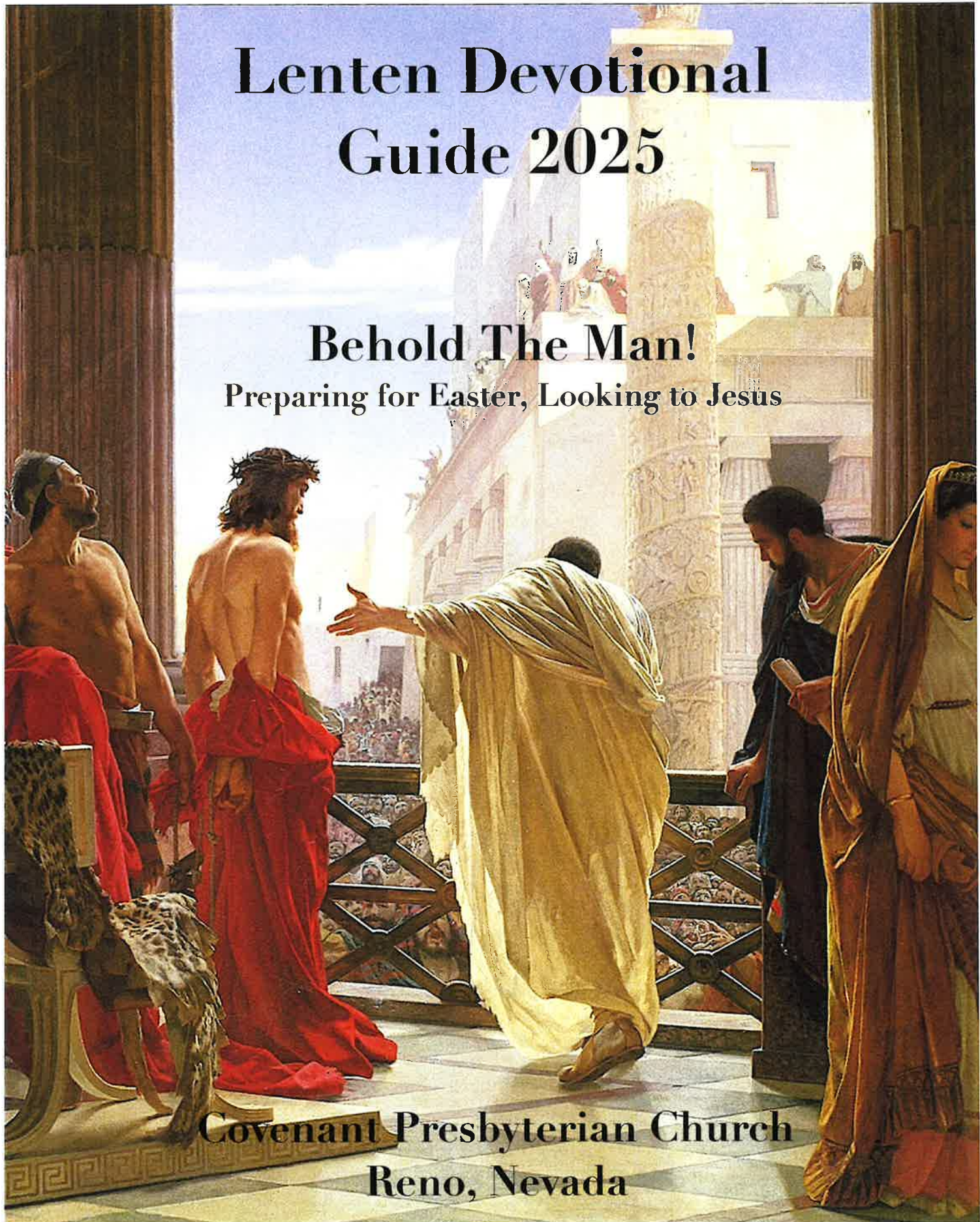


# Lenten Devotional Guide 2025

## Behold The Man!

Preparing for Easter, Looking to Jesus



Covenant Presbyterian Church  
Reno, Nevada





Dear Friends:

Welcome to Covenant Presbyterian Church's Lent Devotional Guide for 2025. Our theme for our season of Lent this year is "Behold the Man" using the words of Pilate when he presented Jesus to the hostile crowd in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. It is our intention to look carefully at Jesus of Nazareth—who He was, what He did, what He said—to gain a fuller understanding of Him and a deeper relationship with Him. We think this will be a good way to prepare for Easter.

And in a real sense that is what this Lenten devotional book is all about. In Old Testament Prophecies, in New Testament Commentary and in the Gospels' story of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are invited to "behold the Man" and to consider His rightful place in our world and in our lives. Our tradition of preparing and offering these booklets as a gift to our church members and friends has proved to be a valuable tool for many of us as we prepare our hearts to receive the gift of Easter. Easter is, by our understanding of world history and from our gracious place within God's Family of Faith, an annual event that deserves our undivided attention and our dedicated preparation. We hope that you will find the thoughts and prayers of our Covenant servant leaders—elders, staff and other gifted writers—helpful and inspiring as you look forward to Easter and "behold the Man" who came to save us from sin and death and accomplished His work by going to the Cross and rising from death.

The name "Lent" comes from an Old English word that means "lengthen" and points to the reality of lengthening days as we approach Easter. Day by day, the sun shines longer through the days of Lent, the 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, excluding Sundays. In this booklet, we offer a Bible reading, personal reflection, suggested response and prayer for each of these 40 days. This collection of devotions is divided into three parts: 1. Old Testament Prophecies Pointing to Jesus' Death and Resurrection, 2. New Testament Commentary on Jesus' Death and Resurrection, and 3. the New Testament Narrative of Jesus' Death and Resurrection.

Once again this year we are adding a sentence at the conclusion of our devotional thoughts, responses and prayers for each day: *Today I took the following action of service for the benefit of someone else, to the glory of God and as part of my preparation for Easter\_\_\_\_\_*. We want this to be the season not merely of "giving things up for Lent," but of "giving for Lent." It is not our expectation that each of us will be willing and able to fill in the blank with a personal act of service at the end of each and every day of Lent, but that thinking along these lines each day will lead us to offer and note for ourselves such acts a few times over the next few weeks. To aid us in this Lenten experiment in intentional service, we offer a list of suggestions on the following page.

We think that our simple, intentional acts of kindness during this season, done with an eye toward Jesus and His ultimate giving for us, will be a vital part of getting ourselves ready for April 20<sup>th</sup>.

I am grateful to those who have helped make this guide a reality for us again this year.

May you be blessed by what you discover and what you are reminded of in the pages that follow. And may God be glorified by what you choose to do as a result.

Behold the Man!

Pastor Jay Hull for the CPC Elders, Staff, Worship Ministry Team and other Writers  
Lent 2025



**Antonio Ciseri, Ecce Homo (Behold the Man!) - 1871**

## LENTEN ACTION IDEAS...

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

1. Give a copy of this Devotional Book to someone who doesn't go to our (or any) church.
2. Tell someone why you are excited about something that is happening here at Covenant.
3. Bring something for the food cupboard here at our church.
4. Pray for the person who wrote today's message.
5. Do a chore that your sister or brother or spouse is supposed to do.
6. Take a flower to your teacher or to a friend.
7. Send flowers to your mom "just because."
8. Leave a really good tip when you eat out and put "God bless you" or "Jesus loves you" on the receipt.
9. Pray for people serving Jesus in foreign lands. Maybe send one of them a card.
10. Invite someone to our church service who hasn't been to one recently or ever.
11. Visit someone in a care center or hospital.
12. Pray for someone you don't like.
13. Give a fast food gift card to a homeless person.
14. Take out, and bring back, your neighbor's trash cans for them.
15. Send a thank you card (anonymously or not) to a colleague or church friend or staff member or neighbor. Be specific about why you are thankful for them.
16. Bake some cookies and drop them off at your dentist's/doctor's office for the staff there.
17. Read a story to your grandchild(ren). Use funny voices. Perform all the parts.
18. Take an international student to the grocery store (We can help hook you up. Call the church office.)
19. Clean out your closet and donate clothes, shoes, purses, sweaters, coats, etc. (Good Shepherd's Clothes Closet, Esther's Closet, Salvation Army).
20. Buy a pair of jeans for the Good Shepherd's Clothes Closet.
21. Next time you are at the grocery store, buy some long-lasting produce (potatoes, onions, carrots, oranges...) and drop them off at the St. Francis Food Pantry.
22. Check out Hosanna Home's website ([hosannahome.org](http://hosannahome.org)) for items needed & drop them off as instructed.
23. Leave a little something taped to your mailbox for your mail delivery person: cookies, thank you note, gift card...
24. Next time you get mad at someone, don't respond. Pray for them instead.
25. Give sincere compliments to three people you see today.
26. Make a special donation to our church's Deacon's Fund.
27. Take a kid out for ice cream and conversation.
28. Give a copy of a favorite Christian book or CD to someone.
29. Send an e-mail to one of our missionaries to introduce yourself to them and ask how they are doing.
30. Meditate on the words of a hymn or praise song you know. Then tell someone else how it spoke to you.
31. Memorize a psalm or a passage from the Gospels (maybe from today's Scripture reading?). Recite it to someone you know, and ask them what they think about it.
32. Say a special prayer for people in difficult life circumstances you know about... Nicaraguan refugees, abused children, victims of crime, policemen, politicians...
33. Plant a tree in memory of someone.
34. Invite a neighbor over for coffee or a meal.
35. Buy the coffee or meal for the person in line behind you at the coffee or sandwich shop. Tell them you are merely following the way of the generous God you know and serve.
36. Call a friend you haven't seen in years and ask how they are doing.
37. Bring a treat to work for the person you like the least.
38. Pull out some weeds at your neighbor's house. (Make sure they are weeds!)
39. Resolve to name the name of "Jesus" today in a meaningful way in conversation with someone who doesn't yet know Him. Then pray for Him to provide the opportunity.
40. Commit to participate in a local ministry here in Reno...
  - ✚ Wednesday Afternoon Kid's Club here at CPC
  - ✚ CPC Youth ministry on Wednesdays
  - ✚ Nursery care on Sundays here at Covenant
  - ✚ Other...
  - ✚ The Covenant Choir or Praise Team
  - ✚ A Covenant Ministry Team
  - ✚ The Good Shepherd's Clothes Closet



## 2025 Lenten Devotional Booklet – Table of Devotions

### PART I: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES POINTING TO JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

#### March

5	Psalm 22	<i>"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"</i>	Chris Schlatter
6	Genesis 3:8-15	<i>"But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'"</i>	Kay Blakely
7	Genesis 12:1-3	<i>"...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."</i>	Kathy Croughan
8	Genesis 15:1-21	<i>"When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram..."</i>	Patti Hemsley
10	Isaiah 42:1-9	<i>"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."</i>	Kathy Persons
11	Isaiah 49:1-7	<i>"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."</i>	Steve Marsh
12	Isaiah 50:4-11	<i>"Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."</i>	Janet Goodman
13	Isaiah 52:13-53:12	<i>"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."</i>	Dianne Billharz
14	Jeremiah 23:1-6	<i>"In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."</i>	Stan Schmidt
15	Jeremiah 31:31-34	<i>"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."</i>	Linda Darling
17	Psalm 2	<i>"The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'"</i>	Jim Prosser
18	Ezekiel 36:16-32	<i>"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh..."</i>	Thomas Kim
19	Zechariah 9:9-13	<i>"See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey..."</i>	Alex Manger
20	Zechariah 12:10-13	<i>"They will look on me, the one they have pierced and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..."</i>	Amanda Schlatter
21	Psalm 118	<i>"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone..."</i>	Phil Barackman
22	Exodus 12:1-13	<i>"The blood will be a sign for you on the house where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."</i>	Samuel Dueñas



## PART II: NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY ON JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

NT	<u>March</u>		
24	Mark 8:31-38	<i>"And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things..."</i>	Gerry Dunlap
25	Acts 4:1-12	<i>"...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."</i>	Janet Goodman
26	Romans 5:1-11	<i>"...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."</i>	Kris Pierson
27	I Peter 3:13-22	<i>"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God..."</i>	Chris Rhodes
28	Hebrews 10:1-25	<i>"But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down..."</i>	Cindy Duncan
29	Galatians 2:15-21	<i>"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."</i>	Katie Guerrero



## PART THREE: NEW TESTAMENT NARRATIVE OF JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

31	Matthew 21:1-11	<i>"Hosanna to the Son of David!"</i>	Kathy Ludwig
<u>April</u>			
1	Matthew 21:12-17	<i>"And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple..."</i>	Maxwell Musni
2	Mark 14:1-11	<i>"She has done what she could...."</i>	Barbara Mize
3	Mark 14:12-26	<i>"And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.'"</i>	Larry Stockert
4	Luke 22:39-46	<i>"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me..."</i>	Barbara Landis
5	Luke 22:47-53	<i>"Judas, would you betray the Son of Man...?"</i>	Brent Ford
7	Luke 22:54-62	<i>"And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows..."</i>	Dianne Billharz
8	John 18:19-24	<i>"Is that how you answer the high priest?"</i>	Ryan Ludwig
9	Matthew 27:1-10	<i>"Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind..."</i>	Stan Schmidt
10	John 18:28-40	<i>"Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'"</i>	Steve Patton
11	Matthew 27:15-26	<i>"His blood be on us and on our children!"</i>	Dan Carne
12	John 19:1-16	<i>"The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar'"</i>	Patrick McNeely
14	Matthew 27:27-44	<i>"If you are the Son of God, come down..."</i>	Marlene Hansen
15	Luke 23:26-43	<i>"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."</i>	Jay Hull
16	Mark 15:33-41	<i>"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"</i>	Debbie Barackman
17	Matthew 27:57-66	<i>"Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen..."</i>	Jay Hull
18	John 20:1-18	<i>"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'"</i>	Robert Bennett
19	Matthew 28:16-20	<i>"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."</i>	Lindsay Rowe



## PART I: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES POINTING TO JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

**MARCH 5 (Ash Wednesday)**

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

**Text: Psalm 22**



<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? <sup>2</sup> O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. <sup>3</sup> Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. <sup>4</sup> In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. <sup>5</sup> To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. <sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; <sup>8</sup> "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

<sup>9</sup> Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. <sup>10</sup> On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. <sup>11</sup> Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; <sup>13</sup> they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. <sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; <sup>15</sup> my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. <sup>16</sup> For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; <sup>18</sup> they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

<sup>19</sup> But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! <sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! <sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

<sup>22</sup> I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: <sup>23</sup> You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! <sup>24</sup> For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

<sup>25</sup> From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup> The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! <sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. <sup>28</sup> For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup> All the prosperous of the earth eat & worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. <sup>30</sup> Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; <sup>31</sup> they shall come & proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.



**Domenico Fetti, Ecce Homo  
(Behold the Man) - ca. 1620**

### **Reflection:**

Psalm 22 is one of the most poignant expressions of human suffering and divine abandonment in the Bible. This psalm, traditionally attributed to David, finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ during His Passion. As we journey

through Lent towards Easter, this psalm invites us to reflect deeply on the suffering and victory of our Savior.

Lent is a season of penitence, fasting, and prayer, a time when we remember Jesus' forty days in the wilderness and His preparation for the suffering at the cross. The opening words of Psalm 22, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" echo Jesus' cry from the cross (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). These words remind us of the profound sense of abandonment Jesus experienced as He bore the weight of the world's sin. Sin cannot be in the presence of the Father, and therefore, when Jesus approached the cross, He did so alone. Given the trinitarian nature of God and Jesus' place within the Trinity, this would have been very difficult. Lent calls us to enter into this mystery, acknowledging our own sinfulness and the brokenness of the world.

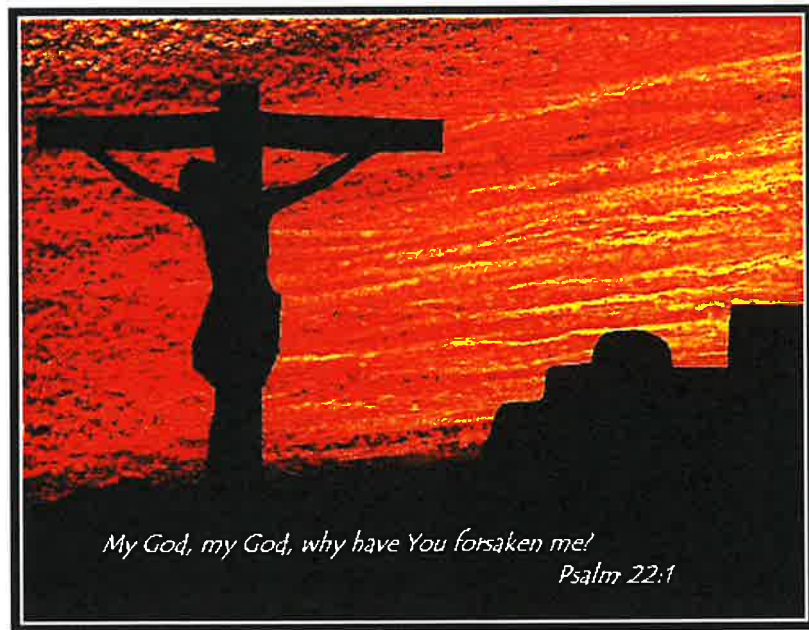


The vivid imagery of pierced hands and feet, and divided garments foretells the crucifixion in astonishing detail. One would be hard pressed to find a more prophetic text in all creation. It not only describes the physical agony of the cross but also the emotional and spiritual torment. Yet, amid this suffering, there is a profound trust in the Father. Jesus' use of this psalm from the cross reveals His intimate connection and dedication to God's plan, even in the depths of suffering.

The latter part of Psalm 22 shifts from lament to praise. After the suffering comes the proclamation of God's deliverance: "*For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one.*" This mirrors the journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. The resurrection is the ultimate vindication of Jesus' suffering, proving that God had not forsaken Him but was working out His plan of salvation through Him.

## Response:

During Lent, let us not shy away from the hard questions and the raw emotions of suffering. Like Jesus, we can bring our deepest pains and fears to God, trusting that He hears us. As we meditate on Psalm 22, let us also look forward to Easter with hope, knowing that our suffering is not the end. The cross is a reminder that through Christ's pain, we have access to eternal life and victory over sin.



This Easter, may we celebrate the triumph of God's love and grace, remembering that through Jesus' suffering, we have been redeemed. Let us be guided through the shadows of Lent into the light of Easter proclaiming valiantly, "He has done it!"

## Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, who endured the cross for our sake. Help us to reflect on His suffering and our own need for repentance. Allow our own trials to strengthen our faith and remind us of the hope we have in the resurrection. Lord, prepare our hearts to celebrate the joy of Easter, knowing that through Jesus, we are never forsaken. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- Chris Schlatter

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



MARCH 6

*"But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'"*



**Text: Genesis 3:8-15**

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

<sup>11</sup> He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

### Reflection:

When our grandson was seven years old, we were caring for him while staying in a "Family House" near Children's Hospital in Oakland, CA. He was there to donate bone marrow to his younger brother. Being a normal curious impetuous boy, and having grandparents who weren't diligent enough, he pulled the handle on an interesting red box on the wall in the hallway. The alarm was amazingly loud. People descended on us from all directions. Within no time at all there were all kinds of people in uniforms and scrubs and then the firemen came. Our grandson took off running. We found him in his bed with the covers pulled over his head. One of the firemen gently talked to him about his "mistake," and then we comforted him and told him everything was ok.



**Christos Efstathiou, Adam and Eve**

Just like our grandson, Adam and Eve took off running to hide from God because they realized they had sinned against Him when they ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God came looking for Adam and Eve. *"Where are you?"* I believe God asked where they were in a sad, but gentle way. God knew what they had done and where they were. Our grandson didn't make any excuses for his bad action, but Adam and Eve surely did. Adam pointed to Eve, and Eve pointed to the serpent. The comparison between Adam and Eve and our grandson is not completely analogous, since our grandson had never been told not to pull handles on red boxes. But after he pulled the handle, he knew he had done something wrong and ran to hide. The consequences of Adam and Eve's sin carried forward to all mankind, the descendants of Adam and Eve, all of us. Romans 5:12 explains *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...."*

There would be enmity, or deep-rooted hatred between Satan and mankind (Genesis 3:15). But we also see in Genesis 3:15 that God in His love and mercy gave a promise of salvation. *"He will crush your head and you will strike His heel."* Whose head would be crushed and by whom would it be crushed? And whose heel would be struck? God was talking to the serpent, so it was the serpent's head that would be crushed. Satan would suffer a fatal blow. But Satan would strike the heel of someone. That someone is Christ Jesus. He would pay the penalty owed for sin. He would suffer and die on the cross, but it was not fatal. Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. *"But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God."* (Hebrews 10:12)

### Response:

We should always be aware that we are fallen creatures in need of salvation. We can't run and hide. God knows our sin. God also loves us. He requires that we acknowledge our sin and confess. In our Sunday worship services at Covenant we have a time for silent confession of sin. 1 John 1:8-9 says: *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

But the question arises: What is sin? The short answer is that sin is when we go against God's will for us. Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. So, another response is to know God's will as He has revealed it to us in His Word, the Bible. God does not change. His Word is just as valid for our lives today as it was when written and compiled. That's why we study the Bible.

We can't do all of this on our own. We need God. Only through His Spirit in us can we resist temptation. We must open our hearts to Him in prayer, seeking Him in our lives every day, every minute.

