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A Lenten Devotional

LENT 2014

Introduction

Lent brings ideas of self-denial, fish fries, ash-laden foreheads, crazy and committed people, along with the absence of fun. Lent is a season that belongs to the church calendar - just like Advent, Epiphany, or Pentecost. Lent begins with a party; after all Christianity is a celebratory faith. (This is where Mardi Gras, French for 'Fat Tuesday,' comes from.) The Christian faith is not just that. The Christian faith is also about self-restraint or self-discipline. This is why the season of Lent mimics Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness (Mt.4; Lk. 4). Christians, for 40 days, embody various forms of fasting - just like Jesus did - to discover and learn more about themselves. The psalmist teaches us that fasting's purpose is to reveal that we are hardwired to desire God. When we deny ourselves, then our desires are amplified. That is when the idols of our heart are revealed most clearly to us and when the Holy Spirit can do his best work.

There are a few things to understand about lent. Lent, as a season, is not commanded by God. It's just a tradition. So if your conscience does not lead you to celebrate lent, then don't. Follow the Spirit's leading. He will lead you to pick up your cross, to die to yourself, and embrace the wilderness trials in other ways. Lent is just an established, traditional way that Christians across the centuries have embraced those rhythms of life.

This devotional is meant to help you understand the Christian life. To teach you that the way of life is via death to the natural and selfish impulses of our hearts. It's not good enough to stop consuming sugar, or going on a prolonged digital fast, or going on a pilgrimage. You have to replace those habits with something else. I need to do something better with my digital sabbath. Perhaps spend more time with loved ones, and/or spend more time focusing on how Jesus loved people, and/or serve at a homeless shelter.

The list is endless. With this period of self-examination and self-denial, however, it is crucial to keep your focus on the good news instead of our own brokenness! All of us are more sinful and helpless than we would ever admit or imagine. Yet in Christ we are more accepted and forgiven than we would've ever dared hope.

May this devotional be for the Glory of God and your good,
- Rev. Robbie Schmidtberger

Cover Art - *The Temptation of Christ*, a mosaic in the Cathedral of Monreale, Sicily

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Lent is a Time to Practice Resurrection

“Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front” by Wendell Berry in *The Country of Marriage*

..So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.....

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

Questions for Reflection

How does this poem challenge the external pull and internal push to consumerism?
What vision of community and life does this poem present to us?
What aspects of life require courage if humanity is to flourish together?

Week 1 | Dying to Self

"When Jesus calls a man, he bids him to come and die."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

March 5 | John 3:25-36

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. *Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is John's purpose in life and ministry?
2. How is it possible for John's joy to be linked to the denial of his own reputation and glory?
3. What is your purpose in life?
4. What is the promise made to you, as Jesus' disciple, here in this text?

Daily Prayer

Father, I confess that I live my life for my name, reputation, and image. Free me from the love of myself which is false and toxic - to myself, to others, and to this world. Help me to live for you, that I might become more like your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me understand what I am here for - in my city, in my relationships, and in this space.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

March 6 | Luke 9:23-27

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but *whoever loses his life for my sake will save it*. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Questions for reflection

1. How does one find life in Jesus?
2. How is the Holy Spirit calling you to deny yourself today?
3. What is the promise given to you in the gospel on the basis of this text?

Daily Prayer (Taken from *The Valley of Vision*)¹

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, You have brought me to the valley of vision, where I live in the depths but see you in the heights; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold your glory.

Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells, deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Your stars shine; Let me find Your light in my darkness,

Your life in my death,
Your joy in my sorrow,
Your grace in my sin,
Your riches in my poverty
Your glory in my valley.

March 7 | Luke 14:25-33

Now great crowds accompanied Jesus, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Jesus say that his disciples must hate their own life?
2. What all is involved in hating one's own life?
3. What is the cost of following Jesus?
4. What is the promise given to you here in this text?

Daily Prayer

Father, Help me to weigh the cost of following you. And as I count the cost, help me to see things clearly — that I would know what is important, what is true, and what is to be prized. I must confess that the cost of following you scares me. Help me to trust you. Remove the stubbornness and trepidation of my heart by showing me how much you love me.

