

THE GIFT OF LENT

2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



Hello Friends,

Welcome to our Resurrection Church 2021 Lenten Devotional! 2020 and 2021 have certainly been a “year of Lent.” All the losses, deaths, separations, pains, anxieties and turmoils of the past year are powerfully summed up in the death, sorrow and self-denial of this season we call Lent. My hope and prayer for us is that this Lent, more than any other in our life time, will be a time we can dig deeply into the “sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” because of the extraordinary once-in-a-century difficulties we have faced this year. As Kagan Bigler writes on March 26, though we may not understand these hardships, in Christ they do have a purpose—to transform us and bring us into deeper communion with Jesus.

This year’s Lenten Devotional does not include Sundays, which are traditional feast days, in the season of Lent. It also does not include Holy Week, when we will gather to observe, the events which took place in the last week of Jesus’ life. I invite you to read through this devotional as part of your observation of “a Holy Lent.” Thank you to each person who contributed a devotional this year. I look forward to “drawing near to God” and celebrating this season of Lent with you.

Grace & Peace, Rev. Elijah Lovejoy



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Get the Plunger!

Ash Wednesday, February 17

He knows how we are made; he remembers we are dust. Psalm 103:14

Our downstairs toilet overflowed last week. It was a mess and no fun to clean up. But after many paper towels, a trash bag, Lysol wipes and a plunger, our bathroom was finally clean.

Why am I telling you something nobody wants to hear about? Because the season of Lent is a lot like our overflowing toilet. Sin has stopped up God's beautiful creation. Rage, lust, arrogance, depression, suicide, greed, envy, idolatry and sexual immorality are overflowing in our streets, communities, homes, schools, work places and hearts. Ravi Zacharias anybody?

We don't like talking about sin, the mess it has made of our lives or what Jesus did to clean it up. That's why we have the season of Lent. Think of Lent as our annual time of "intensive spiritual spring cleaning." During this season, we focus on Jesus' journey to the cross. We spend 40 days fasting, praying, fulfilling vows to the Lord, engaging in spiritual combat, confessing our sins and asking God's forgiveness through Jesus. It's not that we don't do these things at other times. We just do them intensively during Lent—like we celebrate Jesus' birth intensively during the 12 days of Christmas.

Biblically, the 40 days of Lent correspond to Jesus' 40 days of battle with the devil in the wilderness, Moses' 40 days on Mount Sinai, Israel's 40 years in the wilderness and especially the last week of Jesus' life, which we call "Holy Week." Jesus could have chosen any time to die for the sins of the world, but he specifically chose the Old Testament Liturgical Festival of Passover, which we celebrate during Holy Week.

It has been a hard past year. A lot has overflowed in 2020 and into 2021. But take courage. You are not alone. Jesus faced these same hardships while on earth. As the author of Hebrews says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). And David says in the book of Psalms, "He knows how we are made; he remembers we are dust" (Psalm 103:14).

So this Lent, whatever suffering, hardship, temptation, fear or sinful stronghold you are facing, whatever burdens, losses, fears or anguish you are carrying from the past year, bring them to Jesus. Lean into him. Seek him as the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Let him comfort you with this promise, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

Then on Easter Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, we will be able to celebrate what a beautiful, clean, new creation Jesus has made out of our overflowing sin. This is the Gift of Lent. Jesus has set aside this time for us to go deeper, confess, seek him, heal and grow into the new life of his resurrection. Let's embrace this much-needed gift together. -Rev. Elijah Lovejoy

What Destroyed The Earth?

February 18

“⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

Genesis 9:8-11

What destroyed the earth? In my first attempt to write this devotion I thought God just didn't think the earth was beautiful or good anymore, but that wasn't true. While editing my paper my mom said something that caught my attention, “You're making it sound like God did something wrong; as if He's the bad guy in the story when the cause of the problem is human sin.” I realized this was true.

Throughout the Old Testament the Israelites go back and forth from repenting and worshiping God to worshiping idols and committing every sin that could possibly be committed. God didn't want to destroy the earth, but humans drove Him to destroy it. He was sad to destroy it, but it made Him even sadder to see his creation act this way. God tried everything He could possibly think of to help them turn from their sinful ways. Nothing worked, and He finally went to His last resort: Destroying the earth. God didn't want His whole creation to die, so He saved the one righteous person, Noah, and his family.

So who or what destroyed the earth? Human sin. People in Noah's time were not taking God seriously. Perhaps they thought, “Well, God said that we will be punished if we disobey Him, but He hasn't done anything yet, so let's keep committing sin.” Then God flooded the earth; something they didn't think was possible. In the days of Noah if a person sinned they received God's punishment. In the New Testament Jesus died on the cross so that we don't have to bear the burden of sin's punishment.

Noah and Jesus have similarities and differences. Noah had sin; Jesus was perfect. An example of when Noah sinned is Genesis 9:20-23.

²⁰In those days Noah became a farmer, and he made a vine-garden. ²¹And he took of the wine of it and was overcome by drink; and he was uncovered in his tent. ²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father unclothed, and gave news of it to his two brothers outside. ²³And Shem and Japheth took a robe, and putting it on their backs went in with their faces turned away, and put it over their father so that they might not see him unclothed.

Another difference is that Jesus saved and is saving billions, but Noah only saved eight people. We may feel like Noah, only saving or helping a few people, but God is helping us accomplish so much more. Last but not least Noah had the ability to offer others salvation once, but Jesus' salvation is unending.

-Charissa Lovejoy

Psalms 25

Several years ago, because it was a Western Literary Classic and therefore Educational, I assigned myself the task of reading the Odyssey for the first time. Much to my surprise, it turned out that the reason the Odyssey is a Western Literary Classic is because it is, in fact, A Darn Good Book—so good that I’ve read it again every year since and have no plans to stop.

This year being so busy though, I decided to listen to the Odyssey on audio book. Turns out the Odyssey is even better when you listen to it, because...it isn’t a great novel. It is a great song. When I waited and absorbed it at listening pace, instead of flying through pages silently, I felt its scope and beauty in a newer and fuller way. Words that seemed needlessly repetitive when I read them became ringing and evocative when I let myself be spoken to.

Psalm 25 is also a great song, and like most songs it is not organized around a single idea or in a logical progression from point A to point B; instead, it is a meditation, leaping swiftly from highs to lows and back again. In verses 2-3 and 19 we get a sense of what has prompted this inner struggle; David is beset by savage and treacherous enemies. This Psalm was most likely written when his son Absalom and many trusted officers tried to seize the throne (full details in 2 Sam 15-18), but David doesn’t pause to name them; his external enemies seem insignificant compared to the enemies he sees in himself. David’s initial plea for salvation segues into thoughts on what distinguishes a righteous man who hopes in God from the “wantonly treacherous” enemies surrounding him—“make me to know your ways,” he says, “teach me your paths, for you are the God of my salvation.” But this in turn brings him to acknowledge his own failure to know and walk those paths. Perhaps like Paul in Romans 7:15, he does not understand his own actions: “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” He touches first on “the sins of my youth”, but also on his current guilt, “for it is great”, and on his inner suffering: “I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged...”

But rather than being lost in his despair, David also interweaves hope throughout. His own sin and frailty are contrasted and mingled with God’s steadfast love and mercy. Each time David’s guilt or fear overwhelms up, he turns back to a waiting hopefulness: “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right”—and so David goes on to humble himself again. His despair and fear are instinctive; his repentance and hope are deliberate, like a breath cycle, and perhaps this “breathing” of trouble/sin in, repentance and hope out is itself evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in us, instructing sinners in the way. In Hebrew the word for “spirit” also means “breath.”

Lent is a season of repentance and humility, just such a season as David experiences in this Psalm; so we know it is simultaneously a season of hoping and waiting. We don’t instruct ourselves, David says; rather God instructs us and leads us, provided we respond with repentance and humility. Rather than “reading the novel”, let’s sit back this Lent and listen to the song, and let ourselves be taught like David.

-Katharine Floro

What A Joy!

