

Journey to Easter

A 2020 Lenten Devotional Compiled by the North American Baptist Fellowship

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The 2020 Lenten Journey begins on Ash Wednesday, February 26. Every day of Lent there is a devotion written by someone who is part of the North American Baptist Fellowship. You will note Sundays are not included for Sundays are not part of Lent as every Sunday is an Easter celebration and therefore is not part of the season.

Palm Sunday is April 5 with Maundy Thursday on April 9 and Good Friday April 10. Easter is on April 12, 2020.

For many Christians, Lent is a very central part of the practice of their Christian faith. It is a 40 day preparatory season before Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday, a service of repentance, leading to Maundy Thursday, the Last Supper, and the garden of Gethsemane, the passion and crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday, culminating in Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

As Baptists we can sometimes be impatient and forget all that Christ went through before His suffering and death. That whole journey when He "turned His face towards Jerusalem" knowing full well what was to happen to Him. It's an encouragement to each of us to join Him in His journey and not just occasionally, to tear through Good Friday so that we might celebrate Easter Sunday, but to reflect. The second reason for engaging Lent is that tens of millions of other Christians in North America do the same and it is a bridge of Christian fellowship to join them in their journey.

I would like to thank Trisha Miller Manarin and Shelby Gregg in all their work in coordinating this project and I am grateful for those who have written these devotionals and celebrate with you the encouragement it is to engage their work.

Warmly,

In Christ

Jeremy Bell

General Secretary

North American Baptist Fellowship

2/26/2020

Monica Leak

Psalm 51:1-17; Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Have Mercy Psalms 51:1-17

Have mercy. I fall on the mercy of the court. If you've ever watched a courtroom drama there is usually some point where the guilty overwhelmed by the testimony brought against them or unable to any longer tolerate the weight of their wrongdoing confesses on the stand or blurts out against their lawyer's wishes to confess as ask for mercy. Mercy an act of compassionate treatment shown to an offender. If we are the offender how quick are we to acknowledge our wrong? Do we just expect mercy just because we didn't mean for something to happen or that the person just needs to get over it and move on? Do we even go as far as to act as if nothing ever happened? This was not David's approach, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions," (Psalms 51:1, New Revised Standard Version). He asked for mercy and a clean slate. That takes a level of courage and honesty. Can you be that courageous to stand before your spouse that you wrongly accused of forgetting something important or the child you punished without having the full story or the colleague that you snapped at on the job for asking a question and admit your mistake and ask for forgiveness?

Have mercy. When you commit a wrong it stays with you. You can't just shrug off the situation. You can't take back the words exchanged in frustration and anger. Maybe for a moment, you can act as if nothing ever happened but at some point, the memory will return. Something you see or hear will remind you of what occurred and take you to that place of sin. You cannot outrun sin or hide from it because it will find you. Like David in verses three through five you recognize that the sin, the guilt the offense, the wrong is in front of your face, and admit that sin with the knowledge that it is God who is the righteous judge and will have the final say in your case. We seek God's mercy because of His unfailing love for it is only his mercy that will lift the weight and blot out our transgressions.

Have mercy. We seek the mercy of God in our case because we know what he desires for our lives. "You desire truth in the inward being," (Psalms 51:6, NRSV). Where truth abides it overshadows the lies, the

guilt, and the shame. For that truth to reign on the inside, David asked for the teaching of wisdom in his heart. He asked for purging and washing so that he would be cleansed of his sin. This is the extent of God's unfailing love, His mercy towards us that when we sin, we can confess our sin knowing that he will forgive and cleanse.

Have mercy. We seek God's mercy because it is God who can give us a fresh start. What does a fresh start look like? It looks like a clean heart. It looks like a renewed spirit. It looks like a sustained relationship with the creator. It looks like having the Holy Spirit abiding within. Not shamed or cast away from God's presence but in right relationship filled with His spirit. When you have been forgiven and obtained mercy, your response is one of gratitude. You move from a place of anguish over your wrong to a place of restoration and seeking God to sustain you.

Mercy obtained. When mercy is granted there should be a response. While words of gratitude are often appreciated when you receive mercy from one whose mercy is unending maybe there should be more ways of expression. David provided these options in verses thirteen through seventeen: teaching transgressors (sinners, the guilty, those like him), singing of God's deliverance, declaring God's praises and a yielded heart and spirit. Our sin once separated us from God but because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus we have obtained mercy and right relationship with God restored.

Prayer: Lord thank you for the undeserved mercy that you have extended toward me. Just as I have obtained your mercy bless me to extend that same mercy to others.

2/27/2020

Robert Wallace

Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7

Surprising repentance

In all three of our texts today, we read the act (or results) of surprising repentance. The superscription of Psalm 51 sets the context of the psalm as the repentance of David following the terrible Bathsheba incident. 2 Samuel 11 tells the story of David's attempt to cover up the rape of Bathsheba and murder of her husband. When David was confronted by Nathan, it would have surprised no one if he had simply killed the prophet and continued to live the lie. Instead, David responds in repentance and confession. Psalm 51 read through the eyes of David shows a humility and a vulnerability that one rarely sees from powerful leaders. It's surprising because the powerful usually do not do well when it comes to repentance.

For that reason, the story of Jonah is surprising as well. It is hard to find a villain more worthy of destruction than the Assyrians. Their armies had weaponized terror and cruelty throughout the centuries. They were responsible for the loss of the Northern kingdom of Israel. Everyone (including Jonah) would rejoice to see the Assyrians finally get what was coming to them. Yet, in the face of God's judgment, the Ninevites repent. It's surprising because the thoroughly evil usually do not do well when it comes to repentance.

Neither do the religiously confident. Paul of Tarsus, expert in the law and religious zealot, was an expert at knowing exactly who was in and who was out of the kingdom of God. After his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, however, he repented of that arrogance and surprisingly became an evangelist to the Gentiles. It's surprising because the theologically arrogant usually do not do well when it comes to repentance.

Maybe we are confident in our theology. Maybe we are enemies of the faith. Maybe we simply believe ourselves to be above the need for repentance. When we hear God speak, however, it calls us to turn from all that gets in the way: our selfishness, our wickedness, and our pride. May we pray with the psalmist this Lenten season. Let us confess and implore God to remake us into someone that desires

God's truth. May God create a new heart in each of us. May we not fall into the temptations of the powerful, wicked, or arrogant. May we do well when it comes to repentance.

2/28/2020

Don Sewell

Psalm 51; Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17

Psalm 51: 10-11 “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”

The Bible reveals some characters who look eerily similar to us. Many in the Bible attempted to serve God while seeking benefit for themselves. In other words, a spotty track record in terms of responding to God's calling. They were, and we are, sinners who miss the mark of God's will. The only “course of treatment” for the warped human condition: God's grace-filled forgiveness and redemption.

David could claim distinction by defeating Goliath and leading Israel. But he also failed miserably in the areas of adultery, much less the brazen scheming that led to the death of Uriah. He carried a profound level of regret and desperation as seen in Psalm 51: 10-11.

Jonah, the reluctant prophet, finally obeyed God, but continued in his bigotry and anger. Isn't it odd that one can see the hand of God in the provision of a giant fish in the swirling seas, yet still exhibit very un-God-like characteristics? And do we do that today?

Jesus Christ answered the great question of redeeming the Davids and Jonahs of life. He offered Himself to cover the penalty of our sin-filled human condition. Paul explained that such redemption could transform both the Jews and the Gentiles (Romans 1: 16).

And it all started as the Son of God gathered disciples, revealed the Kingdom, confronted the powers of sin, and displayed His unbounded love for humanity. His love compelled Him to volunteer in our place. He became the “Balm in Gilead”, healing folks like David, Jonah, you, and me.

2/29/2020

Don Sewell

Psalm 51; Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 18:1-7

Isaiah 58: 1-4b-7 – “Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

Many words automatically lift our hearts. We feel “comfy” when we hear words such as “celebration”, “sunrise”, and “hug”. But “corruption” doesn’t usher in pleasant thoughts. Just voicing the word reminds us that we need to fix our world. And corruption can hit the family of faith. In Isaiah 58, we see a scandalizing idea: God's people might even warp the ways of worship and service. Of course, we're pretty good at corrupting anything in front of us, even to the point of maligning the work God calls us to do.

Isaiah called out the Hebrews for faulty service and half-hearted, superficial fasting. Then he turns the concept on its head in verses 5-9. He calls for a renewed sense of humility that compels people to address oppression, injustice, hunger, and poverty. Such things of scarcity and pain will not be part of the kingdom of God.

Because of our self-serving tendencies, we prove once again that we need to be covered by divine forgiveness. And thanks be to God, Christ's forgiving power will be cover us until our final breaths. And the stains of our corruption will be wiped clean when we meet our Master in His Kingdom.

Can God's cleansing power radically reform us? He who faced the horror of the cross for our sakes has no problem regenerating His children. They just have to humbly trust and follow. Will you today?

3/2/2020

Meg Thomas-Clapp

Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18

A season of penitence calls us to examine ourselves and our society. We ask God to reveal to us the ways we have caused harm in what we have done and what we have failed to do.

As I leave a meeting with the staff of a local domestic violence shelter, the stories I've just heard invite me to approach the texts from the place of the survivors. Jesus' words have been applied to abusive situations encouraging survivors to forgive time and time again, turn the other cheek, and continue to stay in places of violence. We know these messages in no way speak to abusive situations. But are there other places we fail to look? Have we sinned by not asking deeper questions of scripture? We pray with the Psalmist: Let there be no deceit in our spirits!