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In Jesus, who is my redeemer, I pray,
Amen.

March 8 | Mark 9:42-50

Jesus said: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Commentary

Jesus is speaking in hyperbole - exaggeration for effect. He wants his audience to know how awful sin is. God hates sin. But there is another dimension, some subtext, to this Jesus' hyperbolic language here. Jesus is telling us that fighting sin in our lives is painful. Jesus' words must not be taken for ascetic purposes, where we injure ourselves because of sin, guilt, or shame. Self-injury lacks biblical merit and implicitly says Jesus' physical death was not enough for you.

Questions for Reflection

1. What lies do you believe that lead you to excuse sin? Are you willing to repent of them?
2. What sin in your life are you giving into because it's just too hard or painful to resist?

Daily Prayer

Father, Forgive me for not hating my sin as I ought. Help me to understand how awful and offensive my sin is to you. Help me to hate it. Teach me to let go of the things I love but should not. Work in my life by your Spirit's power and make me more like Jesus.

In his name I pray,
Amen.

Week 2 | Understanding the Wilderness

“The ancient story teaches us that freedom is truly difficult to embrace. Living into God’s liberating story for our life comes at a price. A wilderness awaits. But the wilderness is also where our lives begin to be redefined.”

- Chuck DeGroat, *Leaving Egypt*

March 9 | Heidelberg Catechism

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Questions for Reflection

1. What, from this catechism answer, do you find comforting? What do you not find comforting, whether from apathy or ignorance?
2. How can you improve upon your spiritual exercise of meditation?

Daily Prayer (From *the 1783 Book of Common Prayer*)

O Lord, you fasted forty days and forty nights. Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey your godly emotions in righteousness, and true holiness, to your honor and glory, who livest and reign with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

Amen.

March 10 | 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does God comfort you in your afflictions on the basis of this text?
2. How is Jesus' shared experiences a comfort to you?
3. What is the purpose of your sufferings?
4. Does this redemptive purpose comfort you at all?

Daily Prayer

God, it is not easy for me to embrace suffering. I hate it. It's miserable. But perhaps that is just the point. My heart - the very core of my being - knows that something is wrong with this world and is crying out. Father, help me to believe that you are making all things new in this world. Help

me to seize hold of the reality that your Son has defeated sin, death, and evil. May your Spirit guide me through my doubts and frustrations.

In Your Triune name I pray,
Amen.

March 11 | 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the treasure in the jars of clay?
2. What is your hope on the basis of this text?
3. What are your afflictions preparing you for?

Daily Prayer

Father, it's hard for me to believe that there is a purpose to this wilderness trial. But thank you for it. Open my eyes that I may see where you are taking me. Help me to understand the wonderful reality of glory - even though it's unseen. May your Spirit nourish me and feed my spiritual imagination with the picture of glory. Only then will my trials turn to joy.

In Jesus I trust,
Amen.

March 12 | Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him

and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why did Paul suffer?
2. What did he gain?
3. What happens to those who share in Jesus' sufferings?

Daily Prayer

Father, Once again your word tells us that there is a purpose to suffering - that we would become more like your Son Jesus Christ. Do your work in my life amid these trials. But as you do, help me to rejoice in suffering. That I, like Paul, would count everything as loss because of the wonderful worth of knowing Jesus.

In His name I come before you,
Amen.

March 13 | Romans 8:13-30

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why are the sufferings of this life not worth comparison with the coming glory?
2. Paul points out that all of creation also longs for redemption, how does this encourage you?
3. Who helps us in our weakness and how?

Daily Prayer

Father, It is encouraging to know that the Spirit prays for me. Help me to grasp the truth that all things work together for your glory and my good. Help me to be patient. Hope requires patience. Work in me and help me to be more hopeful in my whole life and being. I can only do this if I know you as my Father. Help me understand my adoption as your child.

In your Son's name,
Amen.

March 14 | Numbers 13:25-33

At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

Commentary

"Israel rejects God not because they want to be more, but rather because they are willing to settle for less... It was all too much to bear. In one instant, they saw their greatest hopes and greatest fears before them. And they chose to succumb to their old nemesis — self-condemnation." - Chuck DeGroat, *Leaving Egypt*, pg. 147.