February 20

1 Peter 3:18-22

This passage blows my mind – that a righteous albeit perfect person would give his life for the sins of an unrighteous person. And that includes me! While I may not be as evil as the people of Noah’s time, I am far from perfect. And what’s more mind boggling, was that this one death was for all of us not just a few. All of us? Yes, all of us. Romans 3:23 says for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (ESV). Yes, all of us. Further on in Romans, Paul reminds us that the wages of sin is death. But he goes on to add that this price has already been paid. When Jesus died on the cross, He did it for all of us, not for himself. He paid our price. “Too good to be true,” you may ask. My father always reminded me, never trust the “too good to be true” deals. There is always a terrible price. But to receive the redemption Jesus is offering, all we have to do is to receive it. Confess our sins and accept the forgiveness God offers by receiving Jesus as our Savior. The book of Ruth, in the Old Testament calls it a kinsman redeemer. By accepting Jesus, we are adopted into the family of God and Jesus becomes our Brother, our own personal kinsman redeemer.

What joy it is to be a part of His family. As members of His family, we are entitled to everything He has. Like our Pastor often reminds us, when we accept the death He suffered for us, we are also accepting His resurrection. When times are bad and it seems liker we are dying, we can look beyond the death, and pass through it into His glorious resurrection. Yes, life has its valleys, low times, but God brings us through them, up to a high place where we can stay close to Him through prayer, through the Sacraments, and through study of the Word. We can be sure He will stay close to us.

When I was a teen ager, I used to dread Lent. The scriptures were so sad, The music could be a drudge. But now I see Lent as a time of growth, a time to draw closer to the risen Lord. Each year as I go through Lent, Easter and my fellowship with the Him becomes more and more exciting. It helps me to understand the cycle of death and resurrection occurring in my own life. Praise God for all he has done for me!

-Richard Carter

Genesis 22:5-14

⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” ⁶And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹²He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

What stands out to me from this passage is the angel appears in front of Abraham and Abraham lifts his eyes. The angel was just in time at the last minute. One more thing is that Isaac didn't struggle or try to run away. Also Abraham obeyed the Lord without asking any questions or saying, “That's my only son.”

What I think God is speaking from this passage is to obey him because God doesn't want to hurt his children. Also we should trust in him and not give up because he always loves his children no matter what. He always wants his children worshiping him but not other false gods.

The reason God tested Abraham was to see if he truly loved and trusted him. The reason he needed to see if he loved him was so he could make the plan he was going to do. He was going to use Abraham to rescue the world.

-Simeon Lovejoy (with help from Pax)

Psalm 16

Hi friends! I hope you all are having a good day. I want you to take a moment and think about all the choices you have made today. Life is full of choices. Did you choose what you were going to eat for breakfast? Did you choose what shoes to wear with your outfit? Did you choose whether you would go to town to pick up groceries? Even if you did not make these specific choices, I am sure you had to make some sort of choice. I want to emphasize the word “choice” because it can be a very powerful word. The dictionary defines “choice” as: an act of selecting or making a decision when faced with two or more possibilities. Each day we are faced with two or more possibilities, and it is up to us to make the right decision.

However, there is one choice we can make that will provide clarity for all other decisions. We must choose God. We must choose God over and over and over again. When we choose God; we choose life because God gives us life. Every decision we make comes with a consequence-good or bad. If we do not choose to allow God direct our lives, the consequence will not be so good. Things will become a lot harder to understand, and we will not make confident decisions. You may be thinking *I have chosen God and He is in my life*, but do you choose Him over everything? For me, it can be hard to always choose God in every situation, but the outcome is much better when I do, as in verse 2, “You are my Lord; I have not good apart from you.” When we began to separate ourselves from God, we can begin to develop idols. A person, thing, place, or object should never take the place of God. Whether we realize it or not, it is very easy to do.

In conclusion, we will definitely look different when we choose God. We will not be like everyone else, but that is ok because God wants others to see Him through us. We are called to serve Him and spread His Word. If we look for satisfaction in the world, we will never get it. If we rely on God for satisfaction, it will always be given in its time. When we choose God, we choose life. We will receive a “beautiful inheritance.” Scripture also says: “I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” Nothing can defeat us if we choose to live a life according to God. We will still face trials and tribulations, but they would be much worse without God. Verse 11 recalls, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” When we choose God, we get a path laid out for us, we are full of joy, and we will always be fulfilled. It is easy to say “I am a Christian and Jesus is in my life,” but it is also easy to let things replace God. We cannot allow this. We must stand firm in our faith and be courageous. Friends, I leave you with this: life is full of choices, and eternal life is the most important choice!

-Olivia Allen

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:7-11 (NASB1995)

Are you lonely? But I am always with you. My love never leaves you.

I am woven in the fabric of your life.

Jesus is stripped of His garment and His garment is now ours. When we go through sufferings we have Christ's garment of suffering.

The first apostles were martyred and their sacrifice was considered a loss for the people around them. But, in effect, their suffering was greatly valued by God. Remember, God is glorified even in our failures and the unfortunate things that happen. Cling to Him for the glory of His Name. Receive your sufferings with peace.

There is a picture of soldiers stripping Jesus at the Cross. He wants us to understand that He wants to strip away everything we are attached to. Let go of those things that are important to us but are not in Him. Once He is of paramount importance in a soul, letting go will be much easier and we will be totally His. He wants us to depend on Him.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen has said that the Cross is our soul and God chisels us with our sufferings into the shape He wants it to be.

- *Name withheld by request*

The Ten Commandments And Your Heart

February 25

Exodus 20:1-21

Whether you're a believer in Christ, a Christian or not, chances are that you have been exposed to one of the greatest passages in Holy Scriptures known as the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue. There was a time when God's word was chiseled in stone on every court house in every city of every county, province and state in the United States. So if we look at North Carolina as an example, there are 53 major cities and we multiply that by 50, the number of states in the United States that comes to 2,650 buildings which have carved into them the Ten Commandments that sounds impressive. It almost makes the United States look like a very Christian nation. Now if you add all the monuments and statues which have written on them the Ten Commandments you could add at least an additional 5,000. Finally, if you add all the churches in the country which is 380,000 conservatively speaking this gives us a total of 387,650 locations where you can find the Ten Commandments. I actually think the number of Ten Commandments in public places is closer to 500,000. This certainly seems to support the words of Isaiah 40:8 "the grass withers and the flowers fall, by my word will stand forever".

With all these Ten Commandments floating around you would think that we must live holy and upright lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have violated the very first commandment; Thou shall not have any other God. Today we live in a world which ignores the word of God and instead enjoys the pleasures of other gods. What are the other gods that we take so much pleasure in you ask? Anything that takes the place of the God of the Bible is a false god. Now if you are asking me, does that mean that I need to think about God all the time, then my answer is a resounding YES? Does that mean that I can't watch the super bowl? Of course not. God wants his creation to enjoy what he has created, however you need to balance this against God's Holy word. Let your heart and the Holy Spirit be your guide. Hebrews 10:16 says "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." Imagine what would happen if God's Law was written on your heart and mind. What a difference that would make in all your decisions.

The season of Lent is a perfect time to memorize the Ten Commandments and a great time for parents to help to write these commands on the heart and minds of their children.

-Michael Pinkston

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. 11 By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. 14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:7-14

Can you imagine how God might feel upon hearing the words of this psalmist? There is peace and harmony between God and His child. The child does not fight against God or His commands. Instead, he finds refreshment, joy, light. He does not despise instruction but sees the statutes of God as valuable as gold, sweeter than honey. The psalmist seeks no other reward than the reward found in keeping God's laws. This psalm is an example of harmony between creature and Creator, between Lord and servant, between Father and son.

A few weeks ago our 2 year old, Valor, who has a genetic condition that depletes his ability to fight infection, developed a mysterious sore on the inside of his bottom lip. For you or I this might be an annoying sore that makes itself known when we eat or brush our teeth but would likely heal in a few days. For Valor it became painful to the point of him not wanting us to clean his mouth after he ate. Even a shirt gently tugged over his head and face to dress caused him to burst into tears. His lip swelled. The sore became whiter and larger. And he became a restless and exhausted toddler as his body put all energy into healing his lip. There was no longer peace between Valor and his parents.