We often glorify the sufferings of Christ, mystify his death, and then quickly jump forward to the resurrection and platitudes of "everything happens according to God's plan." Often in our hasty explanations of salvation we declare that abuse, whether by the state, hands of another, or even by God, is justified. Without realizing, we create a formula of Christ's death and resurrection that propagates systems of violence, especially when heard by those who have experienced the violence and abuse themselves. Can we take a step back and stay for a moment in the grief and lament found in the Lenten season? Let us encounter the emotions of loss and confusion felt by those closest to Jesus, the despair and pain experienced by so many who are suffering today.

Grief knows that life has been changed in ways that can't be restored, yet in our mourning we find the divergence of new opportunities to carry forward that which was lost. Trauma marks those who have experienced violence. We need witnesses to the violence around us and hidden in the homes of our communities. People unafraid by not knowing how to explain the suffering, people bold enough in their love to be present without any glimmer of hope on the horizon. Rather than grapple with the texts of the early church trying to carve out a theory of atonement, may we be brave enough to stay in the moment of uncomfortable loss, to be present in a way that only God can empower us to be. May we like

Christ, “become like our siblings in every respect”, not justifying the violence nor downplaying the pain, but by being fully present.

3/3/2020

Lynda Brown-Hall

Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14-5:10

The common thread between these passages of Scripture is the contrast between obedience, disobedience and acceptance of one's actions. Psalm 32 speaks directly to the ease of one's conscience, when they confess their sin. And knowing that they are blessed as a result of their confession and that God has promised to forgive us of sin, if we put our trust in Him. While Genesis 4:1-16 give us a different view of the good seed and the bad seed. For we find two brothers: one brother, Cain whose name signifies a possession. A man, which was most, welcomed. A God-man that was hoped to have been the promised seed. Then the other brother, Abel who was a clear depiction of vanity, a vain mortal, a miserable man, who lived a miserable life, and who was met with an unnatural death after the judgement against him for killing his brother.

Both give a view of two different scenarios that rest on the morals of who we are. We were once lost, but now we are found. We were once living in sin, doing whatever seemed right in our own minds, and we liked it. For sin is pleasurable to the flesh. However, the day of reckoning comes to us all when we have to stop and take account of the deeds done in our bodies. When we reflect upon that which we heard from our grandparents, our parents, our teachers and all those that possess a moral compass in directing our paths in righteousness. The results of feeding, nurturing, and developing one's mind on the things of God ultimately will bring you to the realization that there is a reward bestowed upon those that are of the household of faith. It is the blessed ministering of the Holy Spirit that opens us to receive that which God intended for us from the very beginning of time, and that is a right relationship with Him through constant confession and repentance of sins.

Yes, we inherited this deadly sin by way of Adam, but God did not leave us there to die in our sins. For Hebrews 4:14-15, clearly show our great "High Priest" which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like we, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. This same grace extended to us by God our Father will be the same grace that will save our life (Hebrews 4:15). For our

Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, our High Priest came with compassion upon our ignorance and our lack of knowledge that we may come to know that He came for the sole purpose of saving us from our sins. Jesus was willing to pay the penalty with His life to prove His love for us. I don't know about you, but I am fully cognizant of the fact that I'm not here because I'm so good, but rather, I'm here because God is so good to me." "For I want you to know, if justice was given a free hand we would be gone now to see how long eternity will be. Nevertheless, God, in His infinite wisdom, has once again stayed the hand of mercy for each of us to try again. And because of mercy's involvement in our life, we have another chance." I am here healed yet again from the afflictions of life caused by sin. I refuse to set down on God; because God has not sat down on me. Therefore, I keep getting up. Life knocks me down more than I care to share, and I keep getting up, pressing forward. Hallelujah! "My dear ones, I'm grateful, so much so until I have resolved that with this opportunity of mercy given to me, I am going to lay aside the weight and sin that so easily beset me. I am more determined than ever to run this journey of life with patience. This race that has been put upon before me, I will surely run. I'm not going to put stock in the transitory things of life, but rather I am going to look to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of my faith, because I know it's later than we think."

During this season of Lent, make a conscious decision to confess and repent of your sins to the only one that can forgive you and restore you, Jesus who is the Christ.

3/4/2020

Cecily Noel McIlwain

Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

In Wendell Berry's "Health is Membership," the world of love is contrasted with the world of efficacy and safety. Products marketed as killing 99 percent of germs or helping 99 percent of cancer patients are prized assets in the world of safety. However, when thinking of the world of love demonstrated in the parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18:10-14), Berry retells the story not with the shepherd saying, "I have saved 99 percent of my sheep," but rather, "I have lost one."

How often in a culture of success, efficacy, and safety do we think about going into the wilderness for the good of the smallest minority? Today's Scripture passages ignite the value of risk and wilderness. The psalmist does not retreat into the safe haven of the Hiding Place from the scenic beach shore but from "distress in the rush of mighty waters" (Ps. 32:6-7) Moses does not receive the Law of the Lord easily but only after one failed attempt and a miraculous forty days and nights of fasting. The Shepherd of Jesus' parable journeys into the mountains to find 'the one' before considering the days work to be done.

In the same aforementioned essay, Berry argues that the smallest unit of health is the community. As we walk with Jesus through the wilderness to the cross this Lenten season, may we be mindful of those who are no stranger to the wilderness, ourselves included. May we treasure those saints in our communities who are well acquainted with wilderness as indispensable members. May we be challenged to embrace spiritual practices that seem uncomfortable (fasting, meditation, lectio divina/visio divina) for in that discomfort we might be exposed to truths long abandoned or concealed by our 'efficient' routines and schedules?

"Here I am before you with my firmness and my infirmity. Preserve the first and heal the second. Here I am before you with my strength and my ignorance. Where you have opened the door to me, welcome me at the entrance; where you have closed the door to me, open to my cry; enable me to remember you, to understand you, and to love you. Amen" A prayer of St. Augustine

3/5/2020

Isaac Mwase

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7

A little known factoid about Baltimore is that it is a hilly city. I get to run up and down some of these hills some Saturdays with a local running group called the Pacemakers. Runs originate from different places in the city. University Baptist Church, Baltimore, hosts two of these runs, one in the Spring and another in the Fall. Our fearless leader sends out a Thursday email announcing where that Saturday's run begins. When he uses phrases like "a mostly flat course" or "a relatively easy stroll" you can be assured that you'll have to run up some challenging inclines. My local hilly terrain is a wonderful opportunity to connect with the thoughts expressed by the Psalmist, the prophet Isaiah, and by the Apostle Paul.

The Psalmist was familiar with hills. Hill country as can other terrain became a source of inspiration to the Psalmist that God comes to the help of those who seek God. God is your keeper. God is your protector. God is your helper.

The Prophet Isaiah challenges the reader to "look for the rock from which you were hewn." He also urges us to look to "the quarry from which you were dug." There is a beautiful neighborhood that enjoys a lake formed from an old quarry (I get to run by those waters, every so often). This quarry lake and many other reservoirs in Baltimore City are reminders that God's goodness can be appreciated in these ordinary features of our cityscape.

As a Christian who lives in Baltimore, I can appreciate the encouragement that the Apostle Paul gives to Timothy, that he be faithful and fearless. Many speak of Baltimore as a city known for its homicides, crime, and poverty. I was once afraid of Baltimore. My fears have been driven away. I can rest in the peace of Christ whose perfect love drives away all fear. I can live courageously in a city chockfull with possibilities and blessing. Christ came so that we can live faithfully to God and fearless wherever we are.

3/6/2020

Starlette Thomas

Psalm 121; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31

Psalm 121

I feel acutely aware, lately, that we live in the midst of a world of hunger, of poverty, of racial inequity. We live in the midst of political chaos and so, so much injustice. I write these words while thinking about a family member who is sick, while thinking about strained relationship with those I love, while in the midst of my own personal pain.

I am someone who is quick and ready at all points to jump into action. Just this weekend, I wrote a list in my journal of the things from the past week that were weighing on me- and followed that list with the question “so what is my responsibility here? What is this moment calling in me?”

I was hoping, then, that this Psalm text would be a rallying cry of sorts- a “now is the time to get up and get moving!” However, it wasn’t exactly that. The word of Psalm 121 invite something else in me. An exhale, an invitation to remember my own humanity and to pause, to rest, to grieve- to tend to ourselves while we are “in the midst.”

March 6, today, is my dad’s birthday. I remember being a child and knowing that my dad would advocate for me, knowing that he’d hear me, knowing that I was precious to him.

I know that dads aren’t this person for everyone, but I invite you to pause and think of someone who has been that for you: the person who made you feel precious, who you knew would receive you with care, and with love, who wanted the best for you. Remember what that feels like, linger in whatever that brings up for you. Now, read the Psalm again, slowly- from the place you are remembering.

Know that you do not journey alone. Know that you have help, and that your help comes from a God who knows you, who hears you, who advocates for you. Know that you are invited to work, and you are invited to rest, to pause.

In the midst of all that is- Yours is God who sees you, who knows you, who attends to you, who cares for you. Rest here today.

3/7/2020

Bill Tillman

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10

Look Up Especially When You Feel Like Looking Down

I find it most difficult to even think about engaging God, or God's people, when I'm experiencing low points. Those low points may come as I'm experiencing what Isaiah called the revilings, the reproaches, of people. You know those? You've prepared, presented, engaged but still get things put back in your face. Apparently, nothing was clear enough, practical enough, fascinating enough, trivial enough for these revilers and reproachers.

Or, the low point may come later as I rehearse what I wish I had said, including the "what I would do with you if it weren't illegal" thoughts. The self-reflection that becomes self-scorn, that becomes the polar opposite of what Jesus instructed "love others as you love yourself" is the substance of a low point. Most of us need education toward how to do the self-love.