One last thing. There are so many verses in the Bible about being thankful. One example is Colossians 3:15-17. *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,*

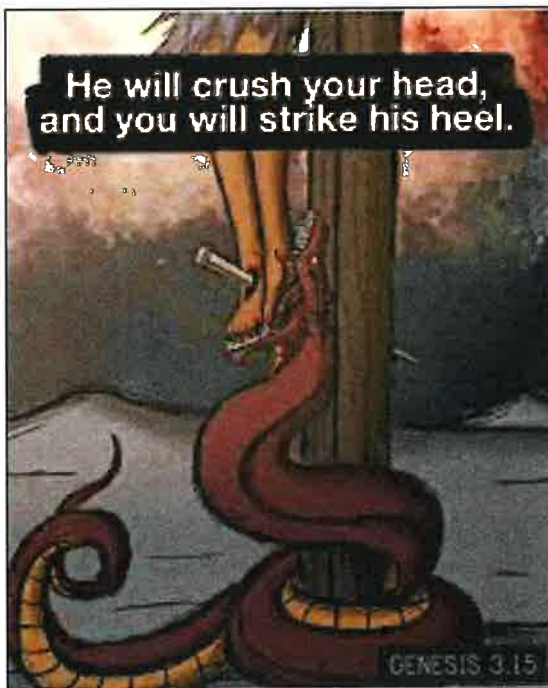
*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

The words thankful or gratitude are mentioned three times. Christ Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins. He paid the debt we owe. And He was raised from the dead, defeating Satan. How can we not worship and sing His praises with thankfulness?

### Prayer:

Dear Father God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit – I acknowledge that I sin against You in so many ways. Please forgive me and help me to follow Your Word as revealed in the Bible. Be my strength to resist temptation and to surrender my life to You. Mold me into the person You would have me be for the work You have for me to do. And Lord, draw me ever closer to You in gratitude for Your amazing love. Amen.

- Kay Blakely



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

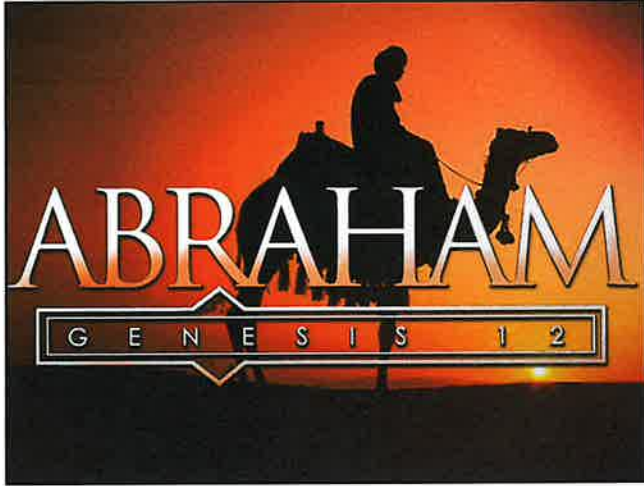


MARCH 7 "...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."



**Text: Genesis 12:1-3**

**12** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."



**Reflection:**

Abram, leading a comfortable life in the wealthy city of Ur was called by God to "go". GO from your country; GO from your kindred; GO from your father's house. In other words, GO from everything that you know and are comfortable with "to the land I will show you." This was Abram's call - to go where God leads, wherever that might be.

While God has a command for Abram to "Go", God makes some promises. "I WILL show you the land you are going to" - Canaan. "I WILL make of you a great nation" - a new nation, eventually the nation of the Jews. "I WILL bless

you and make your name great, so you will be a blessing." - many will know the name of Abraham. "I WILL bless those who bless you, and he who dishonors you I will curse" - God protects those whom he blesses and those who don't will know God's wrath. And the final promise "in you all families of the earth will be blessed." Later, God gave Abram a new name - Abraham meaning "father of many nations" Through Abraham's lineage comes Jesus, through whom all nations are blessed.

God kept his promises, and today we are recipients of the blessing he gave Abraham. Through Abraham God set up the generations that lead to Christ. In the first chapter of Matthew the genealogy of Jesus is listed, and the very first ancestor listed is Abraham. Abraham wasn't sinless, but his family tree leads us to the only one who roamed the earth who was, Jesus Christ, and through his redeeming work on the cross we are very truly blessed.

**Response:**

This is our call - to go where God leads. This ultimately leads us to Christ Jesus, and the cross where he died a horrible death that we might be free from sin and righteous before God. As we go through Lent it is worthwhile remembering all the people of faith in the Bible and in our lives who have been a blessing to us, and let us look for ways to be a blessing to others. God calls us all to tasks based on our gifts and resources that he has bestowed on us. Listen for that call, and no matter how unbelievable it may seem, know that he wouldn't ask if he didn't know we could do it, and of course he'll be with us every step and misstep of the way. I'm reminded of Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." This is our ultimate task.

**Prayer:**

God of the Covenant, help me to have the obedience of Abraham to follow where You lead me and the faith of Abraham that You keep Your promises. Just as Abraham was a blessing, show me how to bless others, just as I have been blessed. Help me to "Go" and share the good news of redemption through Jesus Christ, and let the blessings continue. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

- Kathy Croughan

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.**



**MARCH 8** *"When the sun had gone down and it was dark behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram..."*



**Text: Genesis 15:1-21**

**15** After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."<sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."<sup>8</sup> But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"<sup>9</sup> He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."<sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.<sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.<sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.<sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.<sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.<sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,<sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,<sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,<sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

**Reflection:**

In this, one of the most momentous chapters in the Bible, God gives a vision to Abram where faith is defined, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is foreshadowed, and God reveals His heart for mankind as He expands on His covenant promises.

**How do we walk with God when we are struggling with doubt?**

Abram is aging (it's believed he was over 75 at this time). Though he has a full heart toward God, "his shield and great reward" and his "sovereign Lord" (v 2-3), he is troubled by doubts about the promises God made to him in Genesis 12: What about this promised heir when he has no offspring? Does he have enough faith to follow through with God? How will his progeny possess the land? When Abram bares his distressed thoughts before God, he is given answers, assurances and a great covenant.

As the vision unfolds, God repeats His vow that Abram will be the father of a great nation through his own true son (v.4). While Abram might be figuratively "in the dark", unable to see how the promises will play out, God takes him out under the night sky and says, "Look up!" While his mind wrestles with his childlessness, God directs him beyond the obstacles and strengthens Abram's faith by pointing to the stars of heaven. "You can't begin to count them. This is how your offspring shall be!" And if Abram ever again wondered about God's promises, when he needed his core faith fortified (and he would), all he had to do



was wait until nightfall and look at the stars above. Abram took many steps through dark times, but God patiently taught him to lean on His protection, provision and guidance.

### **The “Most Important Verse in the Bible” and a New Covenant**

“And he believed the Lord.” With his face turned up, something happened in Abram’s heart that elicited what theologians often cite as the most significant verse in the Bible. Abram believed, even without understanding God’s entire plan to fulfill His promises. It’s a giant turning point for Abram -- and for us. For the first time in scripture, we are told how a sinful man or woman may become right with God.

Verse 6 sets forth explicitly the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, a foundational argument underpinning the books of Romans and Galatians and mentioned in James. What great news that we can pass from sin to holiness and blessing!

The third assurance in this chapter comes after Abram again asks God “how shall I know?” in verse 8. This final question about possessing the land elicits a covenant that should give every believer great comfort when considering their own ultimate salvation. Yes, God answers Abram’s final question in precise detail, but it’s HOW He establishes this covenant that points us to Jesus as Savior.

In verse 9, Abram is told to lay out a series of animal carcasses arranged with a path running between the halves.

This type of ceremony was well known in different cultures of the time. To confirm an oath, two parties would together walk between the bloody parts of various creatures as they spoke their vows, essentially declaring, “May I be like these animals if I fail to keep my promises.”

Abram prepared the elements as directed, probably expecting to participate in the ceremony. But God put him into a deep sleep before He alone passed between the pieces. This is a graphic picture of God taking accountability for both parties in this holy covenant. It’s as if He declared, “I alone will be torn limb from limb, I alone will be a bloody sacrifice if I fail to keep My promise to bless you and your offspring.”

This Covenant was not only one-sided but eternal. ALL of God’s promises are! How does this affect us? Let’s go to theologian James M. Boice:

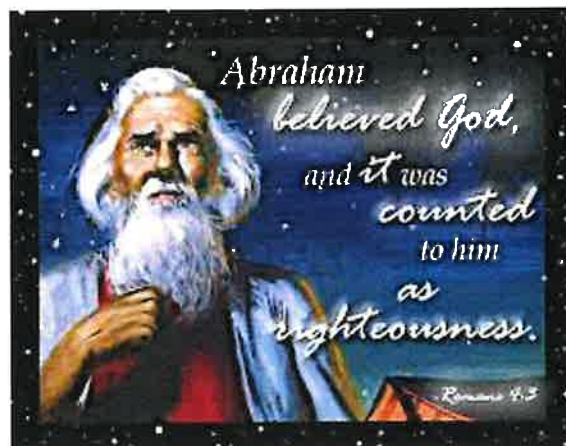
“Human beings are unfaithful with nothing to commend themselves to God. Had God not unilaterally established His covenant, none would have believed. Had He not made His covenant eternal, all would fall away and be lost. If His covenant had not been entirely by grace, none would have heard the promises...Yet, the sovereign, eternal, gracious God did establish His covenant, and He confirmed it, not with the blood of animals but with the blood of His only Son, Jesus Christ. During the three hours of darkness when Jesus hung upon the cross, God moved in the darkness to ratify the covenant. And because of Christ’s death we shall never perish – neither shall any man snatch us out of His hand... Our salvation depends on God alone who has established an eternal, unchangeable, and gracious covenant.” (Genesis Vol II, P. 120-1)

### **Response: Help My Unbelief**

While Genesis 15 details God establishing His relationship with His chosen people, it also reveals a God who deeply loves us and seeks to assure us of His grace and faithfulness – even when we cannot discern patterns or purposes in our journey alongside Him. He is the God who takes us by the hand and shows us the stars – even when we most feel overwhelmed by doubt and darkness.

Do you ever ponder, during those dark nights, “how do I know I will make it to the end? How do I, like Abram, address the doubts that still creep in though I am called to faith?”

If we strive to hold up our end of any spiritual bargain with our Almighty and Holy God, we will fail. We were not called to walk between the animals. Anything remotely close would have fed our temptation to boast. In doctrinal terms, this is called “justification by works”. It’s all too easy to think we can “help God” with our rescue or tell Him how our lives should go or advise Him on what our salvation should cost. At such times, we’d do well to remember this night when God established the covenant. He not only knew we



would need deliverance from death to life, but He has always had a perfect plan to restore and establish His people in His eternal Kingdom.

So, as best we can, with help from God, we do what Abram is learning here in Genesis 15: Believe. Trust God's promises. Have confidence in His timing. Hear and receive His Word. Rest in Jesus' finished, sufficient work on the cross.

"Believe." Will we ever *really* know what this means or if we "have enough" of it? Maybe we should figure out how to stir up more? I heard this in a sermon: "Martin Luther said belief is like the ground soaking up the rain. It's like a rock sitting in the sun and becoming warm". In other words, it isn't us **DOING** something to manufacture (manipulate?) an outcome, to assist in our salvation. It is us resting in what God has so thoroughly, effectively, and unconditionally done on our behalf through His great and unfailing love for us, love ultimately demonstrated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

### Prayer:

To our Father God who takes us by the hand and illustrates His promises by the incalculability of the stars and confirms them by the giving of His Son Jesus Christ: help us have the courage and faith to believe in Your vows, to hope and trust in Jesus as the fulfillment of every promise, and to share the hope we have with those who still wrongly strive to substitute works for the free, eternally sufficient and costly gift of salvation You give us through our Savior Jesus Christ alone. Amen.

- Patti Hemsley

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**MARCH 10** *"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."*



### Text: Isaiah 42:1-9

**42** Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

<sup>2</sup> He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; <sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. <sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

<sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:

<sup>6</sup> "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, <sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

<sup>8</sup> I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. <sup>9</sup> Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

### Reflection:

The content of Isaiah 42 is situated in a time of exile and darkness for the people of Israel. They had been taken captive by the Babylonians and were longing for deliverance and restoration. Amid this despair, Isaiah offers hope by revealing God's plan to send a servant who will bring justice and light to the nations. Isaiah 42 is part of a larger section known as the "Servant Songs" in the book of Isaiah. These songs prophesy about the Messiah and His mission and serve as a prophetic glimpse into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the ultimate servant of the Lord. The passage emphasizes the qualities and mission of Jesus: to bring justice, righteousness, and salvation to the world. It highlights God's delight in His chosen servant



and the importance of responding to His message. Let's examine each verse to better understand its meaning.

Verse 1: The speaker is God Himself, introducing His chosen servant. The term "servant" is significant, as it evokes the idea of humility, obedience, and devotion to God's purpose. The passage goes on to describe the servant as one in whom God's soul delights.

Verse 2: The servant will not cry aloud or lift up his voice in the street. This emphasizes the gentle and humble nature of His servant.

Verse 3: A bruised reed the servant will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. This imagery illustrates the servant's compassion and care for the weak and vulnerable.

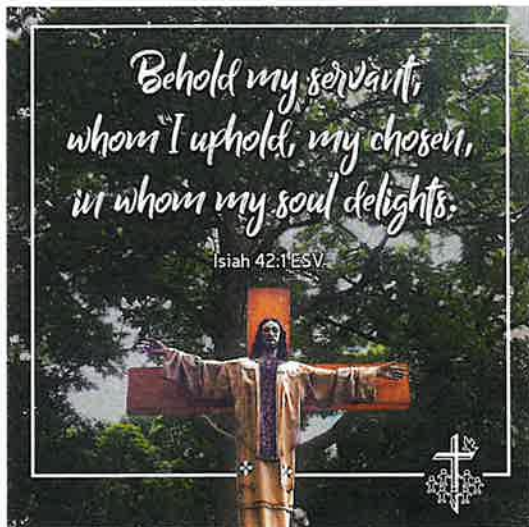
Verse 4: The servant will not grow faint or be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth. This persistence in the face of opposition is characteristic of Jesus, who pressed forward in His mission despite adversity.

Verse 5: This passage shifts to a broader perspective, as God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, is introduced. This underscores the divine authority and sovereignty behind the servant's mission.

Verse 6-7: Here a remarkable message of the servant's mission is stated: *"I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations."* This echoes God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, where He said, *"in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise, as He is the light of the world, bringing salvation not only to Israel but to all nations.

Verse 8: God will not give to another His glory and His name. This reaffirms the unique and divine nature of God and emphasizes that the servant, while exalted, is not a rival deity but an instrument of God's purposes. This truth aligns with Jesus' declaration that He and the Father are one.

Verse 9: God declares His authority as the One who knows the end from the beginning. The fulfillment of these prophecies in Jesus Christ demonstrates the divine foresight and sovereignty of God.



#### **Response:**

During this season of Lent, Isaiah 42:1-9 reminds us of the true nature and calling of Jesus. He was faithful to His calling, no matter what, even to death. It also clearly describes the power and majesty of God, who in His greatest act of mercy, provided a way for us to be sanctified by sacrificing His own son. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

#### **Prayer:**

Dear Lord, help us to embrace our own calling, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to bring justice, righteousness, and salvation to the world around us. May we strive to imitate the gentle and humble character of Jesus, ultimately bringing glory to You and extending

His salvation to the ends of the earth. In Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

- Kathy Persons

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

MARCH 11

*"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*



**Text: Isaiah 49:1-7**

**49** Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. <sup>2</sup>He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.

<sup>3</sup>And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

<sup>4</sup>But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God."

<sup>5</sup>And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—<sup>6</sup>he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

<sup>7</sup>Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

### Reflections:

The first six verses of Isaiah 49 are sometimes called the second servant song and were spoken to God's people in exile in Babylon. On first acquaintance with this passage and taking Isaiah in isolation, it was not clear to me whether the servant in question is the unknown prophet, or whether the servant personifies the nation of Israel. Fortunately for me, I read the words this side of the cross and resurrection and believe that Jesus is the Servant exemplar. God's charge for his Servant goes beyond the reconciliation of Israel to God, the task of The Servant is to gather his people back to the Father. The stark truth is that it was not possible for humanity to reconcile itself to God. Jesus had to be sent to be the one who accomplishes the

reconciliation.

When I come into the Sanctuary of a Sunday morning, I always get a lift from the intarsia (a fancy word for an elaborate form of marquetry much practiced in 15th-century Italy) on the Narthex wall. The picture is a lighthouse. Lighthouses hold a particular fascination for me due to being a sailor. When sailing at night, the wind seems to blow stronger, the waves seem higher and you are wondering exactly where on the chart you are (I'm older than GPS) and is your course good. Then you see a brilliant stab of light which seems to penetrate right into you and your spirit soars. Nothing in the physical world around you has changed. The reefs, shoals and navigation hazards are lying in wait, so why the joy? The answer is that you can work out where you are and from that, the directions to go to reach safe harbour.



**Phillip Galle, Lighthouse of Alexandria (1572)**

Early lighthouses were illuminated by candles and their brightness was measured in candlepower. The leap forward in making them effective was the construction of reflectors and lenses to focus the small individual lights into one powerful beam that could penetrate the night skies. Such lighthouses have saved many lives over the centuries. Useful as these structures are, their range is limited by the curvature of the



Earth. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit isn't inhibited by temporal constraints and can reach all corners of the Earth in pursuit of saving souls.

### Response:

Jesus may have been tasked with God's mission but are we now just to sit back and leave all the work to him? The answer is a resounding NO! The Great Commission makes it clear that we all have our part to play however small or insignificant we may think we are. The Sunday School song *"Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light,"* paraphrases this beautifully. We are called to live our lives as Jesus taught us so that we

may radiate pure light. Just like that small candle in the earliest lighthouse we can join with others and through the lens of Jesus be a powerful light for the nations that will reach to the ends of the Earth.

### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Jesus calls us to be the light of the world. When we wonder if we have the faith to persist in our mission, we ask You for strength. When our hope in your promises falters, point us to Christ's encouraging presence. When we wonder if

we possess the love to work for the transformation of the world, let us rest in the Holy Spirit who heals, counsels, and consoles. May the Easter Triduum inspire us to keep moving forward to continue the work of our mission as Your servants.

- Steve Marsh

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

## MARCH 12

*"Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant?  
Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust  
in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."*



### Text: Isaiah 50:4-11

<sup>4</sup> The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. <sup>6</sup> I gave my back to those who strike, & my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace & spitting.

<sup>7</sup> But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

<sup>8</sup> He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.

<sup>9</sup> Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

<sup>10</sup> Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

<sup>11</sup> Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches! Walk by the light of your fire, and by the torches that you have kindled! This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.



## Reflection:

This passage can be read on several levels. What is true of the prophet who wrote these words is also true of the prophets who preceded and followed him, and it is true of Jesus, to whose advent and passion all prophecy ultimately points. The prophets, and Jesus, were all able preachers, obedient and suffering followers, and courageous champions. Jesus alone was anointed by the Spirit to be the ultimate and faultless example in all of these roles.

The passage opens with a picture of the daily practices of hearing to understand; receiving the Word to remember it; learning in order to obey. All these disciplines equip us to face whatever comes our way. They also enable us to encourage those in need. Jesus' ministry was marked by His ability to comfort the weary and heavy laden. This came from his diligence in prayer, faithfulness in listening to His Father and consistent obedience (doing the will of the Father who sent him). These disciplines are the foundation that enabled the prophets to persist in delivering their messages despite persecution and empowered Jesus to endure the way to and through the suffering of the cross.

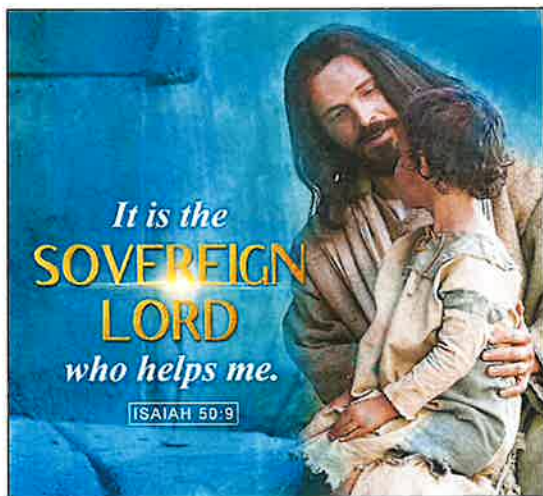
There is a strong portrait here of the promise that God accepts, assists and prevails on behalf of those who rely on Him. Those who believe and trust will be saved. They can be confident and even defiant in adversity. That doesn't mean they won't face times of darkness, but followers of God can make their way through the darkness by trusting in His wisdom, goodness and power.

Turning to our reflections for Lent, the ultimate darkness faced by anyone was what Jesus faced on the cross. In His distress he prayed, "my God my God why have you forsaken me?" He was in the darkest time imaginable – separated from God – but He still uttered a prayer. An anguished cry to God may be all we can muster. But it is enough.

## Response:

To follow the disciplines Jesus exemplified for us, to trust in and rely on God, runs counter to our culture. The world we inhabit is marked by the "virtue" of self-reliance and the value of independence. This is nothing new. Over three centuries ago, Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote about the closing verses of this passage:

*"Those that make the world their comfort, and their own righteousness their confidence, will certainly meet with a fatal disappointment, which will be bitterness in the end. A godly man's way may be melancholy, but his end shall be peace and everlasting light. A wicked man's way may be pleasant, but his endless abode will be utter darkness."*



## Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank You for your inspired Word. Help me to listen well to it. Thank You for Jesus' example of unwavering obedience. Help me to be a faithful follower. Thank You for Your assurance that Your Spirit will be with me for guidance. Help me to trust in Your name and rely on You to provide the strength I need for each day of my life. Amen.