Questions for Reflection

1. What makes you return to the same old patterns and behaviors? Why do you settle for anything less than what God promises you?
2. Where does Caleb's courage and confidence come from?
3. What is your biggest challenge in not claiming Jesus' past as your own?

Daily Prayer

Father, I settle in life. Help me belief and own the promises that you make to me. You promise life, so help me embrace the fullness of life, which is only possible if I trust you and submit to your reign. Help my unbelief.

In Jesus' I trust and come before you,
Amen.

March 15 | 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.* That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Questions for Reflection

1. What has God promised you - on the basis of this text? Or, what is God doing for you on the basis of this text?
2. Why do Christians say "Amen" when they pray? What should this remind us?

Daily Prayer

Father, All that you have done is mine in your Son, Jesus. Thank you for this wonderful reality. As you looked upon him upon his baptism you said: "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." That pleasure and delight is given to me due to my union with him. Thank you. Help me in my unbelief as I wrestle and doubt my standing and identity before you. I substitute the truth with lies. Thank you Father.

It is true.

Week 3 | Facing Your Idols

“Man’s nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols”

- John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*

March 16 | Habakkuk 2:18-20

What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies?
For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!
Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise!

Can this teach?

Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.
But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does the prophet say "woe" to the idolaters?
2. What benefit are idols to you?

Daily Prayer

Almighty God, who sees that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

March 17 | Psalm 115

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"
Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great.

May the Lord give you increase, you and your children! May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth!

The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man. The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

Praise the Lord!

Questions for Reflection

1. How does a person become *like* what or whom they worship?
2. According to this text, why should God glorify his own name?

Daily Prayer (adapted from *the 1979 Book of Common Prayer*)

Most holy and merciful Father: I confess to you and to one another that I have sinned by my own fault - in thought, word, and deed - by what I have done, and by what I have left undone. I have not loved you with my whole heart, and mind, and strength. I have not loved my neighbors as myself. I have not forgiven others, as I have been forgiven. Have mercy on me, Lord. I have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served me. I have not been true to the mind of Christ. I have grieved your Holy Spirit. Have mercy on me, Lord.

That's only possible in and through Jesus Christ,

Amen.

March 18 | Matthew 6:6-15

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Jesus say you should pray? There are reasons given in the prayer itself.
2. What priorities should shape your prayer life?
3. How do these priorities challenge your current prayer life?

Daily Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

March 19 | Luke 18:18-30

And a ruler asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Questions for Reflection

1. Does Jesus mean for every Christian to sell all that they own and give the money to the poor, or, is Jesus exposing this man's idolatry, and in turn revealing that the young man has not truly kept the commandments?
2. How does this text expose your treasures and values?
3. What promise is yours on the basis of this text?

Daily Prayer

Father, help me to let go of anything that I prize more than you. Help me to realize that money or possessions or influence or anything else, none of these things solve the dilemmas of life. Only you do. Help me believe such a wonderful reality.

Amen.

March 20 | Matthew 6:19-24

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor

rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Questions for reflection

1. What is the connection between what we see and what we love?
2. Why is it the case that you cannot serve two masters?
3. What promise is yours on the basis of this text?

Daily Prayer

Father, may my treasures be in heaven with you. Help me to understand that all that I have is from you, and you entrust them to my care. Give me the guidance as to how you would have me use them. May the order of my life be for your glory and the good of your creation.

in Jesus I pray,
Amen.

March 21 | Matthew 6:16-18

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why are you celebrating Lent?
2. How have you engaged in hypocrisy - doing the opposite of what you believe in right - recently?
3. What is the gospel promise here in this text? Claim it, and own it in Christ.

Daily Prayer (adapted from *the 1979 Book of Common Prayer*)

Father, I confess to you all my past unfaithfulness - the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of my life. I confess to you my self-indulgent appetites and ways, and my exploitation of other people. I confess to you my own anger at my frustration, and my envy of those more fortunate than myself. Forgive me of my love for worldly goods and comforts, and my dishonesty in daily life and work. Forgive me of my negligence in prayer, worship, and witness. Forgive me because Jesus' righteousness is my own.