The psalmist, Isaiah, and Luke's narrative give us a beginning place for learning self-love, which is implicitly related to identification of the need for self-forgiveness. And, of course, it necessitates engaging God, or sometimes at least the best ideas you can conjure about God. "Look up" those ancients directed. The architects and builders of the cathedrals caught an idea that informed builders for centuries. Walk into one of those structures and you cannot but help look up. If you have not understood transcendence before, you will then. And, the transcendence of God translates into the reality that God transcends all our realities. We can begin to conceive of different perspectives as to how we view life, how we view ourselves.

The psalm composer and Isaiah spoke out of experience. Each of them had awareness of the kinds of lows we all experience, but had moved through those, understanding these kinds of things form a cycle in life. The low side of the cycle can be identified and absorbed as we follow these Scripture composers' advice—look up, put your mind on the One who observes when your foot may slip (a low point) and provides comfort to one's soul.

The Luke passage usually headed as "Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant" reflects more than the matter of an out-of-personal-contact healing. That which we should notice more is the concern on the part of the Centurion with which many of us can affirm. You know the situations? I, you, we are part of a team, a group of colleagues, and one of the group becomes unwell. We are short-handed. Less production and lower quality of work ensues. No amount of arrogance, anxiety, or impatience will help the situation. But, patience, attention directed toward those who can maybe fill the gap along with attitudes and actions that reflect authentic humility are the way.

So, as we are tempted to look down, and be cast down, and feel our souls shrink, let us look up, listen for God, and feel our souls nourished.

3/9/2020

Johnny Serratt

Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6

At the beginning of his classic exposition on the season of Lent, Alexander Schmemmann says, "When a man leaves on a journey, he must know where he is going. Thus with Lent. Above all, Lent is a spiritual journey and the destination is Easter, 'The Feast of Feasts.'" The Psalm for March 9th, the 128th, is known as a song of ascent. This means that as folks were traveling up to Jerusalem for Passover they would sing this song. Those who would embark on the journey from their homes going up to Jerusalem sung this song to remind them of the good that comes from honoring the Lord. There's a peace that comes from God when we follow God's way. It is easy for us to forget how difficult it must have been to journey once a year for Passover. Those that set out had to leave behind the ease, comfort, and stability of their homes. Life on the journey was always more difficult than life at home. The experience of journeying up to Jerusalem is analogous to how we go through Lent. During this penitential season, we give up some of our pleasures and ease. As we leave behind some of our vices or guilty pleasures, the purpose of the season comes more into focus: Easter. People may find Lent strange, some thinking, "why must you go through this silly season just to get to Easter? It will come even if you do not." I imagine similar comments were said to the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Our answer is similar to theirs, this is the way to God, and we praise him for the journey.

3/10/2020

Robin Kay Monk Self

Isaiah 65:17-25 4:6-11 (Other Scriptures: Psalm 128, Romans 4:6-11)

“Already Done”

Did you grow up with chores as a part of your childhood? If so, you know that chores were part of the expectations of living under the roof of your parents' home or of your children living under yours. Because you or your children were blessed to be in a home, there were tasks that each person in the house was responsible for as part of their 'cost' for living or existing in this space. Sometimes, there were promises of fun times outside or allowances for tasks done. Other times, there was the prevention of upset parents or cancellation of fun to motivate us to work in our assigned spaces. In either case, the children received the blessings because of what they did, and the home was all cleaned up because of the work the children had done.

In today's devotional scriptures, we are reminded of the ultimate blessings that the LORD God provides for all God's children: a home and space where no more struggle, no more sickness, no more premature death, no more plethora of tears shed, no more haves and have nots, no more threat of punishment of predators and no more tasks to be complete exist. Now THAT is a home all put together that anyone would be glad to live in!

Think about our work, neighborhood, family or political environments. If we are honest, we recognize that no space on earth yet works as righteously as this blessed place God has promised. So, as God's children, we may be motivated to find our task and get it done so that our world will look as cleaned up as God's Promises toward us. Or... we may find ourselves weighed down or overwhelmed by the sheer notion that we will never get it done enough to keep God happy with our activity.

Take a deep breath and look again at the promises of the scriptures. The blessings of the Promises have nothing to do with our tasks being completed, but on our futures and blessedness being sure. It is God that makes our homes, our relationships and our place in God's family and divine Home secure. It is God that has already done the heaviest lifting to make the promises of the 'new', the righteous and the ultimate blessings. The Promises are not based on our works but on our belief in our belonging to God our Divine Parent. It is already done.

During this season of clearing out space for God to speak, what promise from God encourages you most right now as you journey?

3/11/2020

David Simmons

Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22-32; John 7:53-8:11

It is human nature to divide up the world into nice, neat categories. We like black and white, left and right, good guys and bad guys. But for Jesus, there really aren't such clean categories. That may be why the story of the woman caught in adultery does not appear in the "earliest, most reliable manuscripts." Some scholars think that Jesus's actions were just so controversial that early scribes stopped copying this passage, figuring there's no way Jesus would have done what he did.

Later scribes realized they were wrong. This is exactly the kind of thing Jesus would do.

So what exactly did Jesus do? With an adulterous woman on the left and the righteous prosecutors on the right and Jesus in between, Jesus wrote in the dirt. Many have attempted a guess at what Jesus wrote that so affected the religious prosecution that they dropped their stones and walked away. But trust the author. If it mattered, he would have told us. The meaning is in the absence. What matters is not WHAT Jesus wrote in the dirt, but THAT he wrote in the dirt.

When we meet the adulterous woman, she is just "this woman." No name. Barely even human. She is known only by her vile deeds. With dignity undeserved, she is thrown before the group and made to await her verdict. She is also a pawn, used to expose the heterodox nature of this man some were calling "The Christ." Will he condemn her as the sacred law requires?

Then he writes in the dirt.

In that divisive moment, Jesus breaks all norms. He doesn't call them by their titles. He does not dignify their question. He shows no deference to the court. Instead, he bends down and scribbles. In the dirt. In that moment, the righteous feel the message. Jesus is treating them the way they have treated her. With one simple act, he tells them, they are the same. His words now make sense: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

Jesus is not trying to humiliate the righteous crowd. He's trying to save them. You see, Jesus did not come to save the righteous, but sinners. In fact, he can only save sinners. Jesus wants to say to them, as he wants to say to us, "Neither do I condemn you." But first, they must first become sinners. They must release their grip on their hate, on their self-righteousness, on their black and white view of the world.

And so must we if we wish to be saved.

May in this Lenten season we loosen our grip and let the stones fall.

3/12/2020

Jeremy Bell

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23

Psalm 95:1-5 begin with those marvelous words in verse 1; “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!”

These words are embedded in our piety, polity, worship and prayers. They are so familiar in what they draw us to and what they draw from us that is like putting on a comfortable coat only to discover that the words draw us freshly into a new and open experience of God; that old coat and familiar words is soon discovered to be the new experience, a new expression, an encounter with the Living God.

Exodus 16 take us from the euphoria of Psalm 95 to the murmuring and complaints of Israel. So common in the experience of faith, when faced with trouble, do we wish for and call upon the old days and old memories. Those memories are often contrived by us, twisted by us, to be memories that were better than the reality they reflected. It is a liability of leadership that Moses and Aaron encountered in verse 2, when the people murmured against them. It is a reality that many of us face. It’s that form of leadership called a Pinata relationship where expectations get put upon, placed up, stuffed into leaders. False expectations, which when they are not fulfilled result in the leader morphing into a piñata, where those that have placed those expectations do not simply murmur, but go about destroying the piñata, bemoaning the expectations that they themselves have created. Exodus 16 is part of that trap.

Colossians 1:15 – 23 takes us to one of the most magnificent in all of scripture. Worthy of reading and rereading on a very, very regular basis. In my own life, I repeat the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostle’s Creed daily, and then I sing that paraphrased first verse of the hymn rooted in Lamentations “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning, great is thy faithfulness, Oh Lord.”

While reading the whole piece is essential, memorizing and echoing verse 15 will for most of us suffice. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”

3/13/2020

Jeremy Bell

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:9-21; Ephesians 2:11-22

Psalm 95 verse 6 & 7 continue to amplify and resonate a wonderful crescendo of worship before the living God. "O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand." Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel once worthily said "I asked for wonder and you gave it to me." Worship, and especially worship as described in this Psalm, is indeed that of wonder and of awe; not busy, not obligatory, but in awesome wonder.

It's important that we find in Exodus 16 that as we worship and live out our lives in Christ, that through the incarnation we find not only God to be worthy of our worship, wonder and awe, but when we complain or cry out, God listens and answers. Psalm 116 will tell us "I love the Lord for he has heard my prayer." Exodus 16 reminds us that in the starvation, loneliness, and fear of the Israelites in the desert, the Lord heard their prayer and in response to their hunger, sent quails in the morning and manna at night to feed not only their bellies, but to remind them of the steadfast trustworthiness of God who hears.

There is nothing that encourages me more than in Ephesians 2:11, which accomplishes 2 very important things for me. We are reminded of the kind of angst and strangeness of being far off from God, yet in fact, the presence of Jesus built a bridge to the Father that was non-existent in so many profound ways. Verses 17 – 20 capture it all and in this day and new morning, please read this; if it is your practise to do so in the morning, please read it right now, at midday, and in the evening, so that you might not only experience clarity, but comfort and a profound encouragement which knows no better words than these. "And he came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

3/14/2020

Don Sewell

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27-35; John 4:1-6

John 4: 5-6 - "Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon."

God expects one major courtesy from His created beings, and that's to obey. In the Old Testament, heroes of the faith did just that. Abraham left his home at God's command. Esther risked her life at the royal court to save her people. Hosea preached and backed it up by forgiving adulteress Gomer, providing a real-life symbol of God's vast love and forgiveness.

But also, there are stories where disobedience reigns, further reinforcing the crucial need for a solution to our sin problem. Even Moses was caught in a disobedience. His method of providing water at Meribah didn't follow the explicit commands of Jehovah God. The result was catastrophic for many who wanted to see the Promised Land.

