconstrue these great blessings to mean God's people were entitled and invincible. People behaved as if temple attendance solidified their privileged status and excused their ever-growing sins, including shunning and abuse of "aliens, the fatherless, and widows".

Seeing the cycle of blessing, then complacency, then selfishness, then destruction, repeated AGAIN, Jesus was both terribly saddened and righteously angry. Yet he still went through with sacrificing his own life to pay for those sins, and for the sins of those of us yet to come. A love that would give the ultimate sacrifice for people who so easily turn away and fail to operate out of love themselves, is incomprehensible.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, we are so blessed that you in your magnificence would love us. May we never take it for granted, nor fail to share it with others who are crying out to be so loved. Amen.

Jennifer Stafford

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 21, 2021

THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

READ: Romans 8:1-11; Isaiah 57:15-19

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, may we open our hearts more to people who come from other countries and welcome new neighbors, too. Amen.

MEDITATION: When I lived in Japan, only one percent of the Japanese were Christians, but the Japanese enjoy Christian schools and Gospel songs. When Japan had been in isolation for 250 years, there were young samurai who wanted to understand new technology and learn English. One of these, Niijima Jo, found a Chinese Bible and was interested in it. He went to the northern island where steam ships sailed to America for trade. The American captain of one of these ships was delighted that Niijima gave him his long sword to pay his way. He also traded his small sword for an English language Bible.

In 1865, the ship landed in Boston. The Captain introduced Niijima to the owners of the ship, Mr. and Mrs. Hardy. They found out that he wanted to know about God and learn English. Surprisingly, Mr. and Mrs. Hardy promised to pay for his education. Niijima hoped to become a pastor, so after graduation from college, he studied in a seminary to become a pastor. Both the captain and the Hardys were so spiritual to help Niijima again by paying for that education as well.

Back in Japan, Pastor Niijima met Yamamoto Yae and they married. Then they built a Christian University, Doshisha University in 1888. Next, they inspired three young women to build a Christian school for women in 1900.

CLOSING PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for loving me. There is nothing better than you. I'm so glad for our pastors and other people at The Little Church and Lakewood Grace. Amen.

Carmen Sterba

Monday, March 22, 2021

MERCY: FAITHFULNESS TO GOD's WILL

READ: Matthew 9:9-13; Hosea 6:6

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, I ask that you fully open my eyes to see others with God's mercy in my heart, mind, and actions. Amen.

MEDITATION: When Jesus "saw" Matthew, he knew the entirety of Matthew's past, present, and future being. He knew Matthew was a particularly accursed sinner as a loathed tax collector, despised by his own kinsmen in a profession characterized by greed, graft, and abuse.

Yet, he loved Matthew, asking him to "Follow me," and supped with him in a house filled with other sinners. The Pharisees, constrained by their rigid adherence to their doctrinal law, asked the disciples why their teacher would do this. While acknowledging Jesus as a teacher, they strove to divide the community by going to the disciples with their questions rather than directly to Jesus.

However, by example, Jesus was the teacher of mercy, showing mercy to sinners by going to where they were, by welcoming them into fellowship with himself, and by showing them God's love. Faithfulness to God's will is based on right conduct toward our fellowman: the act of mercy. No sacrificial offering apart from God's will is acceptable. How easy it is to hide behind a mask of indifference, bias, and ignorance when looking at others. I need to learn to see through Jesus' lens of mercy, and actively teach others by my example.

CLOSING PRAYER: Jesus, thank you for your mercy in loving us no matter how unworthy we may be. Thank you for asking us to join you, for teaching us by example, and for giving us the courage to lead others to you. May we go to them, show mercy to them where they are, and welcome them into God's company. Amen.

Sandi Rose

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

GOODNESS WINS

READ: Romans 12:17-21; Deuteronomy 32:35, Proverbs 25:21-22

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, open our hearts to hear and our lives to speak of your ways. Amen.

MEDITATION: We are called to a different standard of living. These verses call for a response to an enemy who doesn't come naturally. We may ask, who is our enemy? Perhaps our "enemy" is the party with whom we don't agree, someone disrespectful, mean-spirited, offensive, condescending, or dishonest. In this current political climate, there is so much that can upset us on both sides. How will we respond? Will we be kind and forgiving or pay one insulting comment with another?

Whether it's a family member, friend, politician, or neighbor who operates in a hurtful way, we have the choice to do likewise or to respond in a way that is Christlike. To follow Christ isn't the easy way, but one which requires us to call on the Holy Spirit to transform us into forgiving, kind people who allow us to live as people of peace.