In his name,
Amen.

March 22 | Colossians 1:9-14

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is praying for the Colossians to know and experience?
2. What has Jesus done for you on the basis of this text?
3. What promise is yours because of Jesus?

Daily Prayer

Father, may your Spirit help me to understand what Paul was praying for in this passage. May your Spirit do this by filling me with the knowledge of your will, in spiritual wisdom and understanding, and enabling me to walk in repentance. May sin continue to die in my life, and may I glorify you in my thoughts and actions. Thank you for delivering me from the domain of darkness - something that was only possible through your Son, Jesus Christ.

It is in his name I pray,
Amen.

Week 4 | Loving Like Jesus Loved

“Jesus has shown us how to love: look, feel, and then help. If we help someone but do not take the time to look at the person and feel what he or she is feeling, our love is cold. And if we look and feel but do not do what we can to help, our love is cheap. Love does both.”

- Paul Miller, *Love Walked Among Us*

March 23 | 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the purest expression of love?
2. How can people around us see God?
3. What are signs of our abiding in God?

Daily Prayer *(From the 1783 Book of Common Prayer)*

I beseech you, God, look upon the hearty desires of your humble servant, and stretch forth the right hand of your Majesty, to be my defense against all my enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

March 24 | Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his

wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Questions for Reflection

1. Who are your neighbors - the people whom God has placed around you to love?
2. How can you love them - by seeing them, having compassion, and showing them mercy - better?
3. What prevents you from risking your well-being for others?

Daily Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

March 25 | John 13:1-20

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Jesus wash Peter's feet?
2. Have you washed other people's feet? why or why not?
3. What are ways that you can humble yourself and serve other people?

Daily Prayer

Father, In our culture we wear white shirts and pants, walk in our homes with shoes on, and have easy access to baths and showers. So it's not common, at all, to wash people's feet. That's a weird thing to imagine. Yet your Son did. The stigma of washing feet is there. And he humbled himself... because he loved me... because I am his. Father, help me. May your Spirit work in my heart and life so that I would be willing to wash other people's feet. Give me eyes to see when I can do that too.

Thank you Jesus for humbling yourself and washing my feet.

Amen.

March 26 | Luke 7:11-17

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Luke focus on the details surrounding this mother?
2. How does Jesus respond to the mother after he sees her?
3. How can we do the same?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, you see me in my all my needs. You are moved by compassion. Help me to see people as people; not as projects where I use others; not as objects where I admire and use them for myself. Help me to see them as your image-bearers, who I need to treat with honor, dignity, and respect. I can only do that by your power.

Amen.

March 27 | John 8:2-11

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in

the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

Questions for Reflection

1. How do the pharisees and scribes use the woman in this text?
2. How does Jesus treat this woman?
3. How is Jesus' response a comfort to you?

Daily Prayer

Father, you do not see me in my sin. Instead you see me bathed by Jesus' blood. Your Spirit is at work in my life, and he is convicting me of my sin, reminding me of your words, and cultivating a lifestyle that is honoring to you. You have not condemned me. Thank you for delighting in me. And you equip me to sin no more.

Thank you for giving me all that you command.

Amen.

March 28 | Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do people marginalize Zacchaeus?
2. How does Jesus treat him? How does he treat you?
3. How does is Zacchaeus' life shaped by Jesus' treatment of him? How can you do the same?

Daily Prayer

Father, it is hard to admit this, but I have offended you by cheating and stealing against others in my heart and by my hand. Zacchaeus responded to your grace in a remarkable way. He understood the consequences of grace upon his life. Help me to do the same. May salvation come to my house. Thank you Jesus for seeking and saving me.

Amen.

March 29 | Mark 6:34-44

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do the disciples want to send people away?
2. How does Jesus' response challenge our love of convenience in our hospitality?
3. What do you learn from this miracle?

Daily Prayer

Father, there have been times I have been inhospitable due to the hour and the resources in my fridge. Cultivate a spirit and love in my heart that does not turn people away at my door, neighborhood, or worship due to convenience. Help my heart to overflow in abundance as I love others. Just like Jesus did.