- Janet Goodman

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



MARCH 13

*"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*



**Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

<sup>13</sup> Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

<sup>14</sup> As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—<sup>15</sup> so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

**53** Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

<sup>2</sup> For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

<sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.



**Reflection:**

God has a problem and that problem is us, the people He created to inhabit His perfect earth. We are described in this passage as sheep—stupid and stubborn. Psalm 14:1-3 goes even further— we are corrupt fools, devoid of understanding and incapable of doing good. Being “slow to anger and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8), God dealt with people in various ways. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God chased them out of the garden. Solution #1.

Their descendants multiplied and by Noah’s time “Every intent of the thoughts of his (man’s) heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). God was sorry He made us, wiped out all but Noah’s family with a flood; and then He promised He would never do that again. Solution #2.

Next God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His special people and an example to those around them. He gave them laws, judges, kings, prophets, and even miracles to help them be faithful. Some



obeyed; more did not. Men's traditions replaced God's laws, worship became rote and insincere, and leaders pursued their own agendas and forgot God. God took away their sovereignty. Solution #3.

Then came God's surprise solution: He fathered a son with a virgin human woman. This child was neither good-looking nor famous, coming from a small "nowhere" village in northern Judah. He became an itinerant teacher, helping the lower classes and antagonizing those in power. In the end, he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of a suffering servant—despised, rejected, wounded, pierced, punished, and cut off out of the land of the living. The perfect Son of God became the perfect sacrifice, able to make many righteous. With His wounds, we are "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven." He has done it all for us. The will of God prospers in His hand. Jesus is God's final and altogether effective solution.

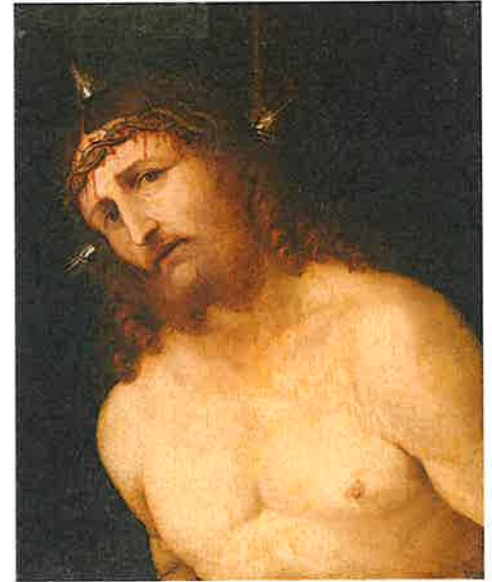
### Response:

How does the will of God prosper in your life? How has God made you able to serve Him well? Since Jesus' sacrifice makes us to be accounted righteous, what does that look like? I imagine myself standing before God the Judge, being justly accused and saying, over and over, "I plead the blood of Christ" like some Mafioso pleading the 5<sup>th</sup> amendment. Then God the Judge says, "I declare you righteous." It takes my breath away. Thank You, Jesus.

### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus, thank You for Your sacrifice. Thank You for giving Your all so that You could give Your righteousness to us. May Your Holy Spirit empower us to be good and faithful servants. Thank You, Source of All That is Good, for the prosperity of the heart that we enjoy because of Jesus. You are greatly to be praised. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- Dianne Billharz



**Lorenzo Lotto, Ecce Homo  
(Behold the Man) – ca. 1550**

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.**

**MARCH 14** *"In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."*



**Text: Jeremiah 23:1-6**

**23** "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. <sup>2</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'"



## Reflection:

### A Fan Letter

Dear Mr. Jeremiah,

We at the men's Bible class at the temple have been eagerly studying your six verses. We have entitled our eight-week study as "The Plain Truth about the Coming Messiah."

There are so many wonderful things we have learned. We want to share our happiness that your six verses have given us. It's hard to tell where to begin.

In the first four verses you, Mr. Jeremiah, give us a wonderful vision of what our shepherds will be like in the coming days. Our leaders will care for us. (verse 4) They will gather us all together and we will no longer have to fear.

Our church staff will unerringly point us to the true Messiah. They will use every effort to promote his success. That, of course, will include using church funds (in silver) to identify and celebrate his appearance. In order to protect us, they will also smash any false messiahs who would come to mislead us.

And the Messiah will "reign as king" (verse 5). No wimp that hides behind the wallpaper. Real strength. He will "execute justice." The glorious days of David will come back again. All of Israel and Judah will be restored. "Neither shall any be missing" (verse 4).

That clearly means that the Messiah will set his people free. No Roman rule over our people. Thank you, Jerry (if we may call you that affectionately), for your clear vision of our future.

One of our Bible class members is an artist. He has painted a picture of how the Messiah will enter the capital city of Jerusalem—all inspired by your words. He will be mounted on a large white stallion surrounded by thousands of his armed supporters. No riding on some borrowed donkey. We have placed his painting on one of the temple walls to remind us of the majesty we are awaiting.

Because of your true prophecy, we have a clear vision of the successor to mighty David. He will be easy to spot. No unemployed storyteller wandering around with a ragtag bunch of guys in the back country. "In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely" (verse 6).

Hurray for your uplifting thoughts. We know exactly what our children are to expect.

Love, The Bible class guys

## Response:

Be happy. When the Messiah comes, our enemies will be crushed.

## Prayer:

We remain eager for your Advent.

- Stan Schmidt

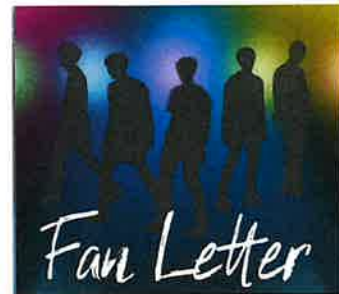
**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

## MARCH 15

*"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."*

**Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

<sup>31</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. <sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord:



I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."



### Reflection:

I must admit that I have never really paid attention to Jeremiah in Bible study or on my own. I am aware that the prophets were appointed by God, and they represented God's Word and his predictions. They were to provide biblical insight and foretold important events that were to happen, had already occurred and reflected God's love, care, and discipline of us.

To begin this, I had to do research on who Jeremiah was and what he was called to do. He lived during the reign of five Kings in Judah. He ministered in several places including Egypt, Jerusalem, Ramah and Anathoth. Jeremiah was considered by people then to be a nobody. He was not successful in convincing people in these places of God's plans for them. He may have been considered a failure by many. He was not rich and suffered immensely by sharing God's Word, being rejected by his neighbors, his family,

friends, and audiences like the kings of his day. Jeremiah was even put in jail and thrown into a cistern. He was taken to Egypt against his will, but he was always steadfast to God.

Jeremiah told everyone about the New Covenant, that their kingdoms were doomed because of their sin. Nobody responded or acted upon his words. God saw that Jeremiah was obedient and faithful regardless to the opposition and personal cost. He held firm to what God had planned for him.

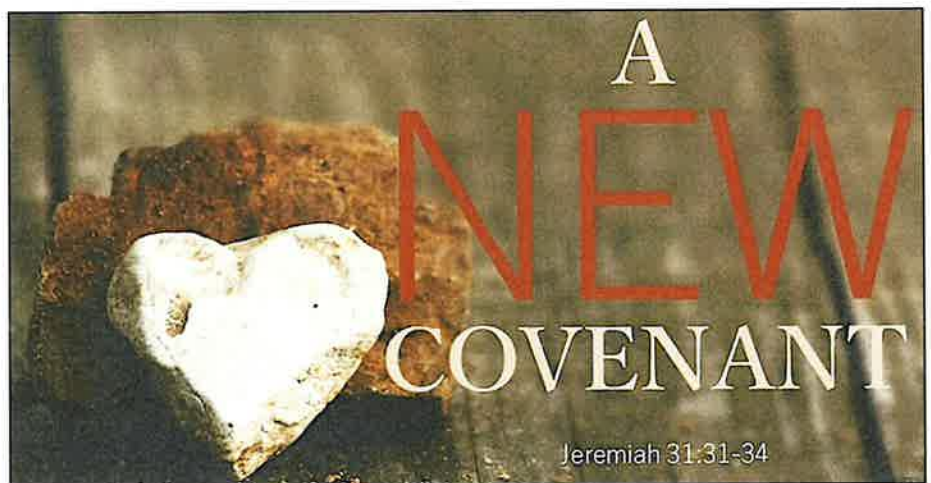
### Response:

So, after reading about Jeremiah and reading more before and after the verses above, I have been reinforced in my belief that God is in control, and we can learn that obedience and faith in God will prevail. We have the benefit of living after the new covenant *did* come. It came to be through the life and death of Jesus Christ. He took our sins away, and we can live in God's Word. We can strive not to sin and to be obedient. We can hold on to faith in Jesus Christ our Savior and the Word of God as demonstrated through the life of Jesus Christ despite what may be going on around us and what disobedience we witness.

### Prayer:

God help us to understand and see Your Word. Help us to be faithful and obedient and to keep the New Covenant that has been given to us. Help us to proclaim Your Word through our actions and words declaring Your message.

- Linda Darling



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

MARCH 17

*"The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."*



**Text: Psalm 2**

**2** Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,

<sup>3</sup> "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

<sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

<sup>5</sup> Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,

<sup>6</sup> "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me,

"You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

<sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

<sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

<sup>12</sup> Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

### Reflection:

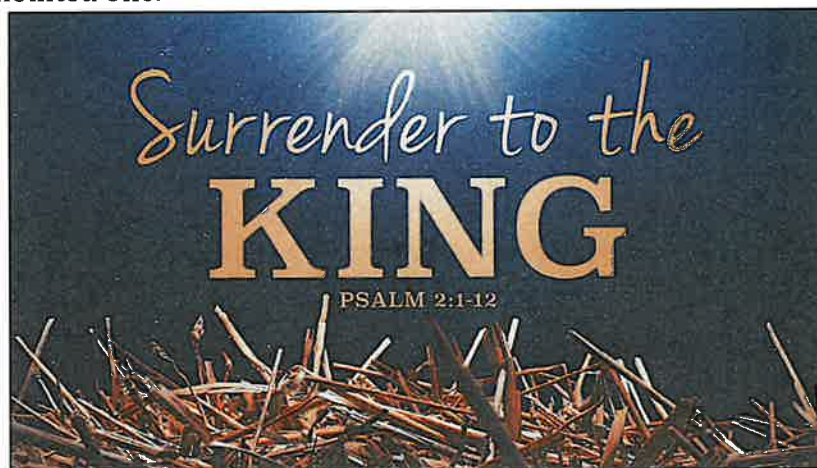
There is only one ultimate king. God has allowed Satan to rule over the earth for a time. Some people do not realize Satan is temporary and Jesus will be the eventual ruler. Jesus is the anointed One. The word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew phrase "anointed one."

Here we read the nations and people are making plans that will be in vain. The rulers (kings) have no real power over Jesus (God's "anointed one"). He laughs at them. God installed the line of David to rule, and it will come to be on Zion (Jerusalem). There is no mention of how this transfer of power will take place, but if God says it, it will happen.

God declares Jesus is his Son and God is Jesus's father. Jesus can ask whatever he wants and it will be given to him. Jesus is to rule over the earth with an iron scepter. The

scepter was symbol of imperial regalia (power). Back in the time this was written, iron was one of the hardest metals known. Striking someone with iron can do a lot of damage; not something we want done to us. The passage talks about dashing the people and rulers to pieces like pottery. In Revelation 2:26-27 this Psalm is quoted, and the one who conquers with God is pictured ruling over the nations. God is all powerful.

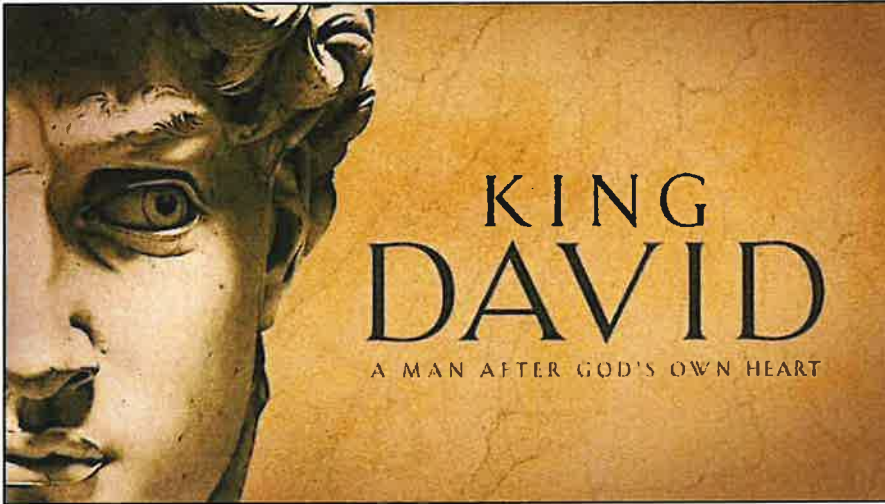
God wants good things (Blessed are all who take refuge in God) to happen to the people and rulers of the earth, but we are commanded to serve the Lord with fear and trembling (avoiding being smashed to pieces). If we choose to try to fight with God, things will not go well for us. We can listen to Satan, the father of lies, but life will get harder if we do. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, Jesus responded with psalms for answers (on the high tower told to throw himself off and angels would catch him (perverting the meaning of Psalm 91:11), but Jesus said do not tempt the Lord your God (quoting Deuteronomy 6:16). If we read God's Word, Books like the Psalms and even Deuteronomy, we will also find a valuable tool –the Sword of the Spirit (The Bible)—to defend us against Satan's attacks.





## Response:

Make a decision not to spend your time in vain. Understand that to anger God will have bad consequences. King David was a man after God's heart. His sins were terrible and in many ways ruined his life, but he was willing and able to keep a right attitude towards God. God praised David for his heart attitude. We all need to be busy doing things that please God and keeping our hearts right towards God.



## Prayer:

Talk to God. Pray. You might even want to read a Psalm and incorporate some of what you read in your prayer. Example; using Ps 2:11... Help me, Lord, to know what You may want for me today so that I may follow in Your will (fear and trembling to avoid God's disapproval).  
- Jim Prosser

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

## MARCH 18

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh..."*



## Text: Ezekiel 36:16-32

<sup>16</sup> The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>17</sup> "Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. <sup>18</sup> So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. <sup>19</sup> I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. <sup>20</sup> But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.' <sup>21</sup> But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.

<sup>22</sup> "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. <sup>23</sup> And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. <sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. <sup>28</sup> You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> And I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. And I will summon the grain and make it

abundant and lay no famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. <sup>32</sup> It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

### Reflection:

I grew up in a Christian family; however, through middle school and high school we stopped going to church. About the time I went off to college at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, my parents started getting quite involved in the Korean Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. My father became an elder and my mother was devoted to the church and congregation. My brother went off to college at Johns Hopkins University and got involved in Little Sparks, an inter-varsity college campus Christian ministry.

At the time I didn't understand why my family was so involved in church and Christianity. I thought it was a waste of time. I could be watching a game or studying for an exam instead. My main focus during my college years was to get into medical school. I thought to myself, "how is going to church going to help me get into medical school?" My heart was hardened.

Over time and having attended church in Reno for over a decade and having gotten married and having children my heart has softened to faith and Christianity. I have come to realize that life isn't just about achievements and doing well in school. It is more about serving others and following and trusting in God. I still struggle trying to rely on my own strength and resources at times and fall back to being too prideful. More recently, there are factors that bring me back to God and relying on Him. One is the softening of my heart as mentioned and another is my physical health. I suffer from frequent migraine headaches, and I have tried various treatments including medications, change in diet, regular exercise and acupuncture. None of the treatments have had a lasting effect unfortunately. Even though my migraines can limit my functioning at times it helps keep me more reliant on God and keeps me humble.

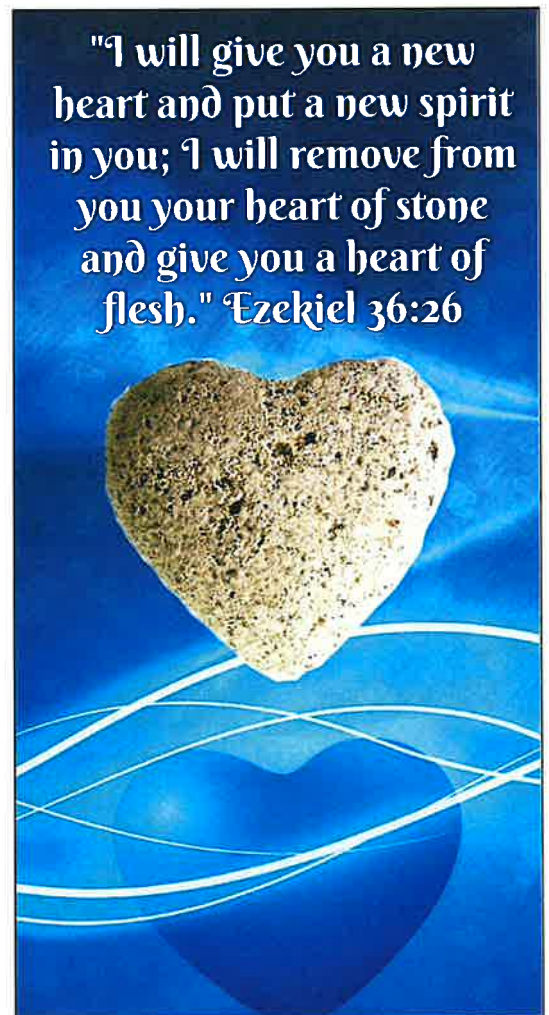
### Response:

As the words of Ezekiel have helped me to pause and to consider how I have seen God work in my life, softening my heart toward Him, I would encourage you now to pause and do the same. How have you seen God's work in your life? How has He helped you to overcome hurdles that might have kept you far away from Him? How has He helped you to see His presence, His power, His goodness...? How has He softened your heart?

### Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank You that for the sake of Your holy name You give us grace and work for our redemption even when we are turned away from You. Thank You for taking our hearts of stone and replacing them with hearts of flesh. Thank You for the gift of faith in You through which we are healed and saved. To the glory of Your holy name, Amen.

- Thomas Kim



"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 36:26

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



MARCH 19

*"See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation,  
gentle and riding on a donkey..."*



**Text: Zechariah 9:9-13**

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

<sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

<sup>13</sup> For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.

**Reflection:**

Who doesn't enjoy the poetry in the Old Testament? Here in Zechariah 9:9-13, we've got both of the Advents of Christ featured. First in 9:9 we have the proclamation of the Daughter of Zion to Rejoice. The daughter of Zion is the personification of The LORD's holy city and people as a young woman. He then personifies Jerusalem in the same way. What are they rejoicing about? The arrival of our King Jesus Christ. Zechariah goes on to describe him as *tsaddiq* which is Hebrew for "righteous" or "legitimate." That would mean he is of the house of David. Then *nosha* which in Hebrew has a few meanings. Here it is translated as "having salvation," not as something possessed for himself but to be given (to us!).



**Felix Tafsart, Triumphal Entry (1896)**

We then see he is humble and riding a donkey. This has a couple of meanings. First, it's a direct prophecy of Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey. Second, He is not on a horse. Horses in this time were for fighting wars. The donkey is a sign of peace in this verse, and we'll see that next in 9:10. Here we have chariots, war horses, and battle bows, all being cut off or discarded, and then Jesus will speak peace to nations. This reflects his identity as the Prince of Peace.

The LORD's rule will be "from sea to sea." This likely indicates the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, meaning he will unify Judea and Israel where King David ruled. The River mentioned here is the Euphrates in modern day Iraq, which was at the time the assumed end of civilization. From there to the ends of the earth, the sum total of earthly territory, Jesus would establish his universal kingdom of The LORD. In 9:11, because of Israel's covenant with God and his holding steadfastly to it, the prisoners here are figurative for the faithful, held in dry cisterns. This is before we had jails and the like and so an inescapable pit would suffice. Such suffering without hope or water would be restored twice over. Finally, in 9:13 The LORD has unified Judah, and Ephraim, a name for the Northern Kingdom, into a unified means of triumph over the pagan polytheists, in this case the Greeks.

**Response:**

There are many things in the Old Testament that don't make a lot of sense to the modern reader. There are many cultural touchstones that with study we can understand but would have been easily





## THE KING WHO GIVES JOY

Zechariah 9:9-10

comprehensible to the people in the time when the individual books were written. The idea of those faithful to the covenant being in a waterless pit would ring clear in the time, but does it for us? With the help of historians and scholars, we now know there were unused dry cisterns which were used to hold prisoners.

In this passage we're compared to spiritual prisoners set free by The LORD's grace. Now we might ask, why fight the Greeks? This conflict points to the Maccabean victory over the Greeks in 167 B.C The Greeks at that time were

still polytheistic, still pagan. It also points us to our LORD's coming final triumph over all enemies of His truth.

### Prayer:

LORD, Yahweh, please guide us on this journey and path You have set us upon. I beseech You, keep placing signs and giving us those who wittingly or unwittingly guide us to Your glory and salvation. Please give us the strength and wisdom to approach You in prayer boldly and justly, and set us to ask of You what is right in Your eyes. Amen.

- Alex Manger

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER** \_\_\_\_\_.

## MARCH 20

*"They will look on me, the one they have pierced and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..."*



### Text: Zechariah 12:10-14

<sup>10</sup> "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. <sup>11</sup> On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. <sup>12</sup> The land shall mourn, each family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; <sup>13</sup> the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; <sup>14</sup> and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.