The slightest frustration, disappointment, or not getting his way resulted in dramatic melt downs. The wrong blanket to cover him at night, pant leg not pulled down just so, a toy stolen by a sibling, the wrong parent or sibling getting him out of his crib, the sippy cup he didn't want—you name it—he was not happy. He was not refreshed, joyful, or filled with his spark of joy. He did not find any value in the instruction of his parents. He was a storm of emotion and exhaustion; quite the opposite of the harmony reflected in this Psalm.

Then it happened. A week later, he was snuggled in my arms as I sang to him before I laid him down for the night. He was completely at peace, resting in my arms, and it felt amazing. I immediately thought, "Wow, this must be how God feels when we finally rest in Him." He watches us battle through this life on our own, letting our pain, emotions, tiredness, and selfish desires dictate our thoughts, our interactions, our relationship with Him, even our peace.

How often do we throw temper tantrums because we refuse to rest in the Lord? Do you need refreshment, joy, and light? Do you want to know the secret to possessing something more valuable than gold? Do you have a sweet tooth? There is something sweeter than honey you can have. Do you desire a great reward? The psalmist gives us the answer: seeking and obeying the commands of God. An impossible task, isn't it? Thankfully, Jesus has fulfilled this for us. But in our dependence on Christ to obey the commands of God, we can snuggle into the arms of God and let Him sing over us.

-Brandi Lovejoy

As I read through the “Anglican Pocket Guide to the Season of Lent”, the word *pity* that characterizes the merciful type of giving we participate in, during Lent, stood out to me. Initially, I thought of the poor. I have been poor, I have known many poor people, I have given selflessly to the poor, and if I am being honest, I have, at times, been afraid of poverty-stricken areas and situations. As I considered that word, I can remember not wanting to be someone’s pity or charity. I have heard others use that term, also. They didn’t want to receive someone’s generosity towards them as pity. Right then, God spoke to me through my chosen scripture. Here, the apostle Paul is listing the things that come with our position in Adam (before we are saved) and in Christ (after we are saved). Of those is the thing we battle with daily – sin, which leads to shame. Shame can take on the form of self-condemnation. Before we come to a place of repentance, declaration of faith, and acceptance of salvation, we may find ourselves deep in the shame of our sin. Shame may be how we make ourselves suffer over and over for the sinful choices we have made in our lives. But, here’s the good news – we don’t have to suffer with our sin and shame. When we confess our sin, turn away from it – which I know can be overwhelmingly difficult- we have one that sees us. He sees us suffering in our patterns, our habits, our shame, our doubt that we can be anyone better than who we are right now. He offers us the opportunity to accept HIS response to our suffering – His son, Jesus. God has pity on us in our suffering. Here’s that good news again! His word tells us in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” A recent study of this scripture by The Daily Grace Company assures us “To be poor in spirit means we recognize our utter need before God. To be poor in spirit means that we see our desperate need for a Saviour.” God has pity for us in our suffering, but he is waiting patiently for us to acknowledge that we need salvation, a way out, a better way. When we accept His pity, not as charity but as mercy and relief, our suffering ends and we are indeed set free. Lent can be your season to genuinely face your sin, step away from your shame and condemnation, empty yourself out before God and let him fill you with new things. Allow his pity to light the way to mercy and compassion that you can then turn and give away to others. And one more time for the people in the back...the good news continues in Romans, chapter 8, verse 1, “Therefore, there is now **NO CONDEMNATION** for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

-Kelli Crespo

Come Quickly

March 1

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations, and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Pilgrimage Song

March 2

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem! Psalm 122:1,2

This Psalm is a Pilgrimage song, a song of Accent that worshippers sang as they were going up the hill to Jerusalem.

David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

“And they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.” 2 Samuel 6:17

David loved the LORD and was excited to worship, not alone, but with his fellow believers. He knew the value of this worship with others and how it strengthens the church as they encourage each other in their belief in God. The Peace David mentions is a Peace of well being that comes when the church is knit together as one.

What a beautiful and comforting Psalm. When I read this, I feel David is talking to me and to my church family. Do I feel the Joy that David expresses as he is going into worship with his fellow believers? I did not always feel this joy and excitement because I attended church out of commitment. The difference is now I am excited to worship with my church family because of the change in my heart and allowing the Holy Spirit to come alive in me.

I also think David is showing us the importance of worshipping together. When we come together in worship and in fellowship there is unity and support that I feel from my brothers and sisters in Christ. I see Joy on their faces even though we wear mask now due to a pandemic.

I encourage you to come together in Christ. The worship now at Resurrection Church is similar to David. He worshipped in a tent that held Ark of the Covenant containing the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together” Hebrews 10:24,25

“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” 2 Corinthians 9:15

-Sandy Fermanides

Saved by Faith for Good Works

March 3

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8-10

As we prayerfully walk together during this Lenten season, we are humbly reminded of the traditional Christian practices and disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Much of our focus is rightly placed on prayer and fasting. But what is “almsgiving?” “Alms” can be traced to the Old English and simply means the faithful and merciful giving to our neighbors who are in need. It is a deep expression of love, compassion, and charity for the poor, the homeless, the destitute, the old, the sick, the hurt and all who have none to care for them. Giving “alms” are faithful “good works” that can be anything from performing simple acts of loving kindness to giving one’s “time, talent, and treasure” to our Church’s many outreach efforts and other Christian charities.

Ephesus was a great Roman commercial city and center of paganism located on the west coast of what is now Turkey. St. Paul founded and led the faithful Ephesian Church despite the great persecutions and opposition that they faced. He wrote this encouraging and “teaching” letter to them while he was imprisoned in Rome and stressed our Lord’s redemptive work, Church unity and proper conduct inside and outside of the Church.

In this key passage, St. Paul reminded them and us that through our Lord’s free gift of grace we are saved through faith and through our faith we are called to do “good works” to His glory... not ours. He starkly reminds us that we “can’t earn our way into heaven” by simply giving money and things and doing good deeds for others... and then pridefully boast to garnish worldly praise. That would amount to accepting a “cheap grace” and not truly acknowledging that our Lord died on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins. It was only through His great sacrifice that we are saved, and through his loving gift of grace, called to do faithful “good works” for those in need.

So, as we and pray and fast together during this Lenten season lets also obediently give “alms” especially as our community, nation and the world continue facing the pandemic, suffering and persecution.

-Ted Baltes

The Good Shepherd

March 4

John 6:1-15 (See also a parallel passage, Mark 6:33-44.)

Jesus often conveyed a spiritual truth then substantiated or illustrated that truth with a temporal object lesson. For example, He offered *living water* to a woman as she drew water from a well (John 4). Early on in His ministry, He stated that He did not come *to judge the world* but *to save it* (John 3:17). He proceeded to show mercy to all kinds of sinners and heal all kinds of diseases, to the displeasure of the religious leaders. (both actions are components of *salvation*)

Our Lord proclaimed *"I am the Light of the world"* just before healing a blind man (John 9). He declared *"I am the resurrection and the life;"* a presumptuous assertion, unless of course you can raise the dead (John 11).

Our focus today is the feeding of the multitude, detailed in John 6:1-15. The historical event John described authenticates two of the Lord's spiritual truth claims. He asserted *"I am the bread of heaven,"* just after He fed the crowd of five thousand souls. Bread was on the menu.

Secondly, Jesus stated *"I am the Good Shepherd."* (John 10:11). Filled with compassion, Jesus fed the throngs whom He deemed as "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). Through the miracle of fish and loaves, He demonstrated His Shepherd's heart by feeding them.