Our Lord understood the Father's plan to erase the consequences of disobedience. Jesus would engage in a cosmic struggle in Jerusalem. And that battle for souls involved unspeakable physical suffering. John 4:6 notes that Jesus was tired in route to Galilee. Being fully man while also being fully God, He couldn't just dismiss the common physical issues He faced. He was love personified in a normal human body.

Going to the cross was infinitely more traumatic than being dog-tired by an oasis. And His physical anguish for us was preceded by being betrayed by a disciple who had listened to the words of love and grace for three years.

Because of His infinite wellspring of love, Christ accepted this plight of torture to redeem sinners, including you and me.

3/16/2020

Trisha Miller Manarin

Psalm 81; Genesis 24:1-27; 2 John 1:1-13

2 John 1:1-13

In the midst of this Lenten Journey, we read the words of John written to an unnamed woman. How many times do we encounter unnamed women – whether faithful or unfaithful – in the scriptures? Not that her lack of a name is central to the passage, but if she had a name (for instance Jenna) we could contemplate her faithfulness by name as we do other greats of the faith (even women). Imagine... would that I lived a life reflective of Jenna as opposed to the “elect lady” who John writes to in the second letter. According to John, she has a lot of reasons to celebrate!

Some of her children are walking in the truth. I don’t know about you, but I often find truth rare. In our modern day society even Christians would often choose being “nice” than being people of “truth.” We seem to have mixed up truth and love as if they are not compatible. And yet, I think if we truly love, we will be people of truth. For verse 6 says, “And this is love, that we walk according to his [God’s] commandments.”

While we might think the commandments are rules to oppress we ought to consider them as a gift deepening our relation with God. Jesus held the commandments to such a great regard that he offered even higher notions in Matthew 5 when he said, “you’ve heard it said, but I say to you....” These words of Jesus elevate the commandments so that humanity might grow in our relationship with God, with one another and with creation.

If we are to walk according to God’s commandments, we are walking in truth. As we walk in truth, injustice must be confronted; sin must be defied; and love must triumph. As we journey to the cross and the empty tomb may we walk in truth knowing deception is not far from the path. As this letter comes to an end, John speaks of the desire to be face-to-face with her instead of writing.

Perhaps in these days of waiting and wandering, there are people who need to be lifted up and encouraged to walk in love. Perhaps there are people who have been unnamed who are longing to be called “elect;” who are eager to hear their name spoken with life. Perhaps we, too, need to remember to love one another – not be nice, but love knowing there are times love calls for truth and we must walk in the truth even as we walk in love. I am also quite certain there are “Jenna’s” willing to walk with us so that together we might walk in love and truth on this journey.

3/17/2020

Leo S. Thorne

Psalm 81; Genesis 29:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

“The Wilderness and Beyond”

“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” So we read in the Book of Hebrews (2:12) as the author describes Jesus facing the ultimate of wildernesses, even his death on the cross. The Lenten season offers opportunity for us to reflect on Jesus and ourselves during these challenging journeys in our faith experiences. Though they may seem to last forever at times, wilderness experiences have an end.

I like to look at wilderness experiences as signposts, not hitching posts. What helps me get through these night experiences is the awesome promise embedded in the gift of hope, which Poet Emily Dickinson calls: “the thing with feathers that perches in the soul.” But looking ahead is in no way an attempt to duck the reality of the lonely, barren wilderness. Life is hard at times, pain can be severely powerful, exacting moments can sometimes be very debilitating, and in some of these painful ego states our soul can find close company in the words of the Psalmist David in Psalm 88: 1-2: “Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear unto my cry; my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near unto the grave.” Yet, these wilderness moments of life have a specific, transformative God-purpose. If we let them. They come to deepen and strengthen us. Probably this is what African-American poet, Langston Hughes, implied when he wrote: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.”

I recall as a child singing along with my family a little chorus which has held for me over the years a memorable line: “Don’t let anyone steal your joy,” and this includes our wilderness experiences. If there is a wilderness moment in your life at present, try to tippy-toe and raise your head, if only a little, and peep with hope to a horizon of joy in the distance. Our God walks with us in both – the wilderness and the joy. That is why we dare place our trust in the unfailing wisdom of our loving God. We choose to believe the signpost of Psalm 30:5: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” Did I hear somebody say, “Amen!”

3/18/2020

K Scarry

Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39

Psalm 121

I feel acutely aware, lately, that we live in the midst of a world of hunger, of poverty, of racial inequity. We live in the midst of political chaos and so, so much injustice. I write these words while thinking about a family member who is sick, while thinking about strained relationship with those I love, while in the midst of my own personal pain.

I am someone who is quick and ready at all points to jump into action. Just this weekend, I wrote a list in my journal of the things from the past week that were weighing on me- and followed that list with the question "so what is my responsibility here? What is this moment calling in me?"

I was hoping, then, that this Psalm text would be a rallying cry of sorts- a "now is the time to get up and get moving!" However, it wasn't exactly that. The word of Psalm 121 invite something else in me. An exhale, an invitation to remember my own humanity and to pause, to rest, to grieve- to tend to ourselves while we are "in the midst."

March 6, today, is my dad's birthday. I remember being a child and knowing that my dad would advocate for me, knowing that he'd hear me, knowing that I was precious to him.

I know that dads aren't this person for everyone, but I invite you to pause and think of someone who has been that for you: the person who made you feel precious, who you knew would receive you with care, and with love, who wanted the best for you. Remember what that feels like, linger in whatever that brings up for you. Now, read the Psalm again, slowly- from the place you are remembering.

Know that you do not journey alone. Know that you have help, and that your help comes from a God who knows you, who hears you, who advocates for you. Know that you are invited to work, and you are invited to rest, to pause.

In the midst of all that is- Yours is God who sees you, who knows you, who attends to you, who cares for you. Rest here today.

3/19/2020

Joby Tricquet

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:10-21; Ephesians 4:25-32

Ephesians 4:25-32 Take It Up for Good

For ages Christians have adopted some type of fast for the Lenten weeks. This is indeed a good discipline. It allows us to replace one of life's pleasures with a spiritual focus. Instead of a meal, we partake of that which nourishes us spiritually, for example. Most often that which is laid aside temporarily is taken up again come Easter Morn. Again, fasting for a day or a season, even giving up a little pleasure for a time of deep discernment is a discipline Jesus expected us to practice. The rhythms of the church year help us toward that end. Yet, my question to you today is not "What have you given up for Lent," but "what are you holding that you need to release for always?" Then, the follow-up question is naturally, "What takes its place?"

When I read today's passage from Ephesians, for a moment it strikes me as odd that the attitudes Paul is addressing are attitudes that were on display in the church in Ephesus. Then a business meeting or two comes to mind. Oh, yeah. It still happens. As stated in Paul's admonition to the Ephesians, the key to the successful release of attitudes grievous the Holy Spirit is to embrace that which bears the fruit of the Spirit's work in our lives. Truthfulness, service, kindness, and forgiveness take the place of falsehood, selfishness, malice and holding a grudge. Hopefully, stealing, rage, and brawling have not been our norm lately. But what about the grudge thing? Or have you considered that failure to minister when given the opportunity just may be theft from God's point of view? Reread verse 28 with that in mind.

The fact that you are reading these words indicates your faithful practice of Lenten reflection. I hope we will use this time of discipline as an opportunity to cleanse our lives from that which has no place at all, ever. Gaze into the mirror of God's word. Let it reflect that which we may have grown accustomed. Let go of what does not belong. Take up that which does – for good.

3/20/2020

Starlette Thomas

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9

When you feel like the Lord is not your shepherd

Psalm 23 is quite possibly the most popular song in the entire Old Testament hymnal. It is the most requested at funerals, the most recited in times of despair and in thanksgiving. Children and elders alike know it by heart: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want."

Even non-Christians and unbelievers are familiar with this passage of scripture. It is a comforting image, a promise we all want to believe in, that there is someone looking out for us—no matter where we find ourselves. But what happens when you feel like the Lord is not your shepherd?

I know, I know. This is not a part of the lyrics, not the way that you remember it. We cannot get the original version out of our head. It may seem blasphemous to even suggest that there is a time when any believer might feel as if they are without a shepherd.

But I have been there and I am certain that I am not alone partly because of a book titled Shepherd Leadership: Wisdom for Leaders from Psalm 23. The authors, Blaine McCormick and David Davenport, write in a chapter titled "Shepherds Know the Valley" these alternative verses:

"I am a sheep without a shepherd. I do not know whom to follow—and I am utterly in want. I am empty. Nothing satisfies. Nothing refreshes me. I find no real fulfillment. No lasting security. No real rest. I feel like a lost soul—totally, irretrievably depleted."

If you are here, you have a shepherd who knows the feeling and knows where to find you. Jesus knows the valley of the shadow of death like the back of his bleeding hand.

3/21/2020

Don Sewell

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9

John 1:1-4 –“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”

My 3-year-old granddaughter told me about the funny antics of her two kittens. After she relayed the sweet stories, I told her to “tell Rainbow and Lonely hello for me.” She looked quizzically at me. Then with a wry smile she said, “They don't talk.”

Communication is not just a challenge between a little girl and her cats. In the greatest news of all time, John's Gospel introduces the most moving words. The Son has been with the Father from time immemorial. The words raise the flag of the Trinity, revealing God's master plan to redeem the world to Himself through His Son. He is symbolized as the light of all people.

Let those last words soak in for just a minute. He was sent to illuminate the world, not just glow for a favored people group. His unbounded love is for the downtrodden folks and high achievers. It's for those with resources and those who wonder where to get their next meal.