### Reflection:

These words of prophecy from the book of Zechariah describe what will come to be when Jesus is crucified. He writes that great sadness will sweep the whole of every family and each individual will feel the grief. At the time, Zechariah didn't necessarily know, or indicate that he was prophesying the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, but later in the book of John, Chapter 19 verse 36-37 it is written, *"For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled...they will look on him whom they have pierced."*

The comparison of the grief that would ravage the people to the grief one feels when they are mourning the loss of a child, is probably the greatest comparison a human heart and soul could understand. Not everyone knows this grief, and God willing, I wouldn't wish this grief upon anyone.

Between our two boys, Noah and Jonah, Chris and I were expecting a little boy. The medical challenges we had to overcome to conceive our boys were intense. The spiritual, emotional, and physical investment

given to this built a crescendo of joy and happiness to conception, which led to a long way to tumble down when our little boy died. In the scripture, naming each family (David, Nathan, Levi....) and how they would grieve as a family, and “each wife by themselves,” might seem to some an unnecessary repetition; however, having experienced the loss of a child myself, I know how this grief can be shared but also how one can be incredibly lonely and feel like you are weeping all by yourself.

For Zechariah to use these descriptions to express the weight of mourning Jerusalem would feel when Jesus was crucified evokes in us the greatest of pains a person could feel.

### Response:

Think of a time when you lost something precious (I pray this was not a child). How does your deep loss help you in this time of Lent to see Jesus and His mission more clearly? How are you more deeply enabled to understand God’s great sacrifice for us and so to prepare for Easter?

### Prayer:

Dear Lord, we come to You with this prayer, to know that the pain of Jesus’ sacrifice should impact us as deeply as the loss of our own child, and to ask for Your mercy as we grieve this loss during this time of Lent. Help us to truly acknowledge this time of year, not just as a tradition but in remembrance of the sacrifice You made in giving Your only Son. Lord in heaven, bless the mothers and fathers who have grieved losses, and share Your spirit of mercy on us. We thank You for the times of darkness and sadness, because without the dark we cannot recognize the light. In this way we understand the joy of what comes next. The resurrection of Jesus. Might we be filled with joy to wash away the mourning. Amen.

– Amanda Schlatter

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**MARCH 21**

*“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...”*



**Text: Psalm 118**

<sup>1</sup> Give Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” <sup>3</sup> Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” <sup>4</sup> Let those who fear the Lord say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

<sup>5</sup> Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. <sup>6</sup> The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? <sup>7</sup> The Lord is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

<sup>8</sup> It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. <sup>9</sup> It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

<sup>10</sup> All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! <sup>11</sup> They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! <sup>12</sup> They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! <sup>13</sup> I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. <sup>14</sup> The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

<sup>15</sup> Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the Lord does valiantly, <sup>16</sup> the right hand of the Lord exalts, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!”

<sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. <sup>18</sup> The Lord has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

<sup>19</sup> Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. <sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. <sup>23</sup> This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup> This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

<sup>25</sup> Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!

<sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.

<sup>27</sup> The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!

<sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.

<sup>29</sup> Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

## Reflection

It’s probable that David penned this psalm when he had gained full possession of the kingdom to which he had been anointed. He invites and stirs up his friends to join with him, not only in a cheerful acknowledgment of God’s goodness and cheerful dependence upon that goodness, but in a believing expectation of the promised Messiah, *“The stone the builders rejected...”*, v.22. (Christ even applied this verse to himself (Matt. 21:42).

In this psalm, David calls upon everyone to give God the glory for his goodness, vv. 1-4. He encourages himself and others to trust in God, from the experience he had had of God’s power and the great things he had done for him, vv. 5-18. He gives thanks for his advancement to the throne, and we can see this as a figure of the exaltation of Christ, vv. 19-23. The people, the priests, and the psalmist himself, triumph in the prospect of the Redeemer’s kingdom, vv. 24-29. In reading this psalm we must glorify God for his goodness, his goodness to us, and especially his goodness to us in Jesus Christ.

## Response:

It’s easy to glorify God for his goodness when it aligns with our own plans and expectations, when his ‘cornerstone’ aligns nicely with the structure that we’ve already laid out for ourselves. But how about when life isn’t so good from our human perspective, when *“out of my distress”* v.5, or when *“The Lord has disciplined me severely”*, v.18? David knew that God’s steadfast love endures forever and that we can rely on his goodness even in challenging times. The key of course is to put our hope and trust in the ‘cornerstone,’ Jesus Christ, and to let him be our true reference and guide for living lives of repentance, faith, love, and humility.

## Prayer:

Lord ,please help us truly to believe in Your goodness even when facing great personal and collective challenges. Help us to be comforted by Your steadfast love and to be used of You to share Your love and gift of salvation with others. All glory be to You, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

- Phil Barackman



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



MARCH 22

*"The blood will be a sign for you on the house where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."*



**Text: Exodus 12:1-13**

**12** The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, <sup>2</sup>“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. <sup>3</sup>Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. <sup>4</sup>And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. <sup>5</sup>Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, <sup>6</sup>and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

<sup>7</sup>“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. <sup>8</sup>They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. <sup>10</sup>And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. <sup>11</sup>In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your

hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s Passover. <sup>12</sup>For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. <sup>13</sup>The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

*"Then He said to Abram:  
"Know certainly that your  
descendants will be strangers in a  
land that is not theirs...and they  
will afflict them four hundred  
years...Afterward they shall  
come out with great substance." -  
GENESIS 15:13 & 14*



### Reflection:

Genesis 15:13-14 *"Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions."* God made a covenant with Abram to give his descendants a land to possess as a nation. Here we are in Exodus, and the Israelites have been suffering as slaves of Egypt for four hundred years. I wonder if some of them remembered the promise God made to Abram as the first Passover was unfolding. Later on, after they had crossed the Jordan into the promised land, they celebrated this same Passover in the plains of Jericho. Joshua 5:9 *"And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of*

*Egypt from you."* Several other significant Passover celebrations occurred throughout Israel's history.

At the end of the Old Testament, God stops speaking through prophets. During that time the Israelites suffered greatly at the hand of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid king who ruled over the region of Judea. He was infamous for his severe persecution of the Jewish people. He forced the Jews to abandon their religious practices and adopt Greek customs. He desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by offering sacrifices to Zeus and outlawed Jewish practices like Sabbath and circumcision. Even the Maccabean revolt was not enough. It might have freed them from Antiochus, but then came the Romans. Here we are again, four hundred years and more suffering for the people of God. John the Baptist, in John 1:29 says: *"Behold, the*

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*. The Last Supper, which Jesus shared with his disciples, was a Passover meal. He identifies himself as the ultimate Passover Lamb. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:7 says: *"For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."* John, in Revelation 5, identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God saying: *"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."*



**Response:**

As we meditate on the significance of the Passover in the history of the Jewish people, let us respond by remembering, believing, and trusting in the promises that our loving God has left us in His Word throughout the history of His people. All this we read is evidence of the faithfulness and trustworthiness of our Lord. Note that suffering is not absent from all this. He never promised a life absent of it, but the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient to save us!—not only from the ultimate reality of sin and death, but even better to give us access to God himself!

**Prayer:**

Father, it is impossible for us humans to reach You. In Your Holy presence there can be no sin. Your holiness obliterates it. Time and time again, the Israelites (and us too) failed to trust in you. We fall back to our sins. And time and time again you show your great power and love. We are completely unworthy of being saved. And yet, you sent your only Son to accomplish what we could never. Thank you so much for this undeserved gift! Help us to humbly accept it and live accordingly. We offer you all the praise and worship we can, know your Holy Spirit makes if perfect for your holiness. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Amen.

- Samuel Duenas

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

# LENT

A SEASON OF REFLECTION,  
RENEWAL, AND PREPARATION





## PART II: NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY ON JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

MARCH 24

*"And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things..."*



**Text: Mark 8:31-38**

<sup>31</sup> And he [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."



**Caravaggio, Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) (1605)**

### **Reflection:**

#### **CROSSROADS**

Thirteen months ago, on February 25, 2024, I delivered a sermon at Covenant titled "Born to Die." During the preparation of my message, I was challenged and convicted. Jesus spoke plainly, frankly, and explicitly to His disciples (and to me). He chastised Peter, and after, He called all those following to hear His unvarnished words. Here is a simple fact: Everybody dies an earthly death (with the exception of Enoch, Elijah, and arguably, Melchizedek). Jesus was reminding all those who would listen (including us) that mortal life is short and comes to an end, and He warns us all NOT to live for temporal life but to follow Him and live for Him, which is an eternal relationship. I will focus on verse 34 from the Amplified version of the Bible...

Mark 8:34 AMPC *"And Jesus called [to Him] the throng with His disciples and said to them, 'If anyone intends to come to Me, let him deny himself [forget, ignore, disown, and lose sight of himself and his own interests] and take up his cross, and [joining Me as a disciple and siding with My party] follow with Me [continually, cleaving steadfastly to Me].'"*

Christ's forthright words to all those following must have been shocking. Please read the amplified verse again and let it sink in... We are to deny self and embrace the challenges, hardships and sacrifices that may come if we truly follow Jesus. Even if it means going against personal comfort and the norms of society! Are we willing to face difficulties and even suffering, or death as a follower of Christ? Or do we just want to blend in? By the way, faith is not a "fire escape," but rather an eternal relationship.

Christ's first century disciples left their lives behind and walked with Him, memorizing all He said, even though they did not get it. But remember, Jesus gets us. Are we walking with Him and digging into His word diligently in order to be His true disciples, to side with His party of Truth and cleave continually and steadfastly to Him? Does anything in this world provide for us better than Christ?

### **Response:**

Every morning when we shake off the sleep of the previous night and start our day, we are at the crossroads... Each of us must choose to respond to Christ's call and take up our cross and follow Him daily,



being fully committed to Him, even as He was fully committed to dying on His cross, to save a people for Himself. Are you one of His? Are you carrying your cross and bringing others with you? James 2:17 reminds us that *"...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* We must pick up our cross.

True followers are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, who came to earth in human flesh, finished His saving work on the cross, rising from death and bringing forgiveness for sin and eternal life with Him. We are to have abiding faith and live for Him here on earth as He has commanded in today's passage, and spend eternity with Him in His glory. Our life is not "All in this world, and Jesus too." Our life is to be, "All for Jesus!" Not some, not most, but ALL.

Finally, WHY do we take up our cross and follow Him? Because we love Him. Why do we love Him? Because He first loved us and gave himself for us, to be chosen among the world, to share the truth of His love to others He has also called—to take up their cross and follow Him—all those journeying to eternity with Him. The relationship begins now, and continues forever. I am at THE CROSSROADS. Are you?

### Prayer:

Father God, Jesus my Savior, Holy Spirit, I can't do this without You. My cross lies before me, I either forget to pick it up and follow, or I look the other way, hoping You will forgive. May I take what You have said in today's passage to heart and put it into action. I know you've got me. May I always follow You, clinging to You without shame. This body is wearing out and will someday die. I will lose this world and all of it will be left behind, and I will gain being with You, my Savior, forever. May everything I say and do bring glory and honor to You. In Jesus' name, and for His sake, Amen.

- Gerry Dunlap

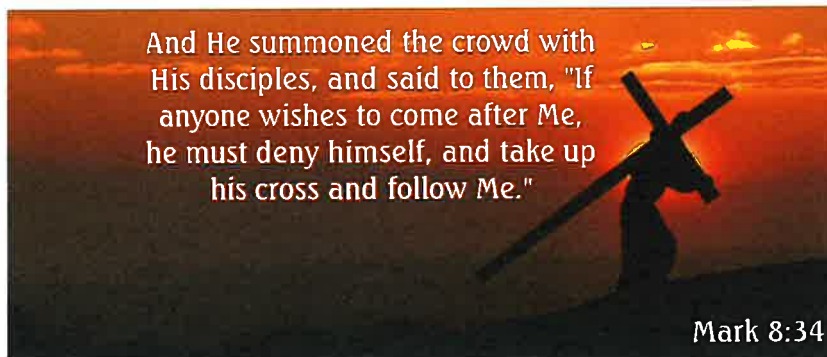
**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

## MARCH 25

*"...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

**Text: Acts 4:1-12**

**4** And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, **2** greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. **3** And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. **4** But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. **5** On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, **6** with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. **7** And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" **8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, **9** if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, **10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. **11** This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."



## Reflection:

During Lent we prepare our hearts to understand, hopefully at a deeper level, the significance of the resurrection. To better comprehend the resurrection's transforming power, we need to compare today's passage to a very similar instance with many of the same characters. Some of them act the same in each situation. Others are radically changed.

In today's passage, Peter and John are called before the same Jewish leaders who (unjustly) convicted Jesus. Jesus was at first silent when questioned about his identity. Ultimately, Jesus answered by identifying himself with God, using the words "*I am*" when asked if He was the Christ.

That answer led directly to Jesus' conviction for blasphemy.

Standing in the shadows during Jesus' trial, observing Jesus' testimony and the leaders' reaction, Peter knew that identifying with Jesus would be dangerous and might be fatal. So, when questioned by a servant girl, he denied even knowing Jesus. Though likely spoken quietly to the girl, Peter's denial could not ultimately be hidden – all of the Gospels relate the story. They do so not to bring shame to Peter, but to give glory to God when we know "the rest of the story" that unfolds through the rest of Peter's life. Today's passage is part of that unfolding story.

In Acts we see Peter no longer denying Christ to an insignificant servant girl, but boldly proclaiming Christ to the powerful Jewish rulers – the very same who had crucified Jesus. Those leaders are acting in the same manner as they did with Jesus, even using some of the same questions. The stakes were equally high for Peter – naming Jesus, proclaiming His true identity and power, could be fatal. And yet, not only do Peter, and John, who was also an eyewitness to Jesus' trial, identify with Jesus, they've just performed a miracle in Jesus' name. That miracle has caught the attention of the people, many of whom come to believe in the name of Jesus. And it has caught the attention of the leaders who wish to silence Peter and John. But this time, rather than denying Jesus, Peter boldly calls out the leaders' guilt in Jesus' death and goes on to proclaim the good news that God resurrected Jesus and gave His followers power to act in His name as they have just done in healing the man who was blind from birth. Peter concludes by declaring that Jesus alone is the way of salvation. And he makes his proclamation, not in the shadows, but directly to those who have the power to charge and kill him, and in the hearing of the people of Jerusalem.

## Response:

One of the strongest pieces of evidence of the truth of Peter's assertions is the change in Peter himself. Nothing short of the transformative power of God could bring about such a change. Peter has come full circle. It was he who first named Jesus as the Christ, when asked by the savior who the crowds, and more specifically, who Peter thought Jesus to be. Jesus followed Peter's confession by warning his followers of the cost of discipleship, and the eternal consequences of denying his name. Even so, Peter did deny Christ... but was brought back into fellowship by Christ's loving forgiving grace and ultimately Peter boldly proclaimed the name of Jesus.



*But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges! <sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

**Acts 4:19-20**

## Prayer:

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the gift of Your grace through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Thank You for Your written Word that contains stories of those whose lives You have changed. For we, like them, can so easily deny You. Thank You that the story doesn't end there – that Your forgiveness extends to each of us, every day. As we move through this season of reflection, give us Your resurrection power to name the name of Jesus in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. We pray this in the strong name that is above all other names, Jesus. Amen.

- Janet Goodman

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

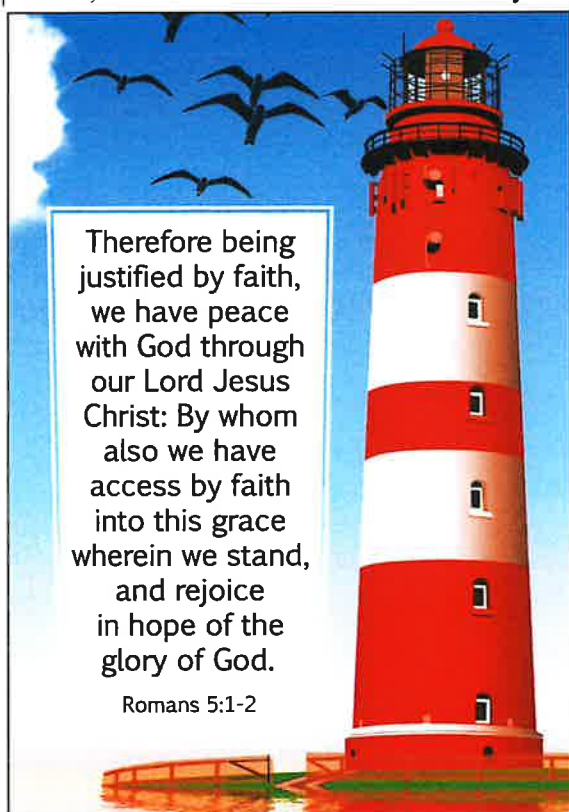
MARCH 26

*"...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,  
Christ died for us."*



**Text: Romans 5:1-11**

**5** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **6** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. **11** More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.



Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1-2

### Reflection:

I'm justified? God views me *"just-as-if-I'd"* never sinned? How can that be when I am chockfull of sin? I relate to Chris Tomlin's song, *Indescribable*, *"You see the depths of my heart and You love me the same!"* Who am I that God cares about me? The answer was right under my nose in verse 7. *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Because of His incredible love for me and for all believers, He declared us righteous, morally perfect, without sin and therefore justified by our faith! Not *will* be justified. Not *becoming* justified. We are justified.

Why did God declare us not guilty of our sins? 1John 3:1a tells of the intimate relationship God desires with us. *"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* However, there was a dilemma. Our sin produced division between God and us. *"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your*

*God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."* - Isaiah 59:2

Nevertheless, our Sovereign Lord can put together what's been torn apart. He had the perfect plan for restoring our broken relationship. He laid our sins on Jesus and clothed us with His righteousness. *"For our sake He made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* - 2 Corinthians 5:21. Martin Luther referred to this as the *Great Exchange*. John Calvin expressed this as a *Wonderous Exchange*. Jesus took our sins to the cross and paid the price for our freedom. Our sins are forgiven!

God's saving grace through His Son, Jesus Christ, is the ultimate gift that He gives to His undeserving children. However, salvation brings other extraordinary benefits. Paul writes that we also receive peace with God, access to God, a preview of our future. With Jesus, we can see the purpose of our pain. Jesus's sacrifice abolished the conflict between God and His children making a way for believers to delight in a peaceful relationship with Him. We've been given the promise of eternal life with our Lord and Savior.



Jesus's death and resurrection secures our salvation and eternal life. The love of God has poured the Holy Spirit into our hearts. Even our suffering brings growth!



Romans 5:1-11 takes us on a Lenten journey reminding us of God's grace, Christ's sacrifice and the hope we have in Him. Paul emphasizes the significance of Jesus' death on the cross as the ultimate act of love and sacrifice for our salvation.

### Response:

Receiving God's amazing grace convicts me of how little grace I show to others (especially when I drive). I would like to show grace to others. However, unlike God, I see their mess-ups and judge them. It's a bit like looking for the speck in their eye while a 2x4 is protruding from mine. Actually, it's exactly like that. What can I do to solve my *no-grace-for-you* problem? I guess that's a problem right there. It's all about me fixing my sin. Which leads me to another vulnerable confession.

I'm convicted about how little time I spend with Jesus through prayer, reading Scripture, worshipping Him and listening for His voice. I just felt God's Holy Nudge on my contrite heart referring me to James 5:16, *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."* So, when you see me at church, only make eye contact with me if you don't mind that I share my list of sins with you and ask for your prayers.

### Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, for Your gift of salvation which has restored our broken relationship. I'm grateful that You let me know that our relationship was broken. Help me to turn from my sins. Please show me the sins that I'm not aware of. Lord, I want to make more space for You in my life. Help me. Unto the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Amen.

- Kris Pierson

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**MARCH 27**

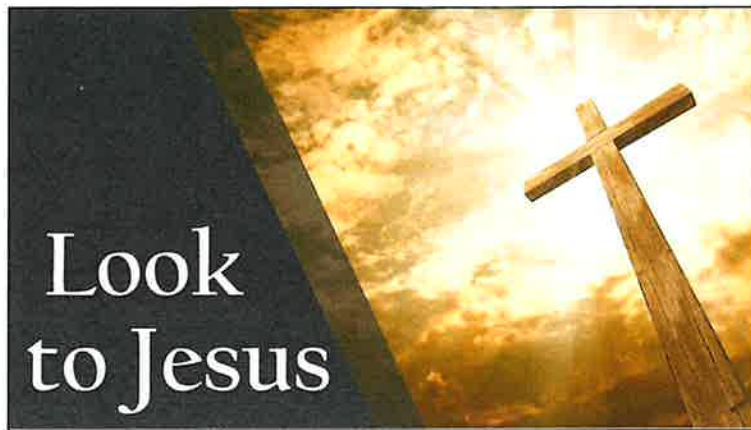
*"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit"*



**Text: 1 Peter 3:13-22**

<sup>13</sup>Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup>Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.



### Reflection:

I have a friend who suffers for righteousness sake and considers himself to be blessed. I don't think he looks upon himself as suffering, but I do not envy him his life. We talk once a week providing that the internet in the city in which he lives is working. Sometimes he is without electricity for days at a time. He is a missionary in a country that openly hates Christians. There the "secret" police are not always so "secret." He has friends and then suddenly he doesn't. Some of his former friends have said they have been told to have

nothing to do with him because he is being watched.

My friend is one of the most joyful people I know. When we are able to connect via zoom he is always upbeat and full of good news. As for myself, I think his life is miserable. But his joy comes in serving our Lord. He loves to talk about Jesus and what He is doing. The thing about missionaries is that they have to talk about Jesus, no matter the danger, otherwise they wouldn't be missionaries.