David, the shepherd king of Israel, described his Shepherd-Lord with a song of praise (Psalm 23). For those who could perceive it, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand revealed His timeless identity as David's Shepherd and Lord. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in need;" (*"How shall we feed all these (needy people)?"*) Jesus asked. John 6:5). "He makes me lie down in green pastures" (*"there was much grass in that place;"*) John 6:10). "He sets a table before me;" (*"after giving thanks, Jesus distributed to those who were seated;"*) John 6:11). "He restores my soul" (*"and they ate as much as they desired and all were satisfied;"*) John 6:11, 12). "My cup overflows" (*"and they filled 12 baskets with leftovers;"*) John 6:13). Jesus was the Shepherd of the lost sheep of Israel. He was King David's Shepherd. Is He your Shepherd?

As we approach the anniversary of Jesus' death and resurrection, His role as *the Good Shepherd* becomes even more momentous for His sheep. Our everlasting Shepherd not only leads us, feeds us, restores us and comforts us, He also *"lays down His life for the sheep."* (John 10:11) That spiritual truth was realized when Jesus died on a cross for you and me.

Beloved, if we listen for His voice, He will assure us that we can fearlessly follow Him. We can trust the One who loved us so profoundly that He surrendered His life for us. He will permit no one to take us from His hand (John 10:28). *"We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* Amen.

-Owen Lovejoy

Heaven Can Wait

March 5

Jeremiah 31:31-34

During Lent, we await the death & resurrection of our Lord. We also know He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. But what do we do between now & the time our Lord calls us to heaven, where there will be no pain & everything is perfect?

There are some things we can only do on this side of heaven that we will not have the opportunity to do once we are living in heaven. We cannot lead a friend, stranger, or anyone else to a saving faith in Christ. There will be no opportunity to help a person in darkness to find the Light. In fact, we will not be able to live by faith at all. Faith is the evidence of things hoped for ... what else is there to hope for when we are living in the presence of God in heaven? We will see for ourselves the things we had to have faith in when we lived on earth. Everyone in Heaven already knows the Lord.

We will not have the privilege of standing on the word of God in the face of adversity. There is no adversity. We won't be able to please God by choosing Him over sin. There is no sin. We won't help anyone in need. No one in Heaven is in need. We will not have the honor of serving God when the cost is great. We will not be able to give your life. We will not be able to share in His suffering. There is nothing to overcome. No loss or danger of loss.

We have one chance to truly give to God. One opportunity to sacrifice for Him. One chance to give our all. One chance to have victory over the enemy. Heaven is where we inherit our reward, but here in this life is our one chance to earn our reward.

Do not misunderstand. We do not earn our passage to Heaven. Salvation is a free gift, but once we are in Heaven, there are great rewards. The Earth is a special place. Our lives are priceless gifts from God. Do now what you will never have the opportunity to do when you get to Heaven.

Psalm 90:9-12

John 4:35-36

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

James 1:17

-Judi Journey

Praise God For His Mercy!

March 6

Psalm 51

God of everlasting mercy,
We don't always do the things that make you happy. Often I do things I know are wrong for me to do. Please forgive me of my sins give me a clean heart oh God and create a right spirit within me. Thank you, Lord for loving me, even when I fail. I know that you can make me whole again. In Jesus name, I pray! Amen.

If you will pray and ask for God's forgiveness with a sincere heart He will forgive you and bring peace and joy to you. Pray and study His word and He will direct your path.

Psalm 51 reminds me that no matter how terrible my sin is my God always stands ready to forgive it, if I am willing to confess it. His mercy stands ready to take away the guilt my sin had brought on me.

"Awe, but," you might say, "I have not committed adultery, then had their spouse murdered to cover it up like David did. Surely, God does not hold my 'little' sins against me." But you know what, to God sin is sin. No matter how small or great you feel your sin may be, the Bible says the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God in His great mercy has already paid the price for our sins even before we commit them.

John 3:16 says for God so loved the world, that he gave his only son that whoever believes on Him shall not die but have eternal life. God paid the most costly price there is: the death of His only son. When I confess my sins, and turn them over to Jesus, I am forgiven. I, too, can have eternal life with Him! Wow! How exciting that He would die for even me. When I realized that Jesus would have done it if I was the only one that ever believed it literally changed my life. God helped me to want to strive to be more like Jesus every day. He put a new song in my heart! What an awesome God we serve!

Remember If you don't feel at peace with God, then know He has died for you! Confess your sin to Him right now, accept Him as Lord over your life, and you too will be forgiven, have eternal life and have peace with God knowing that it is well with your soul. Yield to Him and he will create in you a clean heart and renew a right spirit in you. (Ps 51:10) Go and tell somebody! Give God praise!

For more, Read Luke 19:1-10

-Laveda Carter

Send Us Out

March 8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here I am, Lord. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

Pat eased the car into the merging lane and deftly blended into the Saturday afternoon traffic, I-95 southbound to Fayetteville.

Comfortably strapped into the passenger seat, and with our guitars in the back seat, I began to softly hum the song we had just sung at the team meeting in Smithfield preparing for the upcoming Cursillo weekend.

Pat was humming it, too. We looked at each other and laughed.

When you’re asked to lead the music for the Cursillo, you live your life through, in, and around music. You pop like a champagne cork and the music bubbles and overflows to those around you. The song was John Michael Talbot’s “*Send Us Out*.” It spoke of going forth to proclaim the reign of His kingdom. “*Send us out with your power and authority to overcome and heal the world.*”

We were discussing how John Michael Talbot bases his songs on scripture when my eye caught sight of an old gentleman standing on the shoulder of the interstate. He was desperately waving his arms at the traffic speeding by. Next to him stood a dark-haired woman, most likely his wife. Their beige sedan was leaning to one side with a flat tire.

Anything stationary by the side of the road suddenly becomes a blur as you drive by at 65 miles per hour; certainly no time to react.

Pat and I rode in silence for a brief moment, our minds absorbing the pitiful scene. With one eye in the rearview mirror, Pat turned to me, “Should we turn around and help them?”

Without hesitation I looked at her. “Yes!”

Pat exited the interstate, circled around and headed north again. Over four lanes of traffic we could see the old couple still trying to flag someone down.

We exited again and headed south on the interstate, this time staying in the right lane to have quick access to the shoulder of the road. The wheels crunched over gravel as Pat slowed and stepped on the brake. We unbuckled and jumped out. The couple stared at us in mixed disbelief and relief. I shouted to them over the rush of traffic, “We can’t change a tire, but we’re here!”

The old man reminded me of the Jewish Tevye in “*Fiddler on the Roof*.” I could almost read his thoughts when he saw Pat and me smiling, ready to help -- except change a tire.

(Continued...)

“Oh, Lord! Here I am an old man stuck in the middle of nowhere, miles from home, with a flat tire and hysterical wife. I’ve never asked for much in life. And you have to send me two women?”

But his eyes twinkled despite the conversation I imagined he’d just had with God. He was surely someone’s beloved papa who probably recently said goodbye to a houseful of dark-eyed youngsters somewhere in the northeast.

But Jewish they were not. Italian they were. Raymond and Theresa Pezzoli, we learned, were returning to their retirement home in Fort Lauderdale from a visit in New Jersey with their sons and families.

Theresa kept wringing her hands in frustration. “Oh, nobody would stop. Raymond, isn’t it nice these ladies stopped? Raymond?”

But Raymond at 85 years old was under the car wrestling with the jack.

“Raymond, please get out of there. These nice ladies will drive us to a gas station. We’ll call Triple A. Raymond!”

Raymond’s hand shooed us away from under the car. “Go. Go to the gas station. I have to stay with the car,” he said, determined to protect it from harm and evil.

We left the persistent Raymond wrestling with the jack -- and I fervently prayed the Lord would protect this stubborn old man from himself. We drove off Exit 73 to a Waffle House with a blue police car parked in front. The cop was chatting with locals over coffee when we walked in. Above the counter next to the health certificate was a sign: *Jesus is Lord, no foul language here.*

Theresa approached the cop, told him the situation and would he please call Triple A to help them. We drove back to Raymond, now relieved of his mechanic’s duties by a young fellow in a pickup who stopped to help. Triple A who would take over the jack-wrestling business was on its way, we reassured Raymond.