In Psalm 23, the Lord's sheep are treated with utmost attention and care. The conclusion is highly personalized. The sheep (you and I) will be recipients of goodness and mercy, invited to God's house forever. Such jaw-dropping communication takes our breath away. Such forgiveness and accepting love will never be fully articulated by even the greatest writers and poets.

But there's a price to be paid for such a powerful love that heals all the diseases we have wrought upon the world. The plan involves the Son voluntarily accepting all penalties that should rightfully go to His sheep.

That astounding plan is the best news you will ever hear.

3/23/2020

Dennis Sansom

Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 146

Psalm 146 is an ideal Psalm to read and ponder for Lent. It contrasts the fleeting and vain powers of the “princes” with the Lord’s real and liberating power. We cannot date when the Psalm was written, but we know it was chanted and prayed after the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. By then the people had seen many “princes” come and go, both in and out of the land of Israel, each “prince” promising success and prosperity, but each failing. They and their plans “return to the earth.”

In our chants and prayers of this Psalm, we should think of the “princes” as the political powerholders and movements who equate true justice with their plans, who pretend to be the goal of human history, and who assume a mantle of permanence and infallibility. Human history is a cemetery of the failures of political movements and forces who identified justice and righteousness with their own ideologies and personalities.

However, true power comes the Lord, and the Psalm specifically defines what kind it is. It is the power of creation, of the right execution of justice for the oppressed, of feeding the poor, of freeing prisoners, of giving sight to the blind, of lifting up the burdened, of watching over and upholding the strangers, orphans, and widows, and of bringing to ruin the wicked. This kind of power comes from the revelation of God, from the divine being and, thus, is not restricted as are the limitations and corruptions of the “princes.”

During Lent we need to realize that in our praises of the Lord we put an end to speculation about the nature and demands of the Lord, that we declare that God has definitively revealed a new power, a new justice not based on the short-sighted and self-serving “princes” but on the redemptive and liberating presence of God. In our praises, we become the worshipful community who embodies and models this power to a world harmed and scared by the “princes.”

3/24/2020

Cassandra Aline Jones

Psalm 46; Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1

RESTING IN OUR SAFE PLACE

With the exception of my loving family, music has always been where I felt safe and secure. I was 4 years old when I heard a jingle of a television commercial, then climbed up on the piano bench in our home and played the tune I 'd just heard. Within two weeks I was in weekly private piano lessons. Although I certainly was not aware at the time, playing the piano was a safe place, a refuge, if you will, where I would be inspired, fascinated, inquisitive while being free in immersing myself into a world of joy, skill, creativity which was wrapped in a God-given gift.

Playing the piano was my safe place, my place of rejuvenation after disappointments, failures, and let downs. In fact, years before I understood the need to seek relief from stress, or anxiety, losing myself at the piano playing concerti, waltzes, sonatas, Joplin, Burleigh, Negro spirituals, gospels, and contemporary R and B, was always welcoming, soothing, and gratifying. It just made my world seem better and gave me hope for a better tomorrow. Here we are journeying through another Lenten season being reminded of our need for a safe, welcoming place of refuge and rest. We may all enjoy a physical place of refuge, but these texts affirm our access to the greatest place of refuge. God is the strength of our hearts, under the greatest trials of our lives, and through our greatest dangers and fears.

Today, REST IN GOD who is our safe place. Instead of constant busyness, constant wrestling within ourselves and with others, REST. Instead of fighting the countless ideas, beliefs and intentions of others in our lives, take the time today to REST. We are safe when we take refuge in God. In this Holy space we have a stronghold and a source of strength by which we can face the uncertain future. Take a breath. Rest and chill. Allow your mind to rest at some point today. After all of our preparation, skillful, meticulous, work and careful plans, every day is filled with uncertainty. Each day is a new opportunity to rest in the presence and power of God who is our eternal safe place. REST.

3/25/2020

Dennis Sansom

Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34

Isaiah 60. 17-22

These words may have been written after the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C. Verse seventeen contrasts different kinds of building material—bronze with gold, iron with silver, wood with bronze, and stones with iron, implying that God was going to construct something far superior and longer lasting than the destroyed Temple. Also, the early readers may have had other edifices in mind—the great pyramids of Egypt, the splendid palaces of Assyria, and the famous city walls and gardens of Babylon. In comparison with the future edifices of the Lord, they are transitory and shoddy work. In comparison to the true Lord of History and Judge of Nations, they represent the vain pretenses and failures of all empires that assume they can enforce their own brand of peace and justice into the world. Driven by greed and violence, they foretell their ultimate dismantling.

In contrast to the failures of the empires, the prophet depicts a novel and unparalleled state of human existence—a time of no violence, moral illumination, divine glory, righteousness, and the fulfillment of the ancient promises given to Abraham. This state will not be brought in by another King or Ruler. It will be directly constructed by the Lord.

Even though the writer of these words may have lived after the author of the famous Servant Songs (Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52-51), he has thought through (under the Spirit's inspiration) the incredible consequences of the Servant's work. It is because the Servant is chosen by the Lord and will not fail, will render justice throughout the earth, will vicariously suffer for the guilty, will not render violence for violence, and will make many righteous that the unprecedented and divinely established reign of peace and righteousness will appear in the world. The Servant will transform the world by forgiveness and redemption, not by the typical exhibitions of dominative power. The future, therefore, is not permanently dark and sorrowful. The forces of hate and violence will not have the final word of human history. Hope is legitimate because the Lord will construct a new city with "walls of Salvation" and "gates of Praise."

In this Lenten time, let us vow to work with and as the Servant for the new city of the Lord.

3/26/2020

Robin Kay Monk Self

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

“Discovered in the Darkness”

Wow... We are over halfway through the Lenten season. By now, you may have found your ‘moment’ during this annual practice of voluntary sacrifice or maybe you are here to find encouragement. Possibly, you seek to take intentional time to reflect, to pray and to remember Christ’s sacrifice and to practice spiritual discipline in community. What if it is none of these things and you are just looking to get through this season of fasting because you feel lost in the dark?

In the book of Acts, we see a passionate, busy, productive, efficient, and sincere religious leader who leveraged his position, trusted the human-made process and found himself in the dark. Sound familiar? Saul wanted to make an impact. He did. He committed time and overtime to the work of religion. He produced. Yet, along his journey to continue the work, God interrupts Saul’s progress and leaves him in the dark.

Even when he opened his eyes – attempting to look around, assess his situation and address the issue – Saul could not see his way through. Ever been there? Sincerely giving your all only to find that you’ve been headed the wrong way with no view of the way forward or out. Instead of groping on, consider this: there are some things you can only learn about God while in the dark. Instead of rushing ahead, running to perform and walking your own way, in the dark, you can learn to be led, learn to listen and learn to wait.

In the dark, you discover God’s plan often interrupts your own. While there, you can learn to discern God’s voice from the voices from without and within. Dependent on the move of God and the resources of other people, you learn to lean on understanding beyond your own. When you are forced to face that your vision lacks sight, you can discover a greater purpose.

During this season of reflection, what has blinded you from seeing clearly?

3/27/2020

Derek Hatch

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19

We begin with the end. The Revelation passage is exactly that – a picture of the end of the story. The final image shows more than it says. It satisfies every recitation of the Lord’s Prayer when the voices in heaven proclaim, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15; NRSV). We see what NT Wright calls “God’s new world of justice, healing, and hope” (Surprised by Hope, 122). Surrounded by “theophanic weather” (i.e., lightning, earthquake), God’s full presence with God’s people is described in the temple in heaven opening, with the ark of the covenant inside.

Visions like this are awe-inspiring, but they also can bring heartache. As much as they bring us expectation and hope for the coming day when the Lord will put everything right, we are sadly confronted by the present reality, one that is not yet what we expect. The passages from Psalm 130 and Ezekiel bring this sense of things to our attention. We, like the psalmist, cry out to God in pain – pain that might have been caused by sins committed or righteousness omitted. When we see these mistakes and transgressions against the light of God’s mercy, we recognize how much we fall short. This is a good practice for the Lenten season – to recognize our vices, no matter how large or small, in preparation for Jesus’ passion and death.

We do not remain in our sins, though. If that were the case, Ezekiel says, “how then can we live?” (33:10). Instead, we find forgiveness that transforms our lives, and this prompts us to wait upon the Lord “more than those who watch for the morning” (Psalm 130:6; NRSV). As God’s mercy has made renewed us in the present moment, we wait for God’s justice to set everything right at the end of the story.

3/28/2020

Don Sewell

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53

Psalm 130:1-3; 7 - "Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption."

Since the Garden of Eden, the seemingly mild deviation from God's instructions became full-blown, continuous rebellion. The consequences of that poor choice includes greed, international tensions, destruction of God's creation, and sheer heartache.

As a teenager, I quickly learned that roofing a house wasn't for the idle-minded. Sure, one needed brute strength to carry 80-lb shingles up the ladder, but finer motor skills came to play in nailing the shingles in perfect rows. The more complacent and sloppy, the greater chance the whole row would go off kilter and have to be ripped up. "Mild deviations" trigger horrible results.

Psalm 130 reveals how sinfulness destroys our spiritual linkage to our sinless Lord God. In verse 3, we join him in the rhetorical question, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?"

None of us can approach our Holy God with unforgiven pride, waywardness, apathy, and self-aggrandizement. Any right standing we could possess comes from Christ's unmerited grace.

Ezekiel 36 speaks of God's blessing for "the wayward". Verse 8 provides moving hope: "...for they shall soon come home." Because of Jesus' redeeming work on the cross and His confirming resurrection, we have the chance to come home.

The celestial door is open; the holy welcome mat is in place. Welcome home!

3/30/2020

Shelby Gregg

Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

Be strong. Be independent. Take care of yourself. You can do it. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Don't take no for an answer.