During Lent it is customary to give something up. And we only have to do it for forty days. I recently heard the question "If I give up something I don't like does it still count?" That may sound silly, but how willing are we to give something up if we really like it. Even giving it up for Christ. Jesus tells us to count the cost. How often do we go for the cheap stuff? My friend is fully invested in the Kingdom.

### Response:

No matter where God sees fit to put us we are to live for him. Sometimes we will find that we will suffer in some way. Broken relationships, financial reversals, libels and slanders. These are nothing compared to what Jesus suffered for us. We are always to keep our eyes on Jesus. We are to remember that in our lives we are to glorify God and our reward is to enjoy Him forever.

### Prayer:

Lord, give us strength, give us courage. Help us to endure the pains of this life for the sake of the Kingdom. Plant in our hearts the assurance our treasure is in heaven. To the glory of Jesus the Christ, Amen.

– Chris Rhodes



Lucas Cranach, Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) - 1537

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



MARCH 28

*"But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God..."*



**Text: Hebrews 10:1-25**

<sup>10</sup> For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

<sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' "

<sup>8</sup> When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

<sup>11</sup> And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

<sup>15</sup> And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, <sup>16</sup> "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

<sup>17</sup> then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

<sup>18</sup> Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### Reflection:

The book of Hebrews was written masterfully, concerned for those that were still wanting to go after the old ways, and the writer is breaking it down to show that to do so would mean apostasy. That means the rejection of Christ and of the belief that Christ was the perfect and obedient lamb of God.

Jesus had said *"If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned"* (John 15:6).

To remain in Christ meant not practicing the old rituals of animal sacrifices. God's people had been participating in sacrifices with the blood of animals and a high priest since they were given instructions



through the Torah, particularly the book of Leviticus. Mentions of sacrifices go back as far as Cain and Abel. The writer through the first 9 chapters of Hebrews has been explaining, in great detail, why going back is not the way, that Jesus is higher, and that what could never be done through the sacrifice rituals and sprinkling of blood has been done, fully and finally, through Jesus. In the writer's efforts to convince his audience he keeps orbiting the Old Testament and Jewish liturgy, perhaps because the writer was addressing Christian



Jews. Although, it is not confirmed he was writing to Christian Jews, I think as one commentator said, "Why would Gentiles care about Jesus' superiority to Moses or the order of Melchizedek?" (We'll have to save that question for another day.)

Think about it though. Israel had been carrying on these rituals and sacrifices all their lives, often in fear of the ground opening up and swallowing them (see Numbers 16). Now Christ has fulfilled the law and as our verse indicates, "*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...*" This had to have been difficult for the Hebrews to internalize. Yet, I think we do the same thing. We know the work of Christ is finished and we have the blessing of Paul's letters stating over and over this free gift of God and our salvation by faith and His grace, yet how many of us struggle with the "doing" instead of "being"? Or the idea that we somehow still have to do enough (always more) to earn our way into this incredible salvation.

I can't imagine how intense this battle was for them, hence the intensiveness of the book of Hebrews. Then we have this picture of Jesus offering a single sacrifice then taking the posture of *sitting*. He rests. He sat at the place of highest honor, at the right hand of God. Not even the angels sat there; they *stood* in the presence of God.

This was not a picture of any high priest that the people had known, for they offered sacrifices endlessly, year after year. Jesus breaks all molds, shatters stereotype, comes in through windows when we are waiting at the door, responds when no one else will, makes fools seem wise, lived as fully human and fully God and never sinned. He is the Alpha and Omega. He is the highest high priest! He is Salvation. Jesus is Lord!

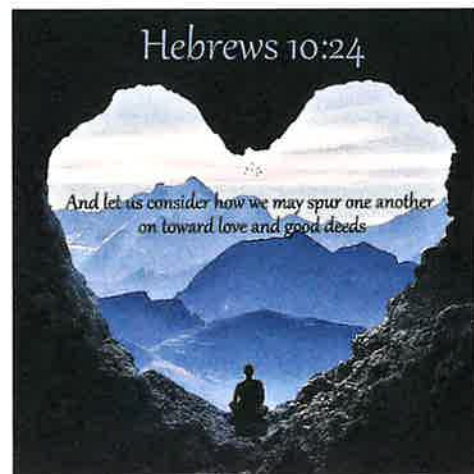
### Response:

Are there things, or ways in my life that I do or participate in because I somehow equate them with pleasing God? Of course, we will do good works as Christians because we love God and often experience His heart for people. But are there areas that are not motivated by this. It may not be an easy question to answer. Beliefs can build strongholds in our thinking, and only God can show them and tear them down. Have you ever tried to convince someone who still uses a map how GPS works? Or how much better a calculator is than longhand math? No way do these small things compare to the gift of God, but believing that something might be better often means giving up something.

### Prayer:

God, I grant You access into areas of my life that don't necessarily express or reveal the true freedom I have in You. During this time of preparation, help prepare my heart to be and remain open to You always. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.

- Cindy Duncan



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**MARCH 29**

*"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."*

**Text: Galatians 2:15-21**



<sup>15</sup> We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be

justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup> But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup> For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.



### Reflection:

Every 3 years my family is required to move. We don't just move down the street or across town, we move. At the very least it is a new city, but it typically is a new state. Every 3 years our lives are disrupted from what we know, and we adapt to a new environment. New schools, a new church, new jobs, new community, new weather systems. Are you sensing a theme? It's all new. It feels like we are in a constant state of change because as we start to get settled, we anticipate a change on the horizon.

Take a moment to think of a time you were asked to make a change; big or small, good or bad, willfully or not. Whatever memory was just stirred up I am guessing there was also a certain feeling that accompanied that memory. Change is hard. It is often psychological, emotional, and spiritual.

The Galatians were not any different, they were asked to change. The change they needed was a change that would reconcile them with Christ on the Cross. It was also psychological, emotional, and spiritual. See, the Galatians were not quite getting it. They had heard the Gospel, knew Christ died, but they thought they were justified by the old law alone and did not need to be justified by Christ on the Cross. In his letter, Paul was challenging them to change. He urged them to let the power of Christ allow them to die to their old selves and let Christ live in them. Their justification would come by faith in Christ and not the works of the law. Paul further emphasized that if the law was all that was needed to experience God's grace, then Jesus' death on the Cross would mean absolutely nothing.

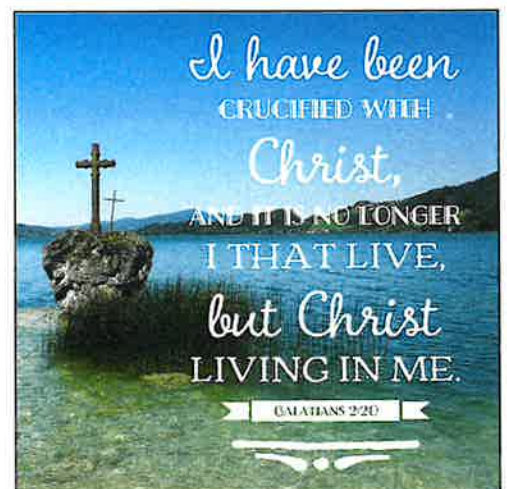
### Response:

This Lenten season as you reflect on Christ's death and resurrection, I encourage you to think about a change you might need to help you better to be "crucified with Christ." What would help you dive deeper with Christ? Maybe it is as simple as beefing up your prayer life. Maybe it is finding a community organization that will strengthen your faith. Maybe it is finding an accountability partner or group to share with on a regular basis. Maybe it is a big change like a new job or career. Whatever it might be, don't let Christ's death be in vain. Let your old habits die so Christ can live in you daily.

### Prayer:

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, Your death for us changes everything. We who were locked up in sin are now free to follow Your way of faith and hope and love. We who were about to die are now living in the reality of life eternal and in confident anticipation that when we move—not just down the street or across town but away from this earth and these mortal bodies—we are coming home to You. Help us to make the changes You ask of us to make Your life in us shine more brightly that others may see You and that You will be glorified.

- Katie Guerrero



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



## PART THREE: NEW TESTAMENT NARRATIVE OF JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

MARCH 31

*"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he  
who comes in the name of the Lord!"*



**LENT**

**Text: Matthew 21:1-11**

**21** Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup> "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' "

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

### Reflection:

This may be a well-known scripture to you. Matthew 21:1-11 truly paints a beautiful picture of the humble entrance Jesus made into Jerusalem, the entrance that had been prophesied of so long ago. Things



**Evans Yegon, Palm Sunday**

were in order for this special day for our King. The donkey was ready, the cloaks were in place to be laid upon the donkey. The crowd was arriving, and branches were being cut and spread. The crowds began to shout "Hosanna!" while the rest of the city questioned this entire scene.

"Hosanna! Hosanna!" Although it carried a different meaning in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, Hosanna is a word of praise and adoration. It translates to "Praise God!" What a beautiful day for the followers of Jesus to be able to praise Him together in Jerusalem.

What took place on the streets of Jerusalem on this day was beautiful- even considering what many of us know is to come

in the next week. But do we often think about what took place before this important moment in the life of Jesus? Who helped make this moment happen?

Each time I have read this scripture, my attention has been pulled back to verse 6 over and over again: **"The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them."** Our focus is on Jesus. It is on the donkey. It is even on the crowd. But for a moment, place your attention on the disciples.

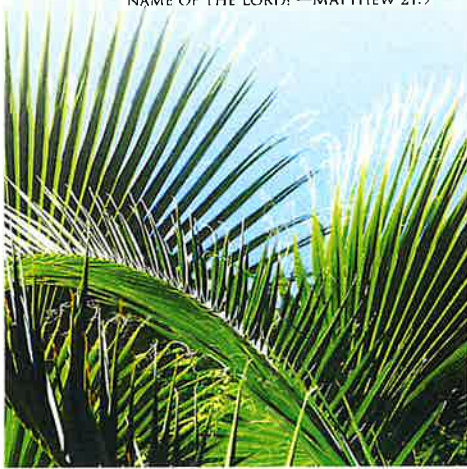
Without any questioning, scripture tells us that they obediently went and grabbed the donkey and the colt. They were ready to confront anyone who was questioning what they were doing. They prepared the donkey for Jesus. I image that they worked their way through the crowd to stay with Jesus, to protect him from the onlookers, those questioning Him, those angry with Him. They did all of this with assumed



exhaustion and high emotions from all they had previously done with Jesus. Take note—these disciples are never named in this story.

# Hosanna!

BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE  
NAME OF THE LORD! —MATTHEW 21:9



## Response:

This Lenten season, may we never take our eyes off Jesus. But may we remember the examples of faithfulness and pure devotion set out during the story of the Triumphal Entry by the unnamed, emotional, exhausted disciples.

In the season of life you are living this Lenten Season, how can you show devout trust and faithfulness to our Lord and Savior? How can you do something that he is asking you to do? Has he asked something of you that it is time to respond to? Has he laid a relationship on your heart that it is time to mend or strengthen or forgive? Is there a piece of scripture that He keeps reminding you of that it is time to live out? While we keep our eyes on Jesus this season, may we also be like the unnamed disciples and “Do as Jesus has instructed us” (V6).

## Prayer:

Heavenly Father and King of Kings, I thank You for Your Word and the way it teaches me, prompts me, guides me, and encourages me. You know the season of life that I am in right now. - Kathy Ludwig

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

## APRIL 1

*“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple...”*



**Text: Matthew 21:12-17**

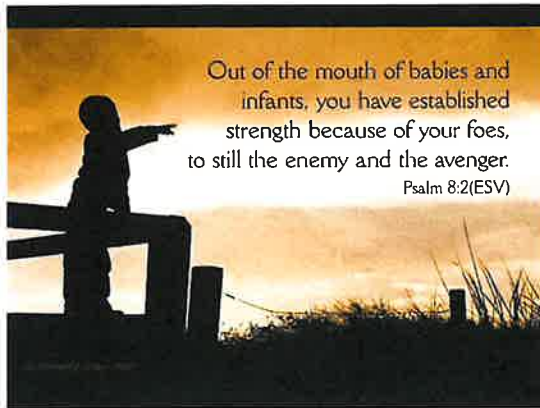
<sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

<sup>14</sup> And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, <sup>16</sup> and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, “ ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”

<sup>17</sup> And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

## Reflection:

In just five verses there is so much to unpack about this situation. First, I'd like to give some historical context. The temple that Jesus goes to is the biggest, the only real temple in all of Jerusalem. This makes it the religious center of the entire city and the entire nation, and so it is the most impactful place for Jesus so profoundly to challenge the social norms. This also makes what Jesus did extremely controversial. We know that this is the week before Jesus' crucifixion and to me that adds a lot more impact to what he is doing.



Context aside, I want to highlight the main point here that Jesus seems to be making. It's not just the potential misuse of money here that Jesus is talking about when he says "*...but you are making it a den of robbers.*" It's the fact that this place of worship has been turned into a marketplace and a place of socialization. Jesus states that the temple should be a place of worship alone and he drives out the people who are running business there before he starts performing miracles.

Moving on from this point, I think it's important to look at how the priests abuse their power. This is very common in the religious establishment of Jesus' day, and we can point out many

other times in history where this is true of the Church. The priests in power try to claim that calling to a Messiah Jesus "*Hosanna to the Son of David*" is blasphemy. However, Jesus then quotes the psalms in response (this is verse 16). By doing this, he implies that even the children can see the truth that the priests are unable to acknowledge. Jesus sends a powerful message by removing what is corrupt and restoring what is broken.

### Response:

It's important for us to remember what Church is really all about. I think that it's extremely easy to get in the habit of going to church on a Sunday and to just go through the motions. What this passage shows us though is that Church is not primarily a place of socialization or a marketplace. It's wholly a place of worship. It's easy to forget that sometimes. Now, the point here is not that fellowship has no place in the church, because it does! Fellowship is a cornerstone to what makes a Church healthy and strong, so long as we remember the reason why we come to church: Yes, to learn about God, about worship, about ourselves, but especially to worship and praise God.

Furthermore, we can also take away another message from Jesus' confrontation with the priests in the Jerusalem Temple. A much more direct point. We need to ask God for the courage and the strength to put a stop to corruption in His Church. As followers of God, it's our job to make sure that our church is run with the singular goal of Praising God every Sunday. I think, as a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church, that we have done a very good job of this.

### Prayer:

Lord, help us to remember the reason that we attend church. It is so easy to go every Sunday to Your place of worship and simply go through the motions of worship. Please provide us Your strength so that we can keep praising You with everything we have. Let us participate at church as Jesus intended us to. Help us to speak out against corruption in the Church as Jesus once did. Amen.



**Raymond Balze, Jesus Chasing the Merchants  
from the Temple – ca. 1870**

- Max Musni

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.**



APRIL 2

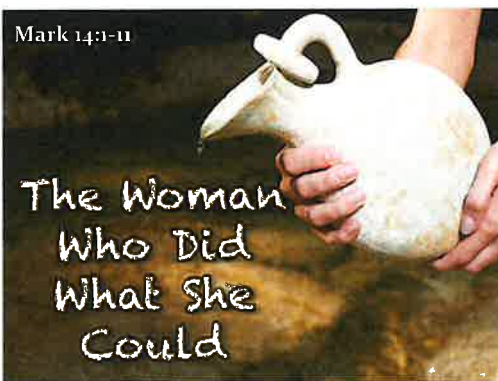
*"She has done what she could; she has  
anointed my body beforehand for burial."*



**Text: Mark 14:1-11**

**14** It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, <sup>2</sup> for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

<sup>3</sup> And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. <sup>4</sup> There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? <sup>5</sup> For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. <sup>6</sup> But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>7</sup> For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. <sup>8</sup> She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. <sup>9</sup> And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."



<sup>10</sup> Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

#### **Reflection:**

The time of his suffering is drawing near and Jesus knows it. The Passover observance is just two days away. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law are plotting for a way to arrest Jesus and have this man they believe to be a blasphemer killed. But they are cautious in their plot as Jesus has become a compelling and popular

leader among the people who have poured into Jerusalem in huge numbers to celebrate the Passover. They will wait until after the Passover to carry out their murderous schemes in order to avoid a riot.

Jesus is staying in Bethany, a small town not far from Jerusalem. He and his disciples have gathered at the home of Simon (a man who Jesus probably healed of leprosy) to share a meal. Now, at this instance, the scripture seems to freeze for a moment in time. If a camera had been available, the photo journalist would have snapped a picture the instant that Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 12:3) pours a pound of rare and expensive perfume on Jesus' head. Everyone in the room gasps. What has this woman done? Usually, a few drops of oil would be used on the head in anointment to honor one. Jesus would have been drenched in this lavish and extravagant act by Mary. Fragrant oil poured down his entire body!

The reactions are recorded: Indignation and fault finding, rebuking of Mary by some. But Jesus defends Mary's action and says she has done a wonderful thing for him and he is blessed by it. Judas Iscariot leaves the gathering and goes to the chief priests thus aiding in their plans to capture and kill Jesus. Perhaps the rebuke by Jesus in Mary's defense was the last straw for Judas.

Why did Mary do it? The perfume was valued at what would be a year's wages. I imagine it was everything she had, her security, and she gave all she possessed to honor her Lord and her Messiah. Mary knew who Jesus was. This was worship for her. Jesus announces that the anointing was in preparation for his burial and in verse 8 Jesus states "She did what she could." What higher cause and what greater goal can a follower of Jesus have than this? She gave what she could because she loved Jesus.

#### **Response:**

Have you ever been ridiculed or criticized for what you have done for Jesus, His Church, or His children? Has anyone ever said "it's over the top"? What would you imagine an equivalent action to Mary's be? Pray that Jesus will show you some way that you can bless Him and bring glory to His Name today.



### Prayer:

I am greatly humbled, Jesus, by Mary's example of worship and devotion to You. I pray for your guidance and empowerment to love and serve You in such a way that you will also one day say of me "She did what she could." I want to be extravagant for You. Amen.

- Barbara Mize



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:**

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**APRIL 3**

*"And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.'"*



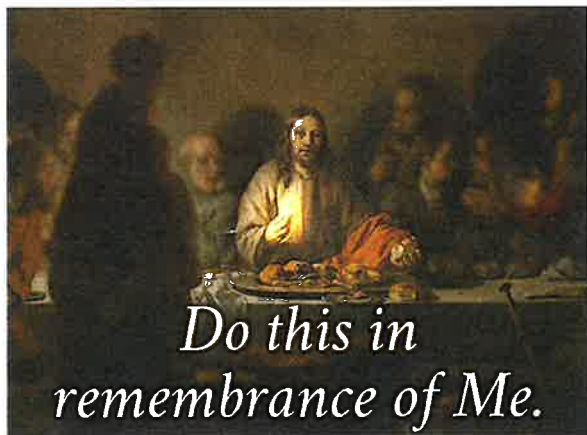
**Text: Mark 14:12-26**

<sup>12</sup> And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>13</sup> And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, <sup>14</sup> and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' <sup>15</sup> And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." <sup>16</sup> And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

<sup>17</sup> And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. <sup>18</sup> And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." <sup>19</sup> They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" <sup>20</sup> He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. <sup>21</sup> For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

<sup>22</sup> And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." <sup>23</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. <sup>24</sup> And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. <sup>25</sup> Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

<sup>26</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.



*Do this in  
remembrance of Me.*

### Reflection:

Jesus sent two of his disciples, Peter and John (Luke 22:8) with instructions, into Jerusalem to both find a suitable location to hold the Passover Meal with his Disciples plus to do its actual preparation. Such preparation included everything from purchasing and preparing a spotless lamb for the meal to providing the unleavened bread, proper table settings, drinks, etc. The Passover Festival, as we know, is a

major annual one-day event in the history of the Jewish people. It celebrates God sparing the lives of Israel's first-born children in Egypt and freeing the Hebrews after 400 years of slavery. They couldn't leave Egypt

fast enough to please Pharaoh after he witnessed the death of all Egypt's firstborn sons in approximately 1446 BC.