Time to leave. I hugged Theresa and turned to the old man for a hug. He smiled with tears in his eyes and had a grip like steel.

“God bless you both,” I said, wishing we didn’t have to leave them. As we pulled away onto I-95, I turned and saw Theresa wiping her eyes and waving to us.

Suddenly John Michael’s words came back to me: “*Send us out with your power and authority to overcome and to heal the world.*”

A daily devotional I read says, “Remember – you go into this day as one sent, sent to do justice and show the mercy of God. Sent to change the world that God loves by loving it too.”

-Ellen Hart

O Holy Jesus!

March 9

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” John 10:14-16

I have a specific prayer that I pray during Lent that I adapted from one of Anselm’s Good Friday sermons (circa 1100). I would love to share it:

“Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who condescended to die for your flock, acknowledge me among Your sheep and lead me to Your pasture. You who drank the bitter cup for me, enable me to share in Your glory. Your punishments torture my conscience and Your torments my memory: for I fear to drink the potion You drank, the sins You bore were my sins. I, an obstinate slave, committed the crimes for which You were flogged, it was my deeds that were paid by You; my iniquity was the cause of Your death and my misdeeds brought about Your wounds; alas for my sins for which atonement had to be made by so bitter a death! O unspeakable mercy!... that when satisfaction for guilt was owed by none but man and none but God was able to provide it, You showed Your mercy by becoming man, and, though You owed nothing for Yourself, paid our debt by dying for us...Behold how God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us.

O the grace of Him who does this!

O the holiness of that death!

O good Jesus!

O holy Jesus!

What shall I endure for You who endured so long and so much for me?

The display of what You have done is the proof of Your love. What am I to do who am the unworthy recipient of this love?

How can I return this love?

Take what is Your own; do with Your servant what seems good to You... You gave Yourself completely for me and my salvation is completely Your work.

You bought my spirit for Yourself, You bought my body for Yourself, both are here to serve You. I am Yours in spirit and in body. O good Lord, what shall I render to You for such great blessings, I, a worthless slave and unprofitable servant?

Shall I rejoice or mourn because of Your death?

Indeed, I will do both. I will rejoice because of the grace of Him who delivered You up and because of the love of Him who died. But first I will mourn over the cause of that death, that is, because of the consciousness of my sin, and I will mourn with Him who died.

If I do not rejoice, I am ungrateful; if I do not mourn, I am unfeeling.” (Adapted from Anselm’s Good Friday sermon found in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes *The True Image* pp. 348-349).

-Melissa Jones

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

March 10

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and a not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver his; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breast. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.”
- Psalm 22:1-11

Oftentimes, we might find ourselves in pain, agony, or woe. During these moments it is easier to fall short of God’s glory. We make excuses, blame others, and expect God to fix our problems. God is always with us, He knows the trials we are facing, and He hears our cry for help. Sometimes, God might seem distant to us or as if He is not present. Realizing this, we need to pay more attention to Him. We have to let go of our problems and trust in Him. We must die to sin daily in order to gain our new creation in Christ. Pain will pass, but more will come; it is part of dying and rising with God. This is how we will be reformed through Christ. God is our rescue. He is why we are alive today, He is why we face hardships, and He is why we will die yet live.

Whenever I find myself in tough or stressful situations, I tend to become very anxious condoning everything but the truth. I try to hide my real struggle becoming overwhelmed with many emotions. As you have probably heard it, “the truth hurts,” but suffering equals glory. We have to embrace the anguish we encounter and call on God. As referenced in John 14:6, “God is the way, and the truth, and the life.” In Psalm 50:15, God tells us to call upon him in the day of trouble. He wants to guide and lead us because we are his followers. God has given the evidence, but it is up to us to seek it. Are we willing to call upon his name for help? Are we willing to die and rise daily with Christ? Are we willing to surrender ourselves for Him?

Dear God,

Let us not become darkened through life’s challenges, but let us see the light that shines through. You have the power to guide, lead, and help us into the right direction. Let our footprints be marked by your blood, and our cries for help be directed to You. Give us the strength and courage to progress daily by reliance in You. Thank you for answering our calls in times of trouble and when we are skeptic of You. Amen.

-Violet Allen

Rights

March 11

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus Christ, in the form of God, was born in the likeness of men,
He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, from beginning to end.
Constantly seen as an illegitimate child, opposed by love ones, and misunderstood,
He lived his life under a shadow, a life of obedience for us, which no one else could.
You see, the freedoms and rights we have on earth, I have exercised them fully,
I have gossiped. I have ignored. I have judged. I have even been a bully.
Like a lost sheep, I have followed too much the devices and desires of my own heart.
I have blamed. I have hurt. I have not held my tongue from being smart.
I have lied. I have denied. I have complained. I have wrongly accused.
Yet He lived in an unbelieving world without complaint—betrayed and abused.
Spit on, mocked, stripped naked, nailed to a cross, to save us all from sin,
Humiliated and persecuted—He gave his life that we may be born again.
I wake each day, seeking the Lord, that He may have mercy upon, spare, and restore me,
That I may accept hurt without complaint, and in all conditions—His will I pray to see.
Lord, give me the strength to resist temptation—to realize the weakness of my own ability,
And to lay aside my right to enjoy my rights, through Him, with transforming humility.
He came, setting aside his right to rights, assuming for all—indignity, injury, hurt, and rejection.
He came, choosing a life of humility, that we may live forever through His death and resurrection.
Yet, at times, I still act in my flesh, failing, and falling short of the glory while His love is relentless,
So, my day ends seeking forgiveness to the Almighty and most merciful Father for the sins I humbly confess.
Amen.

-Angela Fields

Loving Father

March 12

Psalm 36:5-10

Growing up I never knew unconditional love. I am a survivor of childhood trauma. A childhood full of abuse, abandonment, and a narcissistic parent. I had to fight for what I thought was love. Love is what happened if I was a good girl that submitted to the desires and wills of the adults that were supposed to care for me. If I was extra good, my dad that abandoned me would pick me up for a visit, maybe. If I was quiet and kept "the secret", I was rewarded with ice cream, candy and unlimited TV in the care of my grandparents. If I was able to fight the daydreaming, and other traits of my undiagnosed ADHD, I didn't receive a "spanking" or get yelled at that day. If I walked, talked, dressed and fit the mold of the daughter my mother imagined, I didn't get humiliated in front of family and friends. I wouldn't be called names and laughed at by my parents and other adults.

I had to earn love, attention, and affection. This was my twisted perception of love, and love made me hate life. I was really good at pushing away healthy love by the time I was an adult.

When Goose was an infant, I decided to try church and God again. The first time I really listened to the words "God loves you like a father loves their children," a rush of sickening, painful emotions and memories flooded over me.

It took years of prayer church in therapy to understand what I received growing up wasn't love. What God was offering was a perfect love. A love that I didn't have to work for. A perfect love that provides me with protection and provision of my needs. A love that guides me and comforts me. A love that no man (or woman) on earth can provide. We receive such a perfect love from our heavenly Father, that we can't fully comprehend it on earth.

I used to question if God saw past my ADHD, anxiety, depression, and traumatic past. How could He love such a broken and beaten human? One who couldn't even function on most days? And the answer is yes. Yes, God loves us. Even when we can't imagine why. I've learned that's when I feel God's love the most. I found my unconditional, pure, love, in my heavenly Father. "Love came down and rescued me."

-Tommi McLamb

The Race

March 13

Hebrews 11:39-12:3

I enjoy walking and hiking in our mountains on a daily basis. Recently, I tried hiking with ankle weights and wrist weights to help build muscle and stamina. As you can imagine, the extra weight turned the hike into an uphill battle!

In today's passage, we are encouraged to lay aside every weight and sin so we can persevere in life's race. Some things that weigh me down are worry, fear, hopelessness, anger, bitterness and unforgiveness. When I hold onto these, life is an uphill battle. When I repent and ask Jesus to take them away, my load is made easier and my burden lighter.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..." (Hebrews 12:1) I am thankful for the heavenly cloud of witnesses surrounding and cheering us on. Sometimes I picture loved ones in heaven like my grandparents, my parents and my sister, who died in July, uplifting me. They encourage me to press on.