I have heard these and so many other phrases like them many times in my life. At times, they are a comfort, a reminder that I can do whatever is before me. That I have skills to make something happen. That I have experience to pull from. That I have a capacity and a strength to push forward until something gets better.

Until I can't. Because, after years of fighting, I have come to realize that my real strength comes not from who I am, or even in who God has made me and is still making me to be. No, my true strength comes from God, who guides me, who goes to battle for me, who is Lord and master. And in that I am comforted. On my bad days, I can give it to Him and He takes over and sees me through. On my good days, I can celebrate with Him. When I am unsure, He calms me. When I don't have the words, He forms them for me.

"I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land." Despite our competence, our experience, our strength, we have all been lost. So lost that we don't know where to turn, or to whom. How wonderful, that as followers of Christ, we always have someone to turn to. When our soul is parched, God is right there to fill us back up. How wonderfully refreshing that finally, I don't have to do it all. In a world that tells me that I can do it all, that I should do it all, God tells me that I can come to Him. And He will give me strength.

Nothing is too much. Nothing. What a great privilege that is, on a long, weary day. God gives me strength for today. And tomorrow, I will be refreshed and able to move forward again.

"Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning; for in your I put my trust."

3/31/2020

Robert Cochran

Psalm 143; II Kings 4:18-37 and Ephesians 2:10

A Page Turns for All

Today marks a turning point in my 42-year ministry—a day before April’s Fool Day and a day less than two weeks before the celebration of our Lord’s Resurrection. I mark the day with wonder, not overlooking the challenges that confront each of us and all of us, but certain of God’s promise of a new Kingdom emergence, one marked by the righteousness of that Divine promise.

Experience teaches me, as it does the Psalmist, that all humans, whether those of faith or those without, fail to live into the full potential of God’s righteousness. Believers continue to disappoint, sometimes falling even into overt acts of persecution, misguided by human claims. I can own my pain such behavior causes, such pain the Psalmist acknowledges. I admit I, too, have not always lived up to the standard of righteousness that God reveals to me.

My personal lament, however, turns with that of the Psalmist into a song of joy as I focus on the work of the prophet Elisha, whose ministry brings life back to a beloved child, the son of the Shunammite women. In that story, sense again the life that God’s prophetic work gives. This March 31st turns us away from April Fool’s Day toward April 12th, the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the resurrection empowered by the might God shares with the Church.

In God’s power, the unity sought and promised by Ephesians 2 will appear, beyond my personal service. Confusion abounds; pointed words divide, but such is not the finale’. The separations created by such tactics, separations due to race and dogma, will diminish in importance. The experiences in Christ will remain. “We were dead in our sin. You were dead in your sin. Surprise! Together we are alive in Christ. We sit down together through God’s grace. . . We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.”

Baptists, look forward to the day when God’s power, the power shown by Elisha and proclaimed by the apostle Paul overcomes our human weakness and failures. Thanks be to God!

4/1/2020

Isaac Mwase

Psalm 143; Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33

We live in a broken world. We are a broken people. Lent reminds us how broken we are and how much we are in need of Easter faith, a faith rooted in the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and establishment of God's kin-ship. Lent is a season when we implore God in Psalmist fashion, renew hope in a discouraging world, and align our perspectives on issues with God's.

As we journey along in our faith, we do well to implore God to keep us from the dangers that come with living in a broken world. The Psalmist is our effective teacher on how to implore God. Just as he had things that threatened his relationship with God, we too must be cognizant of those things that pose a threat to our love relationships with God, God's people, and God's world. Ask this Lenten season what are things for which you ought to implore God's deliverance. Fear? Despair? Cynicism? Hypocrisy? Lies? Doubt? Discouragement? God will save you. God will preserve your life. God will destroy all that threatens your love relationship with God, God's people, and God's world.

We live in trying times much as did Jeremiah. Instead of becoming forlorn and despondent let Lent fire our imaginations about a future shaped by hopeful acts. Jeremiah's hopeful act was to buy a field when all around him things were falling apart. Who buys property in the face of impending exile? Jeremiah did. Easter people learn to live hopefully in the here and now, despite the dire prognostications of doomsday purveyors and naysayers. A UBC, Baltimore hopeful act is the plan to renovate the church campus for greater community engagement and outreach. What hopeful act is God inspiring in you during this Lenten season?

The account about the woman in the Matthew text who gets to marry seven brothers in succession teaches us the importance of aligning our perspectives with God's on various issues. Jesus confounds the Sadducees when he affirms that God is the God of the living, not the dead. The Sadducee concern about whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection is shown to be in error. Jesus offers the Sadducees a new perspective. Lent offers us opportunities to adjust our perspectives to those of the divine.

4/2/2020

Shelby Gregg

Psalm 31:9-16; 1 Samuel 16:11-13; Philippians 1:1-11

I work at a kid's summer camp on the west coast of Canada, and every summer, have the joy and privilege of seeing over 2000 campers, staff, and visitors come to our small island and hear about the love of God. In this part of the world, that's a lot for a summer camp. Camp takes 10 months to put together and 2 months to execute. 10 months of steady 9-5 work by a team of 6 people. But over those 2 months? That's when it gets crazy. We go from 6 staff to over 100 staff. We go from steady office hours to working 12 hour, 14 hour, 16 hour days 6 days a week. And being on call all night for emergencies. We make thousands of meals, wipe away tons of homesick tears, share even more laughs, and tell hundreds of kids just how much God loves them.

10 months of plan to see it through to completion.

Then, when summer ends, we sleep for a few days. We gather as 6 staff, celebrate what went well, and then begin a process of collating feedback, noting what we want to change, and adapting it for the next year. And we begin planning all over again.

And so it is with each of us, when we gather and minister together as the body of Christ. God uses each of us individually, giving us gifts, but also giving us weaknesses. For it is in recognizing our weaknesses that we seek those around us who have a strength, a gift in that area. And together, we begin to balance. A body needs so many parts, and we do not have to be each part ourselves. Instead, we seek the other parts and come together as a body. And, through the grace of God, through His help, we do good work together, for Him; "That he who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

As we walk through this season of Lent, one in which often fast and do without, may we also be reminded of how much we receive, and of how much God blesses us when we give what little we have, and do so together.

4/3/2020

Shelby Gregg

Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

David laments about the sorrow of his life, feeling scorn, dread, and that “they plot to take my life.” In Job we read “see, he will kill me.” And Paul speaks of his impending death at the hands of the Romans.

The three passages we read today talk about death, a subject that can be uncomfortable for so many of us. It is easy to understand the sorrow, the grief, the weeping that takes place as we think about death. If you have lost someone whom you care for and love, it is heartwrenching. To know that we won’t see them again, hug them again, share a laugh, a cry, a story; it is beyond comprehension at times. And the grief never truly disappears. It just lessens for periods of time, only to resurface when we least expect it.

And yet, as Christians, we know that that isn’t the whole story, for we have read ahead.

Lent, the time before Easter, is leading us daily closer to that amazing, incredible, moment of grace and love in which Jesus takes on our sins, dies, and is resurrected. That moment in which the old covenant is replaced by the new. That moment in which we are now promised a new life in Christ, eternity with God in fellowship, and “dying is gain.” Let us cast aside our grief, and celebrate!

4/4/2020

Don Sewell

Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

Mark 10: 33-34 – “We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

On each anniversary of our two sons' baptisms, I would have annual “special days” with them. We would go bowling or play golf, while all along I would lead them to recall their need for Christ and the meaning of their baptism. We always had fun, but we also basked in the grace of God for normal, flawed kids who needed a Savior.

Psalm 31 recounts our need to admit our limitations and faults. Verses 9 and 10 provide a laundry list of our struggles that include grief, distress, sorrow, sighing, and misery. Even our bones are “wasting away”. But ultimately, the author resolutely states, “But I trust in your, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.”

Christ, the embodiment of love, went far beyond teaching parables about God's kingdom. Revealing the kingdom of heaven involved more than explanation; it demanded a personal, sacrificial portrayal. He went through unspeakable suffering because of his unbridled love for us.

Christians can walk reverently through Lent, gaining a greater sense of the amazing grace that was, is, and will be God's divine plan.

Take a “Special Day” each year. Remember back to the time you encountered forgiveness from the resurrected Christ. Catch yourself weeping at the grace so lavishly afforded to you. Resolve to take up your cross....and follow.

4/6/2020

Deborah Cochran

Psalm 36:5-11, Isaiah 42:1-9, John 12:1-11

As we continue our Lenten journey we are called to acknowledge our Creator. The Psalmist reminds us that God's unchanging love extends to the heavens and His faithfulness to the skies. "Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgements are like the great deep; You save humans and animals alike, O LORD. How precious is your steadfast love, O God!" God moves within His creation to offer refuge, purpose and life in His presence. This hymn of praise is most welcome on this solemn journey as it is a reminder of the kind of love and power that is behind God's purpose.

Isaiah continues the lyric with a servant song in which God is promising a 'servant' to be chosen by the LORD and filled with God's Spirit to bring forth justice, sight to the blind and liberty to those who are captive. The servant will be given as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations. The LORD speaks with the ability to declare new things, things unexpected and unknown, before they "spring forth." God speaks with wisdom and patience, moving forward with purpose.

During this Lenten season, as we observe the events as they unfold in the life and ministry of Jesus, we must acknowledge the many who challenged Jesus and his message. There were accusations and questions designed to trap or condemn. There were miles of dusty paths and hours of teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming good news in the open air. Fatigue and miracle were mingled. The gospel of John would have us pause from the struggle for a moment to witness a tender moment of unspoken praise, a hint of that which was to come. It was a simple, meaningful moment. Jesus had returned to Bethany, six days before Passover, to the home of Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. While the others were eating, Mary entered the room and took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair. The fragrance filled the house. There was no record of any words spoken between them. Her action was enough. Was Mary motivated by her gratitude for the raising of Lazarus or was it the tender concern for the One who was to lay down his life? Mary served differently than Martha. She followed the example of her Lord. Jesus defended Mary's

lavish gift saying it was preparation for his burial. God continues to move in the lives of his people. What praise shall we offer?