Amen.

Week 5 - Jesus' Last Meal

Jesus says, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (Lk. 22:15-16). He longs to eat it. He longs for a meal with friends, because this meal with friends is a foretaste of his kingdom.

- Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*

March 30 | Matthew 26:17-29

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. 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." Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Questions for Reflection

1. What stands out to you in Jesus' last supper?
2. How is Jesus nourishing and encouraging his disciples as he shares the coming events with them?

Daily Prayer *(From the 1783 Book of Common Prayer)*

Grant, I beseech you, Almighty God, that I, who for my evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of your grace may mercifully be relieved; through my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

March 31 | Matthew 26:17-29

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not

believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why were people following Jesus?
2. How do people come to the Father?
3. What is the will of the one who sent Jesus?
4. How does Jesus nourish his disciples on the basis of this text?

Commentary

The Christian faith has a lot of mystery. This text is just one example, and there has been much confusion over the relationship of the Lord’s Supper with the bread spoken about here. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus says we eat of his flesh. But that is not to say the bread is Jesus’ body; nor is that to say that the Lord’s Supper is akin to cannibalism. Jesus is speaking of how he nourishes us - with himself. Jesus is present with us in the Lord’s Supper, and he nourishes us with himself. It’s a meal of spiritual blessing.

Daily Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

April 1 | John 14:1-14

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why should the disciples' hearts not be troubled?
2. How is the Father known?
3. What benefit do the disciples know when they know the Father?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, thank you for going to prepare a place for me and showing me the Father. May Philip's words be a lesson to me. Faith is a process. He walked with you for 3 years and missed the key lesson that you reveal the Father. Help me to trust that you are with me as I follow you.

Amen.

April 2 | John 14:15-31

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is a sign of your love for God?
2. Who does Jesus reveal himself to? And who will he send to his disciples in his absence?
3. What does Jesus do so that the world will know that he loves the Father? What lesson do you find in that?

Daily Prayer (taken from *the Valley of Vision*)

Holy Spirit, As the sun is full of light, the ocean is full of water. Heaven is full of glory, so may my heart be full of you. Vain are all divine purpose of love and the redemption wrought by Jesus except your work with, regenerating by your power, giving me eyes to see Jesus, showing me the realities of the unseen world. Give me yourself without measure, as an unimpaired fountain, as inexhaustible riches. I confess my coldness, poverty, emptiness, imperfect vision, languid service, prayer less prayers, and praiseless praises. Suffer me not to grieve or resist you.

Come as power, to expel every rebel lust, to reign supreme and keep me thine;

Come as teacher, leading me into all truth, filling me with all understanding;

Come as love, that I may adore the Father, and love him as my all;

Come as joy, to dwell in me, move in me, animate me;

Come as light, illuminating the Scripture, moulding me in its laws;

Come as sanctifier - body, soul, and spirit fully yours;

Come as helper, with strength to bless and keep, directing my every step;

Come as beautifier, bringing order out of confusion, loveliness out of Chaos.

Magnify to me your glory by being magnified in me, and me full of your fragrance.

April 3 | John 15:1-17

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As

the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to abide in Jesus?
2. Who does Jesus call you to?
3. How do these two realities shape your life?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, you call me friend. That is such a honor. Thank you for your redemptive work in my life, how you chose and appointed me to bear fruit and keep your commandments. Grant me grace that I would keep your commandments more and more every day. Reveal to me when I don't and help me to walk in repentance.

In your name,
Amen.

April 4 | John 16:4b-15

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is it to our benefit that Jesus went away?
2. What does the Helper do in the lives of Jesus' disciples?
3. How have you experience the Spirit guiding you in the truth?

Daily Prayer (taken from St. Anselm)

I confess, Lord, with thanksgiving, that you have made me in your image, so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you. But that image is so worn and blotted out by faults, and darkened by the smoke of sin, that it cannot do for which it was made, unless you renew and refashion it. This is why you have given me your Spirit. Work in my life and make me like you.

In Jesus I come,
Amen.

April 5 | 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is Paul rebuking the Corinthians?
2. Why do Christians gather together?
3. What does Paul mean by participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?