Some heavenly witnesses who have journeyed ahead are described in Hebrews 11. By faith, they *received promises, became strong in their weakness, and hoped for what they couldn't see*. They have handed the baton to us. We are entrusted in this relay race to pass the baton to the next generation, including our children and grandchildren.

When our son, Elijah, was in high school, he was part of a 4x800 relay team. They made it to the State Championship. We all watched and clapped and cheered and shouted out encouragement as each team member took turns sprinting around the track and passing the baton to the next runner. In like manner, God's heroes enhearten, encourage and inspire us to run the race before us.

Keeping our eyes on Jesus, we follow in His path. *"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."* (Hebrews 12:3) Missionary Andrew Brunson, a current day hero of faith, was falsely accused and detained for two years in a Turkish prison. Amid unimaginable hostility, he penned the hymn, *"Worthy of My All."* The last verse proclaims, *"I want to be found worthy to stand before you on that day with no regrets from cowardice, things left undone, to hear you say, 'Well done, my faithful friend, now enter your reward.' Jesus, my Joy, you are the prize I'm running for."*

In this journey, there is joy, there is hope! Are you *weary and fainthearted*? Look to Jesus! He is in heaven, *seated at the right hand of the throne of God*, interceding for you and me. *For the joy set before Him*, He endured unspeakable agony on the cross and triumphed over death. He promised he would never leave us nor forsake us. He is *Faithful and True* and He will see us through. *He is the prize we are running for!*

-Anita Lovejoy

Resurrection Days

March 15

John 12:1-11

Jesus was coming close to the end of his earthly ministry, so what does He do, He goes to dinner with some of His closest friends, Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead, Martha and Mary. Jesus was surrounded by the people that loved Him, knowing that the great trial was about to begin. We often talk about death and resurrection within our parish. Death and resurrection are all around us. All we have to do is look at the season of winter, spring, summer and fall to see the death and resurrection that is everywhere.

Resurrection Church and by extension all the families that are members have become farmers. There is no better way to explain death and resurrection than through growing crops which are used to sustain life. Having your hands in the soil, tilling the ground, planting seeds and watching them grow, pulling the weeds. This is all part of the process of life, death and resurrection.

But for Jesus this is going to be a different type of death and resurrection. Jesus' death, on the cross would permanently pay the price for the sins of the world and would usher in a new age of grace and salvation for all. Christ's resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven gives us the promise that we will rise with Him in the last days.

10 Personal Benefits of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

See the listing below for the 10 Benefits of Jesus' resurrection. Read, ponder, meditate, and even apply it personally when you can:

Personal Benefit #1 - You can conquer any fear invading your life. What things are you afraid of or afraid to face in your daily living? ([Hebrews 2:15](#), [Psalm 27:1](#)).

Personal Benefit #2 - You no longer need to see the future as a personal uncertainty. You have certainty and confidence in Christ ([Philippians 1:6](#), [Proverbs 23:18](#), [Jeremiah 29:1](#)).

Personal Benefit #3 - You have power through Christ to face anything ([Ephesians 1:19-20](#), [3:20](#); [Philippians 4:13](#)).

Personal Benefit #4 - Because of the resurrection there is a Church and gifted persons - like you - within the Body of Christ ([Ephesians 1:21-23](#), [4:7-11](#), [16](#); [1 Corinthians 12:4](#)).

Personal Benefit #5 - You can have renewed thinking and behavioral change. It is possible for you, even when it looks impossible ([Ephesians 4:22-24](#), [Romans 12:1-2](#)).

Personal Benefit #6 - You can access power over the evil forces of demonic activity ([Luke 10:19](#), [Colossians 2:12,15](#)).

Personal Benefit #7 - You have a new, holy, empowering way of living in this world through a new attitude and wise, healthy, sensible actions ([Colossians 3:1-11](#), [Hebrews 10:19-20](#)).

Personal Benefit #8 - You can Rejoice and be Victorious (an Over comer) in life. Have an attitude that victory is won ([1 Corinthians 15:54](#), [1 John 5:4](#), [Numbers 13:32](#)).

Personal Benefit #9 - You can have the personal experience of love, happiness, peace, job security, a place to live, friendship, marriage, hope, and everything else you need ([Philippians 4:6](#), [13,19-20](#); [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#)).

Personal Benefit #10 - You have the abundance of salvation and all that it means - spiritually, socially, emotionally, materially, and physically. ([2 Corinthians 9:8,11](#); [Psalm 23](#)).

Thus, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great capstone of our faith and the bountiful hope of our future. May you be blessed as you read and meditate upon these 10 wonderful personal benefits. And may this Pre-Resurrection Reflection remind us always of the many benefits we enjoy in the saving work of Christ.

-Michael Pinkston

Alleluia! Give thanks to [Yahweh](#) for he is good, for his faithful love endures for ever. Give thanks to the [God](#) of gods, for his faithful love endures for ever. Give thanks to the [Lord](#) of lords, for his faithful love endures for ever. He alone works wonders, for his faithful love endures for ever. In [wisdom](#) he made the heavens, for his faithful love endures for ever. He set the earth firm on the waters, for his faithful love endures for ever. He made the great lights, for his faithful love endures for ever. The sun to rule the day, for his faithful love endures for ever. Moon and stars to rule the night, for his faithful love endures for ever
Psalm 136:1-9

What is the meaning of the Hebrew word “*hesed*” (Strong’s Number 2617)?

Many biblical words such as mercy, compassion, love grace, and faithfulness relate to the Hebrew word *hesed*, according to an article in [GotQuestions.org](#). But none of these completely summarize the concept.

Hesed is not merely an emotion or feeling but involves action on behalf of someone who is in need. It describes a sense of love and loyalty that inspires merciful and compassionate behavior toward another person.

While God’s faithful love (*hesed*) is eternal and limitless, humans, too, can express *hesed* to one another. When I gave a poor young man much-needed money, furniture and other needs for him and his little boy, I didn’t think of it at the time, but I did it with *hesed* love as this young man was in desperate need.

Hesed, found some 250 times in the Old Testament, expresses an essential part of God’s character. When God appeared to Moses to give the Law a second time, He described Himself as “abounding in” or “filled with” *hesed*, which is translated “love and faithfulness,” “unfailing love,” “faithful love and mercy,” “steadfast love,” and “loyal love,” depending on the Bible version (Exodus 34:6-7). The core idea of this term communicates loyalty or faithfulness within a relationship. Thus, *hesed* is closely related to God’s covenant to His people, Israel.

In Exodus 20:6, God says that He lavishes His *hesed* “for a thousand generations” on those who love Him and obey His commands.

In the Bible, *hesed* often describes the mercy and compassion of God. When Moses interceded for the people, he appealed to God’s *hesed*: “The LORD is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love [*hesed*], forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion In keeping with your magnificent, unfailing love [*hesed*], please pardon the sins of this people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt” (Numbers 14:18--19, NLT).

This very special word *hesed* comes alive to me when I look to my own life. I have been touched by Yahweh's covenant love. Born and raised a Catholic, I served as an altar boy and the Eucharistic celebration--or Mass--was bright and meaningful in my life. However, after 13 years of Catholic education and schooling, I left the Church. I went out on my own to live and learn about life. I took the riches that had been given to me and coldly and deliberately dumped them aside. I traded them for independence, freedom and a good time. For 12 long, empty years I wandered in the desert of my own self-preoccupation. Little did I know that Yahweh God was not finished with me.