Many friendships and marriages could be saved if we followed this recipe.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, this is a very challenging message for us. Yes, it's easy to be kind and at peace with one who is good, but to act in love toward the one who is unkind, that is difficult. Help us to put ourselves aside and allow the Holy Spirit to live this out in us. Amen.

Alyce Olsen

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

GIFTS FROM GOD

READ: Acts 15:7-21; Amos 9:11-12.

OPENING PRAYER: Thanks be to God and to those in centuries past, with help from Apostles, Christians, Jesus, gentiles, and all others who have worked so diligently to define and clarify laws required to make one worthy of becoming a member of God's family. Amen.

MEDITATION: As early as 760 BC (circa) through the mouth of the prophet Amos, God expressed his desire to receive gentiles into his family and church independently of Mosaic laws and observances. God gave this gift to gentiles by giving them the same Holy Spirit and purifying their hearts with faith the same as with Jews.

Disputes, discussions, and debates continued through the centuries but were never resolved. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, differences between Christianity and Mosaic laws appeared to become even stronger.

In approximately 63 AD, a group of men called the Council of Jerusalem, Jews and gentiles, gathered to discuss laws and other customs required for us to be saved. It was at this meeting that Peter pointed out that Jews were not justified and saved by laws, but like gentiles, were saved by the love of the Redeemer, who had been crucified and shared his blood on the cross for the sins of all people. Justification by faith and sanctification by the Holy Spirit cannot be separated. Both are gifts of God.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, never let me lose sight of your love for me. Keep my heart pure. Amen.

Shelly Shellabarger

Thursday, March 25, 2021

CHRIST'S BLOOD TAKES AWAY ALL OF OUR SIN

READ: Hebrews 9:6-14; Leviticus 16:3-14

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Son's sacrifice for the world. Amen.

MEDITATION: Throughout the Old Testament we see the attempts of the priests to atone for their sins and for those of the Hebrew people. The rituals that were performed by the priests for the various sins were specific and precise. Only the priests and the high priest could absolve the people of their sins. The ritual sacrifice of the blood and body of the animals which were given for the absolution of the sins of the people had to be repeated over and over.

When Christ died on the cross we were cleansed of our sins once and for all. His blood shed for us was the perfect sacrifice. There is no longer a need for ritual cleansing as there is no need for a priest to offer sacrifices for our sins. Christ is our high priest. He intercedes for us and represents us to our Father in heaven. We have access to God because of the sacrificial work of Jesus, the Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER: During this time of Lent, we thank you, heavenly Father, for your Son's sacrifice for us. Because of Christ, your Son, our sins are forgiven. We confess our sins before you and know that we may approach your heavenly throne with confidence and the knowledge that we are your sons and daughters. Amen.

Sandy Noreen

Friday, March 26, 2021

THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

READ: John 12:12-16; Psalm 118:25-26, Zechariah 9:9

OPENING PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, please give us the strength and faith to deal with the challenges facing our world in these difficult times. Be with those who are suffering and comfort those who grieve. We praise and thank you. Amen.

MEDITATION: As a child growing up in Tacoma, my only understanding of the story of Jesus' last week was the excitement of waving palm branches on Palm Sunday. In my mind, it was much like our annual Daffodil Parade. As I have aged, however, I now have a greater understanding of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It started as a day of joy and adulation, but was soon followed by betrayal, arrest, trial, and Jesus' crucifixion.

That was then, this is now. As we read the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem generations later, the Bible gives us the **WHOLE** story. In the time of Jesus, his followers did not have the whole story. Instead, the Jewish leaders and priests were jealous and suspicious, and rejected Jesus. His disciples did not understand the prophecies of the Old Testament. And the people were hoping for a leader who would restore their nation to its former glory. When they saw he was not going to fulfill these expectations, many of the people turned against him.

Because we do have the Bible, we must read it carefully to better understand its history and story. This will guide us on our faith journey.

CLOSING THOUGHT: "And these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life, in his name" (John: 20:31). We are blessed!

Joan Jackson

Saturday, March 27, 2021

ACCEPTANCE

READ: Romans 15:7-13; 2 Samuel 22:50, Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, during this Lenten season I pray for guidance, that you would help me to become the disciple you want me to be. Help me to learn the ways of acceptance that you model for me daily, and to embrace the people around me who are different, yet the same as I am: a beloved child of God. Amen.