Peter and John completed all the above tasks, and the Passover Meal was held with the disciples who did not realize that this was the last meal that they would have with Jesus. While they were eating (Mark 14:22-25) Jesus took two traditional parts of the Passover Meal, the passing of bread and the drinking of wine, and gave them new meaning as his body and blood in preparation for what he was about to do on the Cross (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

**Response:**

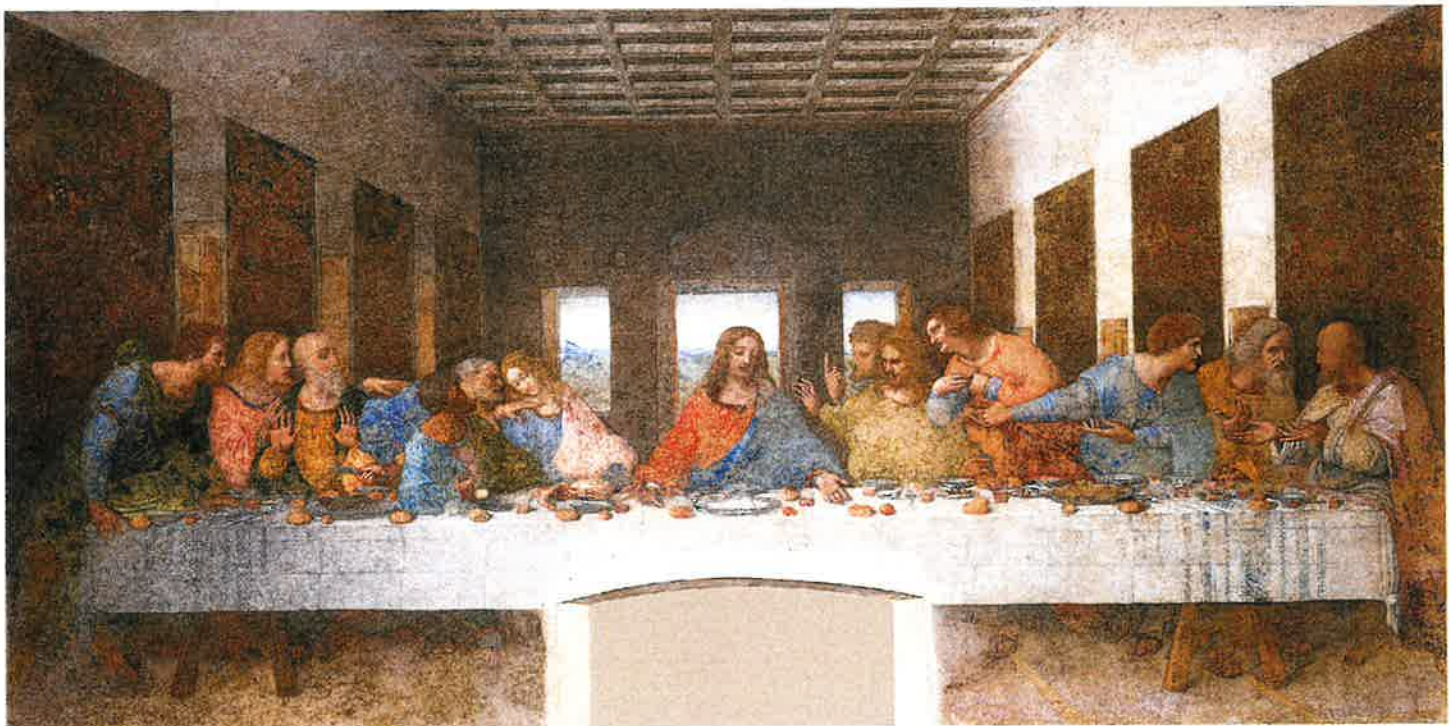
Jesus celebrated The Passover with his disciples at that Last Supper and shortly after that would go on to save us from sin by his dying. Jesus' death on the cross would seal a New Covenant between God and us. The Old Covenant involved forgiveness of our sins through the blood of an animal sacrifice. Now, Jesus offered himself, the spotless Lamb of God, as a sacrifice by which our sins would be forgiven once and for all. Praise be to God.

**Prayer:**

Dear Jesus, help us never to forget the New Covenant that You created on the cross shortly after sharing that Last Supper with Your disciples. Your dying on that cross became the one and only sacrifice needed for overcoming our sins. The periodic sacrifice of a spotless lamb would no longer be needed as Your death and resurrection paid the entire price for our lifetime of sinning. Help us Lord to remember, though, that we do have two major responsibilities: 1). To accept You as our Lord and Savior and 2). To share this "Good News" with others as we go about our daily lives. In Your name we pray. Amen.

- Larry Stockert

***TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.***



**Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper (1498)**



APRIL 4

*"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.  
Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."*



**Text: Luke 22:39-46**

<sup>39</sup> And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." <sup>41</sup> And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." <sup>43</sup> And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. <sup>44</sup> And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. <sup>45</sup> And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

**Reflection:**

Today I am taking on Luke 22:42.

*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* (NIV)

When I started digging more deeply than usual into this verse, I found that the NLT Bible version says *"please take this cup of suffering away from me"*, which led me down the rabbit hole of finding what *"the cup"* signifies. In Isaiah 51:17 NIV says *"the cup of his wrath"*, and *"the goblet that makes men stagger"*. ESV says *"the cup of his wrath"* and *"the cup of staggering"*. NLT says *"the cup of the Lord's fury"* and *"the cup of terror"*. Wow! Just Wow!

Jesus knew he was facing a horrifying experience. Coming to earth as a flesh and blood man, he surely experienced the everyday (and not so everyday) discomforts we have all felt. He would have experienced splinters, cuts, smashed thumbs, chapped skin, sunburn, sore feet, tired and aching body, bone-deep exhaustion, strains, pains and pulled muscles, skinned knees, blisters, burns, the first-century equivalent of stepping on a Lego while bare-footed, head bumps, perhaps even bruised bones (after all, he was a human kid at one time). Jesus knew what pain was, and he knew he was about to experience the worst that mankind could inflict on another human being.

Jesus endured his horrible death for us. He took upon himself the wrath of God (the cup).

2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (NIV). There was no other way, and Christ drank that cup of wrath. As Pastor Jay said in one of his prayers, on January 12, 2025, "Jesus loved us enough to make the ultimate sacrifice for us".

When we take Communion we drink "the cup of salvation, shed for us." Suddenly *"the cup of salvation"* means so much more to me. This cup is filled with God's mercy and grace and eternal salvation! Of course we have to end with a song...

*'Til on that Cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid, Here in the death of Christ I live.*

- "In Christ Alone (My Hope Is Found)" by Adrienne Camp and Geoff Moore & The Distance

**Response:**

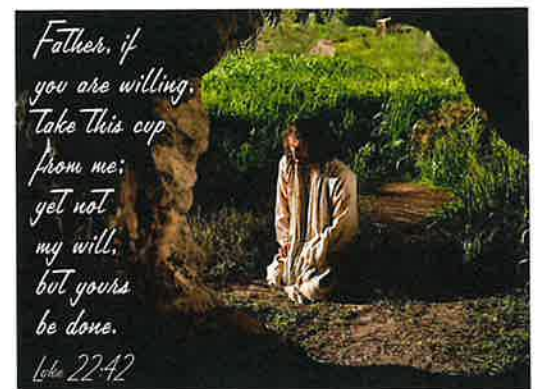
Next time we take Communion together in church, may we remember well the "cup of terror" Jesus chose to drink for us, and the "cup of salvation" poured out for us because of Him.

**Prayer:**

Thank You, Christ, for Your sacrifice, for satisfying God's wrath. Thank You God for Your mercy and the salvation we can never earn. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- Barbara Landis

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.





APRIL 5

*"Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"*

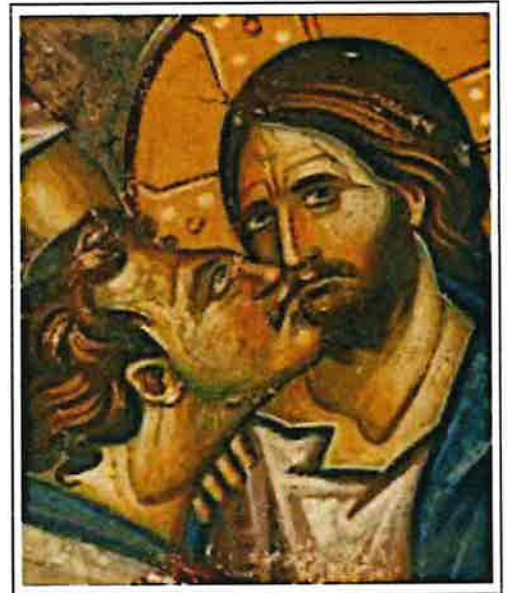


**Text: Luke 22:47-53**

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, <sup>48</sup> but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" <sup>49</sup> And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

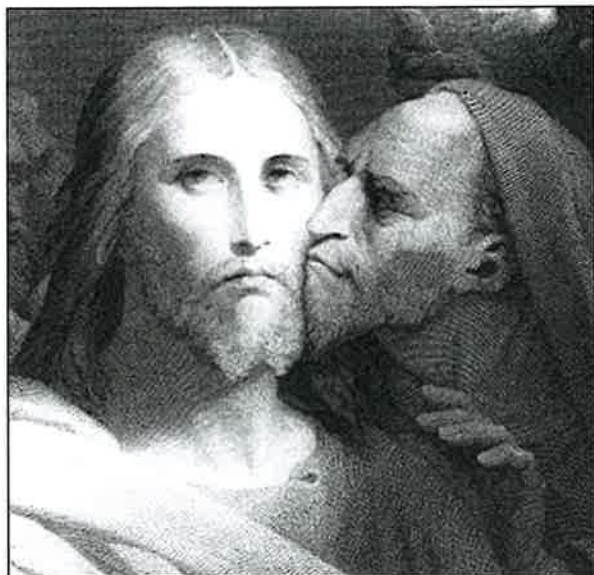
**Reflection:**

When you wonder where certain terms and sayings come from, I can't help but think of the betrayal of Jesus. When Judas kissed Jesus, the saying "the kiss of death" may have originated. Jesus knew what was going to happen as He warned Judas of the terrible thing he was about to do. But, like so often happens, we think of our ways not God's ways when we do something. I believe Judas assumed if Jesus was challenged, he would strike down the challengers with a stroke of his hand. Again, as humans we do things from our perspective rather than thinking what our Lord wants and teaches.



**Response:**

When one of the disciples cut the ear off of one of the guards who was attempting to arrest Jesus another saying was possibly originated. "Those who live by the sword, die by the sword.." Again, we fail to learn from the examples Jesus taught us until He corrects our mistakes. When Jesus healed the guard, He again taught by example of how we should behave. Showing love to one-another, rather than aggression, is a preferred methodology. Unfortunately, most of us are slow learners. Our text is the Bible, but understanding it can be fairly difficult even with dedicated study. We need to learn from our mistakes and hopefully we will sin less and enjoy life more!



**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, please help us know Your ways rather than resorting to our ways. Give us the knowledge and will to follow Your teachings in a way that is pleasing to You and to spread the "Good News" to others less fortunate. Please increase our ability to love one-another as You love us. We ask this in Your Son's precious name, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

- Brent Ford

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE  
BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD  
& AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:**

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**The Kiss of Judas, engraving by Ary  
Sheffler (19<sup>th</sup> c.)**

APRIL 7

*"And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him,  
Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."*



**Text: Luke 22:54-62**

<sup>54</sup> Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. <sup>55</sup> And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. <sup>56</sup> Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." <sup>57</sup> But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." <sup>58</sup> And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." <sup>59</sup> And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." <sup>60</sup> But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." <sup>62</sup> And he went out and wept bitterly.

### Reflection:

Peter thought he was strong. Years of rowing and hauling nets full of fish gave him a physical strength that convinced him that he could handle anything. He was sure he was strong enough to protect his friend and Lord, Jesus, who seemed to be purposefully putting himself in danger. When the mob came with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus, Peter courageously pulled out his sword and sliced off a servant's ear, which Jesus healed. As the adrenaline flow decreased, Peter sort-of-courageously followed at a distance to see what would happen. Sitting around a warm fire with the priest's servants, courage disappeared and he succumbed to doubt and fear, not even able to say to a humble servant, "Yes, I follow Jesus." When Jesus looked at Peter, his vision of himself as strong and brave was shattered forever. He had betrayed the very one he loved most and wanted desperately to protect. Broken and ashamed, he wept bitterly. That's the end of this text but I am so glad the story does not end there. Jesus restored their relationship and gave Peter authority and purpose to build His church. *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* Psalm 30:5b

### Response:

At the end of his poem, "To a Louse," Robert Burns shares some wisdom:

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us."

Heroic daydreams are fun as long we acknowledge that they are fiction. The danger lies in believing them. In my mind's eye I can imagine how it would feel to be a race car driver, a construction worker or an opera singer, but I know better than to act like one. Paul warns us about being deluded in Romans 12:3-



*"For I say...to everyone...not to think of himself more highly that he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."* Peter's faith was in his own strength and like him, we may be strong in some ways, but there will always be situations where we are not strong enough and we don't see the big picture. We need faith to trust God, to know what is right, and to do it, even to our own peril.



### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, please help me to see myself the way *You* see me, warts and all. Grant me faith to see what is the right thing to do and strength to do it. Deliver me from doubt and fear. Please forgive me when I fail. "Speak to my weakness, mighty as Thou art; help me to love Thee as I ought to love."

– Dianne Billharz

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**APRIL 8**

*"Is that how you answer the high priest?"*



**Text: John 18:19-24**

<sup>19</sup> The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. <sup>20</sup> Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret." <sup>21</sup> Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." <sup>22</sup> When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" <sup>24</sup> Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.



**Matthias Stom, Christ Before Annas (17<sup>th</sup> c.)**

### Reflection:

Unfortunately, I am a disciplinarian at my job. I am a dean of students at one of the local middle schools. In my job I must investigate several situations with students and teachers involving misbehavior. It is my responsibility to interview students asking them questions in order to discover the truth, or as close to it as possible. I have to be very careful not to ask questions that are leading or accusatory like "why did you hit so-and-so." Instead, I must ask questions like "what happened?" "What were you feeling at the time?" "What impact did you have on others?" et cetera.

In this passage, Jesus was in a much worse place than the dean's office. However, his investigation was unfair and was

performed in a way that gave Jesus no chance to be found innocent. The religious leaders asked Jesus questions that they already knew the answer to and for that matter what the verdict was. Jesus calls them out and reminds them that they already know these answers, "*Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said*" (John 18:21). It is here that we see Jesus's frustration and I can imagine his tone may not have been as respectful as the priests were used to hearing, which is why Jesus was then struck down for his behavior.

Jesus was set up, and it was clear that he was not there to experience any kind of justice. Jesus recognized the cowardice of his accusers coming in the night to get him; Jesus understood the deceitfulness

of his disciple who identified Him; Jesus knew he was not going to get a fair trial and Jesus knew what the final outcome was going to be.

### Response:

Jesus was called to be our innocent, sacrificial lamb and he ultimately accepted the outcome of this calling. What is God calling you to? What is the tone of your response? Do you have a tone of frustration?... Or of acceptance?

### Prayer:

God, thank You for giving us Your Son. We want to know Your call for us and we want to accept it with all of our heart.  
- Ryan Ludwig

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

APRIL 9

*"Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse..."*



**Text: Matthew 27:1-10**

**27** When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. <sup>2</sup> And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

<sup>3</sup> Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, <sup>4</sup> saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." <sup>5</sup> And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. <sup>6</sup> But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." <sup>7</sup> So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. <sup>8</sup> Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. <sup>9</sup> Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, <sup>10</sup> and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."



Edward Armitage, *The Remorse of Judas* (1866)

### Reflection:

The English Standard Version in verse 3 says that Judas "changed his mind." That is a really weak translation. It's like saying that the Pacific Ocean is damp. A real understatement.

If Judas had gone shopping for black shoes and changed his mind and bought brown shoes, "changing his mind" would make sense.

If my mother had translated this verse, she would have said that Judas "came to his senses." But even that doesn't fully describe what Judas went through.

Since we are not God, we can't look into anyone else's heart. The best we can do is hear what they say and see what they do.

In the previous chapter Peter had told two servant girls that he wasn't a Christian (Anachronistically speaking. I like seven-syllable words.). Then Peter went out (v. 75) and wept bitterly. You can tell he was



sorry. And his regret was part of the reason he has been considered by many to be the first Pope of the Christian church.

In contrast, what did Judas say and do? First, he threw the 30 pieces of silver back at the Jewish clergy. That was a lot of money. When fifth graders hear of the 30 pieces of silver, they often picture 30 shiny new dimes. This was a heavy sack of silver, enough to buy a whole field, a cemetery (v. 7). This wasn't just some garden plot.

Second, Judas went insane with grief over what he had done. He had taken "blood money" and at night had spearheaded a group of armed men to seize the King of Peace. This is much worse than lying to a couple of servant girls. Judas couldn't live with himself.

—He wasn't just saying, "Gosh. I'm sorry."

—He was completely turned around.

—His heart was changed.

The fancy Greek term for this is *metanoia*. (There won't be a test on this.)

In my junior high they voted on the Person Most Likely to Succeed. They got it right. He now lives in a 5600 square foot house, has a most desirable wife, and has written 64 books.

Over the last 2000 years when the church has taken polls on the person in the New Testament Most Likely to be Damned, Judas is often the winner. They got it wrong.

Let's look at Judas from GPOV (God's Point of View). He is a most thoroughly repentant (= change your way of seeing) man.

Quiz question: Does God look at the blackness of the sin or at the sincerity of the *metanoia*?

You can condemn Judas, but I will be looking up to him in Heaven.

### Response:

On Sunday mornings confess your sins like you mean it.

### Prayer:

God, let me see things from Your Point of View.

- Stan Schmidt

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.**

## APRIL 10

*"Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'"*



### Text: John 18:28-40

<sup>28</sup> Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" <sup>30</sup> They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." <sup>31</sup> Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." <sup>32</sup> This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

<sup>33</sup> So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"

<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

<sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

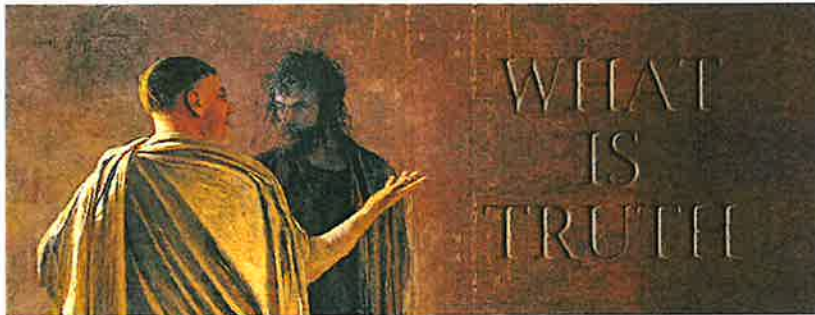
After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. <sup>39</sup> But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” <sup>40</sup> They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

## Reflection:

(vs 38) “What is truth?” retorted Pilate.

**What (dramatic pause) is (dramatic pause) truth?** This is the preeminent question for our post-modern era, and more poignantly for the 2020’s. And this question is worthy of our pondering this very day as we set our eyes and hearts towards Easter, because truth is the cornerstone to everything we believe, everything we trust, everything we hope for. Because “*if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins... We are of all men most to be pitied*” [1 Corinthians 15:17,19 (NASB)]. The historicity of the resurrection rests on the testimony of witnesses of the past. “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received... He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time...; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles*” [1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (NASB)]. “*Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed’* [the implication being “based on other people who are telling the truth”]. *Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name* [again, the implication being because what is written is true].” [John 20:29-31 (NASB)] We need people to be honest; we need them to speak truth. And others need us to speak truth. Our faith depends on it! Truth is foundational to our Faith.

So, back to the question: *what is truth?* This is a question the philosophers have opined on for millennia,



from Aristotle’s empirical truths vs. necessary truths, and Plato’s Theory of the Forms all the way to the post-modern philosophers and politicians of today. Albeit an oversimplification, most definitions and theories of truth typically divide into two camps: either some categorization or attempt at defining reality, or the perception, interpretation, application, or

genuine belief or disbelief of said reality. The second definition, however, is circular, dependent on the first (i.e. reality), and thereby is not in itself Truth unless it is based on reality. Subjective Truth is an oxymoron, and Objective Truth is redundant. Truth is reality, whether one chooses to believe it, perceive it, apply it, like it, ... or not. If something is true for you and not for me, well, my friend that isn’t Truth. Indeed, it may be a helpful practice, but it’s not Truth. If a proposal or assertion reflects reality in certain circumstances (“works for you”) while other circumstances present a situation where it does not reflect reality (“but not for me”), well, in these cases, the general assertion, without any further qualification, is not a general Truth. Truth is independent of opinion or belief or circumstance.

Perhaps at this point, as an Evangelical Christian, you are whole-heartedly agreeing with me in your mind. Yet we as the Church (capital C) can sometimes discard truth so easily, almost intentionally, and at times flippantly. Sometimes, we are so quick to accept as true narratives (sometimes quite outlandish) simply because they reinforce our beliefs (Facebook posts, a story from a friend who has a friend who’s “in the know”, a conspiracy theory from our favorite podcast, news from “our” news channel because “they tell me the truth”). I have had so many friends over the years who are willing to believe nearly anything they are told without bothering to fact check it when it reinforces something that they believe. Similarly, we often refuse to entertain people or ideas without really considering their merits if we preconceive any



conflicts with a dearly held belief. We will unashamedly and summarily reject supporting facts or cogent arguments, refusing even to acknowledge that there might exist some hint of truth or legitimacy, much less making the effort to search it out, because we disagree with the person's conclusion, or application of the truth, and because depending on what we find, that might require us to adjust our own thinking. And that scares us.

But our God is NOT afraid of the Truth, of any factoid, scientific or otherwise. He IS TRUTH. God is not less real or diminished by anything happening in the world: no government policy, no scientific discovery or theory, no lifestyle choices, no behavior or actions of any group of political or social activists. On the other hand, however, our promotion and spreading of untruths and misinformation do diminish the world's perception of Him because it makes us look foolish. Now, someone who knows their Bible might be thinking, hey, it's OK if we are considered "fools for Christ's sake" [1 Corinthians 4:10 (NASB)] or perhaps hey, "the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" [1 Corinthians 1:18 (NASB)]. And that is correct. It's OK if we are deemed foolish for following things that are true. But, "what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?" [1 Peter 2:20 (NASB)]. Contextual interpretation: if we are deemed foolish because we are endorsing things that are demonstratively false, then my friend, we ARE foolish.

And it is indeed foolish because it stems from a fear that somehow in these "facts" our God is discredited or (gasp!) proven non-existent. Ironically, WE become the stumbling block to the world and give them a reason to discredit Him. When we fail to side with truth (because we don't like or agree with that truth), why would the world listen to us when we try to tell them about the most important Truth (i.e. the Gospel of Jesus Christ). And if they won't listen, we impede the gospel because "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" [Romans 10:17 (NASB)]. We blunt the Word of God, which is the only weapon we have in the armor of God (Eph 6:13-18). And it should not go unnoticed that Truth is the belt that holds all that armor together, which gets us back to the earlier assertion: Truth is foundational to our faith. Without Truth, our spiritual armor falls apart, and we are exposed and vulnerable. Which is why it is so important that we as Christians be committed to Truth, all truth, to reality, and not to non-truths that reinforce our beliefs or opinions.