In February of 1975 Ellen and I attended a Marriage Encounter Weekend (a marriage enrichment program designed to make good marriages better). Through the love of my lovely wife Ellen and my Catholic Church, I experienced God's *hesed* for me. Like the Prodigal Son, I was welcomed home both by my God and church amidst tears and celebration. I was reborn in God's loving forgiveness and faithfulness. I suddenly saw how He had never stopped watching over me, had never taken His eyes from me, had given me all the rope I needed in my attempt to find real meaning in my life, when all the time He knew that all I really needed was Him. It has never left me. God is ever-caring and devoted, loyally compassionate and unconditional in His faithful expression of His covenant with me. His covenant relationship with His people results in His loyal love and faithfulness, even when His people are unfaithful to Him. Always at the heart of *hesed* lies God's generous sense of compassion, grace, and mercy.

Hesed surpasses ordinary kindness and friendship, according to the article in GotQuestions.org. It is the inclination of the heart to show "amazing grace" to the one who is loved. *Hesed* runs deeper than social expectations, responsibilities, fluctuating emotions, or what is deserved or earned by the recipient. *Hesed* finds its home in committed, familial love, and it comes to life in actions.

The message of the gospel--God's act of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus--is rooted in *hesed*. This word--my favorite biblical word--describes God's heart not only toward His people, but to all humanity.

-Phil Hart

Deliverance

March 17

Exodus 12:1-14

Exodus...for the Christian, this is a word full of promise and great expectation. In our passage today, God gives Moses and Aaron very specific instructions for Israel. Why did He give such strange instructions? How to make bread... how to choose, slaughter, and cook a lamb ...smearing lamb's blood on the door post and lintel...even how to dress for this meal...why God? During this time period, God was dealing with Pharaoh and showing His Omnipotence. God will not tolerate idols. He will not tolerate false gods. He will not tolerate enslavement of His people. He had had enough and was ready to bring deliverance to the children of Israel. Ok God, so the Israelites were very familiar with the importance of eating in a certain manner at certain times. They were also painfully aware that animal sacrifice/the shedding of blood was required for atonement of sins. Why the blood on the doorposts? Verse 13 explains the blood on the houses will be a sign.. a distinguishing mark. God will pass over those houses and no plague will be among them to destroy them. Then God told Moses that every year this will be a memorial for Israel celebrated as a festival to God. God would set them free from slavery and bondage.

Fast forward to the Passion Week. Did you know that the Last Supper, Christ's Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection all occurred during Passover? What a beautiful parallel! Christ sat and had a meal with the disciples. As He broke the bread and drank the wine, He explained the bread was His body broken for us and the wine His blood shed for us. In that moment, the disciples did not understand this significance. Christ was explaining His impending gift to the world. He was about to shed His blood. He was giving Himself as Our Sacrificial Lamb. Spotless, free from imperfections, without blemish or stain. When Jesus shed His blood, the atonement for our sins took place. So the blood was shed, the death happened, but what is the significance of the Resurrection?

Well, just as God showed Pharaoh that He would not tolerate idols, false gods, and the bondage and enslavement of Israel, when He conquered Death and the grave, when He shed His blood to atone all sin (past, present, and future), He basically showed the devil that He had had enough. He came to make a way for us to be freed from bondage and enslavement to sin. When we accept Christ, we are bought with a price. We are washed in His blood. That blood is our distinguishing mark. When Christ returns, He will pass over us and we will be spared from eternal death and destruction. You think the parting of the Red Sea was spectacular? Just wait! We will make our final Exodus...our mass departure...Christ will gather us to take us home to live with Him in Heaven...now that is something to celebrate! So, the next time you take communion...feast on the thought of our final Exodus! What a day that will be!

-Shelly Howard

Communion

March 18

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

When I was little, my (and Elijah's) mom would cry at the drop of a [sacrament]. Communion, baptism, it didn't take much. "Why is she crying?" I would wonder. To me, we were just sipping a little grape juice and snacking on a little bread. As I grew older, I prayed at various points to see what my mom saw. The answer eventually came, albeit slowly.

First, I read (I think by Martin Luther) a text about the crucifixion. We are angry at the Jews, it said; we blame the Romans. But the true crucifiers of the Lord Jesus Christ were you and I. We would arrive closer to the truth by substituting our own names into the biblical account:

Erin stripped him.

Erin put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him.

Erin began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!"

Erin spit on him.

Erin took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

Erin hurled insults at him.

My Savior? My Jesus? How could I hurt the one I love?

Then, several years later, at a small country church in Virginia, the service closed with communion. I went forward as usual. But this time, when the attendant presented me with the bread, instead of hearing him, I heard Jesus' earnest, almost pleading, voice saying, "*Erin*, this is my *body*, broken for *you!*" And in my mind's eye, I saw his body being broken and heard him "cry[ing] out in a loud voice." Next came the cup. The same thing happened. "*Erin*, this is my *blood*, shed for *you!*" I saw his side being pierced. I saw blood streaming from his head, hands, feet, and back. "I thirst," he had said, and now I get to drink freely. I feel the contents of the cup going slowly down my constricted throat and dispersing throughout my body as a life-giving cordial. "I'm sorry, Jesus. I'm so sorry that you had to go through all that for me. For my sins. I remember, Jesus! I remember that you allowed your body to be broken and your blood to be shed for me, even for me!" And just like my mom, without fail, the tears begin to flow.

-Erin Salmans

Chains are Broken

March 19

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36

God is going to set you free. God sets his people free with Moses. Moses sets the Israelites free.

God works in us just like he worked through Joshua. God used Joshua to give the Israelites a home.

God chose Dave to be the king of Israel. He showed he was worthy by breaking the soldiers chains of fear by killing Goliath.

Jesus sets us free and broke our chains by dying on the cross. Now we are free.

-Pax Lovejoy (with help from Simeon)

Hebrews 10:1-25

Imagine a man hiding in a field behind a herd of cows. He's covered from head to toe in dirt & mud. He can talk to the owner of the field only by hiding behind the cows to hide his filth.

It sounds silly, but that's a fairly accurate image of what sacrifices did for ancient Israelites. Would the owner of the field rather talk to the man face to face or through the cows? Of course he would like to talk to him face to face. But God is Holy & sin is not acceptable to God. We would not invite muddy kids or pets to run freely in our freshly cleaned homes & we cannot go sin-stained into God's presence. Ancient sacrifices did not cleanse people of their sins at all. Obedience is greater than sacrifice.

Only Jesus & His sacrifice can truly cleanse us, but this does not free us to keep sinning. God doesn't take pleasure in our sacrifices. He desires us to do His will. He died once for all on the cross. We go from repentance to obedience, living out the new life He gave us. He cleansed us so we can have real relationship with the Father and live out in the fullness for which we were created. No sacrifice we make will ever be enough. Through fasting (a type of sacrifice) we are reminded of our humanity & submit to the Lord's omnipotence. We make our hearts submissive, teaching our hearts obedience. But only the sacrifice of Jesus cleanses.

Thank You, Jesus for Your sacrifice, cleansing us & making us new. Strengthen us in obedience as we live out Your plan for our lives. Amen.

-Judi Journey

YOU GOTTA' HAVE 'HARP' TO HANG IN THERE

March 22

A song. A psalm of David.

My heart, O God, is steadfast; I will sing and make music with all my soul.

Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. Psalm 108:1-2 (NIV)

One hundred sixty young fingers nervously clutch flutes, violins and harps, their owners sitting tall with shoulders back, hearts pounding, waiting to carry their beloved instruments into the spotlight.

At the recital for a local church's music academy, having taken harp lessons, I am the oldest--in my 60s at the time--of these 16 child prodigies. And I have the most butterflies.

What am I doing here among these scrubbed faces and wide eyes, lacy dresses and starched shirts, who are here to perform for their parents on flutes and violins, harps or pianos? Why did I say, yes, I will play? Because I need the experience to play for people in hospitals and hospices, nursing homes and nurseries--a ministry to which I believe the Lord may be calling me. So. How difficult can it be?

Each child steps forward and plays a simple and familiar tune: *Amazing Grace* or *Jesus Loves Me*. Proud parents clap as the last sweet note of a flute floats away gently, soothing my heart.

All eyes look to me now, and I am startled.

I will play *Suo Gan*, a Welsh lullaby, followed by *Nearer, My God, to Thee*, a nineteenth century hymn--the same that the string quartet played in the movie *Titanic* when the ship was sinking.