MEDITATION: I find this passage from Romans completely relevant to what is happening in our nation and all over the world at this time, nearly two-thousand years after Paul wrote these words to the Christians in Rome. We live in a culture where we find fault and tear each other down, rather than building each other up and valuing our differences. We struggle with accepting our neighbors, friends, even family members, who are different from us. We allow our differences, political, racial, social, and economic, as well as differences in sexual orientation and life style to come between us. We pass judgment without stopping to ask ourselves, "How would Jesus want me to treat this individual who is so different from me?"

Paul's words from Romans 15 are what I refer to as "mandates" to live by. Jesus, the man who ate with tax collectors and healed all who came to him regardless of their "differences", must be our example to live by. When we come to the point where we can love those who are different, treat them with kindness and respect, and build them up rather than judge them, then we will become a better nation. Paul sets a high standard, and we are called to strive to meet that standard, to be better examples of Christ's love for all.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help me to follow your command to love and accept those around me. Help me to be a better example of your love for your people. Help me to see them through your eyes, and to remember that you love and accept them, even as you do me. Amen.

Mary Church

Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021

PRAY IT FORWARD

READ: Hebrews 13:1-8; Deuteronomy 31:6, Psalm 118:6-7

OPENING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for all you have given us. We dwell in the peace of the security of your presence and freedom from fear. Amen.

MEDITATION: “Never will I leave you; Never will I forsake you”
“the Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.”

Take these words into your heart and silently share them with someone:

A five second prayer at the red light for the people in front of you.
For the clerk in the grocery store.
For a child in the park.

When you’re waiting in the dentist’s office, there is a receptionist who needs your prayer: “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.”

When you are making a sandwich for lunch, share your heart and these words toward the farmers who grew the wheat. You don’t have to know them, for they are, as you are, the children of God. Pray it forward.

CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please help us to share your comfort of warmth and peace. Thank you for giving us the opportunity every day to be a light. Amen.

Luci Wickliffe

Monday, March 29, 2021

JESUS PREDICTS PETER'S DENIAL

READ: Matthew 26:31-35; Zechariah 13:7

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to understand your precious words so that they may guide us as we try to walk your path. Amen.

MEDITATION: Jesus predicts Peter's denial using the language of the prophet, Zechariah, who lived over 500 years before Christ (Zechariah 13:7). Peter and the other disciples declare their faithfulness to Jesus. It is easy to understand the terror that the disciples felt at the impending crucifixion and their desire to scatter.

Our faith can waver in difficult times. Our lives are filled with distractions and confusion, but that is exactly when we must hold on to the Messiah's hand.

CLOSING PRAYER: Savior, like a shepherd lead us;
be the Guardian of our way.
Keep thy flock, from sin defend us.
Seek us when we go astray. Amen.

(From the hymn: Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.)

Helen Amsbary

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

THAT'S ENOUGH

READ: Luke 22:35-38; Isaiah 53:10-12

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, please help us to trust you in all things. Amen.

MEDITATION: In this passage, Jesus is warning the disciples that some of the harsh passages from the prophets are about to come true. They can't expect things to go as easily as before. Then the disciples get all excited about having two swords. In most translations Jesus responds, "that's enough". I always thought he meant that two would be plenty, but in the translation (paraphrase) of The Message, Jesus says; "Enough of that. No more sword talk." That may be a more correct interpretation. After all, in only a short while Jesus rebukes Peter for using his sword to cut off the ear of the chief priest's servant.

He wants his followers to be aware that they are now in danger just because they follow him, but this has all been predicted. When we see bad things happening today, we need to remember that God is not surprised. Scripture promises bad times will happen, but the final outcome is good.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, help us not to over-react to bad things with our own strength, but to trust in you. Thank you, God, for the hope you promise through your Word. And thank you, Jesus, for accepting a criminal's death so that we could have this hope of eternal life with you. Amen.

Beth Carter

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

BETRAYAL

READ: Mark 14:17-21; Zechariah 11:12-13

OPENING PRAYER: Dear God, today as we read about your name, we pray that you would fill our hearts, our minds, and our souls. Transform us Lord, and make us more like you. Amen.

MEDITATION: If you've ever been betrayed, you know it's not a good feeling. It's that feeling when they stab you in the back after trusting them. It also implies that the breach of trust was intentional. An accident is one thing, but betrayal implies a conscious, knowing, deliberate act of using the trust someone has placed in you against that person.