Daily Prayer

God, many times I have gathered with your people for my own reasons. I've been selfish or lonely or distant. Forgive me. Make me more like you. This Sunday, when we gather together,

please help me to be more selfless, to be more caring, and more receptive of your word, your grace, and your Spirit.

in Jesus I pray,
Amen.

Week 6 | Jesus' Victory

Jesus flees Satan's temptation not because he doesn't like bread, but because he wants more bread than Satan can provide and because he wants the bread in fellowship with his Father and with his bride. The Devil wants a masturbatory meal, wolfed down alone in the desert.

Jesus wants a marriage supper, joined with his church 'as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2) in the New Jerusalem.

- Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ*

April 6 | Revelation 5:9-14

And they sang a new song, 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, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is Jesus worthy to open the scroll?
2. How do the angelic creatures respond to Jesus' worth?
3. How should this shape your life?

Daily Prayer

I beseech you, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon your people; that by your great goodness we may be governed and preserved evermore, both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

April 7 | John 15:18-16:4a

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be

guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you."

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does the world hate Christians?
2. How does Jesus expect the world to treat his disciples?
3. What is the Helper's job?

Daily Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

April 8 | John 16:25-33

"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does the Father love us?
2. Why do the disciples say they follow Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus share these words with the disciples and you?

Daily Prayer

Father, you are my God. You have poured on me your light of your Incarnate Word. Grant that this light, Jesus, be kindled in my heart, and may shine forth in my life today.

Amen.

April 9 | Hebrews 2:10-18

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be perfect?
2. What does Jesus call you?
3. Why did Jesus become man?
4. How does Jesus triumph over temptation encourage you?

Daily Prayer

O Lord, you fasted forty days and forty nights. Even in that physical hunger you did not give into sin or temptation. Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey your godly emotions in righteousness, and true holiness, to your honor and glory, who livest and reign with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

Amen.

April 10 | Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 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.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 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. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the benefits of being justified with God?
2. In light of these benefits and from this text, what does justification mean?
3. How did Jesus accomplish our justification?

Daily Prayer

Father, I know the pains of estranged relationships. It takes a lot for me to own my faults in relationships and confess them. Yet you, the offended party in our relationship, reconciled yourself through the death of your Son, Jesus. Thank you for your love and grace. Shape my heart by that grace so that I would be more like you.

In Jesus I come and praise you,
Amen.

April 11 | Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of

him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does “those who are in Christ” mean?
2. Why is there no condemnation for them?
3. What does it mean for one to set their minds on the flesh?
4. How is one’s life shaped by the Spirit according to this text?

Daily Prayer (adapted from a written prayer of St. Anselm)

O my God teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you. You are my God and you are my all and I have never seen you. You have made me and remade me, You have bestowed on me all the good things I possess. Yet I have not yet done that for which I was made. Teach me to seek you. I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in my desire, let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you, let me love you when I find you.

April 12 | Ephesians 4:17-24

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why must we no longer walk as Gentiles do?
2. What behaviors and thoughts does this mean we should put off?
3. What behaviors and thoughts should we put on?

Daily Prayer

Father, It’s hard to change behavior and attitudes - especially when shaped by a lifetime of habits. Nonetheless grant me the grace and the joy to put off all things unholy and displeasing in your sight. Give me the patience and endurance as I become more and more like you. And I cannot do this alone. I need your Spirit. May I know and see his work in my life.

All for the glory of your name,
Amen.

Week 7 | Passion Week

Some people feel guilty about their anxieties and regard them as a defect of faith but they are afflictions, not sins. Like all afflictions, they are, if we can so take them, our share in the passion of Christ.

- CS Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*

April 13 | Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is going on in this passage?
2. How do you think the Jewish community and audience understood this passage? Is there any resemblance to a royal, triumphant entry into the city and temple?
3. Is there any ironic dimension of this passage consider that these same people cried out "crucify him" 6 days later?

Daily Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, who of your tender love towards mankind, has sent your Son, my Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon him human flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that I may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

April 14 | 1 Peter 1:8-12

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can you love something than you have not seen?
2. How did the prophets serve you?
3. What promise is yours on the basis of this text?