With heart thumping, I rest my forehead against the harp's warm, golden wood as if to draw the music it holds into my soul. My fingers are splayed on either side of the soundboard and I inhale deeply, breathing in David's Psalm 108:1-2: *My heart, O God, is steadfast; I will sing and make music with all my soul. Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn...*

I place my fingers on the strings. The room watches and waits. The blood swirls in my head. The silence screams. The flute's last note is long gone--it's my harp they want to hear now. Deep breath. Exhale!

I long to be in my sanctuary, in my own room at home where the notes I play scatter and fall at random, and it doesn't matter. Where no one laughs at my poor effort or judges me. Where my husband lies on the couch in the living room--luge training, he calls it--and falls asleep to the lovely, soothing notes landing gently on his ears.

(Continued...)

Suddenly my fingering is off, not correctly placed. My trembling fingers sweep up the strings in arpeggios I don't recognize. I glance to the audience and see frowns and squinted eyes--was that a groan?

Oh, Lord, help. Feet get me out of here. I'm sinking! Tiny droplets of sweat trickle over my brow. How many hours have I been sitting here trying to find the right strings? Only three minutes. Then in an instant it's over. They applaud out of respect--and perhaps relief. I take a small, unearned bow and exhale, my fingers still trembling and sweating.

My grandson, Philip, comes up to me and says sheepishly, his blue eyes empathizing with me, a dimple creasing his cheek, "You sounded better at home, Nana." Sweet, honest boy.

"I know." I reach for a hug and he leans into me, Jesus replenishing my strength through him.

Lesson? I did it anyway. I didn't quit. I finished the race. Even at this age, it was courage I won.

They might even ask me back.

--*Ellen Hart*

THE KING IS COMING

March 23

Matthew 21:1-11

My name is Judah. I live in the small village of Bethphage, east of Jerusalem, just a mile from the Kidron Valley. I am a transporter. With my wagons and a few beasts of burden, mostly donkeys, I haul loads of everything from figs to fat sheep.

In our quiet village, we rarely have any excitement. That all changed six weeks ago, the day before Passover. It started with a dream. A man dressed in white spoke to me as I slept: “Judah, tomorrow your king is coming to Jerusalem. He will ride into the city on your donkey’s colt. Tie the colt and its mother in front of your dwelling. Two men will appear at mid-day, looking for your beasts. They will say to you, ‘The Lord needs them.’” I awoke with a start, my body trembling and these words etched into my mind. “Your King is coming.”

Upon waking the next morning, I questioned, doubted really, the importance of my dream. Yet, I decided to follow the instructions of my night visitor. I tied my donkey and her colt in front of my home and waited. At mid-day, two men appeared, scanning the area. Their eyes found my animals. When they stopped in front of me, I asked if they were searching for something. One responded: “We came looking for beasts of burden. The Lord needs them.” I stood dumbfounded. Finally, I mumbled that I would follow them and lead my beasts.

When we drew near the intersection with the road to Jerusalem, I could hear the crowd, see the dust cloud and I sensed the highly-charged atmosphere. The two men led me and my donkeys to the center of the mass of humanity. We stopped before a nucleus of men, but I saw no king, only commoners like myself. When one of the messengers stated, “Here they are Master. We found them just as You said we would;” a man in simple home-spun garments turned to look at us. With a warm smile, He approached me, laid His hand gently on my shoulder and quietly addressed me: “Thank you, Judah. I’m glad you received my message.”

The man they call Jesus, whispered to my skittish beasts which immediately calmed, then He mounted the colt and started forward. I looked down the road towards Jerusalem. As far as the eye could see, a multitude lined both sides of the road. As Jesus approached, people covered the pathway with a patchwork of robes and branches. A large group preceded the King and another group followed after. As they processed, they sang their songs of praise.

“Hosanna, Hosanna, to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.”

“Hosanna, Hosana in the highest!”

I'll never forget that day when my donkey transported the Lamb of God. With all the tragic then miraculous events that transpired during the Passover festival, I can hardly wait to see what God might do on our next Holy Day. Tomorrow is Pentecost.

Owen Lovejoy

Plentiful Redemption

March 24

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning, O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Psalm 130 (ESV)

As believers, we recognize we are sinners. We have experienced the weight of sin and the toll it brings upon us. In the first line, the psalmist is expressing his need for God. Our sinful souls cannot be wiped clean without the redemption of God. There is no other way to relieve yourself from the sinful bondage. We are called to humble ourselves before him, asking for forgiveness just as he has promised.

In my daily routine, I find myself becoming stressed or ill. I often blame my actions on my workload, when truly that is no excuse. As I take the time to reflect on my actions, I recognize my wrongdoings. Whether it is having a bad attitude or reacting to my siblings in a way I should not, I begin to feel the heaviness of sin and guilt. In the past, I have tried to fix these problems myself but truly speaking, I was not making progress. Trying to fix my sinful ways myself only made matters worse.

Dear Lord, thank you for opening our eyes to sin. Thank you for the power of your redemption. We pray that we become more aware of our sinful ways and learn to better humble ourselves before you. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Haleigh Fields

1 Peter 4:1-8

I've never been the biggest fan of the Francis of Assisi quote, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words." A little research reveals that Francis may not have said anything of the kind, but as someone who enjoys talking with people about Jesus, whether behind the pulpit or in the coffee shop, for me talking about the gospel is more necessary than what is hinted at in the quote. The quote, however much I may bristle at it, does communicate an important truth: as Christians our way of life can preach the transforming power of the gospel.

In 1 Peter 4:1-8, we see Peter applying this principle in his instruction to the church. He calls us to take up the same attitude toward suffering as Jesus did, "because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin" (v. 1). Lent does not promote suffering for suffering's sake. There is a purpose: to come to terms with our sin, confess it, repent from it, and ultimately be done with it. Those who are willing to endure suffering as Jesus did will eventually "not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather the will of God" (v. 2). They testify to how the gospel has transformed their lives, leaving behind a worldly way of life for a godly one.

But not everyone wants to hear that kind of sermon. Year after year, Ohio University is considered one of the top "party schools" in the country. I was grateful to be a part of a successful campus ministry there, where I often heard testimonies from students that spoke of how they left the party life, filled with some of the very sins listed in v. 3, to follow Jesus. They were beautiful, encouraging stories of how God's love changed their lives, but due to 180-degree difference in their lives, these students often were rejected by those they once considered friends. As Peter explained in v. 4, the rejection these students faced is nothing new: "They are surprised you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse upon you."

Peter encouraged those who made the decision to desire God's will over the will of others by framing the rejection they experienced within a gospel context. Jesus himself said that he did not come to bring peace but a sword, even setting family against each other because of his gospel (Matt 10:34-36). During the season of Lent we share in the sufferings of Christ, who faced rejection that we might be saved. When people reject us because of the gospel, we can be assured that we are in good company. If they heap abuse upon you, know that our Savior faced the same abuse. Perhaps knowing that Jesus can relate to that can strengthen and embolden us to let go of whatever sin is weighing us down, regardless of the fallout.

Chris Walk

Everything Happens for a Reason

March 26

Psalm 118:14-24

This passage talks about how God shapes us into who we are supposed to be. This passage talks about how we go through hardship in life that are used to make us better people. And how we are turned from the stones the builders rejected to God's temple stones. I personally have had hardship in life, which happened for a reason that I do not yet know. I have been kicked out of karate schools which was hard on me because it was apart of my life for a very long time, it made me realize that I was growing where I was and that I needed to move on.

Similarly God can use experiences that can sometimes hurt us although it is used to make us better people and to strengthen our faith in God. Remember everything happens for a reason and God knows a lot more than we do and has a plan for us and that plan can have parts that hurt but improve you along the way and eventually you are made into God's temple stone.

Kagan Bigler

Order Our Unruly Wills

March 27

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."²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged^l Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion^l before him.²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,²⁹ 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!"³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.³¹ 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. Matthew 27:24-31

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.



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