So how is it that God loved and cared for Judas Iscariot even after knowing he betrayed him? As humans, most of us would feel angry, and love would probably be the last thing we'd feel. But no matter what we do, God will never stop loving us. In his eyes, we can do no wrong. We can "betray" God and the Commandments, and he will still love us. This is something we can learn from. Instead of feeling angry and acting on our feelings, we should try to love those who betray us, and forgive them.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, let us be more like you. Guide us as we go through our everyday lives and help us to keep your word in our hearts that we may not sin against you. We are forever thankful for your everlasting love. Through Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Noah Fields

Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021

BUT THEY ALL DISOWNED HIM

READ: Mark 14:27-31; Zechariah 13:7

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to be more thoughtful in our deliberations: not jump to conclusions. Help us to realize our shortcomings and to be patient when making judgments. Help us to realize the difference between statements that are deeply felt and those that are realistic. Amen.

MEDITATION: Remember this about Peter: His heart was in the right place. Better a Peter with a flaming heart of love than a Judas with a heart of hate. Condemn Peter if you've never broken a promise, never had a disloyal thought or action to a pledge. Peter loved Jesus even if his love failed.

There was nothing that Jesus was not prepared for: opposition, misunderstanding, the orthodoxy, Judas's betrayal, the agony of the Cross. But what hurt him most was the failure of his friends. The worst time is when we need friends most. There was nothing mentally or physically that Jesus did not endure.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, help us to endure life's hardships using Jesus as a model. In these trying times bring us closer to you. Do not let us jump to judgment in the matter of Peter-like actions. Amen.

Clark Montgomery

Good Friday, April 2, 2021

FAITH ALONG WITH HOPE

READ: Mark 15:33-35; Psalm 22:1, 7-8, 14-18, Malachi 3:1, 4:5

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, our heavenly Father, we as individuals and as a congregation, reach out to you on bended knee for your guidance, your love, your strength, and your compassion. Let us be reminded of your promises to trust us as we trust in you. Amen.

MEDITATION: As I am writing these comments for the Lenten Devotional Booklet, I am having deep concerns for our country, our community, our church, our children, and our families. My concerns stem from the cloud hanging over the country: politically and pandemically speaking.

We, as a country and community have fallen into a mode of fear, anger, suspicion, and guilt. All of these feelings cloud our want and hope for freedom: freedom from disease, freedom of discourse, and freedom from discouragement.

I truly believe that God has had a hand in these challenging times. It is his way to say to the world: "Be calm, be kind, be grateful, behave, and be focused".

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, our heavenly Father, may you hold our faithful hands as we walk with you on this journey. Amen.

Natalie Humphrey

Saturday, April 3, 2021

THE RESURRECTION BODY

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Genesis 2:7

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, please be with us as we try to live the life that you envisioned for us, but know that we will fail along the way, so please continue to guide us in the right direction. Amen.

MEDITATION: The first man, Adam, became a living being, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we were born in the image of the earthly man, so too shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

What the passage is telling us is that the first man had a natural body and was born of the dust of the ground. The other is the last Adam, Christ, the life-giving spirit, who through his death and resurrection will at his second coming give his redeemed people a spiritual body similar to his resurrected and glorified body.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Father, thank you for Jesus, the last Adam, who gave his life for us to save us from our sins, so that we might receive his everlasting life, for which I praise, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bob Kagarise

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED IMPERISHABLE

READ: 1 Corinthians 15: 51-57; Isaiah 25:8, Hosea 13:14

PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for your desire to have a close relationship with us. All you desire is for us to honor you, praise you, and for us to be repentant when we fall short. You are forever faithful. Thank you for not giving up on us. In Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.

MEDITATION: In this passage Paul was addressing the early church in Corinth which was made up of mostly gentiles. He said "We will not all sleep", meaning that Christians alive on the day that Christ returns will not have to die but that they will be transformed immediately.

This applies to us today. We no longer have to fear death because Jesus defeated death when he rose from the dead. Therefore, death is no longer a source of fear. Jesus paid the price for us. Death is defeated and we have hope beyond the grave.

All we have to do is love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind. We will have setbacks, but that is our opportunity to be repentant and get right back to loving God, and spreading the good news of the gospel.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, you loved us so much that you went to the cross and died for us. You long for us to be close to you. Help us in our daily lives to praise, honor, and bring glory to you. When we fall short, let our first instinct be to pray, confess, and ask for your forgiveness. Keep us focused on life with you in eternity. In your precious Holy Name. Amen.

Lizza Lockett

THE CHARGE TO EACH OTHER

Go out into the world in peace;

have courage;

hold on to what is good;

return no one evil for evil;

strengthen the fainthearted;

support the weak, and help the suffering;

honor all people;

***love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.***

From the Book of Common Worship