Daily Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

April 15 | Lamentations 1:12

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

Questions for Reflection

1. The author was specifically speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, how should we be moved by events around us?
2. In what ways has the life and death of Jesus Christ shaped your life?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, Forgive me for all the ways in which I have not been moved by your life and death. Forgive me as I have lived as if your death meant nothing to me. Help me to grasp the true significance of your life for my own and for the world.

Thank you,
Amen.

April 16 | John 17:1-26

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even

as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Questions for Reflection

1. How does the Father glorify the Son?
2. How does Jesus' ascension to the Father bring us joy?
3. What is Jesus asking the Father on our behalf?

Daily Prayer

Father, you send your Son so that I would know you; that I would know of your delight and joy in your Son. And you both have imparted your Spirit to me. As you have done so, you have now sent me into the world so that the world would know you, know of your Triune delight within each other, and work within this world. Father, Son, and Spirit, I ask that you help me to glorify you by my life and in all things.

Amen.

April 17 | 1 Peter 3:8-18

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

"Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;

let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

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.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why were you called?
2. What does it look like for you to enjoy and love life?
3. How can you honor God?

Daily Prayer

Father, I confess that I have bought into the lie that to love life is to do my own thing on my own terms. Forgive me of my rebellion, of my licentiousness, and even my obedience (when I do it on my terms). Help me to love my friends and neighbors and be a blessing to them. Help me to live life under your reign so that I would flourish.

Dully dependent on your grace,
Amen.

April 18 | John 19:17-40

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

“They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are "Jesus' sayings upon the cross?" What do you learn about him as he is dying?
2. What is finished?
3. Why was Jesus killed?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, you were killed because you are the true king. I owe you my life, my loyalty, and my worship. Jesus, you, in a very real sense, are human just like me. Even on the cross you felt pain and was thirsty. You continued to love and care for your mother as you died. And it is by your death that you crushed sin, death, evil, and all that is wrong in this world. Thank you for your love. Father, thank you for your love. Spirit, thank you for your love. Shape my life by these truths.

Amen.

April 19 | 2 Timothy 2:8-13

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why should you remember Jesus?
2. How does the trustworthy saying shape and comfort your life?
3. What promise is yours on the basis of this text?

Daily Prayer

Father, due to your total redemptive work not only have I died to myself, but I also live with him, not only do I endure, I also reign with Jesus, if I stumble and fall, you pick me up and carry me. Forgive me of the times that I have denied you. Father, thank you for your love, your favor, and your kindness that you continue to show me.

Amen.

April 20 | John 20:1-23

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. 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." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 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." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 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.” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Questions for Reflection

1. How did Mary, Peter, and John react to Jesus’ resurrection?
2. Why do you think their reactions were so different? Can you relate to any of their reactions?
3. How does Jesus comfort Mary? How does Jesus comfort his disciples? How does he comfort you?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, many have responded to your resurrection differently due to their interactions with you and their own lives. Peter denied you. John loved you. Mary was a dear friend whom experienced grace and forgiveness when everyone else just used her. I’m no different. I have my own journey with you. I ask that your Spirit would shape my life by your grace, by the truth of my memories with you, and the delight of your company. For when my life is shaped by you, then I will know true joy and love.

Thank you,
Amen.

Afterword | John 20:19b-31

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does Jesus comfort and challenge his disciples?
2. What do you learn about faith? How do you see that faith is a process?
3. How is God calling you to believe, trust, and lean on him?

Daily Prayer

Jesus, there are times in my life that I am scared of you. It's because of your holiness and my sin. But I forget about your love. I forget about my Father's favor for me or the Spirit's work in my life. So I try to hide from you. Hide by distraction, covered by noise. Nonetheless you pursue and find me. When you do, just like with these disciples, you say: "peace be with you." Your words call me to remember your love, my Father's favor, the Spirit's work, and the Triune joy that you all have within me - all because of your life. Shape my life by this reality. May I die to myself increasingly every day. Help me to pick up my cross and follow you. Give me the insight to count the cost and follow you, because you love, delight, and enjoy me.

This is my only comfort in life and in death. It is in you I trust,
Amen.