Let's consider the current state of society at large and the Church in particular. In these last days, we have reached an inflection point where evil has prevailed; truth has become relative, and squishy. This has been tolerated and overlooked, and in certain recent instances championed, by many of our leaders (including some spiritual leaders), some of whom actually embrace a world where "alternative facts" are deemed Truth (and I capitalized Truth here on purpose). And because of this, even in the Church, we have reached the point where we do not know whom to believe anymore, because everyone lies. So, we retreat into an echo chamber where we only listen to what we want to hear, and anything else that does not align with that is prejudged to be false and must be contested vigorously. The logical regression of this type of culture is continuous and increasingly extreme propaganda evolving into the endless, unfounded conspiracy theories that we find so prevalent in today's world... and in today's Church.



**Jacopo Tintoretto, Christ Before Pilate,  
(1566)**

How do we find the Church in this predicament? Precisely because we have not consistently and steadfastly sided with Truth. Do we naively think we are helping to usher in the kingdom when we spread untruths and unsubstantiated claims? Satan is the “father of lies” [John 8:44 (NASB)], so in essence we are literally attempting to “cast out Satan by the power of Satan,” to draw an analogy with Matt 12:24-26. What does the Lord say about these conspiracy theories that cause so much fear and anxiety? “For thus the Lord spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread.” [Isaiah 8:11-13 (NASB)]

How does one navigate this world of alternative facts, falsehoods, and fabrications? Jesus tells us in today’s passage: “*Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*” [John 18:37 (NIV)]. It really is that simple: be on the side of Truth. We cannot simply believe everything we hear or read, no matter the source. To be on the side of truth, we are spiritually obligated to fact check it (did you know this?). This is Scriptural! “*Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.*” [Acts 17:11 (NASB)]. Even though the Bereans were getting it straight from the great Paul (an author of the Bible no less!), they did their due diligence and went back to the Scriptures to validate what he was saying. And notice how the Bible describes them: “more noble-minded”. God tells us to test what we are told. “*Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.*” [1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NASB)]. He wants us to be on the side of Truth, no matter who we hear it from (even this devotional!).

So, what side are we on? And the people whom we are listening to, trusting in, supporting, defending, perhaps even celebrating... which side are they on? Do I stand against those who spread false information (even if they are on my “side”) as fervently as I stand against those who may not believe what I believe? Paul warns Timothy in two separate letters telling him that “*in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.*” [1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV)] and that “*the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*” [2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NIV)]. And who tickles their ears and teaches things from demons? “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, “*whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*” [1 Timothy 4:2 (NIV)]. Those intentionally spreading misinformation and outright lying to you do not care about you. They have no conscience.

So back to Pilate. After asking the question “*What is truth?*”, he went out and asked the Jews, “*Do you want me to release [the Truth]?*” (Jesus is the Truth). “*They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’*” So he did. We condemn the Roman soldiers who crucified the Truth that Good Friday, yet how often do we crucify the truth today. I fear the Church may succumb to the notion that the ends justify the means. However, my friend, in eternity (and we are in Eternity), there are no ends, there are only means. And truth matters in Eternity. “*Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying*” [Revelation 22:15 (NASB)]. In eternity, liars are placed right next to murderers and idolaters.

As we contemplate the death and resurrection of Jesus, i.e. the Truth, let's not be like Pilate and agonize over what truth is and then turn around and sentence it to death. Let's be on the side of Truth and listen to Him (v 37), so that our armor stays together (Eph. 6:14) so that we can be protected against the schemes of the Devil (Eph. 6:11).

Am I really on the side of Truth?

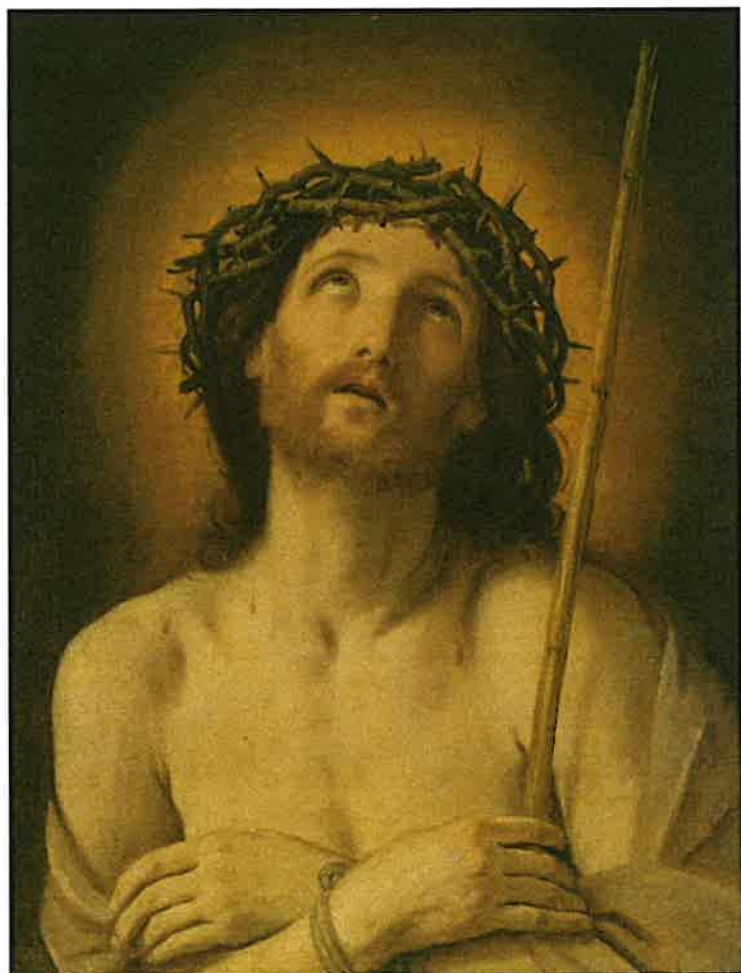
- Do I find myself believing things because it supports a firmly held belief or opinion? Do I spread it without taking responsibility of determining if it is true because I think it will convince, or at least show, other people that my belief is true?
- Do I care about the truth enough to challenge those who spread falsehoods that attempt to support what I believe as rigorously as I fight those with whom I disagree (dare I say hate?) even if something they are espousing might be true.



- Do I respect the truth enough to acknowledge it when I see it, no matter where it comes from or how inconvenient it might be for my beliefs?
- Do I fear that there might be certain facts that, if somehow true, could legitimately challenge God. Because of this fear, am I unwilling to even contemplate or try to understand them?
- Let's go one deeper and even more personal... Is there any question I am afraid to ask even in my own mind for fear of the answer? Do I realize that these potentially inconvenient truths are not challenging God, but rather the strength my own faith? Is that what really scares me, and if so, am I honest enough with myself to acknowledge that?

## Response

- Be on the side of Truth.
- "These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth... Do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate," declares the Lord,... 'so love truth and peace.'" [Zechariah 8:16-17,19 (NASB)]. Speak truth. Don't love lies. Love truth and peace.
- "Be quick to hear, slow to speak" [James 1:19 (NASB)]. Be quick to skepticize, slow to repeat.
- "He who spreads slander is a fool." [Proverbs 10:18 (NASB)] Pause before hitting that repost button.
- "Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; [1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NASB)]. Be "more noble-minded" like the Bereans. Fact check to see if something is indeed true.



Guido Reni, Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) - 1640

- Be honest with God. He is not afraid of your questions. Be honest like the desperate father with the ill child was honest, and cry out to Jesus "I do believe; help my unbelief!" [Mark 9:24 (NASB)]

## Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Help me be on the side of Truth. Help me to reject the lies and fight the falsehoods (even if I wish them to be true). Give me a discerning spirit. Help me not to be afraid of any truth because I think it might diminish You. Help me, rather, to remember that You are the Creator, that You created Reality, and that that Reality ultimately aligns with You. Give me the patience for either waiting to see that alignment reveal itself or for that "truth" to be proven false by subsequent facts (as opposed to other manufactured falsehoods presented as truth). Any truth that mankind uncovers was created by You and does not surprise You. I may not understand it. It may not fit into the narrative I've grown accustomed to, and thereby may threaten my faith. But it does not threaten You. So, in these cases, Lord, hear my cry, "I do believe; help my unbelief!"

- Steve Patton

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

APRIL 11

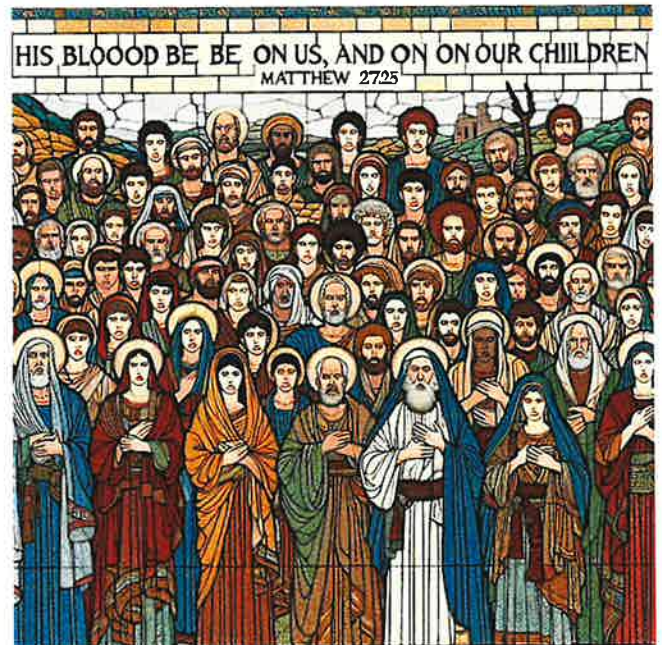
*"His blood be on us and on our children!"*



**Text: Matthew 27:15-26**

<sup>15</sup> Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup> And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" <sup>18</sup> For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. <sup>19</sup> Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." <sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" <sup>23</sup> And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

<sup>24</sup> So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." <sup>25</sup> And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" <sup>26</sup> Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.



### Reflection:

We are all, somewhat squeamishly and disgustedly, familiar with the unfair circumstances of pain and agony that are played out in these emotional scenes. All sorts of self-righteous emotions vent up as we point our fingers at ALL of the erring "actors" in this scene. That said, I'm going to ask that you give me some latitude (grace) to concentrate not on what we did to Jesus the Christ, but what was missing in this entire interaction until it was brought up by Jesus and flippantly responded to by Pilate – *"What is truth?"*

Having just gone through the latest update of our democratic governing process, we are once again confronted with the age-old saying – *Truth is in the eye of the beholder*, and the latest variation – *That may be your truth, but it sure ain't mine!* Hhmmm... Can your "truth" be different than my "truth?" .... NO! Your opinion can be different than mine, but there is only one Truth. Example: *Elect her (or him) and our democracy is all but finished!*" (...need I say more?)

It could be said that Truth is the nameplate for Fact..

What is being played out in these few verses is a manifestation of, and display of, what is called in our day "Winning at all costs." Public discourse gives way to influence where opinion is overruled by emotion, volume and clever slogans. How do we get back to Pilate's only honest statement – *What is truth?*

In my conversations with my kids during Kid's Club, I've been trying to help them see that the Bible is God's Story, a Story where He lays out His Plans for us and our world. In addition to learning about Jesus, *why He came and what He did*, they (WE!) need to see that the Bible is TRUE because it is God's Story! How does each Story build on to and further explain the overall Story of love and salvation? *But....* Yes, there are a million questions they need to ask and we will need to respond to them in a way that shows them that *"through Faith"* all of the answers are in the Bible and they are ALL TRUE! Here is a statement (from last year's Kid's Club Book – "The Promises of God") which is talking directly to the kids about today's Scripture: *"You might even be feeling really sad right now reading or listening to this. But have hope because remember that this was God's Plan, and God's plans actually always turn out to be good."*



Here's how Charles Swindoll ("Jesus") looks at the main characters in this scene and their individual relationship to Truth:

*"Pilate was completely convinced by the truth, yet terrified to admit it or act upon it for fear of losing favor of certain people.*

*Herod was so distracted by superficial pursuits that truth had long ago become irrelevant.*

*Pilate's wife was so easily persuaded and carelessly undiscerning that truth and fiction comingled with ease.*

*The religious leaders were willfully unconcerned with truth because it frustrated their personal agendas.."*

He then goes on to reference a common theme used in connection with this story which anchors Truth directly to the Bible:

*...as the Scriptures declared.... Mt. 26:24*

*...For the Scriptures say... Mt. 26:31*

*...would the Scriptures be fulfilled... Mt. 26:54*

*...as recorded in the Scriptures.... Mt. 26:56*

*...The Scriptures declare... John 13:18*

*...as the Scriptures foretold... John 17:12*

*...The Scripture says... Luke 22:37*



**Rembrandt van Rijn, *Pilate Washes His Hands* (ca. 1660)**

Years ago my Mom helped me learn this axiom –

*"When there's too much information (TMI – They didn't use abbreviations back then), STOP and identify the facts that you do know and then build on that." Isn't that what God is telling us about the Bible – "My children, when you are confused and looking for TRUTH – go to My Scriptures!"*

### **Response:**

So, if TRUTH is our guide, our foundation, our source of strength, our true lifeblood, if all Scripture is TRUE, then ~"Let us run the race that is before us and never give up!" – Hebrews 12:1

### **Prayer:**

Our Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, there are so many ways to start our prayers... Help me please to start each prayer with *You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.* THANK YOU! - Dan Carne

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

## **APRIL 12**

*"The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'"*

**Text: John 19:1-16**



**LENT**

**19** Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. <sup>2</sup> And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. <sup>3</sup> They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. <sup>4</sup> Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." <sup>5</sup> So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" <sup>6</sup> When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in

him.”<sup>7</sup> The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”<sup>8</sup> When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.<sup>9</sup> He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.<sup>10</sup> So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?”<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

<sup>12</sup> From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”<sup>13</sup> So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.<sup>14</sup> Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”<sup>15</sup> They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”<sup>16</sup> So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

### **Reflection:**

We’ve all, at one point or another, deflected blame for our own mistakes onto someone or something else. It’s almost second nature, a flaw in our character that we all share. But Jesus offers us a different path. Even the most celebrated leaders of history can’t compare to Him when it comes to taking responsibility. President Truman famously said, “The buck stops here,” promising to bear the weight of leadership without passing it on. Truman still passed blame to others sometimes. Not perfect, right. However, Jesus was perfect and it is reflected in Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice when He declared, “It is finished” (John 19:28-30), taking upon Himself all our blame, pain, and sin for all eternity.



**Antonio Ciseri, *Behold the Man*, 1871**

In Jesus’ time, the Jewish leaders were adept at shifting blame. They not only demanded the death of an innocent man but did so with full knowledge of His miracles and the prophecies that spoke of Him. Blinded by ambition and power, rather than acknowledging their part, they manipulated the Roman authorities into executing Jesus, claiming allegiance to Caesar, whom they secretly despised, all out of cowardice and convenience.

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### **Response:**

This teaches us a lesson: we should not place our faith in any human leader, no matter how great they may seem, for they all fall short when compared to Jesus, our true King. Jesus took upon Himself our blame, our sins, and did not pass them on. What an incredible God we serve.

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, King Jesus, guide us to emulate Your wisdom in our leadership, whether we lead others or simply ourselves. Help us not to pass the buck but to own our faults and accept Your free gift of forgiveness from our blame. Thank You, Jesus, for being the one where all blame truly stops. You shouldered our shame and our sins, absorbing them into Your mercy and love. Thank You for Your boundless grace. Amen.

- Patrick McNeely

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



APRIL 14

*"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*



**Text: Matthew 27:27-44**

<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. <sup>28</sup> And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" <sup>30</sup> And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup> And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup> <sup>P</sup>As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), <sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. <sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. <sup>36</sup> Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. <sup>37</sup> And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." <sup>38</sup> Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. <sup>39</sup> And those who passed by derided

him, wagging their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." <sup>41</sup> So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, <sup>42</sup> "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" <sup>44</sup> And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.



**Titian, Christ Carrying the Cross (1508)**

### **Reflection:**

The mocking statement this devotional attempts to explore is -*"If you are the son of God come down from the cross"*. Jesus is taunted and bullied throughout the crucifixion. It is difficult for nonbelievers to even begin to understand why he wouldn't just save himself if he was indeed one who had performed

miracles. However, It isn't about saving himself. Out of his ultimate love for us, he stayed on the cross. The prophecies foretold the Sacrificed One must be free of sin, and that is Jesus alone, God's one and only begotten son who took the burden, humiliation and torment as he sacrificed his life for us so that we, having acknowledged his great sacrifice, will be saved and reunited with him in our eternal resting place.

And so, like Simon of Cyrene, we must take up His cross today. We seem to see that the world and its view of Christianity seems to be losing hold and moving away, and just as our Lord was reviled, we too may find that at times our world is a bully to Christians. We may find we are called hypocrites, ignorant and intolerant. We may not face hostility and immediate persecution, but we may experience isolation from family or other groups. Forgiveness comes at a great cost. Jesus' last words from the cross were, *"It is finished"* and *"Into your hands I commit my spirit."* Jesus died, knowing that he had accomplished his purpose—purchasing forgiveness for you and for me. Lord, give us courage to take up our cross and follow him.

Jesus also prayed, *"not my will, but Thine be done."* There was no other way. Jesus had to remain on the Cross. He was the One and Only, the sacrificial lamb that had come to fulfill the prophecies out of his great love for us.

## Response:

If you feel pain and suffering or bullying or mockery in your life today, or ever, use it as a means of remembering and being united to the pain and suffering, the bullying and mockery that fell upon our Savior Jesus who ultimately redeemed the whole world. Thank you Jesus for the sacrifice you made for us.

Jesus made it possible for us to be forgiven because He bore the penalty of our sin on the Cross. God punished Him instead of us. And in so doing He offers us the chance to be forgiven. Jesus tells us that if we will seek Him and follow Him, then we will be forgiven. No matter what you have done, no matter how bad you think you are, if you will trust in what Jesus did for you at the Cross and follow Him as your Lord, He promises that He has paid your penalty.

The reason God allowed this to happen can be summed up in one word: love. Jesus loved us enough to bear the penalty of our sin himself. We cannot look at the Cross and be unmoved. When you look at the Cross, remember the reason Jesus stayed there—it's because of you. Your sin made it necessary for Jesus to die, but you can also see that Jesus did all of that because He loved you so much that He wanted to provide a way for you to be forgiven—even though you didn't deserve it. We are reminded of what true love and forgiveness really looks like. Jesus shows us that true love is costly. To overlook a fault of someone else, to extend forgiveness rather than retribution, to care for another when they don't care for you, is tough. Jesus demonstrates true love at the Cross. When we see his love for us, it should enable us to love and forgive others in the same way.

It may not be easy to follow Jesus. It may cost us a great deal. It will be a hard path to follow. It may cause us to be ridiculed and to feel utterly alone at times, but we must remember why we follow Jesus. When you're tempted to give up in your faith, when you feel like you just can't keep carrying on, remember

where His road leads: to the Cross, where forgiveness and love are found. The Christian life isn't easy, but we should be willing to endure whatever comes because we know the end result is worth it. We must take up our cross and follow Jesus each day.

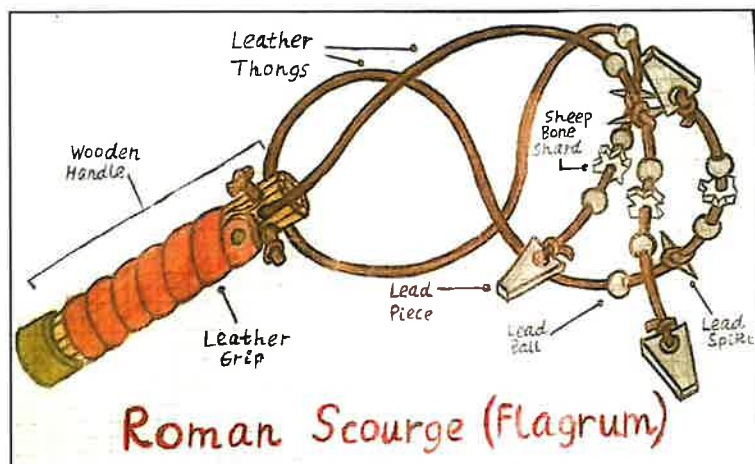
## Prayer:

Thank You for the ultimate sacrifice of Your Son, for even in the face of such cruelty, Jesus prayed for His tormentors, teaching us the power of forgiveness. May we carry His love in our hearts and strive to live lives that reflect His grace and compassion. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- Marlene Hansen



**Jan Mostaert, Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) - ca.1550**



**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.



APRIL 15

*"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*



**Text: Luke 23:26-43**

<sup>26</sup> And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. <sup>28</sup> But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' <sup>30</sup> Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' <sup>31</sup> For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

<sup>32</sup> Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of

condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

#### **Reflection:**

This is a very full passage in the story of Jesus' death. In it we see that...

Simon carries.

Women weep.

Criminals decide.

Rulers & soldiers mock.

And Pilate proclaims.

And Jesus has a message for each one.

To Simon, Jesus apparently spoke powerfully by his final actions. This is made clear by Mark's account of Simon's Cross carrying where he is called "*the father of Alexander and Rufus*" (Mark 15:21). Simon's sons would be known to the later Christian community that Mark was a part of. Then, in the Apostle Paul's closing remarks to the Roman church (Romans 16:13) he says "*Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.*" It is reasonable to assume this Rufus is the same person in Mark and in Romans, and so his mother—Simon of Cyrene's wife!—was like a mother to Paul the Apostle! It seems that Simon, on that ugly day when the Romans forced him to be a part of that terrible parade of death, saw something beautiful, something real, in Jesus. And this moved him to find out more about this man whose cross he helped to carry. And he and his family became fully committed followers of Jesus. It seems, then, that as Jesus, bruised and beaten, walked the road no one would want to be on, his message to this man forced to share intimately in this horrific event was "follow me." And Simon did just that.