4/7/2020

Jay Kieve

Psalm 71:1-14; Isaiah 49:1-7; John 12:20-36

John 12:20-36 Facing the Right Direction

A friend of a friend's father worked for the railroad in Florida. Having worked for them for sometime, he had seen the bad stuff that can happen when tons of locomotive mass meet with the steel and plastic of an automobile. So this father, with mangled metal in mind, sat down his teenage daughter on the eve of her 16th birthday, the day before she was to get her driver's license, and told her the facts of life. Not the "birds and bees" facts of life but the facts that could save her in the event she stalled on the train tracks.

He asked her, "Suppose it is late at night and you are crossing railroad tracks. You are crossing carefully as you have been taught...stop / look / listen...but you pop the clutch by mistake. The car stalls. You try to crank it but it won't because the carburetor is flooded. What are you going to do?"

She replied, "Get out of the car and call for help."

"Perfect, that is the right answer! Now, suppose the same scenario but in the distance you hear a horn. The crossing lights begin to flash and the guard arms come down. You can see the approaching locomotive's light. Now what do you do?" he asked.

"Get out of the car and run!" "Yes...but which way?" the father pressed. "Away from the train!"

"Oh no!" the dad exclaimed, "if you run from the train you would be hurt, maybe killed! You have to run toward the train. I know that is the direction of danger," he explained. "I know that is the threat, the thing you most want to get away from, but in that direction is safety. If you run away from the train, when it hits the car it will propel the debris forward and outward. The car will become a projectile and you could be crushed. But if you meet the engine head on, the danger will all be behind you. Get off the tracks but run toward the train."

I remember this father's advice every time I cross railroad tracks. It seems to me that this is what we are doing during the season of Lent and now Holy Week. As we read and imagine the events in the last week of Jesus' life we are turning to face death. As we move toward Good Friday we are running up the tracks, staring at the great mass of sinfulness and evil that is bearing down on Jesus and threatens to kill us, too. We don't want to see it. It is frightening and we are tempted to turn and run out of Holy Week and into a more ordinary time. We don't want to see it but our lives depend on facing it.

As we turn to face approaching death we meet Jesus in John 12 today. The Greeks went to the disciples and the disciples came to Jesus. He tells them, "The train is coming...the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Jesus has seen the signs and knows of the plots to kill him. He senses mounting opposition and danger and he looks up the tracks. "My time is short," he tells his disciples. And he teaches them that those who try to guard their lives in this world... those who put themselves first and foremost; those who are always running from the train...will surely lose their lives. But those who turn around...those who face the right direction; those who give themselves and give of themselves...will surely find life. Jesus believes God is faithful to those who give their life up in service to God. Jesus believes those who lose their life in God will, like the seed, bear much fruit. He is betting his own life on it.

But don't be fooled. This is not easy, even for Jesus. Turning to face the coming train of trouble and sacrifice is never easy. "Now my soul is troubled. What should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' No it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father glorify your name." Jesus struggles with the probability of his coming death. He doesn't relish the rejection and suffering to come but Jesus' resolve is fixed. He knows that because of his ministry and teaching, the future is unavoidable. Jesus is sure that because of who he is, the Son of Man and the Son of God, the rumbling up the tracks will overtake him. But Jesus is just as sure that God will be glorified in it. Jesus is just as sure that God will redeem his death and the dying seed will bear much fruit.

The crowd heard the assurance from God that Jesus felt as a voice or thunder confirming Jesus' hope. "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out," Jesus says. "When I

am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself.” Jesus told the crowd, “That voice you heard was for your sake. You can believe this.” Jesus turned to face his coming death and in it he saw the possibility of great life, the overthrow of the evil that rules the world and the chance for humanity to find life with God.

“You heard the voice for your sake,” Jesus told the crowd, you can believe this.” Even when the crowd was bewildered... “we’ve heard the Messiah would remain forever” ...Jesus reassured them. “You’ve got the light, now so walk in the light—believe in the light—so you may become children of light.” “You can believe this,” Jesus told them, “I will die but it will bring life.” It is hard to see. It is difficult to know. It is bleak to face death. It is challenging to give yourself to the service of God. But you can believe this, that it will bring life. Those who love their life lose it. Those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Walk in the light and believe in the light.

In Holy Week we are staring up the tracks toward death. The bells are clanging; the whistle is blaring; and we have to decide which way to run. Do we run away from the massive trouble on the tracks by choosing to save the life that we love—self-determined and self-sufficient; guarding our time and our resources with all of our energy? Do we try to outrun trouble—choosing to overlook our faults, our sinfulness, imagining that we are alright? Or, do we turn around? Do we turn to face squarely the reality that Jesus knew and taught? Do we turn around and confess that we must die to ourselves to live with God? Do we turn to give up our self-determination and self-reliance for dependence on God? Do we turn and join Jesus and offer ourselves to the glory of God? Do we turn to walk in light rather than in darkness?

Without knowing it, my friend of a friend’s father captured in his lesson the theme of Lent and Holy Week, “repentance,” turning around. Loving your life and running the wrong way you will lose your life but turn around and run in the right direction—even when that direction is admitting your sinfulness, submitting to death—and you will find life. You will discover life with God that is eternal life. Jesus turned to give himself up to suffering and to the cross. He turned and it brought life. When we turn, it is Jesus who gives us life. The train is coming, death is certain, which way are you running?

4/8/2020

Gerald (Jerry) Young

Psalm 70: Isaiah 50:4-9a; John 13:21-32

John 13:21-32

As I write these words, major league baseball teams are just reporting to spring training. The 2018 World Series Champion Houston Astros do so under the cloud of a cheating scandal from that championship season. They have been revealed, and confessed, to having used technology to steal signs and send messages to their hitters about what the next pitch would be. The organization, the management, the individual players are all being held accountable. The responses of these various have ranged from claiming complete ignorance of what was happening to seemingly sincere apologies that accept responsibility for what was done. It has reminded me this incident in the life of Jesus and his disciples.

Several years ago a group of ministers of which I was a part was privileged to have Jerry Harvey talk to us about an article he had written entitled, "How Come Every Time I Get Stabbed in the Back My Fingerprints Are on the Knife?" The example he used was this incident. Jesus is very troubled and tells the disciples that one of them is about to betray him. They don't understand who it could be, so Peter asks Jesus to tell them who is the betrayer. Jesus responds by saying the betrayer is the one to whom he will give a piece of bread after having dipped it in the dish. He takes a piece of bread, dips it in the dish, hands it to Judas Iscariot, and even tells him to go quickly to do what he would do. All of this in sight and sound of the disciples. Then John tells the reader (v.28), "No one at the table knew why he said this to him." What?! He told them how he would identify the betrayer. He immediately did exactly what he said he would do. And they wonder what that meant and where Judas is going. How did the Jesus Movement ever get off the ground? And their fingerprints are on the knife that will wind up in Jesus' back.

I'm wondering how things would have been different in these situations if even one contrary voice was raised. What if James or John had thundered, "grab him before he gets away! He's going to betray the Master!"? Some of the Astros players have said they declined to participate in the cheating, but what if one of the leaders had said, "Wait a minute. This is just wrong for anybody to do!"? I've seen situations where a single voice in opposition to collective opinion of a group has completely changed that opinion.

In this time of polarity and division, what if we had more individual voices raised in support Jesus' call to follow his way? I wonder.

4/9/2020

David Simmons

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“My time has not yet come.”

Jesus had said this many times. But not this time.

This time, everything was in place. The meal was prepared. Judas had turned. The devil was waiting. And his Father was calling. He had loved his own, and it was now time to love them to the end.

And the end began.

Jesus got up from the table with his closest friends and friend-turned-enemy at his side. John does not spare the pen, describing in detail the removal of Jesus’ outer clothing, the wrapping of the towel around his waist, the pouring of water into a basin, and the washing of dirty, crusty feet. When done, Jesus put his clothes back on and returned to his place, but with everyone confused. No one more so than Peter who first refused the footbath.

“Unless I wash you,” Jesus said, “you can have no part with me.”

Reckless Peter then wanted soaked all over. “Oh Peter,” Jesus said, “You just don’t understand. But one day you will.”

And one day he did.

Several eventful days later, Peter looked off the bow of the boat to see Jesus standing on the shore, robed in glory. Last he saw him, Jesus was dead. Now he was alive. It made sense now. It had been right in front of him all along. The story was complete. Jesus, now Savior, had taken off his robe of heavenly glory, descended to the earth, put on the towel of a servant, and through his beaten, bloodied, and broken body, washed the sins from our souls.

That night at the table, Jesus foreshadowed “the full extent of his love,” a love he would demonstrate on the cross. Now with Jesus on the shore, Peter understood. “Unless I wash you, you can have no part with me.” Peter had been washed.

But those weren't Jesus' only words that night. Jesus spoke in a way that should sober us all: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash the feet of one another." Jesus did not just foreshadow his death, but he set forth a model for Christian action. He wasn't telling us to wash feet – that would be too easy – but to live in sacrifice to others, even to the point of death. While our hearts resist it, hear Jesus saying, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

4/10/2020

Gerald (Jerry) Young

Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 18:1-19:42

Psalm 22

The events of these last hours of Jesus' life are referred to as the Passion, which comes from the Latin word for suffering. From the moment he is arrested in the garden late in the evening until the moment he cries out, "It is finished!" the next afternoon Jesus endures intense and unremitting suffering. You can't read the Psalm without those events coming to mind. Jesus quotes from the Psalm. Clearly the gospel writers understood the Psalm as a guide to their telling of the events of that horrible day.

Matthew's gospel says that there was a great silence for about 3 hours beginning around noon (27:45). What thoughts must have been racing through Jesus' mind! What agonies of body he must have been enduring! But silence. Was he in communion with the Father, drawing strength as he always had from that intimate relationship? Apparently not, for the silence is broken by the agonizing cry from the parched lips. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The physical sufferings of this man were terrible, and when such sufferings strike us we can understand what he understands. Pain from broken relationships and disappointment in those we love and trusted? He's been there too. Threatened by those who want to hurt or destroy us? He knows that suffering as well. Even when we experience the darkness that descends upon our souls when it appears that God has also deserted us, he has endured that same darkness and fully understands that agonizing "Why!" that forces itself into our minds and then into our spirits and only then into the darkness itself as this cry of despair.

He wants us to learn that there is a way out of that darkness, but it leads through the darkness. There is no way around the darkness that will ultimately defeat it. Take time today to reflect on Jesus cry from the cross by spending a few minutes in silent reflection while focusing on the meaning of each of the highlighted word(s) one at a time.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

My God, my God, **why** have you forsaken me?

My God, my God, why have **you** forsaken me?

My God, my God, why have you **forsaken** me?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken **me**?

4/11/2020

Gerald (Jerry) Young

Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; Job 14:1-14, Matthew 27:57-66

Matthew 27:57-66

It is not possible for us to recreate the experience those first followers of Jesus had on the day after his crucifixion. As bad as Friday was, there were things going on that occupied their minds. For a few of them (very few) it was to be as close to Jesus as they could for that final journey. To offer what little support was possible. But at least it was something. For some (many more) it was to try find the courage within themselves to do what they had promised him they would do but proved unable to do. Thomas, who urged them all to return to Jerusalem and the inevitable tragedy that awaited him – and them. “Let us go with him that we might die with him,” he had said so bravely while in relative safe Bethany. And just a few hours ago their leader, Simon Peter, had promised to never desert him only to do a triple denial in the face of real danger. Or the few who would see that the body received a temporary entombment before the beginning of the Sabbath. And they were all likely in shock and that protective numbness it brings in moments of overwhelming pain and grief.

But the next day, this day, it all set in on them. The darkness fell over them like they had never experienced. Total absence of Light, snuffed out and buried forever in the earth. How could they go on? They had left everything to follow this One whom they believed was the to usher in God’s golden age. And now all their hopes and dreams laid forever crushed. This is the part of the Holy Week story we avoid at all cost. We can never fully enter it because we know what comes next and it colors everything leading up to that morning. But they didn’t know that. They did not expect any such thing. All they had was total darkness in which to deal with it all. And silence. Awful silence they made their own screams of anguish, regret, and fear impossible to silence or ignore. They were to spend this day enveloped in that dark storm of the soul.

Let me challenge you to come as close as you can to their experience, so that you might also come as close as you can to their experience when it breaks loose tomorrow. Find a quiet place and at least 30 minutes of time. Choose one of Jesus’ followers with whom you can identify. Do your best to clear your mind of everything else, but especially of what the morning might bring. Then allow your mind to be with that chosen follower and ask them to share with you their pain that dark day. Listen carefully. Allow yourself to feel what they felt. Sit in silence.

Contributors



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Lynda Brown-Hall is a native Washingtonian. She received her Masters of Divinity with a concentration of Christian Counseling from Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary. She retired from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. An ordained minister, she was voted in as founder and first pastor of Nevertheless Outreach Ministry Church and installed in 2019. Prior to the church launch, Nevertheless Outreach Ministry was organized by her and has served locally and throughout the United States with international service in Ghana, Kenya, Guyana, Jamaica, India, London, Israel, Palestine and Amsterdam.



Deborah Cochran served as the Associate Pastor of The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, DC from 1998-2016. She has also served as the Chair for the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Baptist Worship and Spirituality.



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Cassandra Jones is a San Francisco native who is currently living in Charlotte, NC. She is the Professor of Educational Ministry at both Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and Rockbridge Theological Seminary. She is the first African American female to earn a PhD from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She has served in various areas of the Baptist World Alliance since 10th grade, and has travelled & served in ministry in over 60 nations.



Jay Kieve is Coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina. He served three congregations over the course of 20 years in ministry before leading CBFSC. Jay is married to Melanie, a communications director at Clemson University, and together they parent two adult children.



Monica Leak is the editor and a contributing writer of, Faith of our Founders 100 Daily Devotionals to Inspire, Encourage and Propel the Finer Woman. Her first solo project, No More Hashtags Remembrance and Reflections was published by Xlibris in 2018. Her latest projects include a contribution to an anthology, Purpose Pushers: The Journey of Discovering & Walking in Your Life's Purpose released on January 4, 2020 and No More Hashtags Who You Calling a follow up collection of poetry published December 2019. She currently works as a speech-language pathologist in southern Maryland and as a seminary librarian in northern Virginia.



Trisha Miller Manarin is the Executive Coordinator for the Mid-Atlantic Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. She serves as an officer with NABF and loves collaborating with sisters and brothers across North America and around the world! Trisha is married to Tim and they have three teenage children.



Cecily Noel McIlwain is the Girls Youth Ministry Associate at Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco, TX. A Howard Payne University alumnus and a MDiv. student at Baylor's Truett Seminary.



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K Scarry is a 3rd year MDiv student at Wesley Seminary in DC. She currently lives in Herndon, VA and is curious about the intersection of the gospel, justice, and community. K works for a non-profit called The People's Supper, which works all over the country to facilitate meals together to bridge people across lines of division- be it political, racial, class, religious, etc. She also works for The Dinner Party, which connects people in their 20s and 30s who have experienced a significant loss to explore life after loss in community.



Robin Kay Monk Self is a grateful Black American introvert, woman, daughter, wife, missionary, preacher, teacher, counselor, 'X-ennial' and student of life who currently serves as Youth Pastor at Bates Memorial in Louisville, Kentucky and servant in the Lott Carey Missions and Pioneer International Networks. Her heart's desire is that people meet, for themselves, the One who receives, loves, heals, and uses all types of folk to do great things. She never wants to get in the way of that meeting.



Johnny Serratt lives in North Carolina with his wife, Courtney, and his son, Thomas. There he attends Campbell divinity school and is nearing the end of his first year. His interests include Christology, Baptist theology, and sci-fi literature.



Don Sewell is the Director of Faith in Action Initiatives at Baylor Scott and White Health Systems. He serves in the Baptist World Alliance as a member of the Human Rights Commission and Missions Commission, and is a Board Member for the Baptist World Aid, as well as other international non-profit organizations.



David B. Simmons has 20 years of congregational ministry experience in churches in Texas, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. For the past nine years, he has served as a hospital chaplain and is currently the Director of Pastoral Care at Penn State Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, PA. David is married to a registered nurse and has three teenage children.



A first generation preacher, Starlette Thomas presently serves as the Minister to Empower Congregations at the D.C. Baptist Convention. She has also served as an associate and interim pastor, regularly teaches on community- building, hospitality and reconciling narratives. Starlette regularly writes for Smyth & Helwys Publishing Company and Ethics Daily. She is a published author and her sermons have been featured by Sojourners. She was a columnist for Baptist News Global and now ruminates on the intersections of the sociopolitical construct of race, aracial community- building and a raceless anthropology on her blog.



Meg Thomas-Clapp is Associate Pastor at McLean Baptist Church in Northern Virginia, where she empowers people to wrestle with their faith in community to deepen their connection to God and neighbor. She strives to welcome people from diverse perspectives and histories into the life of the church. Meg is passionate about amplifying voices who challenge us to see the gospel from the position of those who have been marginalized and underrepresented. She finds creative energy in deep conversation, kisses from her dogs, and movement.



Leo Thorne is Associate General Secretary ABC USA, Retired. He has been actively involved in BWA life for many decades. He worked for many years in community building in intercultural and ecumenical settings and has advocated for justice and fair treatment for all people on state and local levels. He has served with a number of ecumenical agencies, boards and committees.



Bill Tillman is the Chair of the Christian Ethics Commission of the BWA and Coordinator of the Center for Congregational Ethics and lives in Fort Worth, TX.



R. Joseph Tricquet Jr. – “Joby” - has been pastor of the Fairfax Baptist Church in Fairfax, Virginia in suburban Washington D.C. since 2015. He has previously pastored churches in Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, and metro Cincinnati. Dr. Tricquet is a graduate of Samford University (BA '87), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div. '90), and Beeson Divinity School (D.Min. '01). He and his wife Cathy are the parents of three young adult sons.



Robert Wallace has been the pastor of McLean Baptist Church since August of 2018. For the 20 years prior to that, Robert worked as Professor of Biblical Studies striving to bridge the gap between the academy and the church at various colleges and seminaries. He has a deep love of the Psalms, and much of his academic research has focused on that area. In addition to continuing to write and teach adjunctly. Robert has cohosted a podcast based on the Revised Common Lectionary with New Testament professor and former colleague, Dr. Michael McKeever. "Reading in Church & Other Distractions" has been a source of devotion and fun.



Gerald (Jerry) Young is a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is originally from St. Louis MO and served three churches there (two as pastor) before coming to Northern Virginia in 1989 to Pastor Boulevard Baptist Church in Falls Church. After Boulevard and FBC Annandale consolidated he continued to serve the new United Baptist Church as Co-Pastor until his retirement and being named Pastor Emeritus. He also served for fifteen years as the Director of Supervised Ministry at the John Leland Center in Arlington VA. He and his wife, Gerry Sue, have three children, five grandchildren, and three great-

grandchildren.