To the weeping women, Jesus speaks clearly: *Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.* Unlike the leaders who will remain cruel and callous toward Jesus, these women sincerely lament what is happening to the innocent Jesus. Jesus turns to them, and says that their weeping should really be for



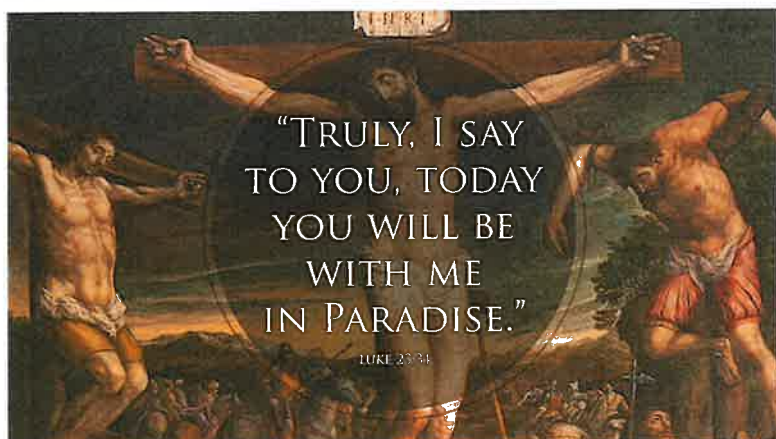
themselves and for their children. He is not being overtaken by death: He is willingly obeying His Father as He goes to His death and then to glory. They, on the other hand, are soon to suffer under God's judgment and human violence as their city is destroyed by the Romans. If people, he indicates, can torture and kill Him—the sinless Son of God—what horrors will they not be capable of in the future? Weep for yourselves. It's an expression of real knowledge and deep compassion, especially poignant when we remember where Jesus is when he says it.

To the criminals Jesus also speaks.

The first criminal seems to have decided against Jesus. He was likely in the habit of deciding against the rest of humanity in general unless he could find a way to extract some sort of personal benefit from them. This man railed against Jesus in anger to do something for Himself and, more to the point, for him (having no idea of the great work Jesus was doing at that very moment!). To this angry and dying man Jesus spoke with silence. I believe this was significant. He absorbed the man's harsh words, and He didn't strike back. Instead, He directs His attention to the other criminal. Thus, He helps us do the same. Jesus didn't come to fix all of us hardened sinners: He came to save us. He worked to compel us to come to our

senses and turn to Him, and when we do...

Jesus' brief interaction with the second criminal is a beautiful moment, as telling and inspiring as any to be found throughout God's Holy Word. And what He says is "Today you will be with me in paradise." To this criminal, and a criminal foul enough to be judged worthy of crucifixion, Jesus essentially says his past is no longer significant. It is *now with Me* that matters. I hear you. My Father has softened your heart toward Me, And now things for you are going to be just fine, as fine



as fine can be. I am struck by the reality that Jesus gave this enormous gift to a man whose potential for any kind of practical, earthly benefit to Jesus, His Church or His ministry was about zero. His entire life as a Jesus follower was going to last an hour or two and would be spent hanging from a cross. And, with utmost significance, eternity holding its breath, this second criminal decided *for* Jesus.

To the mocking soldiers and rulers, Jesus again offers silence. Like with the first criminal, He doesn't dignify their ignorant words with a direct response. Jesus does offer to them, though, the same general message He gives to everyone involved—all of the sinners who were complicit in this gross miscarriage of justice and exercise in human wickedness... and all of the sinners whose behavior has made this terrible sacrifice necessary (that would include me and you). The message comes in the form of a prayer: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" Gracious to the end, Jesus, astoundingly, prays for the blessing and benefit of the very people who are hurting Him.

Finally, there is Pilate. He doesn't make a personal appearance in this episode, but his presence is felt. There is a sign over Jesus—"This is the King of the Jews."—and it was put over Jesus at the insistence of governor Pilate (see John 19:19ff). Pilate's sign certainly was not an expression of this Roman's faith in Jesus. He made it and had it placed over Jesus most likely as a way of taking a swing at the Jewish leaders whose underhanded and manipulative dealings with Jesus were evident. It was a way for him to call them out for the ways they were using him and Rome to achieve their own spiteful and selfish ends. The sign, however, was accurate, and so to Pilate, and Rome, and all the watching world, Jesus also speaks. He speaks by His presence. He speaks by going to the Cross. He speaks by suffering and dying there. "This is what the True King of God's people looks like... This is how My Father's work is accomplished once and for all... This is what His Eternal Son does to bring salvation to all of His people, all those who will trust in Him by faith..."





## Response:

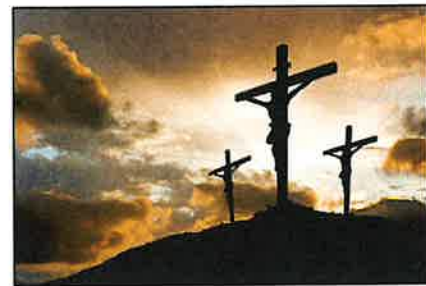
We are Simon. Let us help Jesus when called upon. Let us take up our cross, bear the burden of living life freed from the lure of worldly aspirations and bound to the person and work of Jesus..

We are the women. Let us allow our hearts to be broken by the things that break the heart of God. Let us weep for all of us in this world of too-frequent suffering.

We are the criminals. Let us decide for Jesus, and let us rest in the assurance of his good will and great power and completed work for us.

We are the soldiers and rulers. Let us own up to our personal wickedness, the sin that clings to us, and let us hear the prayer we need from the only One who could say it with necessary authority and power: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

And we are Pilate. With whatever faith we can find in ourselves, let us affirm and announce that Jesus is indeed our King, now and forever. With an openness to God to increase our faith, let us serve His purposes, in His world, for His glory.



## Prayer:

A prayer of Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471)

Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know, To love what I ought to love,  
To praise what delights Thee most, To value what is precious in Thy sight,  
To hate what is offensive to Thee.

Do not suffer me to judge according to the sight of my eyes,  
Nor to pass sentence according to the hearing of the ears of ignorant men;  
But to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual,  
And above all, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of Thy will.

- Jay Hull

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.**

**APRIL 16**

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



**Text: Mark 15:33-41**

<sup>33</sup> And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup> And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>35</sup> And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." <sup>36</sup> And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." <sup>37</sup> And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. <sup>38</sup> And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

<sup>40</sup> There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

## Reflection:

Cowardly Pilate satisfied the raucous crowd and had Jesus flogged before handing Him over to an entire company of soldiers to oversee His crucifixion. These rough profane men (non-Jewish local recruits) further beat their captive, spit on Him, and mocked Him with a ragtag "royal robe" and a "crown" whipped together from briars. Finally, they nailed the weakened Jesus to the cross where He endured hours of pain

and ridicule. These events were prophetically described in amazing detail in messianic Psalm 22, written by David centuries before crucifixion was even conceived as a brutal instrument of capital punishment.

Then suddenly at noon—the sixth hour—darkness enveloped the whole land. The word “land” that Mark uses actually means the entire earth. Amos 8:9 foretells this cosmic event: *“In that day,”* declares the Sovereign Lord, *“I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.”* The onlookers were no doubt stunned. What was happening! Who was this on the cross? After three hours of supernatural darkness (so like the ninth plague on Egypt), Jesus suddenly cried out in a loud voice the very words of Psalm 22:1, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

What was happening in the darkness? What did the darkness mean? The onlookers surely did not know. Jesus’ words are recorded in Aramaic, so “Eloi,” which means “My God,” was misunderstood by some as “Elijah.” Thinking that Jesus was calling out to Elijah, these people watched to see if Elijah would appear. The Jews at that time believed that in a crisis Elijah would come to protect and save the righteous. But Jesus knew that on the Cross at that moment God did not see Him as righteous, but as the embodiment of sin. II Corinthians 5:21 proclaims this mystery, *“God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”* This sacrificial act, this great exchange, is what enables all who believe to be able to stand before a holy God.

The oppressive darkness demonstrated the withdrawal of His Father’s presence with His beloved Son when Jesus became sin for us. That day God’s holy wrath against sin was unleashed on His Son. Jesus bore the agony of separation from His Father so that we might come before God righteous in Christ Jesus. Thus, from the Cross came Jesus’ loud cry of pain: *“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”* Jesus knew that bearing our sins on the cross would bring this rupture. His agonized prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane reflects this somber reality, yet Jesus still submitted to His Father’s will. Our access to God, obtained by Jesus’ sacrificial death, was symbolized that day by the Heaven-to-Earth tearing of the thick temple curtain that shielded sinful people from God’s holy presence.



**Francisco de Zurbarán,  
Christ on the Cross (1627)**

### **Response:**

The centurion, who witnessed these amazing events, spoke truth: *“Surely this man was the Son of God!”* Jesus once asked His disciples, *“Who do men say that I am?”* This is the question that all humanity will have to answer. The people in this Passion narrative had different answers. Pilot viewed Jesus as a problem; the soldiers treated him as a deluded object of scorn; some bystanders thought Him possibly an innocent man worthy of Elijah’s rescue; the faithful women disciples watched their beloved teacher and friend. Let us proclaim along with the Roman centurion, *“Surely this man was the Son of God!”* Let us praise God that He sent His Son to become sin for us so that we might be righteous in Christ.

### **Prayer:**

Thank You, Jesus, that while I was yet a sinner, you loved me and died for my sins and for all who believe. Your willingness to endure physical and spiritual suffering to atone for our sins humbles me and fills me with awe. Mold me more and more into Your holy image, I pray. Amen.

- Debbie Barackman

*“who is Light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5)*

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.**



## APRIL 17 (Maundy Thursday)

*"Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first."*



**Text: Matthew 27:57-66**

<sup>57</sup> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup> And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud <sup>60</sup> and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.



**James Tissot, Guards at the Tomb - ca.1890**

<sup>62</sup> The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup> and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' <sup>64</sup> Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." <sup>66</sup> So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

### **Reflection:**

We humans are big on guarding things. Movies about breaking into places that are heavily guarded, I think, is a film genre all its own. We see guards all the time these days—banks, airports, sports arenas, national borders, concert halls (we had to be frisked last month before we could get into Pioneer Auditorium to hear Amy Grant).

Why this preoccupation with being on guard? I think it is because we are 1) *in the dark* (don't know when a burglar may strike or what a real terrorist looks like so our alarms are on all day), 2) *at risk* (our over-privilege means others have reasons to take from us... so our communities are gated) and 3) *under pressure* (all of this make us fearful and fear brings

pressure).

As a meaningful side note: It seems to me that what we guard most may be a good indicator of what we value. Our money, for example, we keep close to us in our wallets or in locked safes or guarded banks. By contrast, we seem to allow our children plenty of unguarded time on the internet where a frightening array of bad ideas and dark influences are ready to steal their minds. Hmmm...

As with us and our guard-crazy culture, the chief priests and Pharisees of Jesus' day, after His death and His entombment provided by Joseph of Arimathea, were also *in the dark*. They had no clue who Jesus was. They deceived themselves into thinking He was some kind of hellish deceiver.

They were *at risk*. They were the religious and social elite, and they did not want to lose their place of over-privilege. They needed good guards to keep things this way. But maybe, like us Americans and our money and our children, they were guarding too well the wrong things.

They were *under pressure*. Jesus put great pressure on them. He threatened to upset their self-serving status quo, so they called Him a devil and did their best to discredit him. But everything He did and everything He said just didn't fit their "He's the enemy" narrative. Pressure increased, so they had to get rid of him. Resorting to shady and dishonest use of their own systems of law and justice, they got Jesus condemned and crucified. The depths of their clear and unlawful manipulations to take care of their "Jesus problem" must have caused the pressure for these men pretending to be the bearers of God's truth and justice to become nearly unbearable. Jesus had to have been a devil. But He just didn't ever fit the profile. But it had to be so. To think otherwise would make the chief priests and the Pharisees devils themselves. No. It mustn't be so.

Now the rumor was that Jesus was going to rise from death. The in the dark, at risk and under pressure religious leaders feared His followers would steal the body and claim the miracle. So they hired guards. And despite all their efforts, they simply could not keep Jesus in the tomb. And when Jesus rose, what did they do? *When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."* So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. (Matthew 28:12-15) The story of deception the leaders feared is now their story. The possible lie is now their actual lie. The irony is wonderful if it weren't so terrible. Could they actually overlook the



**Philippe de Champaign, Ecce Homo  
(Behold the Man) - 1640**

logical problems—like if the soldiers were asleep how did they know who came and took the body? Could they truly excuse their underhanded use of bribery? Apparently. Everything had to fit the "Jesus is a devil, and devils don't rise" narrative.

It is worth asking, finally, what exactly are the desperate priests guarding? If they think they are guarding the tomb of Jesus against His grave-robbing disciples, they aren't: His disciples have no such plans and are going to be as surprised as anybody when their Savior shows up again and alive. If they think they are guarding against Jesus Himself getting up and getting out, they aren't: By the power of God, His power, Jesus rose. If they think they are guarding against some undesirable inauguration of a new religion centered on Jesus of Nazareth, they weren't: Here we are 2,000 years later writing devotional books encouraging people to look at Jesus and follow Him. So what were these in the dark, at risk and under pressure folks truly guarding? Not the tomb of Jesus, but their own! They were guarding themselves against the reality that God, their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had come to fulfill His promises to His people. They were guarding themselves against their True Lord's saving work, against the mission that Jesus had now completed by which their own tombs could be found empty as well.

#### **Response:**

What kinds of things do you see yourself guarding most passionately? Why?

Are there ways you are guarding yourself against the full freedom and rich life Jesus has brought to the world and to our lives? How can such guards be removed?



### Prayer:

Lord God, I confess that I do guard myself against You and against the fullness of what life with You could look like. I am in the dark in many ways. I feel myself to be at risk so much of the time. And so I feel the pressure of fear that my ignorance and sense of vulnerability bring. Help me. I trust that You have raised me to new life by Your death and resurrection, Jesus. Make that new life a clearer and deeper and more beautiful reality in my life today. To You be the glory forever. Amen.

- Jay Hull

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**APRIL 18 (Good Friday)**

*"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'"*



**Text: John 20:1-18**

**20** Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. **2** So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." **3** So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. **4** Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, **7** and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. **8** Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **9** for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples went back to their homes.

**11** But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. **13** They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." **14** Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." **16** Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

**18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

### Reflection:

John 20: 1-9 is a narrative of the events leading up to the discovery and realization that Jesus had risen from the dead. However, this realization was not the first response of Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter or John. Mary was the first to arrive at the tomb of Jesus and see that the stone sealing the tomb had been removed from its entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and John. We don't know if that is who she sought or if it was the first of Jesus' followers she found. She told them her belief that "they," most likely the authorities, had removed the body of Jesus to some unknown and probably hidden location.

Simon Peter and John run to the tomb to see for themselves just what has happened. John being the faster of the two arrives first. Looking into the tomb he sees the burial clothes of linen lying in the tomb. Simon Peter next arriving, goes into the tomb, and he also sees the burial cloths and a facial cloth which had been wrapped around Jesus' head. John then enters the tomb realizing Jesus' body is not there. Neither

Simon Peter nor John realizes the significance of what has happened. They simply see that Jesus' body is missing.

The events foretold in the Old Testament did not register with Mary Magdalene, John or Simon Peter.

If we place ourselves in their shoes, how would we each respond? I suggest much as Mary did, and though not stated, I expect Simon Peter and John believed in accord. Consider that Mary, Simon Peter and John had just three days before lost one they loved and cared for deeply. They were grieving their loss just as you and I grieve when we lose someone close to us, someone we loved and shared our lives with. We each have lost those we have loved. It is not easy, this grieving process. Death is such finality.

The three went to Jesus' tomb and found only burial cloths and his body missing. I would expect each of them to be upset, have deep concern, questions and anger. "They have taken his body" is Mary's thought, the authorities have intervened to squash any thought of Jesus' rising from the dead among his followers. Their initial reaction and response is one that we very well, and likely, would experience in such a circumstance.

Mary in her grief returns to the empty tomb crying. She bent over and sees two angels in white seated where Jesus had been. They ask of her, "Why are you crying." Rather than being amazed by seeing the two angels, she speaks of her concern that Jesus' body has been taken away. Perhaps in her deep grief, she can only think of the missing body of Jesus. It is to that though she speaks, saying "they have taken my lord

away and I don't know where they put him." In deep grief one's mind can be frozen on one matter and one matter only. Turning to Jesus who she perceives as a gardener, she again speaks to her concern of the missing body of Jesus.

Interestingly, Mary is the first person to whom Jesus reveals himself. Perhaps he was moved by her grief as she stood crying at his tomb. Certainly, she was grieving deeply at his death while the disciples returned to their homes. The angels may have been a prelude of his appearance to Mary. The angels' appearance speaks to a holy event, which is manifested by Jesus' appearance. Mary goes to the disciples and tells them she had seen the Lord and what he had spoken to her.

The disciples gathered in a locked room and Jesus appears. He speaks to them. Then he shows them his hands and side which have been pierced. After this the disciples are overjoyed. I would think overjoyed and amazed at his appearance. The dead do not come back to life, and yet standing before them is Jesus in fulfillment of the scriptures. Surely they were beyond human understanding. Yet there is Jesus, their Lord, our Lord. You and I are also rightly amazed by this returning of Jesus. It is beyond our human understanding. That of which we know but don't fully understand is accepted and believed in faith.



**Lucy McTier, Mary at the Tomb**



**Rembrandt van Rijn, The Resurrection of Jesus - 1639**



**Response:**

Ours is to believe in faith and to love in hope, faith and love. And of these three, love is the greater. Love is not always easy. In this contentious and divided world, in which so many issues divide one from another, to love is a challenge. Neither is love easy for some to express. Hurts, losses, and disappointments in others are barriers to the expression of love. Social expectations, social distinctions, social problems, and social isolation and estrangement are each difficult to overcome. I struggle to live with an attitude of love for others for all the above reasons and for those that live or believe differently than I do. It takes discipline and mindfulness not to be hardened, to become withdrawn from the expression of love. It is ours to live in faith and to express that faith in love for others, the love that Jesus holds for each of us.

**Prayer:**

Lord, please help me to live with an attitude of love for others. Especially for those who live in ways I don't understand. Soften my heart. Lead me to ways to show love for others, for those not as fortunate as myself. Lead me to discern how to best express love for others. And forgive me when I fail to love others, to hold others in judgment as not deserving of my love. Forgive me of my pride and arrogance and let me be always grateful for the undeserved blessings you bestow on me. Grant unto me a spirit of kindness, gratefulness and peace. Amen.

- Robert Bennett

**TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**APRIL 19**

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."*



**Text: Matthew 28:16-20**

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Reflection:**

As a girl and young woman, I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles and later attended a very multicultural university in California. The majority of my life has been spent around people of all races, languages, and ideologies and both experiences afforded me the opportunity to have friends from literally all over the world: Guam, Japan, Chile, Holland, Mexico, Italy, Philippines, and beyond. I felt very fortunate to know so many different and diverse types of people. While attending UC Davis, I even had (silly) dreams of being appointed an ambassador to an exotic country one day! While the ambassadorship never came to fruition through the US government, I was charged by my Savior to be an ambassador for Him. In some ways, I resigned the international aspect of sharing the gospel to missionaries... that was for THEM, not me, I'm in Reno, not Malaysia. But God, in His infinite wisdom, has charged all of us to share the gospel with every nation, language, people, and tribe, teaching them to obey all that He has commanded.

While I am not a missionary in an exotic country, I do teach at a very multicultural school, live in a multicultural community, and have family members with very different viewpoints on God than I do (even hostile and foreign). God has called me to share the gospel with them, and honestly, I'm afraid. Sometimes, I think it would be easier to share the gospel with a complete stranger halfway across the world than with a family member who has openly rejected God, actively seeks to dismantle His Word, and is proudly

unsaved. How can I even begin to speak to someone who seeks to destroy Christianity? Then God humbly reminds me that His servant Paul did the very same thing: sought to ruin the lives and even kill Christians in the first century. So, how can I obey God and share the gospel with people in my school and community, with people who openly oppose Christianity and, given the opportunity, would persecute me for my beliefs? God said in 2 Corinthians 5:20a: "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal [to unbelievers] through us.*" Through me?? You mean someone is watching me, YOU, and hoping that they can have what we have? YES! They want *peace* that passes all understanding... *hope* that endures... *joy* in every circumstance.... *unconditional love*... To be *unburdened* by the crushing weight of their sin.

### **Response;**

Just by Christ living in us, we demonstrate these qualities all the time and, yes, some of the most hostile people watching us, want what we have: The saving grace of Jesus Christ. God is drawing sinners to Himself by using Christians like me and you to represent Him to the world! What a high calling!! While we may not be a US ambassador in The Seychelles or Greece, we have been appointed as ambassadors by the King of Kings and that is an honorable and worthy calling.

### **Prayer:**

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for calling us into partnership with You in Your great work of seeking and finding all Your people. Thank You for appointing us Your ambassadors, and help us to do this well for You as we proclaim Your Good News to the ends of the earth and to the end of the block. Equip us. Inspire us. Direct us. Amen.

- Lindsay Rowe

***TODAY I TOOK THE FOLLOWING ACTION OF SERVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOMEONE ELSE, TO THE GLORY OF GOD & AS PART OF MY PREPARATION FOR EASTER: \_\_\_\_\_.***







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